First published in 2001, this revised article extended and updated 2006-04 offers evidence and hypotheses for a short cultural history of deaf people, culture and sign language in South Asia and South West Asia, using documents from antiquity through 2005. A new appendix shows 110 items on deafness and sign language in the Arab countries of the Eastern Mediterranean and South West Asia. This is a further revised, extended and updated version of a chapter first published in: Alison Callaway (ed) Deafness and Development, University of Bristol, Centre for Deaf Studies, 2001. It is here republished with kind permission. Internet publication URL: www.independentliving.org/docs7/miles200604.html

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APPENDIX: Bibliography on Deafness & Signing in the Arab Middle East, with some historical material, and light annotation.

Signs of Development in Deaf South & South-West Asia: histories, cultural identities, resistance to cultural imperialism

“A running river
is all legs.
A burning fire
is mouths all over.
A blowing breeze
is all hands.
So, lord of the caves, for your men,
1.0 Introduction

1.1 The region addressed here, ‘South & South West Asia’ or SSWA, intends to embrace the old civilisations of Mesopotamia, Arabia and Persia, together with the former ‘British India’, as far east as Burma and Sri Lanka. Much cultural exchange has taken place over the centuries across this region, which also saw the rise of most of the world’s great religions. (See ‘Update & Extension 2006’, below, where SSWA region is extended to the Eastern Mediterranean.)

1.2 For 150 years there has been a slowly growing professional involvement in programs for deaf people (and occasionally with, or by, deaf people) in SSWA. Yet there is still very little detailed and accurate public knowledge about the ordinary, everyday lives, abilities, communication skills, and problems experienced by deaf children and adults in the region. Of course, deaf people have their own inside knowledge and reflection about their own lives. Yet hardly any of that has been pooled, refined, coordinated, written down and published so as to become accredited public knowledge. Without some well-founded public knowledge about the lives of deaf people, it is hard to establish any clear cultural identity, e.g. as a language community, as a cultural community with a long historical heritage, as a scattered nation having shared features that cross geographical borders and barriers, or as an oppressed but resurgent minority.

1.3 Do deaf people in SSWA actually want to establish and develop any such cultural identities? If so, how far might they want to include or exclude, e.g. late-deafened (culturally hearing) people, or bilingual hearing children of deaf parents, or people with mild to moderate hearing impairment? These and similar questions are not discussed here. This paper is not an insider report by an Asian deaf person, nor from a deaf service professional. It comprises notes and observations from a development agent with historical perspectives. It is based on 13 years’ practical work in South Asia, developing formal and informal resources for education of disabled children and disablement services, followed by 15 years of studies and research in the histories of social responses to deafness, disability and service development in SSWA, and also in Africa and East Asia.

1.4 A further purpose of the present study is to provide support and documentation for deaf people within the region to compare their own historical and present situation with that of their neighbours, rather than fixing their gaze on distant regions, such as North America or Western Europe, having very significantly different religious, political and economic foundations, which might offer quite deceptive pathways into the future. Within SSWA there are plenty of differences, but probably a far greater common historical-cultural underpinning. The rise of deaf culture in another vast part of Asia, i.e. China, may also provide more recognisable features, as well as some differences (Lytle et al., 2005/2006).

1.5 This paper should be read in conjunction with the open access annotated bibliography (Miles, 2000a) listing c. 250 items of modern and historical textual evidence, kindly hosted at: http://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/bibweb/Miles/Miles.html. Such evidence could support certain elements of a cultural identity, as discussed below. Discussion is cast in the form of eight hypotheses, which are certainly supported by some evidence, but require a great deal more study, debate and reflection, with the involvement of deaf people in SSWA. These are certainly not the only ways of handling deaf history of the region, and deaf people may wish to take up quite different themes that are of greater interest to them.

2.0 Excluding, Patronising, Sometimes Enabling

Deaf and severely hearing impaired children and young people in urban and rural SSWA have often been treated as sub-human during the past four millennia. At best, deaf adults were treated as perpetual children, and they continued to be so treated by aid organisations throughout the 20th century. (Exception must be made for hearing loss in elderly people, which probably did little to diminish the traditional respect for age). The dominant religions and philosophies of SSWA contain some elements that have tended to reinforce the excluding or patronising treatment, and also some elements from which more positive and life-enhancing behaviour sometimes emerged.
2.1 Evidence of treatment in the distant past is patchy and anecdotal, and of imprecise dating. A few ancient Sumerian proverbs from before 2500 BC mentioned deafness and muteness, which also appeared briefly in the Rig Veda and the Atharvaveda, possibly from 1500 BC or earlier, and in the Avesta (Bailey, 1961). These fleeting mentions indicate little more than the existence of deafness and deaf people. Social responses began to become a little more nuanced in later legal and religious literature, none of which can be dated precisely. In some of the earlier Upanishads (c. 6th century BC ?), the absence of hearing and the absence of speech were at least listed separately, despite the universal tendency to treat ‘deaf and dumb’ as necessarily conjoined. In the Indian Laws of Manu, codified perhaps in the first century BC, deaf people were listed with others who were excluded from certain social situations and from inheriting family property, though by way of compensation the family had a duty to maintain them (Manu, transl. 1884, VII: 149; IX: 201). Deafness and disability were clearly associated with evil deeds committed in a previous life (XI: 48, 51, 53). Some Pahlavi material, in mediaeval Persia, presumed to derive from lost Avestan texts, suggests that a deaf person, even though of correct behaviour and disposition, is "incapable of doing good works" (Pahlavi Texts, transl. 1880, V: 7, 292-293). These restrictions and attributions, and the way they were interpreted, certainly seem to have coloured public attitudes for most of the past two thousand years.

2.2 Deaf people figured in some Jatakas, stories of former lives of the Buddha, which often reflect ethnographic details of ordinary life during two or three centuries BC. For example, in Muga-Pakkha-Jataka, (No. 538, Jataka, transl. reprinted 1993, Vol. VI: 1-19), the Bodhisatta appears as a baby prince who, for a good reason, pretends to be a "deaf and dumb cripple". No. 171, Kalyana-Dhamma-Jataka, tells of a mother-in-law who was hard of hearing, and who misunderstood what was said, resulting in a comic uproar (Jataka, transl. reprinted 1993, II: 44-45). A similar theme appeared in later folk stories, such as "The Four Deaf Men" from Burma, found also in Ceylon (Aung, 1976, 62-64; Parker, 1910-1914, I: 134-136) and elsewhere (Thompson & Roberts, 1960, 76, 163-164) and in humorous tales from Persia (Nicholson, 1930, p. 351). The problem of misunderstanding was exploited when Parvati, Shiva’s wife, took the form of a stone-deaf old woman to trick the sage Vyasa into losing his temper, when Vyasa had been creating problems for Shiva. (Sen, 1925, 252-255).

2.3 Much of the evidence from antiquity reflects unpleasant attitudes that are still familiar today, yet there were also some compensatory measures. In ancient India, the ceremony of upanayana marked the start of a child’s formal education. From Baudhayana’s Grihyasesasutra (II.9), Pandurang V. Kane (1968-1977, II-i: 297-299) translated the special procedure for upanayana that could be used where a child was deaf, mute or mentally impaired and so would have difficulty in giving the audible ceremonial responses. The main difference in this special procedure was that the young person could remain silent. However, Altekar (1965, 292) suggests that there was some dissent from this inclusive permission. John Mayne’s standard treatise on Hindu Law (9th edition, 1922), noted exclusion from inheritance on grounds of disability, including congenital deafness, and that this was understood as a religious necessity. (The Brahminical theory was that wealth inherited by sons should be used for making the appropriate sacrifices to lessen the sufferings and enhance the position of the deceased father; so the inheritance must go only to those with the capacity to perform such sacrifices). All the great religions of the region have had elements of ‘care for the weaker members of society’, and exhortations of this sort have been made down the ages. The impact on public behaviour is very hard to assess, but they may have placed some restraint on active harassment of deaf or disabled people, while perhaps reinforcing the idea of them being weak and helpless. (See Update & Extension 2006, ‘Reappraisal of Earlier Models?’)

2.4 In South West Asia the renowned writer nicknamed al-Jahiz (776-868 CE), who was himself subjected to social prejudices (the name meant ‘goggle-eyed’), wrote one of the world’s earliest treatises rejecting negative attitudes and proclaiming that people with disabilities could be full and worthy members of society (Al-Jahiz, edition 1998). Yet in another of his works, on ‘The Wonders of Creation’, he wrote harshly about the social handicaps of deaf people, whom hearing people found boring because they could not take part in spoken conversation. Elsewhere, in his ‘Book of Animals’ (IV: 404-405), al-Jahiz wrote more discerningly of various different levels of deafness. In the Hedaya, a 12th century guide to Muslim law by al-Marghinani (transl. 1870) that was widely used across the SSWA region through eight centuries, evidence is also available that “the intelligible signs of a dumb person” were legally valid in certain situations concerning that person’s own business (vol. IV, book LIII, 707-708; see also index). Such a practice, which probably reflected earlier Jewish legal provisions (Falk, 1972-1978, II: 256-258), was considerably in advance of some European legal systems.

2.5 Adverse reactions have continued down the ages. Thomas Skinner, exploring in the Himalayas in the 1830s, found five deaf boys in one village, and a similarly high number elsewhere. “The parents of the dumb youths call them idiots, and say they are good for nothing.” (Skinner, 1833, II: 36-38). In the 1890s, the pioneering educator Jamini Nath Banerji at Calcutta reported that many deaf people were beggars and
therefore have no standing in society, are looked down upon and despised, treated more like lower animals than human beings, are actually hooded at in imitation of the ugly sounds they utter, and have even been pelted with stones by gangs of rogish children” (Banerji, 1898, 18).

A hundred years later, in the north of Sri Lanka, David (1994) describes the unintentionally adverse family and social environment in which deaf children usually grow up. Negative attitudes and poor life chances for deaf people are described from Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan in the 1990s (Dhalee, 1994; Joshi, 1991; Shamshudin, 1994). Yet in some rural areas, modern observers have reported more accepting attitudes, e.g. Thesiger (1964, p. 168) among the Marsh Arabs of Iraq. Jepson (1991c) was clear that a ‘significant portion’ of interviewees from various parts of rural India considered deafness a natural thing, a simple fact of life which did not require any special measures, beliefs or behaviour.

3.0 Traditional Manual / Gestural Sign Systems

Traditions of one or more manual / gestural sign systems or language(s) that were supposedly widespread and formalised among educated urban hearing people appear in the literatures and iconographies of religion, law, dance and dramatic performance, political records, folklore, commerce and travellers’ ethnographies. Deaf and hearing impaired people may well have participated in the use of such systems or language(s), but direct evidence of them doing so is scanty before the 20th century.


3.2 Many of the gestures would initially have been mimetic, but over time they became highly stylised and required skilled teachers (Shilappadikaram, Canto 3, transl. Daniélou, p. 10), skilled performers and an experienced audience, as is still the case today. Apart from stylised performance, evidence can be found that a form of sign language was one of the famous ‘Sixty-Four Arts’ that formed part of the social skills of well-brought-up people in South Asian antiquity (Ganguly, 1962, 168-171). There are references to communication by hand signs in the Arthasastra of Kautilya (transl. 1987, e.g. sections 1.12, 2.27, 3.11; pp. 351, 386-387, 505-506), in the Maha-Ummagga-Jataka (Jataka, edition 1993, VI: 182, 240-241), and other classical material. Ananda Coomaraswamy (1928), the great authority on Indian art and culture, had no doubt that there was “an established and conventional sign language of the hands”, used by hearing people in certain circumstances. Wijesekera (1945) describes two forms of sign language from Sri Lankan antiquity. Communication by hands and body movements seems to have been a normal and acceptable practice.

3.3 The facility with which a conversation might be had with deaf people casually encountered in rural areas of Asia, with some interpretation by a local hearing person, was noticed by European travellers such as Frederick Forbes (1844, 156, 172): one man near the eastern border of Persia “amused me much by his inquiries and gestures”, on 21 June 1841. Forbes made notes on the witty way in which the deaf man described various identifiable dignitaries, making inflammatory suggestions about them (p. 172). Some further examples will appear below. However, these stories and descriptions should not be pressed too far. There are other ancient works of literature in which matters are discussed that would seem obviously to invite some mention of sign language, yet no such mention is found, suggesting that it might not have been so widespread or well-known a practice. It is not the purpose in this paper to create an artificially inflated case for sign language or deaf culture in earlier centuries. In the long run deaf people will be better served by a well-documented and soberly argued case without exaggeration.

4.0 Deaf People in Groups: the Engine of Sign Language

In many documented situations, some deaf people in SSWA have spent variable periods of time together in groups, in some of which deaf sign could develop (and in some places clearly did develop) into a formal and syntactically more complex language.
4.1 Amongst guards and servants at royal court. Occasional evidence exists for deaf (or at least mute) guards in antiquity and in Mogul times, e.g. in the Tamil Mullaip-pattu (Chelliah, 1946, 59-66; Subrahmanian, 1966, 680) of the 2nd or 3rd century CE; in the Shilappadikaram (Canto 20, transl. Daniélou, p. 127), probably late in the 2nd century CE; in the Kadambari of Bana (transl. 1895, 122), from 7th century North India; and in one of the accounts of Akbar's 'language origins' experiment (Catrou, 1708, 137).

4.2 In villages having many deaf people. These have been mostly in the high iodine Deficiency belt across the Himalayas and submontane regions (Miles, 1998). The incidence of deafness in the Naga Hills of Assam a century ago was reportedly eight times higher than the census average for India, with some villages where "Every second person [was] either deaf or dumb, or insane" (Allen, 1905, 37). As recently as 1997, Taylor (p. 19) reports a Nepali location where "One in four of their village children becomes deaf." Of the communicative proficiency of the Angami Naga villages John Hutton (1921, 291-292) remarked, "To judge how highly developed is this power of communicating by signs, etc., it is necessary only to experience a Naga interpreter's translation of a story or a request told to him in sign language by a dumb man. .. Indeed the writer has known a dumb man make a long and detailed complaint of an assault in which nothing was missing except proper names, and even these were eventually identified by means of the dumb man's description of his assailant's dress and personal appearance." It is possible that the need for such skills has been reduced through public measures to increase iodine in diets. A recent survey of elderly people in Angami Naga villages (Dzûvichû, 2005) found that while hearing loss was the most widespread reported physical impairment at 40.5% of people aged over 60, attributed to old age decline, there was nobody 'deaf & dumb' among the sample of 380. (It is also possible that Naga people born deaf, or deafened in youth, are less likely to reach 60 years).

4.3 Amidst specific occupational groups, e.g. in tailors' quarters in towns or cities large enough to have several families of deaf tailors; also possibly in some groups of deaf beggars. Deaf tailors can be seen in cities now, but are not so easy to document historically. Ibn Khallikan (vol. II: 333) noted a prominent deaf tailor at Shiraz in the 10th century. Tailoring was taught in deaf schools at Bombay in the 1920s (Wright, 1926, 593-595). Taylor (1997) thought that tailoring was becoming a popular occupation of deaf people in Nepal in the 1990s. However, while noting one successful deaf tailoring business at Pokhara, Joshi (1991) pointed out that many deaf Nepali 'tailors' had very limited skills. They had been steered into tailoring by a very restricted vocational training program, and were unaware of, or could not afford, a much wider range of modern technical skill training that could have been open. Parasnis et al. (1996) discuss many gaps between beliefs, attitudes and vocational opportunities for deaf people in Pune, India. It is instructive to compare the current situation with Wright's list, 80 years earlier, of employment of 28 deaf people, giving details of age, pay, employer, duration of work, etc. Thirteen worked as draughtsmen or in printing, lithography, painting or studio work. Others were clerks, typists, fitters, carpenters, tailors.

4.4 In artificial, experimental situations, i.e. the Emperor Akbar's language experiment, c. 1578-1582, where deaf (or at least mute) women brought up some hearing infants under strictly guarded conditions of silence, to see whether the children would produce any spoken language, or would remain mute (Manucci, transl. 1907, I: 142-143; Abul Fazal, III: 581-582; Catrou, 1708, 137; Badauni, transl. in Elliot & Dowson, 1867-77, V: 533). The idea behind this had already been outlined 500 years earlier in the Qabus-nama of Kai Kaus (transl. 1886, Ch. 7, pp. 86-87) written in Persian in 1082-83 CE. In Catrou's account, when the children were twelve years old they were seen by Akbar and found to have no speech. "They had learnt from their nurses to do without [speech], and expressed their thoughts only by signs, which took the place of words." (transl. from French) There is some conflict of evidence behind this story, e.g. the number of children (between 12 and 30), duration of the experiment (3 or 4, or between 10 and 12 years), whether the nurses were both mute and deaf, and what became of the children later. Such differences support the broad credibility of the story as they suggest that independent sources and viewpoints were available. The number of children presumably decreased, as Badauni noted, with the high child mortality of the era; and they may have been inspected more than once. The nurses and children can hardly have spent three years together, let alone twelve, without developing some communal signing system. The nurses very likely brought some such skills with them, even if they had not previously associated with other deaf or mute people. The experiment seems to indicate the earliest well-documented place and time in India where such people lived as a community, developed their sign language or gestural system, and taught it to children for whom it was a first language. More curiously, the 1570s and early 1580s, when Akbar's experiment was running, was also the period when deaf servants at the Ottoman court were coming to greater prominence and their sign language, used also by successive Sultans, began to be reported by Europeans (Miles, 2000b). Yet the outcome was quite different: apparently Akbar found no use for the gestural communication he saw.

4.5 In residential schools for deaf children or for children with various abilities and impairments among whom
there were some deaf children. David (1987) attributed variations in signs in Sri Lanka to their having "evolved around each school community according to its particular needs. The earliest formally published Indian studies on sign language were based on observations in three residential schools for deaf children, at Dacca, Barisal and Calcutta (Banerjee, 1928). Here it was recognised that sign language was the medium of a counter-culture. Banerjee remarked (p. 70) that "In all these schools the teachers have discouraged the growth of the sign language, which in spite of this official disapproval, has grown and flourished." Sign vocabularies in use at the three different schools were verified with some care and compared for common terms, in an appendix (pp. 76-87), though the description of each sign was a simple verbal one. Banerjee cited various language theories in connection with signing, but held a more positive view of it than was common among hearing professionals in the 1920s:

"The gesture language of primitive man never reached the variety and expressiveness of the modern gesture language of deaf mutes; for before his thought-processes ever reached such complexity, he had definitely cast his vote for a language of cries and sounds. In the gesture language of deaf mutes we see the higher stages of gesture speech which man might have attained had he made the other choice, and preferred to speak with his hands instead of with his mouth."

4.6 In modern Deaf Clubs. Vasishta & Sethna (1994) analysed Indian data from 19 Deaf Clubs responding to a mailed survey questionnaire, giving a broad picture of social and leisure activities of some modern, urban, deaf Indians. Similar activities are reported across South Asia with a small but growing documentation of activities in newsletters and club papers. Some clubs also exist in South-West Asian countries. In the predominantly Muslim Middle Eastern nations, mixed clubs might not be culturally approved, and deaf women are less likely to have freedom of movement to attend women-only clubs, unless in a modernised urban environment. Moulton et al. (1995 ?) report that "In 1990, two clubs for deaf women were established in Amman, Jordan" by a very active Arab woman, who also worked to establish deaf culture and sign language teaching.

5.0 Formal Services and Schools, Begun With Signing

Formal welfare services with an educational element, traceable from the 1830s, initially worked with locally-devised gestural or signed communication, sometimes with simultaneous speech. There was then a transitional period, during which oral methods became the dominant (but not exclusive) educational trend.

5.1 The earlier educational practices can be documented from the 1830s until the 1910s, and were conducted almost entirely by European and Indian hearing women in mission schools or orphanages. For example, Priscilla Chapman (1839) reported the case of a deaf girl at the Female Orphan Refuge, Calcutta, under Mrs Wilson. 'Gunga' was "a great favourite with her playmates: they have taught her to converse with her fingers..." (p. 137). It seem much more likely that the development of a manual communication system here was a mutual process; and that since Gunga would have used it constantly, whereas her hearing friends used it intermittently, Gunga would very quickly have become the expert. However reports by hearing observers, while emphasizing (as Chapman does) the alert intelligence of the deaf person, tend automatically to cast the deaf one in the role of learner and subordinate. Forty seven years later, Miss Baumann (1886) at Chupra reported in some detail on how she 'civilised' a deaf girl found abandoned in the wild. Baumann believed that there was "no deaf and dumb language on the fingers in India, and so I had to learn to speak by gesture to Ellen, the name she afterwards received at baptism." In this case, mutual learning and communication proceeded to the point where Baumann could report later that the girl whom she had at first thought unteachable was in fact "very intelligent, and would ask many questions concerning different subjects which I loved to reply to, and we became close friends."

5.2 By 1898 signed communication in the world of South Asian schooling had reached, at least locally, a pinnacle of official recognition that it would hardly regain for another century, when a government education inspector conducted an examination of pupils in Florence Swainson's school at Palamcottah, South India. Miss Carr reported that, "With a little help from the teachers I was able to examine the children quite easily, both in counting and writing figures. In object lessons there is a sign for everything, but I found them so easy and suggestive, that with the help of the teacher, and pictures and objects I succeeded in testing the children's knowledge very fairly. ... It was my first examination of deaf and dumb children, and I was particularly struck with the ease with which the signs can be learnt. Miss Swainson and her two Tamil teachers seemed able to 'say' anything to the children, and to understand all that the children 'said'. The words 'say' and 'said' are literally not out of place here, for both Miss Swainson and the teachers invariably formed the words with their lips in addition to making the signs." (Report on Public Instruction, 1898, 118-119).

5.3 By that time, 1898, Swainson was aware that professional currents were running strongly in favour of oral teaching approaches. Swainson was a nurse who had worked for some years with blind children, but she had no
formal training to teach deaf children. She and her Indian colleagues had learnt by trial and error how to proceed (Ammal, 1909; Swainson, 1914). They also had some success in teaching a deaf-blind child, Helen Pyari, who was enrolled in 1907 (Swainson, 1907; Smith, 1915, 7; Seeley, 1920, 14-15). During this process the children were sometimes the language 'experts'. By 1906 the hearing teachers were further encouraged to respect sign language by the fact that they had generated a congregation of deaf converts to Christianity, among whom the common language was Sign. Some of the earliest photos of deaf people signing in India come from this school, e.g. a line of children signing the Christian prayer that begins "Our Father Who Art in Heaven" (Swainson, 1906, cover & p. 11). Swainson noted that

“Our services for the Deaf are chiefly in the sign language, in which all can join alike, whether learning Tamil, as those do who belong to the Madras Presidency, or English, which is taught to those coming from other parts.” (1906, 9)

5.4 More formal educational services had begun c. 1884 at Bombay, and almost immediately had adopted an oralist approach, led by T.A. Walsh, an experienced European teacher who had in fact used manual methods for many years before reaching India (Crossett, 1887; Hull, 1913, 309). The next educational work began at Calcutta c. 1892 with ad hoc approaches, but soon the Indian principal, Jamini Nath Banerji, was sent to Britain and the USA for training and he returned to launch Oralism in Bengal and to train teachers who went on to start other schools on this pattern (Banerji, 1898). Various later reports give an impression that Oralism was rigidly followed; yet other evidence rebuts the idea that no alternative approach existed. Jamini Nath's son, Sailendra Nath Banerji (1950), reported many years later on the senior teacher in his father's school, that "The late Mohinimohan Majumdar was a brilliant exponent of the sign language." JN Banerji himself admitted that there were children with whom the oral approach was unsuccessful, and so "This class is taught on the manual spelling method," using a single-handed manual alphabet for Bengali (Banerji, 1907). The early teachers in India did what they could with whatever methods came to hand; in none were they so skilled as to wish to jettison all others (Miles, 2001a).

6.0 Failed Efforts to Stop Deaf Children Signing

From the 1910s to 1980s, when formal education for deaf children was available almost entirely in Oralist special schools, vigorous but futile efforts were made by hearing professionals, and by some families, to stop deaf children signing amongst themselves.

6.1 The first formal studies and records of 'illicit' signing were published in the 1920s by H.C. Banerjee, as noted above. A British teacher who toured Indian schools in the 1930s reported that at Mysore and elsewhere, typically "the method used was an oral one, signs being discouraged and finger-spelling not taught". This teacher's viewpoint is further indicated by her celebration of the achievements of a Mylapore student, who "is now able to speak English and Tamil so well that one would hardly believe Santhanaswamy was once a mute conveying his ideas by means of signs only." (Brodie, 1935) More recently, Pratibha Karnath (1991, 75) remarks that the 'very weak' development of alternate and augmentative communication systems in India arose because the field of speech-language pathology developed at a time when

oralism reigned supreme and even the use of incidental gestures and signs by the hard of hearing was anathema to the speech and hearing specialist. Therapists and parents forbade the use of gestures and signs...

(apparently in the belief that they would cause deaf children to avoid the difficult work of acquiring speech). The influence of exclusively Oralist teachers and foreign advisors continues to be strongly felt (Afzal, 1979; Deshmukh, 1994). For their sake some South Asian teachers in the 1990s still pretended that they used no signing at all in their schools, but on closer questioning admitted that this was untrue (Tesni, 1998, 181). Within the SSWA region only Iran seems to have begun its services in an independent way, at least from the 1920s to the 1950s. Jabar Baghcheban (1885-1966), who had pioneered kindergarten teaching in Iran, developed his own methods for teaching deaf children, with manual signs and a special curriculum (Hadadian, 1996).

7.0 Deaf People, Big and Small, Living Their Lives

A modest number of legendary and historical deaf, hearing impaired or silent figures can be identified, who achieved some prominence in SSWA. Far greater numbers of deaf people have found ways of living their lives without any great distinction but also without being helplessly dependent or being reliant on special services. A majority of those receiving any formal education probably did so in ordinary schools. Among the vast number with no formal education, scattered in rural areas without the company of other deaf people, there have also been many who achieved a social role of some value.

7.1 In the Tamil Tiruvilaiyatarpuranam the deity Murukan (also: Subrahmanyian), son of Shiva, spent some time in a
their professional success largely in terms of their students' academic success. However there is some evidence that

Worthwhile achievements might be expected from some students in special schools, where teachers measured

under 20, and girls from 7 to 16 years of age, without distinction of race or creed, are eligible for admission.” (Kirk, Maharajah of Baroda’s government began schools for deaf children, the rules were that “All deaf boys, above 7 and

boundaries of their gender and age, as well as of their impairment. Undoubtedly there was additional discrimination

and became the first deaf member of staff. Each of these young women stepped beyond the stereotypical

village girls to read, and when it was time for her to return to school they begged her to stay and to continue teaching

Sanmoshavadivoo, returned home during the hot season vacation, and found that she and her younger brother (also

at the deaf school) were the only people in the village who could read and write. She began teaching some of the

visitors (Editorial, 1931) remarked on the extra-curricular activities. The Guides and Bluebirds (= Brownies) were active, and

... These deaf girls display much keenness in all branches of Guiding, tracking, bird lore, etc. ... the Rangers are

enterprising deaf girls there, who were expected to go on to a life of independent usefulness in society. An

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"the Patrol Leaders have shewn powers of leadership and organization hardly to be expected from deaf girls.

whatever modest place has been accorded to prominent deaf men in general historical accounts, deaf women

have been accorded an even smaller place; yet they have not been entirely absent. The learned Pandita Ramabai’s

hearing deteriorated seriously while she was a young woman (Müller, 1899, 127-128; Selim, 2006), and most of her

later educational and practical activities on behalf of widows and other depressed classes were carried out with this

added difficulty. Brief reports from the Florence Swainson school in the 1930s suggest that there were intelligent and

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the Patrol Leaders have shewn powers of leadership and organization hardly to be expected from deaf girls.

Whatever modest place has been accorded to prominent deaf men in general historical accounts, deaf women have been accorded an even smaller place; yet they have not been entirely absent. The learned Pandita Ramabai’s hearing deteriorated seriously while she was a young woman (Müller, 1899, 127-128; Selim, 2006), and most of her later educational and practical activities on behalf of widows and other depressed classes were carried out with this added difficulty. Brief reports from the Florence Swainson school in the 1930s suggest that there were intelligent and enterprising deaf girls there, who were expected to go on to a life of independent usefulness in society. An anonymous visitor (Editorial, 1931) remarked on the extra-curricular activities. The Guides and Bluebirds (= Brownies) were active, and "the Patrol Leaders have shewn powers of leadership and organization hardly to be expected from deaf girls. ... These deaf girls display much keenness in all branches of Guiding, tracking, bird lore, etc. ... the Rangers are beginning Child Nursing and First Aid. They hope to run a small dispensary to which the poor people from the neighbouring village can come for simple treatment.”

The headmistress at this time, Elizabeth Morgan [1931], wrote that one of her more able girls, Sanmoshavadivoo, returned home during the hot season vacation, and found that she and her younger brother (also at the deaf school) were the only people in the village who could read and write. She began teaching some of the village girls to read, and when it was time for her to return to school they begged her to stay and to continue teaching them. Later, Morgan (1947) told the story of an outstanding orphan, Gnanasunderam, who went through the school and became the first deaf member of staff. Each of these young women stepped beyond the stereotypical boundaries of their gender and age, as well as of their impairment. Undoubtedly there was additional discrimination against deaf girls compared with boys, yet opportunities for girls were not confined to mission schools. When the Maharajah of Baroda’s government began schools for deaf children, the rules were that “All deaf boys, above 7 and under 20, and girls from 7 to 16 years of age, without distinction of race or creed, are eligible for admission.” (Kirk, 1920)

Worthwhile achievements might be expected from some students in special schools, where teachers measured

their professional success largely in terms of their students’ academic success. However there is some evidence that
7.7 One of these casually integrated children was "a student of 7th class, aged fourteen years. He is deaf and unable to speak. He has been studying in this school for 7 years but he cannot write his name and father's name. It is difficult for him to write but it is not impossible." (Ibid., 68) This boy was in school, casually integrated with the other children, at least learning the normal social behaviour and whatever else he could pick up. As a child he had made his way in the 'hearing' world. As an adult, no doubt he would continue to do so. The artist Satish Gujral did so, using his talents to make a good name for himself; but after 80 years could still recall that "in our country a physical problem or a visible handicap is sneered at and nobody spares you." Entering a new school at Lahore, he had acquired the name Bola ['deaf', but also 'stupid']; but Gujral "didn't even realise that I was called Bola." One day he saw the name in the attendance register, and asked another boy who it was... (Quraishi, 2006)

7.8 The data suggest that across Pakistan at least 10,000 deaf children may be in a similar situation in ordinary schools, i.e. far more than the number enrolled in special schools. Across the SSWA region, the number is likely to be ten times greater. Far greater still have been the number of deaf children and adults scattered in isolation throughout the rural villages without any opportunity for formal education. Evidence about their lives is extremely scanty. Travellers such as Thomas Skinner occasionally noticed how easily they could be dismissed as 'useless idiots' by their families; but Skinner saw their "lively and inquisitive" faces, and formed a different opinion. If they were useless, he wrote, this was not because of any imbecility on the deaf children's side, but arose from "The want of power in the parents to express their wishes in any other way than by speech" (Skinner, 1833, II: 36-38). This perspective, i.e. that the 'problem' resides not in the deaf person but in society, is often thought to be the creation of politicised western Deaf people from the 1970s onward. To find it expressed casually by a Himalayan explorer in the 1830s may challenge some modern generalisations about attitudes in the past. Modern language studies by Jill Jepson (1991a, 1991b, 1991c) have also cast some light on the lives of a small number of rural deaf individuals and their methods of communicating with members of the local community.

7.9 One among very many children of SSWA whose hearing and other impairments were not properly assessed until several years passed, thus losing the benefits of early intervention, was the daughter of General Zia ul Haq, Pakistan's military ruler from 1977 until his assassination in 1988. The girl was also in need of some oral surgery and speech therapy, and was assumed to have a serious mental disability. In many powerful families she would have been kept in seclusion; but Zia regularly appeared in public with his daughter, with pictures in the newspapers and on television. He addressed public meetings, "speaking as the father of a disabled child". When eventually a full assessment had been made and her hearing impairment and other special needs were better understood, Zia could be seen using sign language with her on public occasions. The witnessed realities of the girl's life, and Zia ul Haq's part in it, could hardly be in greater contrast with the savage political satire of Salman Rushdie's novel "Shame". There a major character (obviously based on Zia ul Haq) has a daughter, 'Sufiya Zinobia', variously dubbed an idiot, simpleton, goof, damaged, birdbrain, moron, mental case, beast, deranged, etc. Notionally, Sufiya accumulates in herself the shame and shamefulness of Pakistan's corrupt national politics, gender discrimination and inept Islamisation; and finally she is portrayed as a monstrous vampire haunting the country, tearing the heads off her lovers. This fictional identity-switch and abuse of a vulnerable, real-life, hearing-impaired girl and young woman, in a political lampoon-fantasy, suggests a return to treating deaf or disabled people as worthless and sub-human. In recent interviews, Zia's daughter, now in her 30s, spoke of her father's loving kindness to her as a child, recalling highlights such as the child-size full ceremonial army uniform she used to wear when accompanying her father on official occasions. Her present engagement in social welfare action is intended to continue what Zia began for people with disability or chronic illness.

8.0 Missing Histories

The historical data indicated above, of earlier signed or gestural communication, planned or unplanned deaf groups, and of the first 50 years of pre-Oral efforts to teach deaf children in SSWA, remain practically unknown, at least as a coherent narrative, to SSW Asian deaf people and to hearing professionals in the deaf field. Consequently such data...
8.1 It is hard to show exactly why and how knowledge disappeared or failed to find its place in the broader histories of SSWA cultural heritages. The similar loss, of the extensive and fascinating history of deaf people at the Ottoman court in Turkey from the early- or mid- 16th to the early 20th centuries, has recently begun to be repaired. Their sign language and activities had been reduced to footnotes in an academic debate about Orientalism and the prejudices of 19th century French intellectuals, until recently disentangled from those agendas (Miles, 2000b; Zeshan, 2002, 2003a). The Ottoman history could to some extent be reconstructed because diplomats and other travellers sent reports home noting that sign language was a useful skill at court among both deaf and hearing people, because silence was obligatory in the Sultan’s presence.

8.2 Beyond that group of deaf people at court, and some evidence of them living in Istanbul, deaf people have little presence in earlier Turkish history. One whose work did survive for centuries is the prolific poet Zati (1477-1546), a boot-maker, partly deaf and self-taught, who went to Istanbul during the time of Bayazid II and made a good impression among the literati and the Sultan’s Court (Andrews et al. 1997). Some sources exist in hagiographical literature, e.g. where a saint has been associated with miraculous healing of a “deaf and dumb child” and the shrine has then become a place of pilgrimage for families with deaf children, of whatever religion, e.g. Saint Eustratius (Mango, 1968), and the monastery of St George Koudounas at Buyukada, where a deaf child is believed to have been instrumental in discovering an icon (Neslihan Halici, personal communication). Such events tend to be disapproved by modern deaf activists, seeing them as focused on traditional ideas of ‘cure’ and superstition rather than celebrating Deafness as a linguistic-cultural asset. (The reported annual experience of one deaf Iranian, Abbas Behmanesh, who as a child was “tethered to the shrine all night” in the vain hope of a miraculous cure [Thornley, 1999] also gives an abusive angle to the tradition). Historically, however, shrine visits may have been among the few occasions when isolated rural deaf children and adults could meet one another, and briefly experience recognition and comradeship. Recent work by Sara Scalenghe (2005) has cast useful light on adventitiously deaf people in Ottoman Syria, using Arabic manuscript sources. Some histories of deaf people in Africa have also been discoverable from the 960s to the 1960s (Miles, 2004, extended 2005), with Egypt prominently represented.

8.3 There are probably a few deaf people still alive who went to school somewhere in SSWA as early as the 1920s, and who could provide oral testimony of those days. However, so far as post-1947 published literature is concerned, the earlier experience is seldom cited. Much of it had appeared in obscure missionary magazines, or academic journals of which only a few copies now exist, in inaccessible library stacks. Responses to the internet annotated bibliography in this field (see URL above), first displayed in September 2000, indicated that experienced people in SSWA deaf circles had not been aware of the extent of relevant materials before 1900. Consequently, deaf people in the region have continued culturally to appear as ‘children’ without history or heritage.

9.0 Cultural Imperialism, or Confident Self-Development?

Efforts since the late 1970s to study or promote South and South-West Asian sign languages and deaf cultures have been sponsored and undertaken with considerable involvement of European and American agents (hearing, deaf, and bicultural) according to the interests, debates and battles of their time and context. This has generated some important advances of knowledge. At the same time, some other foreign agendas have been promoted, which may have added a further chapter of cultural imperialism to the century-long imported domination of oralism. These trends need careful monitoring and critical review. The development of stronger indigenous deaf histories and cultures should lead to an increase of confidence and self-dependence among deaf SSWA Asians, and a more mature and responsible approach on the part of foreign deaf and hearing organisations and development agencies.

9.1 As already noted, formal studies of sign diversity began at deaf schools in the Calcutta region as early as the 1920s, but they were not followed up seriously for many years. In the mid 1970s the deaf Indian researcher Madan Vasishta and some American colleagues began to use filmed evidence in studies of deaf groups. Over a decade they documented Indian SL at Bangalore, Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta (Vasishta et al. 1978) and published introductions to four regional varieties. The results suggested a substantial degree of uniformity in urban Indian Sign Language, and little or no connection of Indian SL with European or American sign languages. Meanwhile Nordic technical assistance was applied to Sign Language studies and dictionaries in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and similar efforts resulted in documentation of Nepali SL (ABSA Research Group, 1987; Ross et al, 1989). In South-West Asia, modern interest in sign language began probably with Barakat’s (1973) detailed work on ‘Arabic gesture’, and more formal deaf sign research has been carried out in Persian SL (Islamic Republic of Iran, 1989) and in Afghanistan (Zaban Ishara, 1991). See also ‘Update & Extension 2006’, below.
This seems to be an instance of linguistic analysis giving a scientific basis to the practical experience of deaf people. Sign Language seems to be more uniform, and over a much larger area, than expected. Practically identical grammars with very little variation, although vocabulary can vary quite a lot. IPSL [Indo-Pakistan and Central India (from Assam to Mumbai and Hyderabad). The results indicate that all these varieties have "clearly indicates that sign language varieties in both cities in fact constitute the same language and have identical grammars" The signs, morphology and syntax of this single IPSL (Indo-Pakistan Sign Language) have now been described by Zeshan in English, after earlier publication in German. (See also ‘Update & Extension 2006’, below).

The hands, minds and communication medium of several million lively deaf people scattered across a subcontinent comprising several nations that have periodically been in political tension with one another, the path cannot be expected to be very smooth nor the end result predictable. The vast majority of South Asian deaf people are most unlikely to have heard anything of the research results. Those in India have for the most part continued with the educational situation as described by Murray Culshaw (1983):

"...there is no standard approach to sign language. In some schools, the English finger spelling method with two hands is taught, in others, the American one handed system is taught, in others, the Indian sign language is taught - there are several of these based on regional and cultural variations - and in some schools, there is a finger spelling system related to Indian languages. This variety results in considerable confusion."

The language situation continued to be so muddled as to cause Vasishta, Woodward & De Santis (1987) to note that "some Americans have tried to impose their signing systems on Indian deaf people, believing that there was no indigenous Indian Sign Language." Such a belief was held by Miss Baumann in the 1880s, and apparently continues to be believed into the 2000s (e.g. Chambers, 2001). The problem arises partly from too narrow an idea of what a 'language' should be. If one listens in Britain to a person with a strong Glaswegian accent trying to communicate in English with someone from rural Devon, one might conclude that either there is no such thing as the English language, or that neither speaker is familiar with it; yet the speakers would not be pleased by such a verdict! A proposal to provide them with an artificial form of their language (e.g. the Queen's English in the tones of an upper-class BBC newsreader of the 1970s), would also meet with some derision. Government officials in Pakistan in the 1980s looked at the idea of trying to establish some sort of standardised national sign system. They were advised by a visiting British consultant, who was in contact with local deaf sign users, that it was "very evident that a thriving and dynamic sign language existed and that it was unlikely to be influenced by any committee invented codes" (Fraser, 1987, 13).

9.5 Similar moves seem nevertheless to be current in India, with a view to the construction of a supposedly unified sign language. This is not entirely an imposition from the hearing world (which has notably failed to find a single national spoken language acceptable to Indian speakers from all regions). Gopalakrishnan (1998), an articulate deaf activist of Chennai (Madras), while recognising that sign language is "bound to have some regional variations and dialects" because signs are used in everyday life and "life depends upon customs, and customs vary from place to place", believes that diversity in India has "retarded the growth and development of sign language", not least by confusing non-users (p. 82). He advocates and earnestly hopes for moves "towards a common Indian sign language" (p. 85); also towards "evolving signs for grammatical terms ... because at present no such signs exist (due to little emphasis on teaching grammar to the deaf through sign)" (p. 84). If enough deaf people were to decide that this should be achieved, it probably could be done, on a given date; but how long it could be maintained is harder to tell. A written or spoken national language of unity can be reinforced daily by the low-cost mass media of newspapers and radio. To maintain a strong, unified core and controlled development for a sign language would probably require a high level of national television viewing, which may be some decades away for the deaf populations of SSWA.

9.6 Nevertheless, Zeshan (personal communication, May 2001) reports that her latest work has included comparisons of morphological paradigms across regional sign languages from all over Northern and Central India (from Assam to Mumbai and Hyderabad). The results indicate that all these varieties have practically identical grammars with very little variation, although vocabulary can vary quite a lot. IPSL [Indo-Pakistan Sign Language] seems to be more uniform, and over a much larger area, than expected. This seems to be an instance of linguistic analysis giving a scientific basis to the practical experience of deaf people,
since Zeshan continues, "Deaf people have also reported to me over and over again that they can communicate quite easily with other people from all over India, whereas they have great difficulty communicating with deaf foreigners." Thus it may be that a sufficient 'unified core' already exists. A major government institution is planning to train sign language interpreters, and there are signs of a shift in government policy, toward recognising sign language as a legitimate form of communication. (See 'Update & Extension 2006', below)

10.0 In Conclusion

"The record of the past illuminates
The conscience of a people; memory
Of past achievement makes it Self-aware;
But if that memory fades, and is forgot,
The folk again is lost in nothingness..."
M. Iqbal (1875-1938)

10.1 For a justification of retrieving history in aid of the self-empowerment and self-development of an Asian minority group, it is hard to improve on this thought by Pakistan's philosopher-poet, Muhammad Iqbal (transl. 1953, 60-62). Yet again it must be emphasised that the present brief sketch of developing cultural histories and activities should be tested, argued through, corrected and extended by deaf South and South West Asians and their friends within the region. The work of collating and examining historical source materials should already have been undertaken by deaf people themselves, and in the future no doubt it will be. Deaf people will probably wish to give a different emphasis to some items, and are likely to recognise many things that a hearing person, especially a foreigner, would not notice. There is also undoubtedly a good deal more material awaiting discovery in local archives, in various languages. Above all, the experiences of everyday deaf life throughout the 20th century await the attention of researchers, students, transcribers and writers who can make a credible analysis and synthesis of these experiences. Individual and family life with deafness in SSWA have had a few more detailed descriptions, e.g. by Abedi (1988) and Bose (1998); but far more studies are needed to build up a picture with depth and variety.

10.2 The patterns of behaviour noted above, and some possible responses, have some similarities to those for which evidence exists in the histories of SSW Asian people who have had learning difficulties and severe communication problems; also, to a lesser extent, among SSW Asian people who were or are blind or having physical impairments (Miles, 2001b). Development experiences with the latter two groups, who have been in a stronger position to 'speak for themselves' and to be heard doing so, and the experiences of urban Euro-American deaf people in the 19th and 20th century (e.g. Bragg, 2001), are worth reviewing, though they are not necessarily a useful or sufficient guide to policies for assisting the development and empowerment of deaf adults and children in SSWA. When enough of these deaf people have had opportunities to grasp and study their own rich and varied heritages, and to stand in their own ground and plan their own futures, their own choices and directions will finally be seen.

10.3 One among the many barriers to their doing so is that the relevant published materials (such as those referred to in the present paper), are almost entirely in English. A great deal more should be produced in the major regional languages of SSWA, and also on video in sign languages.

10.4 By no means all the foreigners who have been interested in deafness and sign language in SSWA have wished to interfere, correct or patronise the regional cultures. Garry O'Connor (1988), who wrote a book on the theatrical and film representation of the Mahabharata, saw the Kathakali version of the epic and commented, "Most of all the hand gestures had impressed me: heightened by silver nail-tips the hands wave, flashed and echoed every form of human and divine state. Imitative, descriptive and symbolic in turn..." (pp. 55-56).

O'Connor (p. 56) also quoted from the director Peter Brook's impressions of the river of Indian life and creativity: "Whatever the aspect of human experience, the Indian has indefatigably explored every possibility. If it is that most humble and most amazing of human instruments, a finger, everything that a finger can do has been explored and codified. If it is a word, a breath, a limb, a sound, a note - or a stone or a colour of a cloth - all its aspects, practical artistic and spiritual, have been investigated and linked together. The line between performance and ceremony is hard to draw, and we witnessed many events that took us close to Vedic times, or close to the energy that is uniquely Indian."

10.5 These remarks came nearly half a century after the American danseuse La Meri (pseudonym of Russell Meriwether Hughes, 1898-1988), working in India, claimed that, "The hand-language is as complete and expressive as any spoken language. I myself, speaking no Tamil,
have conversed with my teacher and colleagues by means of hasta-mudras. I have found them adequate, not only in
discovering the underlying principles of my instructor’s methods, but even in carrying on long, feminine, social
conversations..."

La Meri’s remarks, in the midst of a career based on communicating with the body, came two decades before William
Stokoe’s studies opened up the same battle for Deaf Sign to be recognised as real and complete language. In the
context of that battle, some deaf people and linguists have tended to dismiss any connection between Sign
Language and the lengthy heritage of Indian languages of gesture and dance, maybe on the grounds that any link
might diminish recognition of the linguistic completeness of Sign Language. Such arguments are perhaps no longer
required, as modern research is beginning once again to ‘embrace the body’. ‘Gesture’ has been upgraded, and has
a growing research literature. It seems quite likely that the emerging base of Indo-Pak Sign Language has no
discernible connection with the heritage of dance and gestural communication; yet the review of various kinds of
signed languages (e.g. among American Indians [Davis, 2005]) tends to support the holistic position that there is, and
always has been, a continuum of ways in which both hearing and deaf people use their bodies in communicating.

10.6 If foreign artists such as La Meri, O’Connor and Brook can appreciate and indeed marvel at the South Asian
capacity for exploration and codification of cultural space, it is certainly open to deaf South & South-West Asians to
create and further explore their distinct and overlapping forms of culture and communication.

UPDATE & EXTENSION 2006

A surge of deaf and sign language activities seems to have taken place in SSWA since mid-2001, when the original
version of this paper was published. The following ‘update’ notes, without detailed research, give merely a glimpse of
some significant parts, with apologies for any mis-description and for many omissions. In the earlier paper, ‘South
West Asia’ was taken to end at the western borders of Arabia, Iran and Iraq, not quite reaching Asia Minor and the
Eastern Mediterranean corners of Asia. However, the present update does glance at some activities within these
further parts, and the Appendix gives a short bibliography (110 items) on deafness and signing in the Arab Middle
East.

Indian Advances
Remarkable developments in India during the past five years are described in detail by the highly experienced team
of Zeshan, Vasishta & Sethna (2005). Several research, development and training projects have been carried out in
association with the Ali Yaver Jung National Institute for the Hearing Handicapped at Mumbai. These appear to have
put Indian Sign Language firmly on the official education map. They have developed appropriate video and textual
materials for ISL teaching, sign language interpreting, and for bilingual education of deaf children (AYJNIHH &
Zeshan, 2001, 2002; Zeshan & Panda, 2005); have been training hearing people in ISL, and ISL users to teach sign
language, to engage in bilingual education, and to act as Sign Interpreters; and have monitored the outcomes and
adjusted the inputs, with new editions in press of the earlier (2001, 2002) materials. Further linguistic research and
description on Indo-Pakistan Sign Language have been published by Zeshan (2001, 2003b, 2005a, 2005b) and
colleagues (Aboh, Pfau & Zeshan, 2005). Awareness of sign language, and of its importance in the education of deaf
children and the lives of deaf adults, had developed with painful slowness through most of the 20th century, as
described earlier. Finally it seems that a combination of national vision, modern research results and technology,
strategic advocacy, and vigorous follow-up, has brought about a crystallisation of earlier efforts and taken decisive
steps forward with government backing. It is also a pleasure to note that one of the key participants in the work over
30 years, Madan Vasishta, has just produced his witty and observant memoirs of becoming deaf at the age of 11 in
rural India, battling his way through the 1950s with this unexpected turn of life, eventually joining the deaf community
at Delhi, and from there moving to Gallaudet University to begin a life of learning, teaching and researching in the
USA and India (Vasishta, 2006).

The long-term task remains to spread these advances beyond the urban world, making some benefits accessible to
the many isolated rural deaf children and adults still living in conditions not so far from those experienced by Vasishta
50 years ago; and also to influence professional colleagues across the region. Meanwhile, in a country as vast as
India, recent years have certainly seen more studies and publications of relevance to sign language and to the lives
and education of deaf or hearing impaired people. Examples are another Sign dictionary published (Ramakrishna,
2001); language performance studies continue with students having various levels of hearing impairment, in one of
India’s many regional languages (Joseph, 2003); an internationally sponsored study on sexual vulnerability of deaf
people in India (Patil & Gopinath, 2000); a review of recent progress in services for deaf-blind people (Sharma, 2004); a study of a variety of factors in deaf schools in Northern India, including languages and modes of communication in the classroom (Randhawa, 2005); and doubtless much further useful work. While the present review focuses on deaf people’s lives and communications, it may also be noted that Indian biomedical research is progressing that may eventually prevent far more hearing loss or deafness in the community, by genetic or environmental measures (recently, for example, Ghosh et al, 2005; Kumar et al, 2005; Bedi, 2006). Such developments, and the spread of cochlear implants through the SSWA region, may have an equivocal reception among some Deaf culture advocates; yet they will certainly interact with and affect the future of deaf cultures, so it is pointless to ignore them.

Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran
Some detailed work has been carried out from 2002 to 2004 documenting Pakistan Sign Language, by Sulman & Zuberi (2002, 2003) with various papers available at: http://www.special.net.pk. From Eastern Afghanistan, SHIP reports service development and deaf cultural activity, including deaf clubs, a model school for the deaf at Jalalabad, deaf units in village schools and further collaborative work on sign language documentation (SHIP’s activities, [2003]). A description of projected further Afghan sign language development also appears (Development of Afghan Sign, 2005).

At DeafWay II, the world congress at Gallaudet University in 2002, the Iranian activist Abbas Behmanesh (2002) presented an overview of Deaf Culture in Iran, giving details on deaf education since the 1920s, the longstanding conflict between Oralism (supported by the Iranian government special education department) and Persian SL (supported by the health department, and a number of deaf organisations). He mentions the “first Deaf person to receive his masters degree in Iran”, a history major at Mashhad University, Rouzbeh Gahrman (2002, 2003). Behmanesh, who now lives outside Iran, is rather critical of the effects of the Islamisation process on deaf lives and culture after the 1979 Revolution. Another Iranian emigré, Kader Abdolah (2006) has cast his reflections on the culture and recent history of his country in the format of a novel of various kinds of communication, built around a “deaf-mute” character, Aga Akbar. He is father of the narrator, with whom he shares his ‘home sign’, which the son interprets to the world of rural Iran.

Arab Sign Languages (for References, see Appendix bibliography)
Development of a Sign Dictionary is reported in the Gulf states for Arab Sign Language (Arab Dictionary, 2001). An interesting contribution by Abdel-Fattah (2005) discusses Arabic Sign Languages (ArSL) from a comparative linguistic point of view, illuminating some of the unity and diversity currently found in perceptions of ArSL and their everyday practice across the Arab world. Grammatical analysis by Hendriks (2004) and Hendriks et al (2004), based on Jordanian Sign Language, has led on to a broader description of linguistic structures in sign language across Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Palestine with quite uniform grammar (Hendriks & Zeshan, forthcoming). Several technical studies have been reported on ‘Automatic recognition’ of simplified parts of ArSL, e.g. the manual alphabet (Abdel-Wahab et al, 2004; Assaleh & Al-Rousan, 2005; Al-Buraiky, 2005; Hussain, 1999; Al-Jarrah & Halawani, 2001). However, these mostly lack any clear description of the complexity of spacial use and kinetics involved in signed communication between deaf people.

Attention focused recently on the Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language, which is claimed to have arisen in the past 70 years within an community of 3500 people in the Negev, and is used among deaf and hearing people there (Kisch, 2001, 2004; Sandler et al, 2005; Boswell, 2006). It is reportedly independent of other known regional Sign Languages such as Israeli SL, which itself has been well documented during the past 20 years by some of the same researchers (e.g. Meir & Sandler, 2004) and others (See bibliography index, http://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/bibweb). An earlier account of deaf Bedouin signing near the Gulf of Aqaba (Wallin, 1855) unfortunately does not contain specific linguistic descriptions that might be compared with the Al-Sayyid Bedouin SL.

Ottoman and Turkish SLs
Historical development of Ottoman Sign Language, and the uncertainty about its relation to modern Turkish Sign Language, have been noted in work cited above (Miles, 2000a; Zeshan, 2002, 2003b). In the 1890s, when Ottoman SL was still actively used among servants in the Sultan’s palaces at Istanbul, and when the first deaf school was opened at Istanbul by an Austrian, Ferdi Garati (or De Grati), c. 1891, with the Sultan’s permission, a key person in the school was the head of the ‘manual department’ (i.e. using sign language). He was Monsieur Pekmezian (sometimes H. Pekmezian, or Pascal Pekmezian), a well-educated deaf man, born at Istanbul of deaf Armenian parents. He spent many years in France, as a pupil and then as a teacher, and later toured Europe raising funds for the new school (Les Sourds-Muets, 1892-93; De Grati, 1898; Editorial 1895). De Grati in 1898 reported him as in (sometimes H. Pekmezian, or Pascal Pekmezian), a well-educated deaf man, born at Istanbul of deaf Armenian

written about the school, but Pekmezian seems to have disappeared from the record. A possible reason might have been the growing tensions between Turks and Armenians from the 1890s to the 1920s, the events of the period being a matter of continuing bitter dispute up to the present. Pekmezian spoke several European languages, and was very likely familiar with several sign languages. The Sign Language used by deaf people at the Ottoman court continued to be a matter of keen interest and debate among linguists in Western Europe in the later 19th century. So it is highly likely that Pekmezian took pains to learn about it at first hand, from members of the deaf community at Istanbul who worked, or had worked, in the Palaces. Further evidence may come to light on this matter.

Meanwhile, Turkish Sign Language (TID) needs no external advocate, as it now has its own website (Özyürek & Ilkbasaran, 2003), in addition to that of the Turkish National Federation of the Deaf, http://www.turkdeaf.org, and research is also developing (e.g. Zeshan, 2005c). Use of TID is also increasing accessibility for deaf people to ordinary parts of their life, such as listening to the Friday sermon at the mosque (Albayrak, 2003). Deaf people are obtaining sign language teaching diplomas from accredited courses, the government may be moving slowly toward approving the use of TID in schools (International Blue Crescent, 2003), and publication of a formal TID course is imminent (Zeshan & Dikyuva, forthcoming 2006). A museum of deaf history was set up at the deaf school in Fatih Istanbul in the mid-1990s, coordinated by the school director Ahmet Böncü, with some early documents and pictures (personal communications, Mary Essex, Erkan Demirbas, 2005). There has been more attention recently to various other issues in the education of children with hearing impairments (e.g. Akcamete, 1999; Kargin, 2004; Tufekcioglu, 2000), and the complex factors in identity formation in deaf and hearing impaired young people along the Culturally Deaf, Bicultural (Dual), and Culturally Hearing spectrum (Sari, 2005). There are active Deaf clubs and associations, with sports organisations prominent, and the usual predominance of urban men in activities and leadership (Zeshan, 2003a; Essex, 2004).

Reappraisal of Earlier Models?
With rapid urbanisation of populations across the SSWA region during the past 40 years, some less desirable effects of ‘modernity’ have become clearer. Disabled or deaf people can of course enjoy many technological and design conveniences of physical life in the modern city, and non-material benefits such as the chance for associating with significant groups sharing their particular condition; yet there are some drawbacks. One is the reduction or loss, in the urban setting, of the traditional sense of community and of mutual duties within the extended family, for which the growth in human rights legislation provides only weak compensation or none. In practice, it may take one or two generations before the poorer parts of the population have a reasonable chance of obtaining their ‘rights’ through legal channels. (There is no guarantee that it will actually happen...)

There is some ‘modern’ tendency to refer dismissively to earlier ‘religious’ and ‘charitable’ models of disability and deafness, as though ‘modern’ civilisation has progressed beyond the need for any such primitive constraints, admonitions or motivations. The claimed ‘progress’, and assumption of superiority, did not prevent the mass murder of thousands of deaf and disabled people within the European civilisation in the mid-20th century. Further, some deaf or disabled people living in supposedly ‘advanced’ wealthy countries continue to experience physical or sexual abuse at home, persistent targetted bullying by youths in school or on the street (Dixon, 2006; Miles C, 2005), organised exploitation by older criminals, and the indifferent smiles of those who believe that the introduction of human rights legislation has fulfilled all the obligation of citizens to behave with neighbourly consideration. To these hazards is often added a pervasive sense of poverty, or relative poverty, with which a majority of deaf or disabled people find themselves, in economically weaker or wealthier countries (Miles, 2006). In ‘relative poverty’, their basic physical needs are met more or less mechanically, but this merely reinforces a sense of uselessness, loneliness, lack of opportunity to make any valued contribution to society. In these situations, it may become easier to see some merits in the earlier systems where families and communities were more closely knit together, almost everyone had his or her place and carried out their allotted tasks within their capacities, and acknowledged the common duty to care for one another, reinforced by communally accepted moral and ethical codes, propagated through temple, mosque or church. Countries in transition from the ‘traditional’ patterns to the ‘modern’ should be aware that it is not obligatory to replicate all the arrogant behaviour and stupidities that have afflicted countries taking this path a little earlier.

REFERENCES
See also further bibliography in APPENDIX below, and the earlier SSWA annotated bibliography (to 2001) at: http://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/bibweb/Miles/Miles.html, which gives annotations for many of the items
* 80 items marked with * were added during revision and extension (2006)


AUNG MH (1976) Folk Tales of Burma [Delhi]: Sterling.


BANERJI SN (1949) Sixty years with the Deaf in India. *The Deaf in India* I (1) 3-9. [Continues, serialised in issues I (2), 3-18; I (3), 26-27.]


BAUMANN E (1886) Deaf and dumb Ellen and how she became a Christian. *Indian Female Evangelist* 8: 241-244.


CULSHAW, Murray (1983) *It Will Soon Be Dark... The situation of the disabled in India* Delhi: Lithouse Publications.


* DE GRATI FG (1898) Turkey. *International Reports of Schools for the Deaf* Volta Bureau. Washington City, p. 27.


EDITORIAL (1895) The Deaf of Turkey. Interview with Mr. H. Pekmezian. The British Deaf Mute. Reproduced in The Silent Worker 8 (no. 6, Feb. 1896) p. 12. [See open access full text of The Silent Worker on web at Gallaudet University]


FORBES, Frederick (1844) Route from Turbat Haideri, in Khorasan, to the river Heri Rud, on the borders of Sistan. [Extracted from the journals of the late Dr Forbes]. Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London 14: 145-192.


HAYAVADANA RAO, C (1943-1946) History of Mysore (1399-1799 A.D.), Bangalore.

HOMMAIRE DE HELL, Xavier (1854) Voyage en Turquie et en Perse... Paris.


ISLAMIC Republic of Iran Welfare Organisation (ed.) (1989) *Persian Sign Language Collection. For the Deaf* Education & Research Office, Rehabilitation Research Group. [There have been further editions]


Well documented report on post-doctoral research in Turkey.


* MILES M (2000a) Sign, Gesture & Deafness in South Asian & South-West Asian Histories: a bibliography with annotation & excerpts from India; also from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burma / Myanmar, Iraq, Nepal, Pakistan, Persia / Iran, & Sri Lanka. University of Hamburg, Institute of Sign Language. At: http://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/bibweb/Miles/Miles.html


* SEN, Dinesh Chandra (1925) *Glimpses of Bengal Life,* Calcutta University Press.


* SHARMA, Sushama (2004) Services for deafblind individuals in India. [Conference presentation].


SUBRAHMANIAN N (1966) *Pre-Pallavan Tamil Index.* University of Madras.


WJIESEKERA ND (1945) Sign language in ancient Ceylon. Man 45: (No. 33) 46-47.


APPENDIX

Bibliography on DEAFNESS & SIGNING in the ARAB MIDDLE EAST, with some historical material, and light annotation.

Compiled by M. Miles, April 2006.

NOTE: This is not a comprehensive bibliography. Certainly more material exists in Arabic, and other regional languages, not known to the present compiler. More recent Sign Language work may have been published in some countries. Apologies are offered for omissions, and for faults and variations in transliteration from Arabic to English. These c. 110 items give some idea of the range of work that has been produced, and some of the people involved. Most of it covers social, linguistic and educational aspects of deafness and signing. (Biomedical studies can be found on Medline, via NLM Gateway, so are mostly not listed here unless some social features are included). A few historical items appear in a section towards the end. Some items use old-fashioned terms (like “deaf and dumb”) which were normal in their times, and should not be considered an offence.

To find materials (if a URL is not shown, or the URL has expired), kindly contact your nearest library for advice, or try to contact the author direct. A google search with the author’s name and perhaps a keyword (e.g. deaf, hearing, sign language, etc) may produce a contact address, or some further relevant work by that author.

The compiler has not selected or omitted items on grounds of quality, and neither endorses nor rejects any linguistic, political or religious positions taken by the authors.

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Discussion of Arabic Sign Languages (ARSL) from a comparative linguistic point of view, illuminating some of the unity and diversity currently found in perceptions of ARSL and their everyday practice across the Arab world.


In a study of 974 schoolboys, aged 6 to 12 years, 2.7% had moderate to severe hearing loss; 26.9% had some ear problem.


Provides notes on schools and their functioning, curriculum, teacher training, and innovations c. 1990, with 17 references (in transliterated Arabic).


Includes Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia. (See EL BAKARY, AL-MUSLAT, ROUMANOS, ZWIEBEL).


Views based on an Institute for the Deaf in Jordan with an outreach program.


AL-HILAWANI, Yasser A (2003) Clinical examination of three methods of teaching reading comprehension to deaf and hard-of-hearing students: from research to classroom applications. (Conducted in the United Arab Emirates)


JORDAN. National Center for Hearing Studies. [no date] Jordanian Sign Language (Lughat al-Isharah al-Urduniah). Amman: Al Markiz al-Watani Li-Sam‘iyat. (see HAMZEH, above; TAFFAL, below)


LABABIDI, Lesley & EL-ARABI, Nadia (2002) Silent No More. Special needs people in Egypt Cairo: American University in Cairo Press. Material on deaf people and services, e.g. pp. 9, 38-43, 101-103, 116-117, 146-48, 176; including interviews with two deaf mothers (the artist and actress Hanan Marzouk, and the Sign specialist Hanan Mohsen), some Deaf organisations, and a Deaf Theatre director.

MALEK, Clair (no date) Egypt: Deaf School – Cairo. At: http://www.biblelands.org.uk/project_partners/by_location/egypt/deaf_school/index.htm


MIKAELIAN, Disan O & BARSUMIAN, Vergine M (1971) Hearing loss in elementary school children in Lebanon. Laryngoscope 81: 447-51. 5,020 school children aged 5-15 years in Beirut were screened, and 256 (5.2%) had impaired hearing. The proportion more than doubled where additional otoscopy was performed.


MOURAD MI, FARGHALY NF & MOHAMED HG (1993) Hearing impairment: is it a public health problem among primary school pupils in Alexandria? Journal of the Egyptian Public Health Association 68: 703-726. Hearing tests were conducted on 196 primary school pupils. The school environment was studied for noise level and crowding. Impairments were found among 24% (by audiometry) and 36% (tympanometry). Half the children with audiometric loss were reported by teachers as poor achievers.


MUSTAFA MS & ADDAR MH (2000) Obstetric handling of a deaf patient. Saudi Medical Journal 21 (12) 1185-1188. As the ‘patient’ was able to read and write English, and the gynaecologists were sufficiently patient to communicate on paper, they learnt a lot from her about the human aspects of handling deaf pregnant women.


Detailed overview, with references, list of existing institutions, and teacher training curriculum.


Visits to Fr. Anderweg Institute for Deaf, Beirut, and Holyland Institute for Deaf, Salt, Jordan.


Describes the structure of Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language, which apparently arose in the past 70 years within an isolated community in the Negev, and is used among deaf and hearing people there.


Random sample survey of 6421 children aged 0-12 years found 168 (2.6%) cases of sensorineural hearing loss.


Medical/audiological work in Egypt.


Studies in Egypt showed no positive results of acupuncture with 23 patients having sensorineural hearing loss.


Views on deaf people in Syria.


Several papers concerned with deaf people, organisations, and service development in Palestine from the 1990s on. (See MOULTON above)


Though mainly concerned with Tunisia, there are useful sections on development of services and deaf organisations in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and the UAE.


Short item on the Arab Federation of Organizations for the Deaf.


TUNISIA: CODES. Codes of obligations and des contrats: http://www.jurisitetunisie.com/tunisie/codes/coc/Coc1018.htm and Code de procédure civile et commerciale, http://www.jurisitetunisie.com/tunisie/codes/cpcc/cpcc1075.htm. Tunisian civil law holds deaf people responsible for damage caused by their action or fault, "s'ils possèdent le degré de discernement nécessaire pour apprécier les conséquences de leurs actes" (coc1018, Article 106); and they can act as witnesses in court, "par écrit ou par signes ne prêtant à aucune équivoque" (cpcc1075, Article 95) (Tunisia: codes). These provisos, while a little ambiguous, are important in upgrading the status of deaf people.


UNESCO. transl. Arabic: [Education of Deaf Children and Young People.] Centre of Total Communication, Copenhagen.


*** HISTORICAL MATERIAL ***


Reported sayings, and their context in the life of the prophet Muhammad (c. 570-632 CE) in Arabia, compiled in the 11th century and revised in the 14th century CE, show that he was regularly seen using finger and hand signs. See vol. I: 594, 622, 628; vol. II: 856, 913-14, 959-60, 1031-32, 1032, 1035, 1108, 1125, 1336. For example, Muhammad was in the mosque on one occasion when "a man whose head and beard were dishevelled entered, and God's messenger pointed his hand at him as though he were ordering him to arrange his hair and his beard", so that the man retired and came back with a more orderly appearance (II: 938). Other symbolic finger or hand signals by the prophet are described a little more closely.


With relevance to the histories of signing by deaf people, see pp. 269-272, on "Du langage par gestes et signes chez les Arabes", derived (with much abbreviation) from I GOLDSZIHER (1886) Ueber Geberden- und Zeichensprache bei den Arabern. *Zeitschrift f. Völkerpsychologie* 14: 369-386. While mainly on signing within the historical Arab world, there is some discussion of traditions embodying the finger and hand signs and gestures that were much used by the
Prophet Muhammad, with explanations in commentaries.

CARRUTHERS, Douglas (1922) Captain Shakespear's last journey [continued] *Geographical Journal* 59 (6) 401-418. William Henry Irvine Shakespear, travelling in Arabia, entered Anaiza on 26 March 1914, and met the Emir, Saleh ibn Zamil. Next day, he had "coffee at the house of a dear old deaf man, whose brother was the Mukbil el Thakair at Bahrein." (p. 407)


CLINE, Walter (1940) Proverbs and lullabies from Southern Arabia. *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature* 57 (3) 291-301. Proverb No. 14 (p. 292) "Don't sing to the deaf [?], and don't give advice to a crazy man.

CONDOR, Josiah (1824) *Syria and Asia Minor*. J. Duncan. pp. 53-54. Arriving at Damascus with some other Europeans, Condor paid a visit to "Ahmet Bey, the son of Abdallah, the late Pasha." After some refreshment, the Bey complained of hearing loss, by which "he had now become so deaf that he could not enjoy conversation..." and believed the problem was getting worse. An appointment was made, and the Bey's ears were examined and washed: "having cleared out an immense quantity of hardened wax and cotton, the ringing in his ears immediately ceased". This was followed by some discomfort, as he now heard too much noise. Yet the Bey was clearly delighted to regain his hearing.

EL-DA'EM A (1946) *Arabic: [The deaf-mute child.] Egyptian Journal of Psychology* 2 (1) 108-.


An early suggestion of sign or gestural language appears in a series of Egyptian magisterial admonitions to an idle schoolboy or clerk: "Thou art one who is deaf and does not hear, to whom men make (signs) with the hand", in the Papyrus Koller, "dated approximately to the end of the 19th Dynasty" or around 1200 BC (pp. 35-39, 84-86).


IBN AL-MARZUBAN, transl. & ed. GR Smith & MAS Abdel Haleem (1978) *The Book of the Superiority of Dogs over many of Those who wear Clothes*. Warminster, UK: Aris & Phillips. The author lived near Baghdad, and died in 921 CE. On p. 20, an "old dumb servant woman" saw a viper spit poison on the king's food, unseen by the cook. She tried to give warning by signs, but the other servants did not understand. The king's dog also saw the viper, and kept on barking and howling, but was ignored. When the king went to eat the food, the dog jumped up, ate the poisoned food, then fell dead. The old woman again made signs to show what had happened, and finally she was understood.

"In Cairo" (1909, Feb.) *The Silent Worker* 21 (no. 5).
Notes "the establishment of a school for the deaf in Cairo, where it has for three years had a prosperous existence."

The celebrated essayist Al-Jahiz lived in Basra and Baghdad, from c. 777 to 869 [Christian calendar]. From "The Book of Animals", IV, 404-405:

"Theologians say that your dumb man is deaf: his inability to speak is due not to any malformation of the tongue, but to the fact that he has never heard sounds, articulated or otherwise, he does not know how to produce them. Not all deaf people are completely dumb, and there are also degrees of deafness." [Gives examples of loud noises that some deaf people can hear.] "Others can hear words if spoken in their ear, but otherwise they hear nothing, even if the speaker raises his voice; if the speaker positions himself so that the sound goes right into their ear, they understand perfectly, whereas if he speaks just as loudly into the air, the sound of his voice not being concentrated and conducted along a canal into the brain, they do not understand." (p. 164 of Pellat / Hawke) These comments by Jahiz, about the range of hearing impairment and deafness, and the reason why children born deaf do not start to speak as hearing children do, are among the earliest sensible observations on these matters.


From the book on 'Elegance of expression and clarity of exposition', (I: 77-79):  "As regards gesticulation, the hands, head, eyes, eyebrows and shoulders come into use when a conversation is carried on at a distance, and even a piece of cloth or sword ... Speech and gesture are partners, and what a precious helpmeet and interpreter gesture is to speech! It often takes its place, or makes writing unnecessary ... The wink, the movement of the eyebrows and other gestures are priceless adjuncts, and a great help in expressing surreptitious thoughts." (pp. 102-103 of Pellat / Hawke)

See QUR’AN, below. Gives Roman transliteration of Qur’anic vocabulary, with compounds and derivatives.
Alphabetical index of words in English provides the roots of relevant Arabic word(s) transliterated. Under the words derived from each root, the citation is given of texts using each word. Examples:
pp. 203-210 Root A Y W, used in very many references to Signs or revelations from Allah, and for verses of the Qur’an.
pp. 317-318 Root B K M, used in 6 references to ‘dumb’.
p. 1020 Root R M Z, used when Zakariya should speak only "with signals". (Sura 3: 41)
p. 1265 Root W [H] Y, used when Zakariya "made signal" to people”. (Sura 19: 11).

See pp. 14, 22-23, 35, 45, 94 for proverbs embodying folk views of disability and deafness, e.g. "The mother of the mute understands what he says” (p. 94).

MacMICHAEL HA (1934) Arab dumb show. Sudan Notes and Records 17: 129.
Over 20 years earlier, in Northern Kordojan [Kordofan], MacMichael noted a "deaf and dumb man" who communicated a short history to him by a series of eloquent signs and gestures, here described.

The 12th century scholar al-Marghinani’s influential commentary is based on the major legal schools of Islam. The Jurists broadly admitted the efficacy of sign language for communicating the intention of the ‘dumb’ person. For example, "The divorce of a dumb person is effectual, if it be expressed by positive and intelligible signs, because signs of the dumb are authorized by custom, and are therefore admitted to stand in the place of speech, in the present instance in order to answer the necessity of him who makes them. (Marghinani, I, Bk.IV, Ch.I, 76). On another point of law, Shafi‘i held that a dumb man’s "signs are the same as the words of one who has the power of speech". Other jurists found that “the signs of a dumb person are not altogether free from doubt.” (M. I, Bk.IV, Ch.X, 125).

"Ishaara (A.), ‘gesture, sign, indication’, has acquired in rhetoric [] the technical meaning of ‘allusion’ but, in its early
connotation, a gesture of the hand, a sign of the head, of the elbow, the eyebrows etc., is considered by al-Jahiz (Bayaan, i, 80; Hayawaan, i, 33), together with speech, writing, nusba and computation on the fingers [ ] as one of the five methods by which a man may express his thoughts" ... "In fact the Arabs considered anyone who did not understand the language of gestures and obliged his interlocutor to express his thoughts in words to be a fool". Nwiya remarks that further research is needed "on the ritual or symbolic gestures, which with the Arabs go back to remote antiquity..."

PALGRAVE, Gifford (1863) Notes of a journey from Gaza, through the interior of Arabia, to El Khatif on the Persian Gulf, and thence to Oman, in 1862-63. Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London 8 (3) 63-83. At Riadh (Riyadh), a town of modest size Palgrave had a patient "who had a species of facial palsy" as well as being "nearly deaf, besides having an impediment in his speech." He decided that "an external application of strychnine with appropriate treatment would produce a good effect", though aware that a "most cautious" administration of this drug was advisable. However, "after four or five days the individual entirely recovered the use of his tongue, and was able to take part in conversation. The patient's hearing was also very nearly restored ... This produced a great effect in the town."


SCALENGHE, Sara (2005) The Deaf in Ottoman Syria, 16th - 18th centuries. Arab Studies Journal 12 (2) - 13 (1) pp. 10-25. This study reviews relevant Arabic literature and details the terminology of deafness, medical perceptions and treatment of the condition, the legal, civil and religious implications, briefly mentioning sign language. A number of case histories are given of people who became deaf during the stated period, with biographical references, from Arabic primary sources.


THESIGER, Wilfred (1964) The Marsh Arabs. London: Longmans. In the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates in Iraq, Thesiger noticed that "The tribesmen were especially kind to the afflicted, and among them a major physical disability was perhaps less of a handicap than in some parts of the world. ... During the years I was in the Marshes I met several deaf-and-dumb boys and men, who were happy and friendly, and who fitted usefully into the life of the community." (p.168)

WALLIN, Geo A (1855) Narrative of a journey from Cairo to Jerusalem, via Mount Sinai, translated and communicated by Dr. Shaw. Journal of the Royal Geographical Society London 25: 260-290. On pp. 278-280, Professor Wallin wrote in detail of meeting two deaf Beduin, in the vicinity of Aqaba. The first used some incoherent speech and signs; the second communicated only by signs. Wallin's Beduin guide translated for him an alarming story of skirmishing and escape, from the first man. Wallin thought this tale lacked credibility, so the guide "undertook to question the deaf man more closely by signs and sounds" (p. 279), from which a different story emerged, focusing on a lost camel. The second deaf man, an elderly fisherman, later returned from a journey, still without the camel, and met Wallin and the others. The missing camel became a cause of heated argument between the two deaf men. The first deaf man accompanied Wallin and his guide around the bay of Aqaba, and retrieved his camel. The events give early examples of detailed communication, in the Middle East, between a hearing man and two deaf men, using various means at their disposal.

supposedly addressed to an idle student or clerk, “Thou art one who is deaf and does not hear, to whom men make
(signs) with the hand”.

publication details shown).

PP. 18-30 concern the ear, hearing and deafness in ancient Sumer, Egypt and biblical Palestine. PP. 52-55 give some
details from medieval Byzantine, Hebrew and Arab medicine. Passing mention of Middle Eastern items appears
elsewhere, e.g. pp. 106-107.

References | Appendix | Top

Language
English