

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 461 286

FL 026 963

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TITLE Moroccan Children and Arabic in Spanish Schools.  
PUB DATE 2001-00-00  
NOTE 16p.; In: The Other Languages of Europe: Demographic, Sociolinguistic and Educational Perspectives; see ED 453 678.  
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS \*Arabic; Bilingual Education; Cultural Awareness; \*Culturally Relevant Education; Diversity (Student); Elementary Education; Foreign Countries; Immigrants; \*Language of Instruction; Minority Group Children; Official Languages; Uncommonly Taught Languages  
IDENTIFIERS \*Moroccans; \*Spain

## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses classical Arabic as a minority language for Moroccan children in Spanish schools. It highlights programs of "education des langues et cultures d'origine" (ELCO), which specifically target these students. ELCO is the only public program in Spain recognizing Arabic as an immigrant minority language. Intercultural educational perspectives for Moroccans have been realized through the ELCO Moroccan program, an elementary-level effort run by the Spanish and Moroccan governments. It works to teach the Arabic language and Moroccan culture and improve immigrant students' school integration (enhancing self-esteem and reducing ethnic prejudice and ethnocentric behavior). ELCO for Moroccan immigrants is limited in Spain, and there are some drawbacks. For example, ELCO teaches classical Arabic, which is not the mother tongue for some Moroccan students. Though the official language of Morocco is classical Arabic, other languages are very important (different Moroccan Arabic and Berber dialects, French, and Spanish). Also, Moroccan culture is being defined by the governing organizations and may not be accurate for all students. Therefore, ELCO may not be addressing all Moroccan immigrant students' cultural and linguistic needs, and it may perpetuate the low status of Moroccan Arabic and Berber languages within Spanish schools. (Contains 18 references.) (SM)

# Moroccan children and Arabic in Spanish schools

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LAURA MIJARES MOLINA

Although Spain continues to be a country with a high percentage of emigrants, it has over the last fifteen years also become a country that attracts immigrants. According to the last available data, on 31 December 1998 there were 719,647 newcomers with a work permit living in Spain whereas the number of Spanish people living abroad was 2,134,773 in 1995 (OPI, 1998/1999). This change has caused an increase in the numbers of newcomers in Spain and, likewise, their children's presence in the Spanish school system. This situation has led to the development of programmes to improve the conditions for these new citizens in Spain, as has been done in other countries of Europe. Some of these programmes are aimed at the children of immigrant workers. These programmes are especially significant as they are dedicated to a population whose fundamental rights have been guaranteed by all European governments. Although the goals of these programmes vary, the education of the second generation of immigrant workers is one of the areas most often considered when developing programmes directed to newcomers.

The educational programmes directed towards immigrant minority children are commonly based on intercultural theories about education. These programmes are intended to maintain and develop a multicultural society. For this reason, one of the main aspects of these programmes is to guarantee that schools will not only teach the national language of the country of immigration, but also the languages and cultures of the countries of origin of immigrant children. In Spain, European guidelines have led to programmes of *education des langues et cultures d'origine* (ELCO), currently directed only towards children of Moroccan and Portuguese origin. Although the Portuguese ELCO programme is not the focus of this study, we would like to present some information about it. In the 1996/97 school year, Portuguese ELCO was developed in Asturias, Burgos, Cantabria, León, Madrid, Zaragoza, Galicia, Navarra and País Vasco in 78 schools with 65 Portuguese teachers. The teaching of

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Portuguese reached 6087 children, distributed across those with Spanish nationality 4161, Portuguese nationality 1674, and others 252 (*Informe sobre el estado y la situación del sistema educativo 1996-1997, 1998*).

The focus of this chapter is on Arabic as an immigrant minority language for Moroccan children in Spanish education. The reason for studying this programme is that it is currently the only public programme that acknowledges, within the context of the school, the language of the largest immigrant group. Bearing in mind that it is not possible to study Arabic in secondary schools and only in some primary schools through this ELCO programme, we can easily understand the unstable teaching status. This study can help us to better understand the sociolinguistic context of Moroccan children who attend schools in Spain. Bilingual programmes have been developed before in Spain. The implementation of bilingualism in the autonomous regions has been realised through regional minority language programmes. Therefore, the debate about bilingualism in schools is not new. Although immigration has changed the general scene with regard to the issue of bilingualism, we should not forget about the linkage between the status of regional and immigrant minority languages.

### Intercultural education in the Spanish school system

Diversity has become a matter of pedagogical reflection in schools, and has led to a new intercultural approach to education. This new approach entails a further step away from previous monolingual and monocultural educational policies. Intercultural education is the new framework in which diversity is viewed in the schools. This new way of understanding education is based on recognising, accepting and valuing different cultural realities in the school by including in the curriculum previous learning experiences of minority children. This supposes that equal opportunities are enhanced and that advantage is taken of the richness that diversity implies. For more information about intercultural education in Spain we refer to Carbonell i Paris (1995), Jordán (1994), Juliano (1993) and Santos Rego (1994).

Although intercultural education deserves a wider and richer perspective, this concept seems to have been pushed by the continuous development of the migration phenomenon. It is the result of an initiative of the European Social Foundation, intended to avoid the problems of integration that can be experienced by children of immigrant origin. These

problems are related to loss of the mother tongue and the subsequent cultural identity weakness (Comisión Europea, 1995). Integration is considered crucial to avoid problems related to labour exclusion and to reduce risks of marginalization, school absence and failure rates of these children who are supposedly more exposed to such dangerous outcomes. From an intercultural perspective, it is obvious that knowledge of the mother tongue is an important aspect in the integration or lack of integration of foreign minors in the host countries. Initially, this teaching was intended to provide these children with an adequate education that would help them if they returned to their country of origin. However, given the fact that the idea of returning is increasingly out of line with the expectations of the immigrant population, justification for this teaching has shifted to the knowledge and valorisation it provides of different cultural realities in the school, thus helping the pupils' integration.

In Spain, different educational laws, in particular the *Ley Orgánica del Derecho a la Educación* (LODE) and the *Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo* (LOGSE), advocate the integration of pupils from other cultures. These laws state that pupils should respect individual freedom, develop tolerance and solidarity, acquire habits of democratic coexistence and respect, fight against inequality and discrimination for reasons of race, sex, religion or opinion, and become trained to achieve peace, cooperation and respect for diversity. Based on these existing premises and with the support of European initiatives related to minority education mentioned before, the educational services of the Spanish state have promoted the development of ELCO programmes. This development has also been made possible by the flexible framework introduced in the last educational reform. This reform allows the existence of an open curriculum adapted to the characteristics of individual schools. In the case of children of Moroccan origin, the largest immigrant minority group in the Spanish school system, intercultural perspectives of education have been realized through the ELCO Moroccan programme.

### ELCO for children of Moroccan origin

#### The status of the programme

As a result of the bilateral Spanish-Moroccan Cultural Cooperation Programme, a home language and culture teaching programme was set up for Moroccan children in July 1994. The main objectives of the programme were to teach the Arabic language and Moroccan culture as

well as to improve school integration of the pupils concerned. This approach was also meant to improve self-esteem and to reduce ethnic prejudice and ethnocentric behaviour. In order to achieve these goals, a coordinated effort was made, dividing the responsibilities of the programme between the Spanish and Moroccan governments. Morocco is in charge of coordinating the Moroccan teachers and their wages, as well as outlining the pedagogical materials for the programme. Spain is in charge of the actual implementation of and support for the programme in public schools with a high number of Moroccan children.

The programme can be implemented in two different ways: outside (mode A) and inside (mode B) the regular timetable. In mode A, Arabic language and Moroccan culture teaching are provided during one hour or an hour and a half, twice a week, outside the normal school timetable. In mode B, Arabic language and Moroccan culture teaching are integrated in the school day; Moroccan children usually receive Arabic instruction during the hours in which religion is taught. In neither of the two modes, the subjects of Arabic language and Moroccan culture are officially assessed. This lack of assessment makes the academic status of the programme different from that of other subjects forming part of the school curriculum. This situation has contributed to a perception of ELCO as a secondary subject which is not given the importance that it truly merits. Moreover, the fact that the programme is administered by the Moroccan government and especially directed towards children of Moroccan origin is a reason to perceive this subject as different from the others. Finally, the fact that Arabic is offered only in primary school and that the state does not offer the possibility to continue this subject in secondary school, can be taken as a sign of the transitional nature of the programme.

#### Degree of participation

Moroccans are the largest immigrant community living in Spain. Since the regulation process for immigrants first revealed the presence of a large number of Moroccan immigrants in Spain in 1991 (López, Ramírez & Planet, 1996), this population has continued to grow. On 31 December 1998 the number of Moroccans living legally in Spain was 140,896 (OPI, 1998). The extraordinary regulation process for immigrants, that ended in July 2000, shows again an increase in the number of Moroccan people. Figure 1 shows the growth of the Moroccan population in Spain.

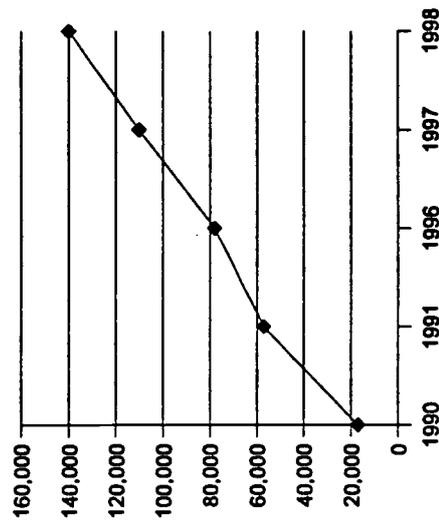


Figure 1 Increase in Moroccan immigration since 1991 (based on the data of the *Observatorio Permanente de la Inmigración* and the *Atlas de la Inmigración Magrebí en España*)

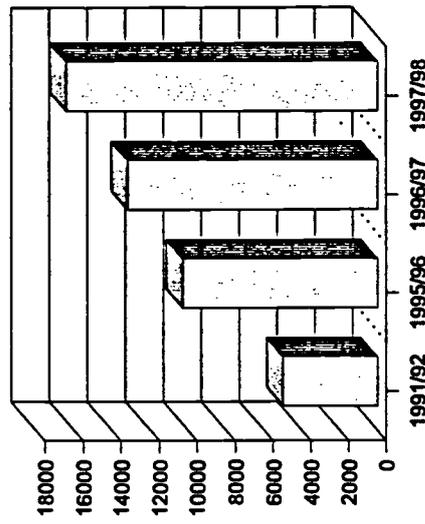


Figure 2 Increase in Moroccan children in Spanish schools (excluding university level education; based on data of *Ministerio de Educación y Cultura español*)

Due to family reunion and births, Moroccan children and youngsters represent the largest non-national group in the Spanish school system, and this group has experienced a major growth in the past few years. In the 1991/92 school year there were 5029 children of Moroccan origin in Spanish elementary schools (Ioé, 1996), whereas in the 1997/98 school year their number was 16,444. Due to the transfer of powers to the autonomous regions, the process of collecting data is very difficult and slow. For this reason the data for the 1998/99 and 1999/2000 school years are not yet available. For a detailed study of the development of Moroccan immigrant minors in Spain, we refer to López (1999).

With these data in mind, a comparison can be made with the number of children who received ELCO in the 1997/98 school year, i.e. a total of 1035 children in all Spanish programmes. We notice immediately how far away ELCO is from reaching all children that could benefit from this education. This is especially remarkable when we compare these figures to those related to the Portuguese-oriented ELCO. Of the 3869 Portuguese children in Spanish schools in the 1996/97 school year, 1674 children received this education. These data have been provided by the *Oficina de Planificación y Estadística, Ministerio de Educación y Cultura*. Although the Portuguese programme has a longer tradition, this comparison can be useful in understanding the limited status of Moroccan ELCO in Spanish schools. During the 1997/98 school year, the Arabic language and Moroccan culture teaching programme was implemented in Madrid, Barcelona and Las Palmas. Only in Madrid some of the programmes were integrated into the regular school time table. More information on the implementation of Moroccan ELCO in Spain is given in Franzé (1999). Table 1 gives an overview of the curricular status of the Moroccan ELCO programme and the degree of participation.

There are also other initiatives that non-governmental organisations and associations have developed in order to offer Arabic teaching to children of Moroccan origin. With regard to non-governmental organisations that teach Arabic, data are not yet available. A significant programme is that offered by the Moroccan Immigrant Workers Association in Spain (ATIME). It has been developed through an agreement with the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture. This association conducts its programme in public schools outside the school timetable a couple of times per week. Members of the association voluntarily teach the children. Most of the time these teachers are graduates without specific training for Arabic language teaching. Also, the courses are given without standardized materials.

**Table 1** Curricular status of the Moroccan ELCO programme and degree of participation (based on data of the *Centro de Investigación y Documentación Educativa, CIDE*)

	Madrid	Barcelona	Las Palmas	Total
Outside the school timetable	199	383	97	679
Integrated into the school timetable	356			356
Pupils	555	383	97	1,035
Schools	28	18	5	51
Teachers	10	6	2	18

With regard to language teaching in secondary school, Spain cannot be favourably compared to other European countries where Arabic language teaching is an optional subject. Spain does not offer such a possibility. As yet, the Spanish option of foreign language learning is limited in almost all public institutions to English or French.

### Objectives of the programme

The learning of the mother tongue by immigrant children is considered essential in facilitating integration into the host society. European guidelines based on recent research on mother tongue learning show that such learning is considered crucial for children's cognitive development and also for their future language learning (Baker, 1997; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1998). The ELCO programme, in addition to incorporating the linguistic contents to be taught, also includes the cultural contents that children should learn in the schools. Actually, the programme distinguishes between linguistic, cultural and intercultural objectives. The first objective for pupils is to achieve basic linguistic competence that will allow them to improve both oral and written skills. With regard to culture, the objectives are to locate and explain the most important characteristics of Moroccan society and also of the Arabic and European worlds. Concerning the intercultural perspective, the objectives are for Moroccan children, by taking into account their cultural identity and language of origin, to develop in an affective and intellectual way that will allow them to achieve harmonic integration into the new society (*Ensemble pédagogique, op. cit.*).

### The implementation of the programme

We aim to make an analysis of the Moroccan ELCO according to the two branches that constitute the programme, i.e. Arabic language teaching on the one hand and Moroccan culture teaching on the other. Although the branch concerned with Arabic language teaching is the main focus of the programme, the branch associated with the teaching of culture should not be forgotten. An analysis of these two ELCO branches can help us to understand the status of Arabic as an immigrant minority language, and also to understand the position of Moroccan children within the framework of the Spanish school system.

Not only is ELCO the only existing public programme in Spain recognising Arabic as an immigrant minority language, it also tries to establish a relationship between the knowledge of this language and the socio-educational results of the children who take part in the programme. It is understood that children of Moroccan origin have specific needs that decisively influence the outcome of their school careers. In order to analyse the two branches, we have carried out fieldwork on the Arabic language and Moroccan culture teaching programme in schools located in the centre of Madrid.

### From mother tongue to classical Arabic

The first important issue to be analysed is what language is being taught in the schools as the 'mother tongue' of children of Moroccan origin. The language that actually is being taught is classical Arabic. In order to understand what this means, it is necessary to outline the linguistic situation in Morocco. By doing so, we will be able to better understand how the ELCO programme in Spain is being articulated.

Although the official language in Morocco is classical Arabic, there are other languages which should more realistically be considered as the mother tongues of Moroccans. These languages are different Moroccan Arabic and Berber dialects. French and Spanish also have also a very important presence in Morocco because they were the main languages spoken during the Protectorate. Classical Arabic is the first language in the hierarchy of languages in Morocco because it has a legal status that the other languages lack. However, it is a highly formal language which is used only in official contexts. As Boukous (1995) says, this split has provoked 'non-mother tongues, in particular classical Arabic and French, to be first in the hierarchy of language use, while rejecting the mother tongues, the Amazighe and the Arabic dialect'. According to the same

author, this hierarchical classification of language varieties in Morocco distinguishes between 'strong languages', i.e. classical Arabic and French, and 'weak languages', i.e. Moroccan Arabic and Berber dialects. This distinction is known as diglossia. Practically the only contact Moroccan children have with classical Arabic occurs in the schools where they learn it as a foreign language. The distance between the capability in classical Arabic versus the mother tongues of the children is proportional to the number of years that these children have been receiving formal education in their country of origin.

Until the independence of Morocco in 1956, French was the main school language of the country, except in religious school centres. After the independence, various educational reforms were designed to achieve complete Arabization of the curriculum, the introduction of Arabic as the language of schools, and the *Moroccanization* of teachers. This process of Arabization has been implemented with varying degrees of commitment, and until today it has not been completely achieved (see also Merrouni, 1993). As Moroccan Arabic and Berber dialects are not legally recognised, their presence and recognition in the schools are virtually zero. However, the *Charte Nationale d'Education et de Formation* published by a National Committee in 1999 gives the Amazighe language a new status as an official language to be learned in the schools.

Even for Moroccan children in Morocco, in order to speak and write classical Arabic it is necessary to have much previous training. It is therefore obvious that to those Moroccan children socialised in another country, classical Arabic is even more alien. It is important to remember this fact in assessing the level of familiarity that these children have with the language that they now are learning at school. If we transfer this situation to the way ELCO is being implemented in Spain, we can see how the programme reproduces the language policy of Morocco. Children of Moroccan origin are not taught their mother tongue, but another different language. It is true that the different Moroccan dialects, though not the Berber ones, come from classical Arabic. These languages are, however, startlingly different, even though there exists a certain fundamental level of coincidence between both languages. As Boukous (op. cit.) says, 'Quant aux autres variétés, à savoir l'arabe dialectal et l'amazighe, elles constituent évidemment des systèmes linguistiques bien individualisés, elles possèdent chacune une grammaire comportant des règles bien précises....'

Without denying the symbolic value that classical Arabic can represent for these children, it is obvious that in the case of Moroccan ELCO there

is a contradiction between the theory on which the programme is based and the reality of the way it is being applied. As previously noted, in many cases these children learn a completely unknown language as if it were their mother tongue. This fact alone should be enough to rethink the basis on which classical Arabic is taught. If the main aim is that these children take advantage of the knowledge of their first language in order to organise their minds and to facilitate the learning of a second language or even the rest of their school subjects, it is evident that by teaching classical Arabic this goal can hardly be achieved. If the main goal for these children is to see their culture reflected in the schools, it will be necessary to analyse what is understood as Moroccan culture.

### Diversity or difference?

As has been mentioned several times, learning the culture of the student's country of origin is the second theme upon which the ELCO programme is based. This learning has brought about the introduction of Moroccan culture in schools, supposedly endowed with the specific features that are the main characteristics of this immigrant community. These Moroccan elements have been defined in advance by the governing organisations and are in this form introduced in the schools. This fact has caused Moroccan children to be defined in the school context by their officially dictated *Moroccanness*. According to Narrowe (1998), we are witnessing the construction of an immigrant culture that is being developed through a series of ethnic obligations that seem to be intrinsic to being Moroccan. Moroccan children are being defined as such by an outside definition of Moroccan ethnic identity (see Mijares, in press, about this issue and about stereotypes with regards to Moroccans). Furthermore, this definition, set in advance for children of Moroccan origin, has arguably been the source of problems that seriously affect these children in school. It is very common to listen to these children, living between two different worlds, and to say that they are neither Moroccan nor Spanish. These children are considered to be living between two worlds so culturally different that their situation can cause an identity crisis that might ultimately lead to school failure. These kinds of statements are a reflection of the persistence of the discourse that Edward Said defined as Orientalist. What is curious to prove is that in this case we are talking about the construction of the other's image. Moroccans as well as Spanish people are participants in this construction. These kinds of discourses are collected in Franzé and Mijares (1999). It is for this reason that the intention is for them to learn and preserve their culture and safeguard a Moroccan personality that

seems to have very concrete features and is the common heritage of all the children of Moroccan origin.

The relation between school failure and teaching the culture of origin was widely discussed in France in the seventies. Studies on this relation have demonstrated that the reasons for the low school success among children of immigrant origin have been analysed much more in socio-economic terms than in cultural terms. Accordingly, it is necessary to note how children of Moroccan origin share school success and failure rates with indigenous children of the same socio-economic status (Camilleri, 1992). Although ELCO is an educational facility that intends to improve the children's academic results, this programme cannot only be conceived as an antidote against the possible school and social problems of the children to whom it is directed.

What seems to result from this characterisation of Moroccan children under the blanket definition of Moroccans is a need to introduce diversity in the schools. Moroccans seem to have fixed characteristics without having in mind their own perception as individuals. This mindset has caused the passing from an appreciation of diversity to an awareness of difference. Moroccan children are different because they are classified as Moroccans and immigrants before being thought of as children and pupils. From this perspective, the construction of a Moroccan identity in the schools is created through various intercultural activities. This is done by introducing elements that are based on a folkloric reading of Islamic practices such as the fasting of the month of Ramadan. Also the *Eid* or the Moroccan gastronomy seem to be key elements in the life of these children. Other folkloric elements such as henna, music or traditional clothes are very important in recreating Moroccan culture in the schools. Difference is constructed by means of these folkloric manifestations of Moroccan culture, while it is not specified which are the identity problems that affect these children. The vagueness and deficiency of the discourse related to Moroccan children in the schools confirms the idea of them being constructed as a piece of monolithic Moroccan culture. In this sense, the teaching of classical Arabic in the ELCO programme instead of the actual mother tongues confirms that Moroccan identity is invented in order to be taught to children.

## Conclusions

At the moment, the Moroccan ELCO programme in Spain is the only public initiative that recognises Arabic as an immigrant minority language. Nevertheless, the current programme has been implemented with some fundamental contradictions that can result in unintended consequences.

On the one hand, the language that is being taught is not the mother tongue of the children towards whom the programme is directed. Instead of the different native dialects, Classical Arabic is being taught as their 'mother tongue'. This situation, which reflects the low status of Moroccan Arabic and Berber languages in Morocco, has been transferred to the Spanish schools. We should not forget that the Moroccan government manages the ELCO programme. The National Ministry of Education is only in charge of allowing the programme and engaging Moroccan teachers that will be in charge.

On the other hand, the discrepancy in skills between mother tongues and classical Arabic is greater when these children have only achieved a low level of schooling in their countries of origin. As has been explained with regard to Arabic teaching, this fact is crucial in order to understand to what level these children are habituated to classical Arabic. They may start the programme learning a totally unknown language. At home these children communicate within their family by means of a dialect. In the case of children who communicate in a Berber dialect, the distance will even be greater. It is crucial that this issue be assessed in order to know whether the objectives of the programme are being achieved or not.

It is also necessary to fix a set of evaluation criteria in order to know how effective the programme is. Such criteria do not currently exist. On the one hand, there is no check as to whether children are learning Arabic or not. On the other hand, there is no knowledge as to whether this learning, as currently operated, is giving the expected results. At this point, we could ask the following questions. Does ELCO contribute to the improvement of the educational careers of children? Does it help to facilitate better integration in the schools? And last but not least, does it help to achieve a sense of interculturality?

In the case of Moroccan ELCO as it is currently being implemented, we are in danger of achieving exclusion instead of integration. The cause of exclusion would be that objectives are not well defined, that the theoretical basis is lost when applied to the daily reality and that vital evaluation criteria are missing to recognise that we have lost our way.

Home language programmes directed to immigrant children should be considered important, but they must have a real and realistic status within the official curriculum in order to achieve the formulated objectives in a concrete manner.

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**Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data**

The Other Languages of Europe: Demographic, Sociolinguistic and Educational Perspectives/Edited by Guus Extra and Durk Gorter. Multilingual Matters.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

I. Linguistic minorities—Europe. 2. Europe—Languages. I. Extra, Guus. II. Gorter, D. (Durk). III. Multilingual Matters (Series).

P119.315.O87 2001

408'.6'93094—dc21

00-063823

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 1-85359-510-1 (hbk)

ISBN 1-85359-509-8 (pbk)

**Multilingual Matters Ltd**

UK: Frankfurt Lodge, Clevedon Hall, Victoria Road, Clevedon BS21 7HH.

USA: UTP, 2250 Military Road, Tonawanda, NY 14150, USA.

Canada: UTP, 5201 Dufferin Street, North York, Ontario M3H 5T8, Canada.

Australia: P.O. Box 586, Artarmon, NSW, Australia.

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Printed and bound in Great Britain by the Cromwell Press Ltd.

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