The first Dutch-Indonesian treaty
A rediscovered Arabic translation
by Franciscus Raphelengius
by Herman de Leeuw*

In this article a translation is given of the printed Arabic version of a Dutch open letter issued by Maurice of Nassau, Prince of Orange (1561-1625). With this kind of document is meant 'a formal open letter issued under a seal in favour of a specified addressee but addressed generally, so as to make known the contents'\(^1\). In older English usage, such letters were designated by the term 'letters patent'\(^2\).

The present letter, together with a Portuguese version, was given in 1595 to Cornelis de Houtman, representative of the recently founded Dutch 'Company of Afar' (in Dutch: Compagnie van Verre), on the first Dutch expedition to the Indonesian archipelago\(^3\). The letter was discovered in the collections of the Antwerp printing museum Plantin-Moretus and first exhibited at the quatercentenary of the separation of the Low Countries 'Vier eeuwen scheiding van de Nederlanden' (April-December 1985) in the Plantin-Moretus Museum. The letter measures 289 x 434 mm and contains 20 lines of Arabic text\(^4\). No other printed or manuscript copies are known to exist of this text. The Portuguese version has served as the basis for the first commercial treaty ever concluded between the Dutch and an Indonesian-Muslim government. As both the original treaty and the Dutch and Portuguese open letter have disappeared\(^5\), the Arabic version of the open letter is the only contemporary extant document related to the treaty. At the same time, this letter is the first known translation from Dutch into Arabic to have been preserved. It precedes by five years an Arabic version of another open letter, which until recently was considered the 'prototype of the later, so-called Turkish passes'\(^6\). The translation of this later Arabic version has clearly been influenced by the model of the letter of 1595. In the perspective of European Arabic printing, it is also the very first printed Arabic text of non-scientific and non-religious content\(^7\).

On 2 April 1595 Cornelis de Houtman departed as chief-representative (in Dutch: hoofd-commies) of the Dutch Company of Afar on the first Dutch commercial expedition to Java. The aim of the expedition was to find the overseas route to Java. De Houtman's principal goal was to get access to the Javanese spice market and, in addition, to try to conclude a treaty with a local ruler. The Dutch Republic was at that time engaged in a war with Spain, which lasted from 1568-1648, and Java formed part of the joint Spanish-Portuguese empire. The expedition was therefore placed under the authority of the admiral-general of the Republic, Prince Maurice of Orange. The open letters and other commissions that were to be presented to local dignitaries were thus all signed by him\(^8\).

The choice of Portuguese and Arabic as languages of communication was evidently due to the absence of persons who could translate into Malay at the time. Portuguese was chosen since it was the language of the European nation that had enjoyed up to that time an unchallenged monopoly of trade in the archipelago. Arabic seemed to recommend itself as one of the languages of commerce in South-East Asia\(^9\). Furthermore, in view of later Dutch policy towards Sa'did Morocco and the Ottoman empire, it may perhaps be surmised that the States-General entertained hopes of arousing latent indigenous resentment towards the Spanish-Portuguese empire by exploiting Dutch-Spanish and Protestant-Catholic animosity\(^10\). Besides, knowingly or not, this choice of Arabic on the part of the States-General may also have furthered the initial success of the expedition for another reason, as the Islamisation of Western Java had from the start in the fifteenth century, been closely connected with (Malaccan) commercial enterprise\(^11\).

On 23 June 1596 the expedition reached the bay of Banten, West Java. The next days were spent in establishing the first contacts. On June 29 a first visit was paid to the expedition by the \textit{ki patih} (governor) of Banten, Djajanagara\(^12\). During this visit the \textit{ki patih} promised that he would cede the Dutch the right of preemption with respect to the new harvest of spices. This meant, of course, a promising start for subsequent negotiations. For the first time, the Dutch could buy their spices without the intermedion of the
Portuguese. On the heels of this success a council of the ship commanders and the representatives of the company was held. In the articles of instruction for the expedition it was stipulated that such a council was to be convened whenever a suitable occasion presented itself to discuss 'the ways and byways that might procure them the greatest degree of loyalty, favour and consent of the king or governor of the country'. For this purpose, de Houtman made, the ship commanders and the representatives of the Portuguese and Arabic versions of the open letter and the commissions of the prince. Upon reception, the Portuguese and Arabic letters were promptly read out. Thereupon, de Houtman asked for a written confirmation of the treaty. This confirmation was granted on 3 July 1596, whereby the treaty was concluded. In the collection of Dutch-Indonesian treaties compiled by J.E. Heeres, a Dutch extract, after the lost Portuguese original, is reproduced, here rendered in English:

As it has pleased God Almighty, and these Eminent Gentlemen, to visit us with four ships, and further, that we have seen the open letter which the Most Honourable Prince Maurice of Nassau ordered them [de Houtman c.s.] to show us; by which letter we learn that His Excellency offers us a confederation and his friendship; further, that that selfsame treaty should be confirmed by you, Eminent Gentlemen, who have been mentioned in the open letter: [we declare that] We are disposed to contract a steady league of friendship and confederation with the aforementioned Most Honourable Prince and with you, Eminent Gentlemen. We hereby swear to maintain this treaty and we will instruct all persons to do likewise. Furthermore, we are glad to have you, Eminent Gentlemen, (or someone else on your behalf) come here in our harbour and city, for the purpose of trade, buying, barter or sale as much and often as you like, with the same liberties that are accorded to you in your own country; and we hereby safeguard that no one will maltreat you nor anyone of your following, nor will anyone injure you or any person of your following. This treaty shall be unconditionally observed by us and our subjects (...) if ever we break this treaty, we may be considered ignoble and disloyal people, which God forbid (...).

Heeres has, erroneously as Rouffaer and IJzerman have pointed out, entered the conclusion of this treaty on the first of July, on the authority of J.I. Pontanus. In an annotation, however, he also mentions the date of the third of July, after the Contractboek; moreover, the abstract of the treaty as preserved there contains an explicit pledge of mutual assistance in the case of hostilities not found in the preceding text:

On the third of July 1596, a treaty has been concluded between Cornelis de Houtman and the Bantamese [to the effect that] they will maintain [a bond of] mutual loyalty and that they will, in case of aggression directed to either of the two parties of this treaty, take common action against the enemy in order to drive him away.

To these two abstracts of the original treaty may now be added the Arabic version of the open letter of Prince Maurice, which contains a few points not found in the abstracts. The following translation is made as literal as possible. Additions are given between square brackets. The beginning of each line in the original is indicated by Arabic numerals between slashes.


/2/ As we are of the opinion that it is a good and profitable thing to bring distant peoples in friendly relationship with the inhabitants of our dominions, especially with merchants who make voyages to peoples and islands that are distant from our dominions in order to enter into commercial relations [with them] and to conclude a durable pact of friendship, we have acceded to the urgent requests of our honoured friends Cornelis de Houtman, Gerard de Beuningen, Reinard de Hell and Bernard Heynck, commanders of the ships that lie at anchor with you, so that their enterprise may be successful. We hereby publicly declare that we have authorized them to set sail, over the ocean, to the kingdoms and archipelagoes of India, and the Orient in general, to visit the inhabitants of those parts and trade and barter with them, on condition that they show friendship and fraternity towards the inhabitants there, on behalf of all residents of our dominions. On behalf of them, we pledge ourselves answerable through this declaration. Therefore, we implore each of you not only to show the aforementioned men, when anchored at your harbour with their cargo, your manifest benevolence and sympathy, but also, to actually help them, and to exert yourselves for the realisation of their enterprise; and, furthermore, to assist them materially, when necessary, for the achievement of the praiseworthy goal they are striving after. Should it occur that some of your residents travel to our country, we will try to satisfy them. Moreover, we will proportionally take upon ourselves financial responsibility for them whereby we will amply compensate the expenses...
De 'open brief' van Cornelis de Houtman in de Arabische vertaling toegeschreven aan Franciscus Raphelengius. (Museum Plantin-Moretus, Antwerpen, No. R 63. 8 (4). 72.)

Reduced.
now made by you. In addition, we are always prepared to lend effective reciprocal assistance. Moreover, we have explicitly instructed the abovementioned men, our friends, not to treat even the most unsuccessful merchant, leave alone citizen, regardless of his dependence, hhigh-handedly or with enmity, and to make no attempts on anyone’s life, unless they have been angered and wronged by others first. However, if they fall into the hands of enemies, so that they have to fight for their lives, they are authorized to defend themselves vigorously and fearlessly. Those that are captured by them will if possible be led to defend themselves vigorously and fearlessly. Those that are captured by them will if possible be led before us, or will already have been executed.

All nations, and also applicable among us. Those that have been angered and wronged by others first. Howevever, if they fall into the hands of enemies, so that they have to fight for their lives, they are authorized to defend themselves vigorously and fearlessly. Those that are captured by them will if possible be led before us, or will already have been executed. Moreover, if they fall into the hands of enemies, so that they have to fight for their lives, they are authorized to defend themselves vigorously and fearlessly. Those that are captured by them will if possible be led before us, or will already have been executed.

Pending the situation. This is legally permitted among all nations, and also applicable among us. Those that have been angered and wronged by others first. However, if they fall into the hands of enemies, so that they have to fight for their lives, they are authorized to defend themselves vigorously and fearlessly. Those that are captured by them will if possible be led before us, or will already have been executed. Moreover, if they fall into the hands of enemies, so that they have to fight for their lives, they are authorized to defend themselves vigorously and fearlessly. Those that are captured by them will if possible be led before us, or will already have been executed.

Written and sealed at The Hague, Holland, on the 16th of the so-called month of January in the year 1595 according to the time-reckoning of our religion.

Both de Nave and Hamilton have recently ascribed the translation of this Arabic letter to Franciscus Raphelengius. For this ascription they base themselves on two arguments: No name of any other person qualified for this kind of work has been preserved for this early period; and the absolute identity of the Arabic type used in the open letter with the type used in the Specimen characterum Arabicorum Officinae Plantinianae Franc. Raphelengii of 1595.

Specimens were customarily issued by printing houses to announce the availability of (new) type. Raphelengius was head of the Officina Plantiniana, the Leiden branch of Christophe Plantin’s Antwerp printing house. The Arabic type displayed in the specimen of the Leiden Officina Plantiniana was here used for the first time. It had been initially cut for the Leiden edition of Scaliger’s Opus de emendatione temporum of 1598. There is no indication that this Arabic type has ever been used by other printers.

For the last quarter of the sixteenth century four persons with knowledge of Arabic are known to have lived in the Dutch Republic. These are J.J. Scaliger, Jan Theunisz., Philippus Ferdinandus and Franciscus Raphelengius. Scaliger recorded that he made occasional translations of Arabic letters at the request of the States-General. However, his complaints about the difficulties he met in these translations make it improbable that he would ever have ventured translating into Arabic. Jan Theunisz matriculated at Leiden University in 1591, as a classicist. The first acquaintance he made with Arabic dates from 1595, when he was employed as compositor at the Officina Plantiniana. Philippus Ferdinandus only reached Leiden in 1599 when he assumed the post of lecturer of Arabic at Leiden University. The only one left evidently was Franciscus Raphelengius (Louvain 1539 — Leiden 1597).

Raphelengius was appointed professor extraordinary of Hebrew at Leiden University in 1585. At that time he held an already firmly established reputation in the field of Semitic philology. Testifying to his learning are his contributions to the pentaglot Antwerp ‘Biblia regia’, published between 1569 and 1572.

This work was printed by the printing house of Christophe Plantin, in whose firm Raphelengius had been working as corrector from 1562 onwards. Raphelengius had begun studying Arabic at least upon completion of his work on the pentaglot Bible, as appears from both his own letters and those from his relatives. For the study of this language he expressed an ever increasing predilection.

Raphelengius’ Lexicon Arabico-Latinum, posthumously published in 1613, forms the culmination of his Arabic studies and is incidentally the first printed bilingual dictionary of classical Arabic.

Raphelengius did not limit his activities to the printing business and Semitic philology, however. In the introduction to his Lexicon he lists twenty sources used by him in the compilation. As penultimate source, translations of Arabic commercial letters, safe-conducts etc., are mentioned, made at the request of merchants. The Dutch original of one of his translations into Arabic has been preserved in the Sources inédites de l’histoire du Maroc. It is the translation of a letter from the States-General to the ‘great emperor of Morocco’, the Sa’did Mawla Bahmd al-Mansür (reigned 986-1012/1578-1603) dated October 15, 1596. It is probable that more translations were made by Raphelengius, e.g., the Arabic translation of the open letter that accompanied the Dutch ‘Expedition Round the North’ of 1594. Unfortunately, no comparison could be made of the present letter with any of these translations, as none of these have been preserved. Finally, such rare or idiosyncratic forms in the Arabic text as yatanaqghah, yataraaddadu, marqa, and nā‘id (lines 7, 9, 11 and 13 respectively), which were already signalled in the notes to the translation of the letter, can only be properly understood after consultation of Raphelengius’ Lexicon. All these hapax legomena, so to speak, therefore point, once more, invariably to the same source.

A not insignificant detail may be added here. In 1592 the Raphelengiuses had published L.J. Waghenaer’s Thesoor der zeevaart. The Thesoor contains descriptions of the coasts and harbours of most countries of Western Europe, Scandinavia, Russia, the Mediterranean and the Far East, accompanied by maps. The part on Eastern-Asia, prominently mentioned in the subtitle before the more common waters of septentrional and southern Europe, but actually put at the end of the work, was based on data furnished by Dirck Gerritsz ‘China’ Pomp, from his East-Asian
voyage.\textsuperscript{45} Raphelengius' printed translation can thus be seen in the context of a decidedly more than ephemeral interest in Dutch maritime expansion. In fact, the basis for the interest of the Officina Plantiniana in maritime trade had already been laid right from the start of its printing activities. For in 1584 Christophe Plantin published at Leiden \textit{Spieghel der zeevaart}, also written by Waghenaer.

Now, when examining the open letter once more, one is struck by the blank spaces left in the introduction, apparently intended to be filled in by hand. Such printed forms had already been used by the States-General for the more common European languages.\textsuperscript{46} Considering the inevitably high costs Raphelengius had had to make for his Arabic type, which was, in fact, seldom used, he may well have thought of opportunities to expand its application. In that case it was worthwhile trying to win the States-General over to this novelty. His hopes were not fulfilled, however. The Arabic and Portuguese open letters which were presented to the governor of Banten were \textit{written} ones, according to Pontanus.\textsuperscript{47} If the writers of the diaries used by Pontanus were unaware of the difference between written and printed Arabic, they still would have been able to tell a written Portuguese letter from a printed one. I presume the States-General considered a written letter more suitable for representation. The difference between such a letter and Raphelengius' form becomes apparent when the latter is compared with the handwritten open letter carried by Jacob van Neck to Java, in 1600 which is kept in Leiden University Library (see illustration).\textsuperscript{48}

Whereas the Raphelengius open letter, on paper, measures only 289 x 434 mm, the text of the van Neck letter is laid out on a vellum scroll of 400 x 660 mm in 25 lines of neat calligraphy. The name and titles of Prince Maurice, and the dating The Hague, Dāl-Qā'da 1008 are here written in gold, in the same hand, which lends it a far more elegant aspect than the rather stiff impression one gets from the printed letter. In view of this, it is my opinion that Raphelengius' printed letter did not travel any further than the distance between Leiden and The Hague.

When assessing Raphelengius' skills as a translator, it must be borne in mind that the essential tools for such an undertaking were absolutely lacking at the
time. Before 1613, when the first edition of Erpenius’ Grammatica Arabica was published, no reliable grammars were available. Until 1828, when the first installment of Bothor’s Dictionnaire français-arabe was published, arabists and dragomans were left to their own devices when searching for apposite terms. M.Th. Houtsma justly stressed this circumstance in his edition of the Arabic correspondence of Erpenius, Golius, and Warner, and consequently refrained from commenting on their errors.

Still, I would like to mention a few points in connection with Raphelengius’ Arabic: The hamz is nowhere used (cf. line 3, yaqraʿaʿun); Hebrew syntax seems responsible for the incorrect al-kitab hadda (line 3); the same line reads min Allāh qādir ʿala l-kull, where the adjective ought to be defined; line 6 reads li-talabāt ṣāliḥa ʿr-rīgūl, where the idāfa requires a defined adjective after the construction; finally, in line 8 instead of al-bahr, or, better, al-muhīṣ, we find al-ya-min, which looks like interference from Hebrew once more. In spite of these remarks, and notwithstanding the decidedly non-Arabic syntax, Raphelengius succeeded in producing a translation that offers despite its gibberish appearance a reasonably understandable Arabic text.

NOTES


4 See Uitgevers en boekdrukkers in het Noorden (ca. 1580-17de eeuw). De betekenis van de Antwerpse emigra tie (introduction by Francine de Nave). Antwerpen, 1985, 19 (no. 82). The letter is preserved in the Plantin-Moretus museum under signature R 63. 8 (4). 72. See also Francine de Nave (ed.), Philologia Arabica. Arabische studien en drukken in de Nederlanden in de 16de en 17de eeuw. Antwerpen (Museum Plantin-Moretus) 1986 (publikaties MPM / PK III), pp. 130-132 (no. 66). The letter already formed part of the collection Plantin-Moretus in 1876, when it was sold by E. Moretus, the last heir of the Plantin-Moretus house, to the city of Antwerp. (Written communication by the present conservator of the museum. F. de Nave, 6-10-1987.)

5 Written communication by Mrs. N.M. Brandt, reference room General State Archives (ARA) at The Hague, 27-3-1987.

6 J. van Oordt. De privaatrechtelijke toestand van den Nederlandschen koopman in de landen van den Islam, Leiden (E.J. Brill) 1899. 265; Arabic version is reproduced on pp. 321-322.


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13 Until that time the Dutch had bought their spices at Lisbon. The Portuguese crown held the sole rights for the marketing of spices, but left the costs of buying and transport to private enterprise. After the personal union of 1580, these rights were assumed by the Spanish crown. See on this matter M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofsz, Asian Trade and European Influence in the Indonesian Archipelago Between 1500 and About 1630. Den Haag/Bandoeng (W. van Hoeve) 1949. 482: idem., 'De eerste moslimse vorstendom-...


16 In the original verpangelen, to barter; E. Verwijs and J. Verdam, Middeinderlandsch woordenboek. VIII. Den Haag (M. Nijhoff) 1916. 2244.


19 With the Contractboeken Heeres meant the manu- script registers of the V.O.C. Chambers of Amsterdam and Zeeland (Heeres, xv). now kept in the General State Archi- vesc (ARA) at the Hague; his reference here is to the ‘Contract Boeck van de E. Compagnie’, or the ‘Tractaten met verschillende Indische vorsten, Firmans, Cauuls, door dezelve verleent sedert 1596-1662’, vol. I (registers of the chamber of Amsterdam) (Heeres. xxii). I have been unable to check this reference; a detailed guide to the documents pertaining to the various Dutch companies for the East-Indies, including these registers, is embodied in P.H. Roess- ing (comp.), Sources of the History of Asia and Oceania in the Netherlands. Part I. Sources up to 1796. München — New York — London — Paris (K.G. Saur) 1982 (Guides to the Sources for the History of the Nations IV.1). 72 ff.

19 Heeres, 45; on the dating, see Rouffaer — IJzerman. II 293.


23 In Arabic: wa ma’ā s-sukkān hinākata yatarraddādū wa- yataqaqallabū bi-amr at-tāriqā: for these two verbs cf. Lexi- con, col. 174a, taraddādū: ‘retractare, versari, converti’ and col. 356b, tagallābū: ‘conversari’. In the Dutch abstract of the treaty: verpangelen, ‘to barter’, is used; see note 16.


41 Lexicon, v.


43 Van der Chijs, 26: translated into ‘Slavoonsch, Latijn en Arabisch’: refers to Res. van Holland, May 1594.


46 Oral communication by Dr. B.N. Slot. General State Archives (ARA), The Hague.


48 Leiden University Library Or. 1365 (3).