Orientalist Studies in The Netherlands. Historical Legacy and Contemporary Paradigm

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The Departments of History and Civilization and Political Science
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.
A view of Leiden on a summer day: the botanical garden, students rowing in the moat around the city, the old observatory in the background.
Themes treated:

Oriental studies in Early Modern Europe
The Renaissance ideal: the search for sources

Pioneers
The golden age
The Enlightenment
Appreciation of Oriental culture

Colonial imperatives
The widening scope in Oriental studies

The 20th-century endeavour
Islam in the public debate
Islamic studies in Early Modern Europe
(from c. 1500 onwards)

The Orient was the Islamic Orient (The Mediterranean basin).

Oriental studies in Europe at that time concerned Islamic culture

Already known: The Muslim achievement with the translations into Arabic.

Texts of the Classical Greek heritage, had been translated in the 13th century from Arabic into Latin

Subjects: Qur’an translated and refuted, philosophy, medicine, mathematics.

Contacts with Muslims:
- Spain (Islam on the decrease): 1492 fall of Granada
- Balkans (Islam on the increase): 1453 conquest of Constantinople
- Levantine trade (Venice, Genoa), less important for Islamic studies.
Grammar of the Arabic dialect of Granada, by Pedro de Alcala, Granada 1505.

Frontispiece showing the author dedicating his book to the Archbishop of Granada, Fernando de Talavera.

Source: Private collection
Grammar of the Arabic dialect of Granada, by Pedro de Alcala, Granada 1505.
The section on the Arabic script (Maghribi). Prototypography of Arabic (woodcut letters).

Source: Private collection
Considerations for Arabic studies in the Renaissance period:

- Missionary activities in the Islamic world.

- Knowledge of the exact sciences. The first Orientalists were medical doctors or mathematicians.

- Linguistic study of Hebrew. Especially due to 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).
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.
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 ascribed to Woudanus in 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.
Warner’s work was truly modern.

In this historical work (published in Leiden 1643) he collected the quotations from Muslim authors about Jesus Christ. He had an interest to learn more about Muslim opinions on Jesus Christ and the position of Christianism within Islam. But he did not participate in theological disputes.

Source: Leiden University Library
Collections of proverbs and sayings were made by many European scholars. These had the advantage of being short and they provided a direct insight in the way of living and of thinking of other peoples.

Here is a collection of One Hundred Persian proverbs, collected, translated and commented upon by Warner, published in Leiden in 1644.

Source: Leiden University Library.
Congratulatory letter by Warner’s Istanbule 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 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.
Scolarly notes by Warner, with his translation, in Latin, of the *Mu’allaqā* of the pre-Islamic poet Imra’ al-Qays.

It illustrates an interest in Arabic poetry which in Europe would come only a century later.

Source: MS Leiden, Or. 1103. The text was published by G.J. Lette, Leiden 1748.
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: Frontispiece 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.
Reinhard Dozy (1820-1883) was professor of History in Leiden. He has become known as the historian of al-Andalus.

He has edited several historical and literary texts in connection with al-Andalus and the Maghreb.

In 1851 he started publishing a catalogue of the Oriental manuscripts in Leiden University Library.
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.
Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936) was a specialist on Islamic law. In 1885 he lived in Mecca. He published his book about Meccan history and society in 1888-1889. From 1889-1906 he served as gouvernement adviser in Batavia (now Jakarta). He was instrumental in subduing the Acehnese. In 1906 he was appointed professor of Arabic and Islam in Leiden. His influence on Dutch islamology is still felt.

Source: Photograph, Snouck Hurgronje Archive, ca. 1910.
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.

Snouck Hurgronje in Mecca, 1885

Source: Photograph, Snouck Hurgronje Archive, 1885.
Snouck Hurgronje has first formulated the idea of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, which started to appear with Brill’s, from 1910 onwards, in three languages simultaneously. The New Edition (from 1960 onwards) has just been completed. The project involves a global cooperation between more than a thousand scholars from East and West. The third edition is well underway.

Source: Photograph, Snouck Hurgronje Archive, 1927.
Arent Jan Wensinck (1882-1939) was a professor in Leiden University. He was a specialist in many fields: comparative semites, Oriental Christianity, Arabic and Islam.

He initiated the Concordance and Indexes of the Muslim Tradition, which was only completed in 1988.
Jan Hendrik Kramers (1891-1951) was professor of Arabic and Islam in Leiden.

He edited several Arabic geographical texts. He published and taught about many aspects of Islamic culture.

He translated the Qur’an directly from Arabic into Dutch for the first time (posthumously published in 1956). The translation has remained in print till today.
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.
The increase of the influence of the social sciences in the study of Islam in The Netherlands is illustrated by the foundation of two important institutions, in the 1990’s, both in Leiden:

The International Institute of Asian Studies (IIAS)
Director: Prof. Wim Stokhof

The Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM)
Director: Prof. Asef Bayat

Either institute publishes a Newsletter or Magazine, which is distributed freely all over the world.
Either institute finances specific research, provides fellowships and organizes lectures.

The IIAS is not exclusively focused on Islam, but on Asian studies. The ISIM focuses its attention on Islam in the modern world.
The institutes are financed by cooperating universities and the ministries of foreign affairs, education and international cooperation.
A consequence of the Muslim immigration in The Netherlands was the building of mosques, of which there are now many hundreds.

Drawing of a projected mosque in Amsterdam, designed by the (French-Jewish) architect couple Marc and Nada Breitman, who took the Süleymaniyeh mosque in Istanbul as a model.

The most controversial debater on Islamic issues in The Netherlands was the Somali-born Ayaan Hirsi Ali. She raised issues of assimilation, position of Muslim women, freedom of speech.

Source: Associated Press.
The caged virgin is a collection of Hirsi Ali’s essays of the past years.

Some of its themes are:

- domestic violence against women.
- female circumcision.
- forced marriages of minors.
- freedom of speech.
- acceptance by Muslims of non-Islamic thinking.

She refers to herself (on the cover) as a ‘Muslim Woman’.

The most controversial of Hirsi Ali’s contributions to the Islam debate was her short film (11 minutes only), Submission I, directed against domestic violence, and violence against women in general.

Qur’anic verses on flogging as a punishment for adultery, here painted on the back of flogged woman.

An extremely blasphemic image according to Muslim standards.

The director of the film *Submission I*, Theo van Gogh, was murdered in the street in November 2004 by a Dutch-born Moroccan Muslim fundamentalist. The murderer was caught and sentenced to life. Hirsi Ali, who had written the script of the film, went into hiding for months.

Source: Associated Press.
The West has its disturbing images of Islam as well.

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.
Another disturbing feature: the easy spread of antisemitic literature in the Muslim world.

The Arabic translation of the well-known antisemitic pamphlet, the so-called ‘Protocols of the Sages of Zion’ in which a plot is said to be hatched for Jewish world domination. The original text was in English, the translation is by Muhammad Khalifa al-Tunisi. Introduction by Abbas Mahmud al- ‘Aqqad. Cairo, c. 1976.

Source: Leiden University Library.
Another 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.
Yet another disturbing image: the burning of magazines and books in the Islamic world. Here is shown the recent affair of the (failed) introduction of *Playboy* in Indonesia (April 2006). That one of Indonesia’s greatest authors, Pramoedia Ananta Toer, goes up in flames as well does not seem to matter. 

Source: Associated Press.
Conclusive remarks:

All these new issues have entered the public debate, and not only in The Netherlands, especially after 9/11.

They have eclipsed many serious issues, and the Islam debate in The Netherlands is sometimes conducted at the speed of the daily news in the press and on TV.

Academic and other specialists try to keep up with these fast developments, but they are often outpaced by the newest atrocity, crime or scandal.

Thank you for your kind attention