

# *Oriental Scholarship and Episcopal Polity: The Reception of John Selden's Arabic-Latin Edition of Eutychius*

by THOMAS MATTHEW VOZAR  
University of Hamburg

E-mail: [thomas.matthew.vozar@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:thomas.matthew.vozar@uni-hamburg.de)

---

*John Selden's 1642 edition and translation of an extract from a chronicle by Eutychius (Saïd ibn Batriq), the tenth-century Melkite patriarch of Alexandria, can be considered the first Arabic book printed in England. This article examines the early reception of Selden's Eutychius in the European republic of letters, exploring the ways in which its testimony about the early Alexandrian Church contributed to scholarly debates over episcopacy against the backdrop of the English Revolution. In doing so it demonstrates how Selden's edition made Eutychius a touchstone in seventeenth-century confessional disputes over ecclesiastical history while attracting readers in England and abroad.*

---

On 30 January/9 February 1614, in the final months of his life, Isaac Casaubon pleaded with the Dutch orientalist Thomas Erpenius to bring to light an Arabic text in his possession: 'Concerning the Arabic history of the patriarch of Alexandria, I beseech, implore, and beg you to present it, or a specimen of it, to the public. I have no doubt it will be a work that is useful to God's church and welcome to good men.'<sup>1</sup> Casaubon, who had earned his international reputation as a

Bodl. Lib. = Bodleian Library, Oxford; CSEL = Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum; JWCI = *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*; PG = *Patrologia Graeca*  
All translations are the author's own.

The research upon which this article is based was funded by Germany's Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg under the Excellence Strategy of the Federal Government and the Länder. I am grateful to Alec Ryrie and to the anonymous reviewer for their helpful suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> 'De historia Arabica patriarchae Alexandriae, te obsecro, obtestor, et adiuro, ut vel ipsam, vel eius specimen des publico. Non dubito fore opus ecclesiae Dei utile, et bonis

scholar principally on the basis of his Greek studies, had also over the years developed an interest in Arabic,<sup>2</sup> and at the time of writing this letter to Erpenius he had recently completed his systematic refutation of Cesare Baronio's *Annales ecclesiastici*, in which he famously exposed the inauthenticity of the *Corpus Hermeticum*.<sup>3</sup> Casaubon, having increasingly directed his energies toward theological controversy and ecclesiastical history since moving to England at the invitation of James I,<sup>4</sup> supposed that the publication of the Arabic history held by Erpenius would be 'useful' to the Church.

Casaubon does not specify precisely which 'Arabic history' he had in mind, but the ascription to an Alexandrian patriarch indicates that it was the *Nazm al-jawhar* (String of Pearls), a history of the world from the Creation written by Said ibn Batriq or Euty chius (Εὐτύχιος being a Greek calque of his Arabic given name), who held that office from 933 to 940.<sup>5</sup> Erpenius' manuscript of this work remained unedited at his death in 1624, when George Villiers, duke of Buckingham, facilitated the acquisition of the orientalist's library by the University of Cambridge.<sup>6</sup> But within a few decades Casaubon's prediction proved prophetic, as Euty chius entered the debate over episcopacy after the English scholar John Selden published an extract from the Arabic text regarding the origins of the Alexandrian Church, accompanied by a Latin preface, parallel translation and commentary, in 1642.<sup>7</sup> Historians such as G. J. Toomer and Jan Loop have treated

gratum': *The correspondence of Isaac Casaubon in England*, ed. Paul Botley and Máté Vince, Geneva 2018, iv. 264.

<sup>2</sup> See Alastair Hamilton, 'Isaac Casaubon the Arabist: "video longum esse iter"', *JWCI* lxxii (2009), 143–68, revised in his *Arabs and Arabists: selected articles*, Leiden 2022, 50–86.

<sup>3</sup> See Anthony Grafton, 'Protestant versus prophet: Isaac Casaubon on Hermes Trismegistus', *JWCI* xlvi (1983), 78–93, reprinted in his *Defenders of the text: the traditions of scholarship in an age of science, 1450–1800*, Cambridge, MA 1994, 145–61.

<sup>4</sup> This was partly due to the single-mindedness of James I: 'omnia priora studia mea funditus interiisse. Nam maximus Rex et literatissimus unico genere literarum sic capitur ut suum et suorum ingenia in illo detineat' ('all my previous studies have become utterly lost. For the greatest and most literate King is so captivated by a single genre of literature that he detains his own talents and those of his subjects in it'): *Correspondence of Isaac Casaubon*, ii. 7–8.

<sup>5</sup> Rightly identified by Jan Loop, *Johann Heinrich Hottinger: Arabic and Islamic studies in the seventeenth century*, Oxford 2013, 98, pace *Correspondence of Isaac Casaubon*, iv. 264 n. 4. Though it is not my concern here, for a recent study of Euty chius from the perspective of a historian of the early Islamic world see, for example, Robert Hoyland, 'Euty chius of Alexandria vindicated: Muslim sources and Christian Arabic historiography in the early Islamic empire', in Letizia Osti and Maaike van Berkel (eds), *The historian of Islam at work: essays in honor of Hugh N. Kennedy*, Leiden 2022, 384–404.

<sup>6</sup> See J. C. T. Oates, *The manuscripts of Thomas Erpenius*, Melbourne 1974.

<sup>7</sup> The most comprehensive treatment of Selden's life and works is G. J. Toomer, *John Selden: a life in scholarship*, Oxford 2009. Other major studies include David Sandler

Eutychius in the context of Selden's remarkable scholarly career and the progress of oriental studies in the seventeenth century more generally.<sup>8</sup> This article, building on their work, seeks to develop our understanding of Eutychius' impact by examining in greater detail the early reception of Selden's Arabic-Latin edition in the wider republic of letters. Setting aside matters directly relating to the Arabic, which are beyond the scope of this study, it explores the evidence of seventeenth-century books and correspondence in Latin, French and English to show how contemporary readers and scholars responded to the revelation of this Egyptian author to the learned world of Europe, with particular attention to the text's implications for church government.

This article first situates the 1642 edition of Eutychius within the context of European disputes over episcopacy at the start of that decade, coinciding in England in particular with efforts to reform the ecclesiastical hierarchy around the outbreak of civil war, and highlights Selden's intention to contribute to the debate by making available part of this previously inaccessible Arabic text. The next section surveys some of the reactions that this edition encountered on the continent, where its significance was understood in a similar light: French Protestant scholars such as David Blondel and Claudius Salmasius looked to Eutychius in making arguments for Presbyterianism, while the chronicle was dismissed as improperly translated and inadmissibly late by Catholics such as the French Jesuit theologian Denis Pétau and especially the Maronite Arabist Abraham Ecchellensis, who devoted a whole book to the refutation of Selden's appropriation of the Egyptian author. The conclusion clarifies that Selden's edition had little effect on the ecclesiastical reforms that were already underway in his country, which culminated in the abolition of the Anglican episcopate in 1646, and that it was largely rendered obsolete by Edward Pococke's publication of a complete text and translation, with Selden's funding and encouragement, in the 1650s, but that it nevertheless succeeded in making

Berkowitz, *John Selden's formative years: politics and society in early seventeenth-century England*, Washington, DC 1988; Paul Christianson, *Discourse on history, law, and governance in the public career of John Selden, 1610–1635*, Toronto 1996; Reid Barbour, *John Selden: measures of the holy commonwealth in seventeenth-century England*, Toronto 2003; Jason P. Rosenblatt, *Renaissance England's chief rabbi: John Selden*, Oxford 2006; Ofir Haiyry, *John Selden and the Western political tradition*, Cambridge 2017; and Jason P. Rosenblatt, *John Selden: scholar, statesman, advocate for Milton's muse*, Oxford 2021.

<sup>8</sup> G. J. Toomer, *Eastern wisdom and learning: the study of Arabic in seventeenth-century England*, Oxford 1996, passim, and *John Selden*, ii. 600–14; Barbour, *John Selden*, 276–82 and passim; Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian antiquity: the construction of a confessional identity in the 17th century*, Oxford 2009, 315, 317–18; Jan Loop, 'Die Bedeutung arabischer Manuskripte in den konfessionellen Auseinandersetzungen des 17. Jahrhunderts: John Selden, Johann Heinrich Hottinger und Abraham Ecchellensis', *Zeitsprünge: Forschungen zur Frühen Neuzeit* xvi (2012), 75–91, and *Hottinger*, 95–101.

Eutychius a touchstone in debates over episcopacy in the ancient Church while attracting readers ranging from Thomas Hobbes to Cotton Mather. Selden's Eutychius will thus be shown to offer an illuminating case study of the intersections of Arabic studies, ecclesiastical history and confessional disputes over episcopal power in the middle of the seventeenth century.

## I

Selden, who was personally acquainted with both Casaubon and Erpenius, began to study Arabic perhaps as early as 1609, and he devoted more attention to the history of Eutychius, introduced to him by Erpenius' pupil Henry Jacobs, than to any other Arabic text.<sup>9</sup> For his edition he worked from an older manuscript in the Cottonian library as well as a contemporary copy written by the Arab Christian scribe Thalja Karmah, brother of the Melkite patriarch of Antioch, which the English orientalist Edward Pococke had acquired in Aleppo in the 1630s.<sup>10</sup> As the first book printed in Arabic type in England,<sup>11</sup> Selden's specimen of Eutychius, published in London

<sup>9</sup> On Selden's Arabic studies see, especially, Toomer, *John Selden*, ii. 595–625. On Oriental studies in early modern England more generally see, *inter alia*, P. M. Holt, *Studies in the history of the Near East*, London 1973, 3–63; Alastair Hamilton, *William Bedwell the Arabist, 1563–1632*, Leiden 1985; *The 'Arabick' interest of the natural philosophers in seventeenth-century England*, ed. G. A. Russell, Leiden 1993; Toomer, *Eastern wisdom and learning*; Mordechai Feingold, 'Oriental studies', in Nicholas Tyacke (ed.), *The history of the University of Oxford, IV: Seventeenth-century Oxford*, Oxford 1997, 449–503, and 'Learning Arabic in early modern England', in Jan Loop, Alastair Hamilton and Charles Burnett (eds), *The teaching and learning of Arabic in early modern Europe*, Leiden 2017, 33–56; Thomas Roebuck, 'Miles Smith (1552/53–1624) and the uses of oriental learning', in Mordechai Feingold (ed.), *Labourers in the vineyard of the Lord: erudition and the making of the King James Version of the Bible*, Leiden 2018, 328–71; Simon Mills, *A commerce of knowledge: trade, religion, and scholarship between England and the Ottoman Empire, 1600–1760*, Oxford 2020; and Thomas Matthew Vozar, 'Isaac Barrow, Ali Ufki and the *Epitome fidei et religionis Turcicae*: a seventeenth-century summary of Islam in the European republic of letters', *JWCI* lxxxv (2022), 145–63.

<sup>10</sup> Toomer notes that Selden received a second manuscript copied by Thalja Karma, brought to England by William Corderoy, treasurer of the Levant Company in Aleppo, while the book was in press: *John Selden*, 605–6. On Pococke in Aleppo see Mills, *A commerce of knowledge*, 71–95, and on his Arabic studies in the context of his broader scholarly interests see Simon Mills, 'Edward Pococke (1604–1691), comparative Arabic-Hebrew philology, and the Bible', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* liii (2023), 117–47.

<sup>11</sup> Several earlier books, including some of Selden's works, featured Arabic words and short quotations (sometimes as woodcut illustrations), but his edition of Eutychius was the first substantial Arabic text printed in England. For a survey of early Arabic printing in England see Geoffrey Roper, 'Arabic printing and publishing in England before 1820', *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* xii (1985), 12–32; and for a study of the important case of the university press at Oxford see

under the title *Origines suae ecclesiae* (1642), generated considerable anticipation. On 19/29 September 1642 a young Ralph Cudworth wrote to convey his excitement about its imminent appearance after seeing some 'divided and imperfect sheets' on the press. The printer, he lamented, 'made me beleeeve I should haue it the lest weeke, and could not haue devided a worse torment to me, then afterward to disappoint me of it'.<sup>12</sup> But by early October he had received a copy and had passed along another to Herbert Thorndike: Cudworth marvelled that the book revealed 'so many rare Discoveries of recondite Antiquity', while Thorndike praised 'the knowlege w<sup>ch</sup> these singularities advance to y<sup>e</sup> Publicke'.<sup>13</sup> While Selden's publication undoubtedly constituted an advance in scholarship, however, some found its implications unsettling. Cudworth, in a letter to Selden dated 21/31 November 1643, noted that the bishop of Lincoln, Thomas Winniffe, had written a discourse on episcopacy '[i]n which, Sir, your Eutychius seemes much to haue troubled him', and he concludes – at this point in the sentence Cudworth seems to have gone from reporting Winniffe's opinion to seconding it – by dismissing the Arabic history as 'a meere Fable'.<sup>14</sup> A few years later Thorndike, in a treatise on the rights of the episcopal Church, would write similarly: 'As for *Eutychius*, I cannot admit his relation to be Historically truth'.<sup>15</sup>

What gave these early readers of Selden's Eutychius such discomfort? If biblical criticism in the seventeenth century largely took its bearings from confessional motivations,<sup>16</sup> that was no less true for the study of the ancient Church. Catholics and Protestants alike contested the interpretation of ancient texts that attested to the governance of the primitive Christians, offering evidence that might alternatively sanction or discredit one or another form of ecclesiastical polity. Should the Roman pontiff reign supreme, as Catholics insisted? Should bishops prevail, as in the Lutheran and Anglican Churches? Or, in line with a strain of thought in the Reformed or Calvinist tradition, should consistories of 'presbyters' or elders be in charge, as among the Swiss and the Scots? A crucial question

Alastair Hamilton, 'The learned press: oriental languages', in Ian Gadd (ed.), *The history of Oxford University Press, I: Beginnings to 1780*, Oxford 2013, 398–417.

<sup>12</sup> Bodl. Lib., ms Selden supra 109, fo. 264. All references to and transcriptions of Selden's correspondence are taken from G. J. Toomer, 'The correspondence of John Selden (1584–1654)', at <<http://emlo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/blog/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/selden-correspondence.pdf>>. On the assumption that Cudworth's letters are dated Old Style, both Old and New Style dates are supplied.

<sup>13</sup> Bodl. Lib., ms Selden supra 109, fo. 262; ms Selden supra 108, fo. 247.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. ms Selden supra 109, fo. 268.

<sup>15</sup> Herbert Thorndike, *A discourse of the right of the Church in a Christian state*, London 1649 (Wing T1045), 142.

<sup>16</sup> On this point see Nicholas Hardy, *Criticism and confession: the Bible in the seventeenth century republic of letters*, Oxford 2017.

in this regard was the historical distinction between presbyters and bishops. One key authority was Jerome, who had indicated in his commentary on Paul's Epistle to Titus that the superiority of bishops over presbyters derived from 'custom' rather than divine decree and in his letter to Evangelus (or 'Evagrius') had supplied the early Alexandrian Church, founded by Mark the Evangelist, as an example: 'In Alexandra, from Mark the Evangelist up to the bishops Heracles and Dionysius, the presbyters always nominated as a bishop one who was selected from among themselves and appointed to the higher position.'<sup>17</sup> Jerome's testimony could be understood to undermine the authority of the episcopal hierarchy, and scholarly treatises brought forth in 1641 by the Leiden-based Huguenot scholar Claudius Salmasius (or Claude Saumaise), under the pseudonym Walo Messalinus, and the French Jesuit theologian Denis Pétau argued over this very point.<sup>18</sup>

In England around the same time, on the cusp of the civil wars, the end of the personal rule of Charles I and the sitting of a parliament for the first time in over a decade sparked a flurry of debate over the reform of the national Church.<sup>19</sup> In December 1640 parliament received a petition signed by 15,000 Londoners calling for the extirpation of the bishops 'root and branch', and within a few months Presbyterian-minded MPs were advancing legislation to that effect, while the opposite faction considered alternative schemes, notably the plan for 'reduced episcopacy' put forward by James Ussher, archbishop of Armagh.<sup>20</sup> The learned dispute of Salmasius and Pétau on the continent, naturally conducted in Latin, quickly percolated down into the vernacular pamphlet wars over episcopacy that ensued across the Channel: John Milton, for one, in *The reason of church-governement urg'd against prelaty* (1641), emphasised that 'Jerome the learned'st of the Fathers hides not his opinion, that custome only,

<sup>17</sup> 'Sicut ergo presbyteri sciunt se ex Ecclesiae consuetudine ei qui sibi praepositus fuerit, esse subjectos: ita episcopi noverint se magis consuetudine, quam dispositionis Dominicae veritate, presbyteris esse maiores': *PL* xxvi.563; 'nam et Alexandriae a Marco evangelista usque ad Heraclam et Dionysium episcopos presbyteri semper unum de se electum et in excelsiori gradu conlocatum episcopum nominabant': *CSEL* lvi.310. See Quantin, *Church of England and Christian antiquity*, 99.

<sup>18</sup> Denis Pétau, *Dissertationes ecclesiasticarum libri duo*, Paris 1641; Walo Messalinus [Claudius Salmasius], *De episcopis et presbyteris contra Dionysium Petavium dissertatio prima*, Leiden 1641.

<sup>19</sup> For the preceding period see Kevin Sharpe, *The personal rule of Charles I*, New Haven 1992.

<sup>20</sup> See the recent account of Anthony Milton, *England's second reformation: the battle for the Church of England, 1625–1662*, Cambridge 2021, 101–43. Milton frames the measures of 1640–2 as an 'abortive reformation'.

which the Proverbe calls a tyrant, was the maker of Prelaty' and furthermore commended 'the late industry of the learned *Salmatius*' on the subject.<sup>21</sup>

This was the context for the appearance of Selden's edition. The passage of Euty chius that he selected for publication is quite brief: it takes up only twelve pages of two columns, the Arabic on the left and Selden's Latin translation on the right, in large type (see Figure 1), with the bulk of the book consisting of an extensive commentary. The focus of the extract, as the supplied title indicates, is on the origins of the Alexandrian Church, the same Church in which, according to Jerome, the presbyters would customarily choose one of themselves and raise him to the station of a bishop. According to Selden's translation from the Arabic, Euty chius records that after baptising the cobbler Anianus and ordaining him his successor as patriarch,

Mark the Evangelist likewise instituted twelve presbyters together with Anianus, who of course continued together with the patriarch, so that when the patriarchate was vacant, they would elect one from among the twelve presbyters, whose head the remaining eleven would lay their hands upon, and they would bless him and make him patriarch.<sup>22</sup>

Euty chius therefore would seem to corroborate Jerome, providing testimony that from the founding of the Church by Mark the Evangelist until the time of the First Council of Nicaea the patriarch of Alexandria was elected by twelve presbyters from one of their own number.<sup>23</sup> This, in turn, could be taken to indicate the contingency of episcopacy as an institution, assigning the fundamental authority to presbyters. For Selden such confirmation was hardly incidental to his purposes but was instead the

<sup>21</sup> John Milton, *The reason of church-governement urg'd against prelaty*, London 1641 (Wing M2175), 19, 29. For an overview of Milton's antiprelatical tracts see Nigel Smith, 'The anti-episcopal tracts: republican Puritanism and the truth in poetry', in Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (eds), *The Oxford handbook of Milton*, Oxford 2009, 155–73. Milton would of course later become Salmasius' polemical adversary after the French scholar attacked the regicides and the revolutionary regime in his *Defensio regia* (1649); on Selden's supposed involvement in that controversy see Thomas Matthew Vozar, 'Selden's reply to Salmasius, an alternative title for the *Pro populo Anglicano defensio*, and why Milton deserves to be strangled: rumour and opinion in the correspondence of Guy Patin', *Seventeenth Century* xxxvii (2022), 937–47.

<sup>22</sup> 'Constituit item Marcus Evangelista duodecim Presbyteros cum Hanania; qui nempe manerent cum Patriarcha, adeo ut cum vacaret Patriarchatus, eligerent unum e duodecim Presbyteris cuius Capiti reliqui undecim Manus Imponerent eumque benedicerent et Patriarcham eum crearent': Euty chius, *Ecclesiae suae origines*, ed. John Selden, London 1642 (Wing E3440/ E3440A), pp. xxix–xxx.

<sup>23</sup> For treatment of this passage in modern studies of the early Alexandrian Church see, for example, Charles Gore, 'On the ordination of the early bishops of Alexandria', *JTS* iii (1902), 278–82; W. Telfer, 'Episcopal succession in Egypt', this *JOURNAL* iii (1952), 1–13; and Eric Waldram Kemp, 'Bishops and presbyters at Alexandria', this *JOURNAL* vi (1955), 125–42.



Figure 1. First page of the Arabic text and Latin translation of Eutychius on the ancient Alexandrian Church in Eutychius, *Ecclesiae suae origines*, ed. John Selden, London 1642 (Wing E3440/E3440A), p. xxvii. Reproduced by courtesy of the Bavarian State Library, Munich, and the Munich Digitization Center.



main impetus for publishing. In the opening sentence of the preface he frames this work of oriental scholarship as a response to 'the most serious and most vexing question concerning clerical rank',<sup>24</sup> citing Salmasius and Pétau.<sup>25</sup> Apparently with tracts like Milton's in mind, Selden further complained that 'even in our England not a few laboriously overstuffed little books fly about', threatening the 'public peace'.<sup>26</sup> The publication of his extract of Eutychius would, he hoped, offer a dispassionate contribution to the debate, and he presented the Arabic author as an 'Egyptian Bede' whose ecclesiastical history would bring new light to the practices of the Early Church.<sup>27</sup>

## II

Selden's book quickly attracted attention among French Protestant scholars. By 16 December 1642 André Rivet was telling Claude Sarrau that he had seen Eutychius in the Hague and was insisting that it was essential reading for their mutual acquaintance, David Blondel: 'Monsieur Blondel must see this work before his own is finished. If it is not in Paris, it must be brought over from London.'<sup>28</sup> Since Blondel had recently published a long treatise in French against papal authority, which he had dedicated to Charles I,<sup>29</sup> and was now working on a Latin disquisition about Jerome's statements on bishops and presbyters, the recommendation was apposite. Sarrau, replying to Rivet on 26 December, declared that he had in fact already sent Blondel a copy of Selden's Eutychius over a month previously, and he added some of his own thoughts on the book. Notably, after declaring that as a tenth-century author Eutychius could only carry so much weight as an authority, Sarrau reported his sense that Selden had shied away from taking a firm position on the central point of the controversy: 'The Notes do not cut sharply, and it seems that the commentator would

<sup>24</sup> 'Gravissima atque plurimum vexata ... Quaestio, de Ordine Hieratico': Eutychius, *Origines*, p. i. <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* pp. ii–iii.

<sup>26</sup> 'Circumvolitant etiam in Anglia nostra libelli non pauci operosius confarcinati': *ibid.* pp. iii, iv.

<sup>27</sup> 'Beda ... Aegyptius': *ibid.* p. xxvi. It is perhaps worth noting that Abraham Wheelocke, the first Adams Professor of Arabic at Cambridge and a correspondent of Selden, would publish the *editio princeps* of the Anglo-Saxon version of Bede the following year: Bede, *Historiae ecclesiasticae gentis Anglorum libri v*, Cambridge 1643 (Wing B1661). See, most recently, Rebecca Brackmann, *Old English scholarship in the seventeenth century: medievalism and national crisis*, Woodbridge 2023, ch. ii.

<sup>28</sup> 'Il faut que Mons. Blondel voye cet escrit devant que le sien soit achevé. S'il n'est à Paris, il le faut faire venir de Londres': *Correspondance intégrale d'André Rivet et de Claude Sarrau*, ed. Hans Bots and Pierre Leroy, Amsterdam 1978, i. 339. Dates in this *corpus* are assumed to be Gregorian.

<sup>29</sup> David Blondel, *De la Primauté en l'Eglise*, Geneva 1641.

like to swim between two waters so as to side with those who will be strongest in the country.’ He nevertheless appreciated that Selden ‘leans, however delicately, on the side of Walo Messalinus’, using Salmasius’ pseudonym.<sup>30</sup> Sarrau understood that the English scholar was hedging so as not to offend the theological sensibilities of whichever party might gain the advantage in the Civil Wars, and immediately thereafter he made a direct connection to the English political situation: ‘The affairs of England have for a long time been on the edge of the precipice.’<sup>31</sup>

Before Blondel’s work would appear, however, Salmasius made use of Eutychius in his next work on the subject, *De primatu papae* (1645). Salmasius and Selden were correspondents, and Selden seems to have had access to an early version of this piece by 1642: in the preface to Eutychius he cites *De primatu* as forthcoming, and Cudworth in October that year asked him ‘if you have any part of Salmasius his Worke De Primatu P. lying by you’.<sup>32</sup> It is no wonder, then, that Salmasius read the annals of Eutychius ‘recently published in Arabic and Latin by the greatest man, John Selden’.<sup>33</sup> Having studied oriental languages himself, he confidently quoted from the untransliterated Arabic concerning, for example, the date of the crucifixion of Peter the Apostle.<sup>34</sup> But for Salmasius, as for others, the chief value of this author lay in his testimony regarding the status of the Alexandrian presbyters in the earliest centuries of the Church. He was not uncritical. While Eutychius states that the presbyters not only chose but also consecrated and blessed the patriarch by the laying on of hands, Salmasius argues that this was anachronistic: ‘Eutychius, for whom the same came down in use, did not know this, because for almost all the Greek and Latin ecclesiastical writers, while they are looking upon a custom of their own time, they suppose that it was always so from the beginning.’<sup>35</sup> Eutychius nevertheless helped Salmasius to construct a historical picture of the early Alexandrian Church, one that aligned with his own confessional inclination. When

<sup>30</sup> ‘Cet Arabe ayant vescu dans le 10<sup>e</sup> siecle, son tesmoignage n’est pas de grand autorité. Dans le texte, il y a pour les uns et pour les autres. Les Notes aussi ne tranchent pas net et semble que le commentateur veuille nager entre deux eaues pour se ranger du costé de ceux qui seront les plus forts a la campagne. Il y a tousiours de bonnes recherches et curieuses et il merite bien d’estre leu. Je l’aime de ce qu’en la Preface il penche, quoi que delicatement, du costé de Walo Messalinus’: *Correspondance d’André Rivet et de Claude Sarrau*, i. 350.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Les affaires d’Angleterre sont longtemps sur le penchant du precipice’: *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Eutychius, *Origines*, p. iii; Bodl. Lib., ms Selden supra 109, fo. 262.

<sup>33</sup> ‘nuper a summo viro Johanne Seldeno, Arabice et Latine editis’: Claudius Salmasius, *Librorum de primatu papae pars prima*, Leiden 1645, 77 (references are to the separately paginated ‘Apparatus ad libros de primatu’).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 48.  
<sup>35</sup> ‘Quod Eutychius nescivit, cui idem usu venit quod omnibus ferme scriptoribus Ecclesiasticis Graecis Latinisque, ut dum morem sui temporis spectant, a principio sic semper fuisse existimarint’: *ibid.* 87.

Blondel's *Apologia pro sententia Hieronymi de episcopis et presbyteris* (1646) was published the following year, it too featured several references to Eutychius, though without any acknowledgment of his dependence on Selden's edition. The Arabic author offered crucial additional testimony in support of Blondel's argument against the priority of episcopacy: 'For what did the patriarch Eutychius certify to us, by common report at least and through hands derived from tradition, concerning the origins of Alexandria in his writings seven hundred years ago?'<sup>36</sup> Whereas Sarrau thought the text was too late to be a creditable witness, Blondel on the other hand seems to stress the relative antiquity of Eutychius, adding a marginal note with the date of the patriarch's death, 12 May 940.<sup>37</sup>

These appropriations of Eutychius in the cause of Presbyterian church government did not go unanswered by Salmasius' Jesuit opponent. In an appendix on ecclesiastical hierarchy printed in 1650 as part of his *Theologica dogmata* (1644–50), Pétau dedicates a chapter to the arguments that Salmasius and Blondel had made on the basis of the statements of Jerome and Eutychius, with his discussion of the latter spanning several pages. Pétau stresses, predictably, the lateness of the patriarch, and moreover accuses Salmasius and Blondel of misreading the passage. But he goes further, declaring that Eutychius paled before an even older Christian Arabic text on the lives of the Alexandrian patriarchs, 'certain excerpts of which Monsieur Abraham Ecchellensis, royal professor of Syriac and Arabic at the University of Paris, has shared with me'.<sup>38</sup> Ecchellensis, a Maronite priest and scholar born Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāqilānī in Ottoman Lebanon, was at this point finishing his soon to be published edition of the *Chronicon orientale* (1651), another universal history by an Egyptian Christian, which is the work that Pétau quotes against Salmasius and Blondel.<sup>39</sup> Pétau, unlike his coreligionist Ecchellensis, was clearly confused about the age of this supposedly 'more ancient' author,<sup>40</sup> since the

<sup>36</sup> 'Quid enim nobis ex communi saltem fama et per manus derivata traditione de originibus Alexandrinae ante 700 annos scriptis consignavit Eutychius Patriarcha?': David Blondel, *Apologia pro sententia Hieronymi de episcopis et presbyteris*, Amsterdam 1646, 17.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*; he undoubtedly derived this information from the preface in Eutychius, *Origines*, p. xv.

<sup>38</sup> 'ex quibus excerpta quaedam mecum communicavit D. Abraamus Ecchelensis, Syriacae et Arabicae linguae in Academia Parisiensi Professor Regius': Denis Pétau, *Theologicorum dogmatum tomi quarti pars altera*, Paris 1650, 725.

<sup>39</sup> On Ecchellensis see Peter J. A. N. Rietbergen, 'A Maronite mediator between seventeenth-century Mediterranean cultures: Ibrahim al Hakilani, or Abraham Ecchellensis (1605–1664) between Christendom and Islam', *Lias* xvi (1989), 13–41, and *Orientalisme, science et controverse: Abraham Ecchellensis (1605–1664)*, ed. Bernard Heyberger, Turnhout 2010.

<sup>40</sup> 'habemus praeter Eutychium illum eo vetustiorum alterum': Pétau, *Theologica dogmata*, 725.

*Chronicon* reaches into the time of the twelfth-century patriarch Athanasius III. But his attempt at gaining the advantage over his enemies by bringing to bear an unknown and still yet to be printed Arabic chronicle shows the extent to which the burgeoning field of oriental studies, well beyond Euty chius, could provide material for confessional disputes.

Ecchellensis himself, in his commentary on the *Chronicon*, mentions in passing that he has written about the question of ecclesiastical orders ‘in a response to Selden’s Euty chius’.<sup>41</sup> But as the years passed by no such response became available. When the Parisian Catholic theologian Jean Morin encountered a similar claim in another work by Ecchellensis in 1655, he found it necessary to write to the Maronite scholar, now in Rome, ‘to ask what he determines with regard to those *Origins*’ of Euty chius, and Ecchellensis replied by pointing out some of Selden’s errors in interpreting the Arabic.<sup>42</sup> Ecchellensis ultimately published his *Euty chius vindicatus* (1661), dedicated to Pope Alexander VII, several years after Selden’s death, but the passage of time did not diminish the stakes nor dull his pen: ‘if you really look into it deeply’, he wrote with brutal exaggeration, ‘you will find that it is not Euty chius the Alexandrian at all, but an Englishman disguised under the name of Euty chius and a spectre striding onto the stage’.<sup>43</sup> By this time a complete Latin translation of the text had been completed and published, at the late Selden’s insistence and expense, by the inaugural Laudian Professor of Arabic at Oxford, the aforementioned Edward Pococke, despite his own misgivings about the reliability of the patriarch as an authority,<sup>44</sup> and Ecchellensis mocks

<sup>41</sup> Abraham Ecchellensis, *Chronicon orientale*, Paris 1651, 166, noted by Toomer, *John Selden*, 606 n. 98.

<sup>42</sup> ‘sciscitans quid de istis originibus censeret’: Jean Morin, *Commentarius de sacris ecclesiae ordinationibus*, Paris 1655, 155 (in the separately paginated ‘pars tertia’).

<sup>43</sup> ‘Imo si penitius perspicendum est, nequaquam Euty chius Alexandrinum, sed personatum Anglum sub Euty chius nomine, et larva in scenam prodeuntem comperies’: Abraham Ecchellensis, *Euty chius patriarcha Alexandrinus vindicatus*, Rome 1661, pt 1, 5. The sense of Latin ‘larva’ as a mask or disguise (and by extension, a character or role) is certainly operative here, given the references to impersonation (‘personatum’) and the stage (‘scena’), but Ecchellensis, with Selden’s death in mind, also seems to be playing on the primary meaning of the word as a ghost or spectre. For previous discussion of Ecchellensis’s response to Selden see Hoop, ‘Die Bedeutung arabischer Manuskripte in den konfessionellen Auseinandersetzungen’, and *Hottinger*, 96–9.

<sup>44</sup> Euty chius, *Contextio gemmarum, sive, Euty chius patriarchae Alexandrini annales*, ed. Edward Pococke, Oxford 1656 (Wing E3438), and *Euty chius patriarchae Alexandrini annalium tomus alter*, ed. Edward Pococke, Oxford 1658 (Wing E3439). A variant title page for the second volume seems to have been printed as early as 1654 (Wing E3437), perhaps to have something to show Selden before his death. See Falconer Madan, *Oxford books: a bibliography of printed works relating to the university and city of Oxford or printed or published there*, Oxford 1912, iii. 51–2, 81, 100; Toomer, *Eastern wisdom and learning*, 164–5; and Jason Peacey, ‘“Printers to the University”, 1584–1658’, in *The history of Oxford University Press*, 50–77 at pp. 73–5.

his opponent by asking rhetorically whether Pococke or other distinguished Arabists could ever give assent to Selden's inaccurate translations.<sup>45</sup> Writing in the aftermath of England's revolutions in Church and State, Ecchellensis was now also able to draw connections between Selden's oriental scholarship and the chaotic state of his country in the 1640s and 1650s: 'There are as many religions among you as there are heads', he quipped: 'the decrees of your Senate or Parliament published around four years ago concerning the religion to be instituted by your theologians and ministers testify to this more than enough.'<sup>46</sup> His use of the word 'Senatus', repeated elsewhere, perhaps recalls the sometimes classifying pretensions of England's revolutionary republic. The 'decrees' to which Ecchellensis refers must mean the Westminster Confession of Faith, which codified Presbyterian polity as the form of government for the reconstituted English Church in 1646, and which appeared in a Latin version in 1656 (i.e. 'around four years' prior).<sup>47</sup> The violent changes wrought by the new reformers, Ecchellensis exclaimed, were such that one could say even Muhammad, the mad 'pseudoprophet' of Islam, 'dealt with bishops, presbyters, hermits, and monks far more mildly and humanely than your Christian, pious, most humane Englishmen have recently done'.<sup>48</sup> While the Maronite scholar does not put it quite this way, the implication is that these disorders in the English Church are the very real consequences of Selden's flawed Arabic scholarship.

### III

Did Selden's edition of Eutychius help to inspire the abolition of English episcopacy in 1646, as Ecchellensis implied? That could hardly have been Selden's intention: as a member of parliament for the University of Oxford in the Long Parliament, he had actually spoken against the proposal for the expulsion of the bishops from the House of Lords in 1641, prompting the Scottish Presbyterian Robert Baillie to call him at that time 'the avowed proctor for the Bishops'.<sup>49</sup> Selden's essentially erastian position, favouring state control of the Church, whatever its form of

<sup>45</sup> Ecchellensis, *Eutychius patriarcha Alexandrinus vindicatus*, pt I, 129; pt II, 360.

<sup>46</sup> 'tot enim apud vos sunt religiones, quot capita ... Decreta vestri Senatus, seu Parlamenti ante quatuor ferme annos edita de religione statuenda a vestris theologis et ministris hoc satis superque testantur': *ibid.* pt I, 11.

<sup>47</sup> *Confessio fidei in conventu theologorum auctoritate Parlamenti Anglicani indicto elaborata*, Cambridge 1656 (Wing C5737).

<sup>48</sup> 'Pseudoprophetam ... longe mitius, humaniusque egisse cum Episcopis, Presbyteris, Eremitis, et Monachis, quam tui mox fecere Christiani, pii, humanissimi Angli': Ecchellensis, *Eutychius patriarcha Alexandrinus vindicatus*, pt I, 184.

<sup>49</sup> *The letters and journals of Robert Baillie*, ed. David Laing, Edinburgh 1841, i. 303.

ecclesiastical polity, is perhaps best summarised in a comment from his posthumously published *Table-talk* (1689): 'They are equally mad who say Bishops are so *Jure Divino* that they must be continued, and they who say they are so Antichristian, that they must be put away, all is as the State pleases.'<sup>50</sup> Selden served as a lay delegate to the Westminster Assembly, the group of divines appointed by parliament in 1643 to advise on the reform of the English Church, but found himself frustrated by the attendees' lack of appreciation of historical evidence,<sup>51</sup> so it is hardly surprising that their deliberations show no sign of interest in so recendite a piece of scholarship as his edition of an obscure tenth-century Arabic history by an Alexandrian patriarch.<sup>52</sup> The Westminster divines, in any case, consisting of a majority of Presbyterians and a minority of Congregationalists, needed little encouragement against episcopal polity.

Selden's edition nevertheless did not go unnoticed in his native country. Many English scholars resorted to this learned volume for the information that it contained regarding the early Christian Church, the Arabic language and even Islamic culture. John Gregory, for instance, in 1646 cited Selden's commentary on Eutychius for evidence that the '*Mahumedans* have another Lords Prayer, called by them the *Prayer of Iesus the sonne of Mary*'.<sup>53</sup> Thomas Hobbes looked to Selden's Eutychius as a source on the Council of Nicaea for his poem *Historia ecclesiastica*,<sup>54</sup> and Henry Stubbe referred to the same edition in discussing the history of the early Christian Church in his manuscript treatise on the rise of Islam, *The originall & progress of Mahometanism*.<sup>55</sup> Milton may even have drawn from Eutychius for his passage on the sons of God in book xi of *Paradise lost*.<sup>56</sup> But in England, as abroad, Eutychius became identified especially with Presbyterianism: by the early 1650s this previously unknown Egyptian author had become familiar enough that Henry Hammond could name 'St. *Hierome* himself, and *Eutychius*' as the two

<sup>50</sup> John Selden, *Table-talk*, London 1689 (Wing S2437), 8.

<sup>51</sup> On Selden and the Westminster Assembly see Toomer, *John Selden*, ii. 569–75.

<sup>52</sup> See *The minutes and papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652*, ed. Chad Van Dixhoorn, Oxford 2012.

<sup>53</sup> John Gregory, *Notes and observations upon some passages of Scripture*, Oxford 1646 (Wing G1920), 165; cf. Eutychius, *Origines*, 58–9.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. Patricia Springborg, Patricia Stablein and Paul Wilson, Paris 2008, 175, 373.

<sup>55</sup> *Henry Stubbe and the beginnings of Islam: the originall & progress of Mahometanism*, ed. Nabil Matar, New York 2014, 91 (where Stubbe's use of the title *Origines Alexandrini* indicates the use of Selden's edition, rather than Pococke's), 92; see pp. 24–6 for Matar's discussion of Eutychius.

<sup>56</sup> Proposed as early as John Milton, *Paradise lost*, ed. Thomas Newton, London 1749, ii. 349. Newton's suggestion has been reiterated by Don Cameron Allen, 'Milton and the sons of God', *Modern Language Notes* lxi (1946), 73–9, but contested by Sung Ryol Kim, 'Milton's sons of God: a reconsideration', *Milton Quarterly* xxviii (1994), 61–8.

'prime favour'd Authors of the *Presbyterians*', and a few decades later Richard Baxter could speak of '*Euty chius Alexandrinus*, the *Presbyterians Friend*' with the expectation that the reference would be readily understood.<sup>57</sup>

The publication of Pococke's complete and by every assessment more accurate edition in the 1650s rendered Selden's tendentious extract all but obsolete.<sup>58</sup> When a philologist such as the pioneering German scholar of Ethiopian studies Hiob Ludolf in 1691 wanted to cite Euty chius on the computation of Easter in the Early Church, it was naturally to Pococke's edition that he resorted.<sup>59</sup> Selden's work on the Egyptian author, on the other hand, seems to have become more of a target than a scholarly resource. In his landmark 1672 defence of the authenticity of the epistles attributed to Ignatius of Antioch – a source favoured by episcopalians for its testimony regarding bishops – John Pearson, Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity and later bishop of Chester, picked apart Selden's interpretations and blasted his theory that Euty chius had access to ancient church archives as 'utterly beyond belief'.<sup>60</sup> The orientalist Humphrey Prideaux, in his polemical *Life of Mahomet* (1697), took pains to clarify that Selden contributed only to the funding of Pococke's edition, belittling his 1642 extract as the petty outcome of a personal grudge: 'Mr. *Selden* did indeed publish a Leaf or two of that *Author*, which he thought would serve his purpose to express his Spight against the *Bishops* of the *Church of England*, in revenge of the *Censure* which was inflicted on him in the *High Commission Court* for his *History of Tithes*.'<sup>61</sup> Among Catholics, the French Arabist Eusèbe Renaudot, for instance, in his 1713 translation of another Arabic history of the Alexandrian Church by a Christian author, in this case the Coptic Orthodox bishop

<sup>57</sup> Henry Hammond, *An answer to the animadversions on the dissertations touching Ignatius's epistles, and the episcopacie in them asserted*, London 1654 (Wing H514), 218; Richard Baxter, *Which is the true Church?*, London 1679 (Wing B1453), 92.

<sup>58</sup> Pococke's edition of Euty chius remained current for over two centuries, and his Latin version was reprinted in *PG* cxi.889–1236. A new Arabic text did not appear until Euty chius, *Euty chii patriarchae Alexandrini annales*, ed. Louis Cheikho, Beirut 1906–9, followed later by the critical edition and German translation, *Das Annalenwerk des Euty chios von Alexandrien: ausgewählte Geschichten und Legenden*, ed. Michael Breydy, Louvain 1985.

<sup>59</sup> Hiob Ludolf, *Ad suam historiam Aethiopicam antehac editam commentarius*, Frankfurt 1691, 438.

<sup>60</sup> 'De Archivis autem Alexandriae, quibus Annales tot debere putat, prorsus incredibile est': John Pearson, *Vindiciae epistolarum S. Ignatii*, Cambridge 1672 (Wing P1010), 171.

<sup>61</sup> Humphrey Prideaux, *The true nature of imposture fully displayed in the life of Mahomet*, London 1697 (Wing P3416), 178. Prideaux is referring to John Selden, *The historie of tithes*, London 1618 (*STC* 22172), which was suppressed shortly after publication on account of clerical hostility: G. J. Toomer, 'Selden's *Historie of tithes*: genesis, publication, aftermath', *Huntington Library Quarterly* lxx (2002), 345–78, and *John Selden*, i. 257–310.

(and contemporary of Eutychius) Severus ibn al-Muqaffa, magnified the earlier criticisms of his coreligionist Ecchellensis, citing his *Eutychius vindicatus*.<sup>62</sup> Despite such scholarly attacks, at the beginning of the eighteenth century a sympathetic reader such as the Congregationalist Massachusetts minister Cotton Mather could nevertheless still recall how ‘the famous Mr. *Selden* has out of *Eutychius* proved, That not only *Bishops*, but *Patriarchs* themselves, were in the Primitive Times *Ordained* by *Presbyters*’.<sup>63</sup>

Selden’s edition of Eutychius may not have played any role in the abolition of episcopacy in England, despite the insinuations of Ecchellensis, but it left a significant impact on the European republic of letters, both as a unique, if unreliable, repository of historical information and as a new, albeit contested, witness against the authority of episcopacy in particular. If, as Jean-Louis Quantin has shown, the English Church in the seventeenth century increasingly took its bearings from patristic scholarship,<sup>64</sup> then the case of Eutychius speaks to the more limited but none the less important ways in which Arabic and oriental scholarship, too, could be deployed to the ends of confessional and ecclesiological disputes. In this sense the Egyptian chronicle ultimately did prove ‘useful to God’s church’, as Casaubon had foreseen, even if it was not always ‘welcome to good men’.

<sup>62</sup> Severus ibn al-Muqaffa, *Historia patriarcharum Alexandrinorum Jacobitarum*, trans. Eusèbe Renaudot, Paris 1713, 28.

<sup>63</sup> Cotton Mather, *A letter of advice to the churches of the non-conformists in the English nation*, London 1700 (Wing M1119), 24.

<sup>64</sup> Quantin, *Church of England and Christian antiquity*.