The Islamic collections of Leiden University Library

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A view of Leiden on a summer day at Witte Singel, near the Library: the botanical garden, students rowing in the moat around the city, the old observatory in the background.
The Rapenburg, Leiden’s main canal. The building style of the houses is of the 17th and 18th centuries.

Photo: J.J. Witkam, March 1, 2009.
Islamic collections in Leiden University,
Some issues involved, some subjects treated, questions posed

A historical overview of the Leiden Library

What are Islamic collections?

Why are there Islamic collections in Leiden?

Where do the Leiden Islamic collections come from?

Who brought them there?

How to make Islamic manuscript collections available to the readers?

The future of Islamic manuscript collections.
The old building of Leiden University Library at the Rapenburg. After the departure of the library it became the State Herbarium, then the seat of the Directorate of Leiden University. Photo: J.J. Witkam, March 1, 2009.
The interior of Leiden’s first University Library, 1610, in a converted church. Open shelving with arrangement according to subject, books chained to the book cases. 

Source: Woudanus.
One of the few chained books that have been preserved. Standard binding in parchment with the logo and the abbreviated name of the University.
The first printed catalogue of Leiden University Library, by Petrus Bertius, and published in 1595. The catalogue follows the division by subject in the physical library.

It is also the first printed catalogue of a public collection ever.

The University used the catalogue in order to attract students.

Source:
http://bc.ub.leidenuniv.nl/bc/nomenclator/index.html
An idealized view of a universal library. An illustration from Leiden’s last comprehensive catalogue in one volume (Senguerdius, 1716).

Source: private collection
Description of the Oriental (= Arabic, Persian and Turkish) manuscripts in the catalogue by Senguerdios, published in 1716.

The page shows a number of scientific texts.

Source: private collection
Some considerations for Arabic and Islamic studies in the pre-modern period:

- Missionary activities in the Islamic world.

- Knowledge of the exact sciences. Some early Orientalists were medical doctors or mathematicians.

- Linguistic study of Hebrew, especially due to the Reformation. Arabic useful because of its archaic linguistic properties. Idea that Hebrew is the mother of all languages.

- Trade with Muslim countries

Development of Arabic printing in Europa. Purpose: export of books, but not successful: Qur’an of Venice (one copy left, 1541). End of the Medicea Press in Rome (1590’s). Its magnificent editions were hardly sold in Turkey (the intended market).
Modern catalogues

Between 1910-2007 the Leiden library has been publishing a series of manuscript catalogues, both of Western and Oriental materials.

This series, *Codices Manuscripti*, is now discontinued, after more than 40 volumes have appeared. Part of the contents of these catalogues has now been transported to internet databases in the Library’s website. The Library is publishing images on the internet.


The complete series can now be accessed at: http://www.islamicmanuscripts.info/reference/catalogues/codices-manuscripti/index.html
Facsimile editions

Apart from by catalogues, manuscripts can be made by way of facsimile editions.

Between 1993 and 2002 seven volumes of facsimile editions of Indonesian manuscripts were published in the series Manuscripta Indonesica.

The series comprises manuscripts in Malay, Javanese and Balinese. Each volume contains all images of the manuscript, always a thorough introduction, and sometimes a transliteration and translation. In 1995 a prayer book from Aceh was published both on paper and CD, the first times ever for an Indonesian manuscript.

The complete series can now be accessed under Manuscripta Indonesica in the virtual library on Islamic manuscripts at:
http://www.islamicmanuscripts.info/reference/index.html
Leiden University Library in its new building at Witte Singel. A modern building of 1983, designed by architect Bart van Kasteel. The first building of the Library especially designed as a Library.

Photo: J.J. Witkam, March 1, 2009.
The Oriental reading room in Leiden University Library in its new building at Witte Singel. Situation in 2004 (changed now).

Early Islamic holdings of Leiden University, an overview, by professors-collectors, since the library did not acquire yet by itself.

- Raphelengius, the printer
- Scaliger (d. 1609) as a historian and specialist of chronology
- Erpenius (d. 1624), editor of texts, his own printing house, author of an Arabic grammar
- Golius (d. 1667), the grand-master, author of a dictionary, collector of scientific manuscripts
- Warner (d. 1665), learned diplomat in Istanbul and bibliophile

They all left their traces in the Leiden collections (except Erpenius, whose manuscript collection is now in Cambridge).
Portrait of Frans van Raphelingen (1539-1597).

Professor of Hebrew in Leiden University, printer to the University, first printer of Arabic in The Netherlands.

In 1613 his Arabic-Latin dictionary appeared posthumously in Leiden.

Engraving after an anonymous painting of 1596. From Meursius, *Athenae Batavae*. 
Portrait of Josephus Justus Scaliger (1540-1609), the most learned man of his time.

Leiden University availed itself of his services in order to attract students.

He knew Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Ethiopian, and a number of other languages. He mostly worked on comparative chronology.

On his desk is an Arabic manuscript.

Source: Original dating c. 1608 in the Senate room, Leiden University.
Portrait of Jacobus Golius (1596-1667), professor of Arabic and Mathematics in Leiden University.

He brought together the first collection of Islamic manuscripts in Leiden.

In 1653 he published an Arabic-Latin dictionary which remained in use during almost two centuries.

Source: 19th-century lithography by L. Springer after a posthumous painting.
Dissertation of Levinus Warner (1616-1665), on the question whether the end of life has been fixed beforehand or not, according to Arabic and Persian sources. Amsterdam 1642.

Warner is one of the most interesting Dutch Orientalists of the early period. From 1645-1665 he lived in Istanbul as Dutch ambassador, where he collected a huge mass of Islamic and Hebrew manuscripts. These still form the core of the Oriental collections in Leiden University. After he departed to Istanbul he did not publish any scholarly work, only reports on Turkish politics.
Congratulatory letter by Warner’s Istanbili friend, the poet Muhammad al-Urdi, on the event that Warner had succeeded in acquiring books from the library of Haggi Khalifa who had died in 1658.

Erpenius, Golius and Warner corresponded with a number of Muslim learned friends and acquaintances. Such early letters are rare and interesting exchanges between the world of Islam and the West.

Since Warner lived in a Muslim society, his outlook on Islam was milder than that of scholars living in Europe.

Source: in MS Leiden, Or. 1122.
The 17th-century Dutch Orientalists had not participated in the anti-Islamic debate of their times, but they had concentrated on philological studies and the exact sciences.

Reland is the first Dutch academic to look for common features between Islam and Christianity. He also shows what Islam is, through Islamic texts. Ignorance breeds fanaticism, and Reland’s means consists of unprejudiced knowledge.

Source: Frontispice of the second edition of Reland’s work on the Islamic religion (Utrecht 1717).
In 1717 Reland was the first to provide the European public with true images of Mecca.  

Source: Leiden 409 F 6, detail of an engraving between pp. 120-121.
Michael-Jan de Goeje (1836-1909) was professor of Oriental languages in Leiden. He is the grandmaster of Leiden’s philological school. He organized the edition of Tabari’s history. He edited the Arabic geographers. He edited many other texts. He compiled manuscript catalogues. He first co-operated with the Leiden publisher Brill’s.

Source: Chalk portrait by Th.S, in Leiden University Library.
Snouck Hurgronje’s influence on Dutch Islamic studies can hardly be underestimated. He is a true pioneer in Islamic Law, and he used his vast knowledge mostly in the service of the colonial administration in the Dutch East-Indies. He largely shaped Dutch colonial policies towards Indonesian Muslims. He was also a modern scholar. He was the first European to make photographs in Mecca (1885). In 1908-1909 he had the first sound recordings made.

Source: Photograph, Snouck Hurgronje Archive, 1885.
The Dutch were engaged, between 1873-1904, in a war of attrition against the Sultanate of Aceh.

Acehnese pilgrims in the courtyard of the Dutch consulate, Jedda, 1884. Photograph by Snouck Hurgronje.

The leader, second from right, is Teungku di Cot Plieng, a famous resistance fighter in the Aceh-war.
Music recording in the Dutch consulate in Jeddah, February 1909. From left to right: Tadjoedin, Sayyid Muhammad, Mas Muhammad Hasim, Haji Agus Salim. Photograph by consul N. Scheltema.

Source: Leiden University Library Or. 26.365: OI D.47. Sound: CD 2a, track 11 (C 16).
Islamic studies in the latter part of the 20th century

In the second half of the 20th century Islamic studies have become infinitely more complex than in the centuries before.

- From philological studies they became also the domain of the social sciences. Philology has remained in place, however, but a new class of experts emerged.

- There came an end to colonial rule over Muslims (Indonesia).

- There started a mass immigration in The Netherlands of Muslims, mostly from Morocco and Turkey. Presently it is estimated that out of a total population of 16 million there are one million Muslims.

- The effects of 9/11. Islam in the centre of the public debate, with issues of assimilation, position of Muslim women, freedom of speech.

- Disturbing points on either side of the debate.
Mystical diagrams of the school of Ahmad al-Qushâshî, a widespread school in South-East Asia.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 2222.
Beginning of the Arabic grammar by al-Shubrawî. Manuscript from Aceh, 19th century.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 7057 (10), f. 1b

In the upper part one sees the Baitul Rahman Mosque, a conspicuous landmark in Banda Aceh and a symbol of Acehnese Islam.

Source: Leiden University Library
Colophon in a MS of the *Kitab al-Hasha’ish*, the work on *Materia medica* by Dioscurides. This MS dated Samarqand, Ramadan 475 (1082).

Under the colophon is a note by the Persian translator, Muhammad b. ‘Alî al-Râmî, telling that he had used this MS for his Persian translation, ‘because in Arabic it is not so popular anymore, but in Persian it is’. Dated 18 Safar 510 (1116).

Source: MS Leiden, Or. 289, f. 228a
Surat al-Fatiha in an illuminated Qur’an with Turkish interlinear translation.

It is a word by word translation, with occasional commentary, all in old Anatolian Turkish.

In this way the reciter of the Arabic text would know the precise meaning, even if his knowledge of Arabic was imperfect.

Manuscript dated Gallipoli, 5 Ragab 926 (1520), copied by Mehmed b. Sarukhân.

Source: MS Leiden, Or. 504, f. 1b
al-Gawâhir al-Khamsa

a mystical text on gestures and sounds during dhikr by Muhammad b. Khatir al-Din al-Ghawth al-Hindi (d. 970/1562).

Arabic text with Javanese interlinear translation. Part of a collective volume. Javanese in specific Islamic text is often written with the Arabic script.

Written on treebark paper, heavily affected by insects. Dated: first half 19th cent.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 5665, f. 111b
Examples of book art: the basmala

1. In an Arabic manuscript from Sumatra, *Anis al-Muttaqin*, ascribed to the 18th century Sumatran author Abdussamad al-Palimbani. Source: MS Leiden Or. 7030, pp. 218, 243, details

2. In *Asrâr as-salât*, and other fragments in Arabic, with interlinear Malay translation. Arabic orthography is often faulty.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 7355, p. 59, detail

Source: MS Leiden, Or. 281, ff. 6b-7a
Kitab al-Halal wal-Haram, in 18 chapters. At the end a list is given of undesirable and forbidden books.

Anonymous work in a collective volume of 38 shorter Persian texts on Ethics, Adab, etc.

MS of well before 782 AH (owners’ dates).

Table of contents

Source: MS Leiden, Or. 286, f. 53b
The contemporary West has some disturbing images of Islam.

The Salman Rushdie affair left most people dazzled and the *fatwa* issued against him, with the constant death threat as a consequence, found no understanding among a western public.


Source: Leiden University Library.
An antisemitic classic in Arabic translation and available all over the Middle East.


Hitler’s crimes against humanity are hardly known in the Middle East, and many think that he was somehow a hero in the struggle against Israel, or against British colonialism.

Source: Leiden University Library.
A leaf of the old paper section of the Leiden MS of the *Kitab al-Musta`ini*.

The ink of the notes in Spanish and Latin seems to be the same as that of the note in Arabic in the outer margin.

From this it follows that the Sephardic Jewish scholar who has written the additions in Latin script was also proficient in Arabic.

At the top of the page there is damage with loss of text. Apparently this lost text could not be supplemented.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 15, f. 122b