

Bibliographical Resources for the Study of Islamic Manuscripts in Collections in the Netherlands

By Jan Just Witkam

I am not going to enumerate a bibliography of manuscript catalogues for collections of Islamic manuscript materials in the Netherlands, nor will I offer a soporific list with dates and figures.

That is already on the record. I have published it in the *World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts*, in 1993, volume II, pp. 345-383. That Survey, which is being published by the Al-Furqān Foundation in London, is the first ever attempt to gain an insight into the bibliographical wealth of the Islamic manuscript in all countries of the world. My survey for the Netherlands was based on research conducted in the course of 1991. Arranged by institution it gives an insight into the range and size of their holdings with information about the cataloguing of Islamic manuscript materials done to date. The Netherlands have known a tradition of Oriental studies of over four centuries, and this, of course, has been reflected in the contents of its library holdings and archives. In the following I will address a few general issues, and mention some recent developments.

ized *ijazahs*, scholarly diplomas, which form a prominent feature of Islamic literatures, does certainly belong to the manuscript legacy as well. Although many of these are nowadays released in printed form, they have retained many aspects of the manuscript era. In addition to the enormous geographical scope (from Morocco to the Philippines, from China down to sub-Saharan Africa), to the historical scope of many centuries (some fourteen in the Middle East, considerably less on the periphery), and to the tremendous variety of materials (everything written, for which only the German word 'Schrifttum' is adequate), one must consider the enormous linguistic variety of the materials: not only Arabic, Persian, and Turkish for the heartlands of Islam, but also Berber, Kurdish and several languages from the Balkans. Beyond the heartlands the linguistic variety becomes even more dazzling and seems to defy enumeration.

Before the question of bibliographical control of such a wide range of materials can be addressed at all, it should be asked whether or not it is justified to treat the Islamic manuscript as one self-contained field of bibliographical study. 'Islamic' meaning here not only litera-

archives. In the following I will address a few general issues, and mention some recent developments.

Definition of the Islamic manuscript

The Islamic manuscript is given a broad definition here. It is not only the entire handwritten legacy of the Middle Eastern Islamic culture of some fourteen centuries. The traditional Islamic scholarly output of sub-Saharan Africa, the Indo-Pakistan-Bangladesh subcontinent, Central Asia, China, and Southeast Asia is also covered by this term. In all these regions, the printing press has only relatively recently replaced handwriting as a means of disseminating knowledge. In the Middle East, India, and Indonesia, to name but the regions from where most texts originate, this process developed in the 19th century. It was a gradual process of transition, and during the entire century manuscripts were indeed made, though in decreasing numbers, alongside the production of printed books. In all three aforementioned regions one sees the development of the lithography as an intermediate form between the manuscript and the printing of the modern age. It could even be argued that one should include the numerous lithographic printings as part of the manuscript legacy, or at least as an additional dimension of it.

Not only book texts are involved, when we speak about the handwritten legacy. Archival materials, letters, documents, and such items are all part of that legacy. One could even maintain that collections of epigraphical nature, such as photographs or rubbings of Islamic tombstones, shawāhid, belong to the manuscript legacy as well. One could even stretch this argument and maintain that all rare and unique materials, such as old photographs, sound recordings and objects of material culture should be included. Interesting, and rewarding, as this may be, it must fall outside the scope of this paper presented in the company of librarians.

The very specific literature of *fatwas*, juridical opinions on all sorts of matters, and the highly personal-

Islamic manuscript as one self-contained field of bibliographical study. 'Islamic' meaning here not only literature of theological nature but all literature, irrespective of the subject, originating from adherents of Islam, be they in the minority in their country of origin or in the majority. The fact that I use the term 'Islamic manuscript' in this context and in the meaning as defined here should indicate that I, for one, have answered that question positively. Islam as a religion and a civilization is the common denominator, and for Muslims this is sufficient for treating the manuscript literature as a compact and self-contained category of material by which their forefathers have preserved their culture. That should suffice for the bibliographer, although he, or she, more than anyone else, realizes that where the Islamic element unifies, the linguistic and geographical variety in the material is at the same time a divider.

To put the question in a more concrete form, and by way of example: are marginal notes in a Koranic manuscript from Canton, China, meaningful to 'ulamā' in Kano, Nigeria? Or another, but similar question: What would be the interest of a Berber-speaking faqīh from the South Moroccan Sousse in literary output in Sasak, the language of the Muslim population of the island of Lombok, one of the Lesser Sunda islands east of Java? Or the other way around? In such cases, and more such far-fetched examples can easily be devised, the most expected answer would be that there is no connection at all between such diverse literary and scholarly expressions as given in the two examples. On the other hand, the Koran from Canton would be immediately recognized in Kano, strange as the Chinese style of Arabic script and illumination may seem to the Kanoese. Such slightly subversive questions do not put the basic unity of the Islamic materials into jeopardy, instead they rather illustrate the extreme complexity of the state of affairs. Notwithstanding, the fact that there is no one on earth, Muslim or not, who has linguistic command over all languages in which Islamic literature is expressed,

questions of the bibliography of Islamic manuscript literature as a whole cannot but be addressed in the comprehensive global way as I do here.

Collections of Islamic materials

It is from the perspective of the former colonizers, Britain, France, the Netherlands, that this enormous variety of Islamic manuscript literature presents itself in the clearest way. A student of manuscripts on the island of Lamu, off the Kenian coast, will hardly ever be confronted with the Cantonese Koran, but he would easily recognize similarities between elements of calligraphy and illumination in his own manuscripts and those coming from, say the Malay world in Southeast Asia, if he were ever confronted with these. By that sort of similarity in style, in outward appearance, often also including the use of Arabic script adapted to local needs, it is justified to speak of an Islamic style which transcends the boundaries between different regions. It lies outside the scope of this paper to discuss the explanation for such similarities, of which many can be formulated. Suffice it to say that there is a large and complex body of Islamic manuscript materials, and that the greatest variety of them is found in the collections in countries such as Britain and the Netherlands, which have an interestingly diverse colonial and commercial history.

I do not mention these two countries without reason. In their libraries and museums they have, more than any other country in the world (though Germany, France and the US are close runners-up), amassed an enormous variety of Islamic manuscript materials. These come from very diverse origins, and have often survived with a much longer lifespan than they would have had, had they remained in their own cultural environment. That, by the way, is yet another aspect which makes the Orientalist collections different from the collections in *situ*. We would never have known what palm-leaf manuscripts in 16th century Java or Bali would have looked like, if there had not been some of these in the libraries

least it is the home town of the International Institute of Asian Studies. So much for chauvinism!

For a long time, the Leiden University Library has considered it to be one of its tasks to include the manuscript holdings of all other institutions in the country in its printed catalogues, not for expansionist reasons obviously, but as a service to its readers. A number of the manuscript collections of other institutions have, in fact, been physically transferred to the premises of the Leiden library and are kept there on permanent loan under agreement. The most important of these are the collections of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in Amsterdam and the three separate collections of Indonesian manuscripts belonging to the Dutch Bible Society in Haarlem.

Since being housed in a new building since 1983, the Leiden University Library has its own Oriental department, headed since 1980 by the present speaker. It has its own publication programme for catalogues, in two series of catalogues. *Codices Manuscripti*, with a Latin title as it was founded in the early years of this century when Latin was still in use as a language of manuscript catalogues (the last catalogue of Oriental holdings in Leiden written in Latin is the volume by Th.W. Juynboll published in 1907; the last catalogue in Latin of Western manuscripts was published less than twenty years ago) is meant as a catalogue series of serious dimensions. Entire languages are usually treated in its volumes of Oriental catalogues. When I took over the editorship of this series for the catalogues of Oriental holdings in the Netherlands, my ideal and example was the impressive series of manuscript catalogues of the German cataloguing project, the *Verzeichnis Orientalischer Handschriften in Deutschland*. It proved to be an unattainable ideal, and still is, mainly for financial reasons. Still, in the past twenty-five years a number of Islamic manuscript catalogues have been published in the series, most recently the catalogue by P. Voorhoeve describing

Orientalist collections different from the collections *in situ*. We would never have known what palm-leaf manuscripts in 16th century Java or Bali would have looked like, if there had not been some of these preserved in the University libraries of Oxford and Leiden. All other such materials have perished, or so it might seem. It is this function of the Orientalist collections of serving as a time capsule that should not go unremarked.

*Bibliographical resources
concerning the in house collections*

A number of the libraries and museums in Europe and the US have never ceased collecting Islamic manuscript materials. They are in fact abundantly to be had on the market, and are usually not very expensive – meaning that it is mostly the librarian or museum curator with his expert knowledge who is able to give the added value to the material. In the Netherlands, the Leiden University is the only institution which has, during its existence of more than four centuries, continued to purchase Islamic manuscript materials of the whole range and diversity discussed here. They comprise some 5000 MS volumes from the Islamic Middle East, and some 8000 Islamic manuscripts from the Indonesian Archipelago. To a lesser extent, the library of the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology in Leiden has continued to accommodate a modest influx of Islamic manuscript materials, usually of Indonesian provenance. Apart from these two institutions, numerous other public institutions in the Netherlands have static collections, often of quite considerable size (up to several hundreds), which are no longer being expanded. Often they are the legacies of private scholars. This means, that the Leiden Library fulfils, albeit unofficially, the task of a national library for Orientalist collections. This fact is also reflected by the research facilities in the Netherlands. In Leiden there are more faculty departments for branches of Oriental studies than in all other universities of the country combined. Leiden has its Research School CNWS for African, Asian, and Amerindian Studies, and last but not

still, in the past twenty-five years a number of Islamic manuscript catalogues have been published in the series, most recently the catalogue by P. Voorhoeve describing all Acehnese manuscripts preserved outside Aceh (Indonesia).

The other series of catalogues is much more ephemeral. It is the series of minor and occasional publications series of the library (*Kleine publikaties van de Leidse Universiteitsbibliotheek*), which was instituted, mainly, in order to accommodate catalogues of exhibitions in the library and to publish bibliographies. It is an in-house produced series of limited bibliographical importance. Never the less it has its use and there are several publications in it on Islamic subjects. This has to do with the annual Ramadan exhibition in the Leiden library. This is a phenomenon in itself. Every year, during the month of Ramadan, an exhibition of Islamic nature is organized. That is done in order to serve the considerable Muslim community, and especially their imāms, in the Netherlands during the Fasting month. The Islamic nature of these exhibitions is widely defined. Last year there was an exhibition of editions, translations and manuscripts of the Arabian Nights. The added value to the catalogue, which was written by members of the staff of the Oriental department and which was published in this minor series of the library, lies in the catalogue which it also contained of the full library holdings concerning the theme of the Arabian Nights, and in the reproduction of some of the illustrations from the translations of the Arabian Nights in it. In 1995 (February-March) the subject will be 'Photographing Iran a Century Ago'. The basis for that exhibition is provided by the Hotz collection of old photographs. A catalogue by Corinne Vuurman and Theo Martens will accompany the exhibition. This smaller, occasional series of publications, which is usually written in Dutch, thereby fulfils its function as a witness to activities for the internal use of the Leiden academic community, whereas the respectable series *Codices Manuscripti* every now and then produces a catalogue in one of the international

scholarly languages that is meant for generations of scholars to come. It now contains some ten volumes of catalogues of a variety of Islamic manuscript materials, both from the Middle East and Indonesia.

It can sometimes be observed that manuscript collections are formed where the manuscripts form the only focus of attention. This is, of course, a mistake. Manuscript materials, although they may need extra care and special attention, are not a category of their own as far as the contents of the materials are concerned. After the closure of the manuscript era, which happened quite recently for Islamic manuscripts as we have seen, the dissemination of knowledge went on with the printed book in a seamless continuation. In addition, numerous scholarly and commercial editions of works written during the manuscript era have been published. It is obvious that for sensible research on manuscript materials a library should maintain a collection of subject-related printed materials as well. It is with these that the scholarly study of manuscripts can be accomplished. It follows that bibliographical and library resources for manuscripts and printed materials go hand in hand. It is impossible to separate the one from the other.

*Bibliographical resources
beyond the library's own collections*

Yet another aspect needs attention. Islamic manuscripts are preserved in virtually all countries of the world. As far as they were not produced there during the manuscript era, they migrated there later. The extent of this phenomenon is unequalled by any other categories of manuscripts in the world. Each study on manuscript holdings necessarily has a comparative aspect. To review manuscripts of a certain text in their proper perspective it is an unavoidable circumstance that holdings of different institutions are compared. To prepare research and travelling, *fi talab al-'ilm*, in search of knowledge, as the medieval Arabic expression goes, it is imperative to have available as much information as possible about hold-

microfilms of mostly Islamic manuscripts from both public and private collections from all over the world in the Leiden library. They have been selected because of their relevance for the study of originals kept in Dutch collections in anticipation of future research. Or they were acquired as source materials in philological and historical research conducted by Dutch scholars and ordered at their special request. In this way the manuscriptural basis of much research in the Netherlands is being preserved in a public holding. Or putting it in a more concrete way: references in footnotes or bibliographies in a considerable number of Dutch academic publications in which Islamic manuscripts are involved, can be checked with the help of microfilms kept in the Leiden University Library. An additional aspect of importance is that microfilms are usually better kept in a public collection than by scholars at home. One of the main differences being in this respect the fact that the Leiden library always makes a copy of each microfilm and that the original film is kept as a mother copy in the microfilm archive and is never used by the researcher. In this way vulnerable materials of uncertain lifespan are kept in a way that warrants survival for the next generations of scholars. ◀

OR 172 [2]

Letter, dated 22 June 1824, of L.C.
Graaf van Ranzow to the Panembahan
of Sumanep, Malay in Jawi (Malay-
Arabic script)



travelling, *fī talab al-'ilm*, in search of knowledge, as the medieval Arabic expression goes, it is imperative to have available as much information as possible about holdings of other libraries. This can only be achieved by making collecting catalogues – both published and unpublished – of institutions which hold Islamic manuscript materials, a task of primary importance. With the numerous rationalizations and budget cuts which during the past ten years the research libraries in the Netherlands have undergone, the category of catalogues of other collections would, in my view be the very last one to be abandoned. It is, in fact, the backbone of the international research on manuscripts. To have such resources available is absolutely indispensable for the study of manuscripts.

To provide its readers a full service of recent publications within the terms of its collection profile, the Leiden library not only collects the scholarly production on Islamic literatures which is published in Europe and the US, but it also tries to have a good and up-to-date collection of publications directly imported from Islamic countries. Although these are often addressed to a local audience and are usually based on locally available manuscript sources only, they are never the less of vital importance. Nowadays especially numerous text editions see the light of day, and even if they may not always meet the international standards of textual criticism, they must be considered as valuable additions to what we already know.

Yet another category of study material should be mentioned here. As already said, catalogues of other collections are of prime importance for the comparative study of manuscripts. And due to their dispersion over the world, Islamic manuscripts cannot but be studied comparatively. I have therefore felt it necessary to have funds available for the acquisition of copies on microformat, and maybe before long in a digitalized form as well, of originals from other collections. In this way over the past twenty years, I have collected some two thousand



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