How, why and for what reasons did so many manuscripts and printed books from Muslim countries reach Western Europe and North America? What led to the creation of these vast and unique Islamic collections in such diverse cities as London, Berlin, Milan and Los Angeles? Who were the people who separated these materials from their countries of origin? These are just some of the questions that will be answered by The Development of Islamic Library Collections in Western Europe and North America.

This book examines collections of major international significance in ten countries: Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy (including the Vatican), the Netherlands, Spain and the United States. It explores the political, economic, cultural and scholarly influences that have shaped the relationship between Islamic and Western societies over the past 1,000 years. It covers a wide spectrum of subjects, from commentaries on the Quran and Hadith to texts on history, literature, geography, medicine, astronomy, mathematics and philosophy, primarily in Arabic, Persian and Turkish, but also in Urdu, Pashto, Japanese, Malay, Makasar, Swahili and many dialects of these languages. It discusses some of the books and manuscripts which exist only in these collections.

The Development of Islamic Library Collections in Western Europe and North America looks beyond the collections as they now are to discover why and how they were developed and the motives that inspired individual collectors. It is a book for Islamic scholars and information specialists who need to know where to locate Islamic materials and for scholars and librarians everywhere who are interested in social development and the major influences of the Islamic civilization.

Stephan Roman has been with the British Council almost since he was awarded his MA in librarianship by the University of Sheffield. He has served as Regional Librarian in the Sudan and Yemen Arab Republic; as Regional Libraries Adviser in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf and Syria; and currently is attached to the British Council offices in Jakarta as Information and Books Projects Officer.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF

ISLAMIC LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

IN WESTERN EUROPE

AND NORTH AMERICA

STEPHAN ROMAN

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For my parents and my wife
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Introduction

How, and for what reasons, did manuscripts and printed books from Muslim countries reach Western Europe and North America? What was it that led to the creation, in cities as diverse as London, Berlin, Milan and Los Angeles, of major collections of Islamic texts? Who were the people who brought these collections to the West?

The aim of this book is to seek an answer to these questions. The book represents a study of the development of Islamic collections in ten European and North American countries. It is an exploration into the political, economic, cultural and scholarly influences which have shaped the relationship between Western and Islamic societies over the past 1,400 years, a relationship which has led directly to the emergence of several hundred collections of Islamic manuscripts and printed books in the West.

What are Islamic collections? For the purposes of this book, I mean by ‘Islamic collections’ all collections of manuscripts written by Muslims and produced in countries having a predominantly Muslim religious culture. Significant early printed book collections are also included, although these are fewer in number than manuscript collections as printing did not become fully established in the Muslim world until the nineteenth century.

The Islamic world covers a large geographical area, stretching from West Africa to the eastern islands of Indonesia. I consider manuscripts originating in all these regions to be Islamic manuscripts if they are the work of Muslim writers and if they have been produced within the structure of a Muslim community. The manuscripts do not need to be concerned specifically with Islam, but must be written by Muslims working within a Muslim intellectual tradition and living in a predominantly Muslim society. They thus cover a wide spectrum of subjects and themes, from commentaries on the Qur'an and the Hadith through to texts on history, literature, geography, medicine, astronomy, science, mathematics and philosophy. These manuscripts are written in a wide variety of languages and scripts. Arabic, Persian and Turkish are the predominant languages of the Islamic world, but there are also manuscripts written in Urdu, Pushtu, Javanese, Malay, Makasar and Swahili, as well as many dialects of these languages. Islamic manuscripts are as varied as the Islamic world itself.

The collections of ten Western countries are examined in some detail. These ten countries are Britain, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Denmark,
the United States, Canada, Italy (including the Vatican), The Netherlands, Spain and Ireland. All these countries have, for varying reasons, developed collections of Islamic manuscripts and printed books which are significant, either in size or content. These collections have emerged from differing national traditions, so that it is difficult to speak about a single Western tradition in the development of Islamic collections. Each country examined in this book has created its own distinctive relationship with the Muslim world, and, although in certain periods of history these relationships have developed in parallel, they have also frequently diverged and followed differing paths. Each collection is in itself reflective of a distinctive national approach to the Muslim world. The collections are not simply random examples of fringe scholarship, isolated and fragmented, but an important part of each country's differing approach to Islamic society and culture. Just as it is impossible to speak about the Muslim world as a single entity except in an abstract fashion, it is also impossible to discuss a single Western approach to Muslim countries and cultures without resorting to broad generalizations and assumptions. Every Western country examined in this book — with the exception of Ireland and Canada — was at one time or another in its history primarily associated with one or more specific area of the Muslim world. The French became involved with Egypt, Turkey, the Levant and North Africa, the Dutch with Indonesia, the British with the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East, the Italians with the Levant and North Africa, the Danes with Yemen, the Americans with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, the Germans with Turkey. Spain drew upon its seven-hundred-year Moorish Arab heritage to develop a distinctive relationship with Morocco and the Arab world. Thus, the Islamic manuscript and printed book collections which evolved in all these countries were the results of differing national traditions born out of contact with differing parts of the Islamic world. Each major collection will therefore be examined within the framework of that national tradition.

Books have been published which list important collections of Islamic manuscripts in Western Europe and North America. Equally, many published catalogues are available which examine the contents of individual collections in detail. This book has a different approach, in that it represents an attempt to look beyond the collections as they now are and to discover something about why and how they were developed and about the motives which inspired individual collectors. These collections are made up of manuscripts and printed books. But they also represent something more. They are the result of many lives spent working, travelling or studying in Muslim countries. Consequently, there are in Western libraries manuscripts acquired by scholars, soldiers, traders, missionaries, administrators, writers, business magnates and travellers. These people became involved in collecting for a wide variety of reasons and motives. These reasons are in themselves worth exploring, for if on the one hand the development of Islamic collections is bound up with differing national traditions it is, on the other, very much the result of individual and personal efforts. Without all these individuals, the collections to be

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found today in Western Europe and North America would not exist. The extent to which individuals were affected, consciously or unconsciously, by their own national tradition so far as the types of materials they collected are concerned, and the parts of the Muslim world in which they worked and travelled, is also a theme that will be explored in this book.

The Islamic collections in Western Europe and North America were developed between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries of the Christian era. The manuscripts held in these collections, however, date back to the earliest years of Muslim history and culture and are written in a great variety of scripts and languages. In the case of Arabic manuscripts, the two predominant scripts used are Kufic, which originated in Kufah, a city in Mesopotamia, and became very fashionable in the Western Islamic lands, particularly Al Andalus and Morocco, and Naskhi, a cursive, flowing script, well suited to being written on paper. Naskhi originated in Makkah and Madinah and spread out from there to become the dominant script of the Arab world, displacing Kufic. Persian, Turkish and Mughal manuscripts use mainly the Naskhi script or a sub-variant of Naskhi. Malay, Swahili and West African manuscripts were also written mainly in Arabic (frequently in Naskhi-derived scripts), while Javanese manuscripts were written either in Arabic script or, more frequently, in Javanese script, a variant of Sanskrit.

Many of the earliest Islamic manuscripts are written on parchment and vellum, and some of the finest examples of this are vellum copies of the Qur'an, coloured with lapis lazuli. Paper reached the Muslim world from China. By the end of the eighth century AD, Baghdad had its first paper mill, and from here the technology of paper-making spread to Egypt (AD 900), Morocco (AD 1100) and Spain (AD 1150). Through Muslim Spain, paper-making reached Europe.

The oriental paper-making industry ensured a steady supply of materials for the production of manuscripts throughout all parts of the Arab, Persian and Turkish worlds, and by the twelfth century AD vellum had been superseded almost everywhere. Syria was considered to be the producer of the finest quality paper, and the Charta Damascena (made in Damascus) had a reputation for being paper for dike usage. However, with the economic and political decline of the Arab world, which became particularly marked between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the rise of a strong Western Europe, oriental paper production suffered a set-back. From the seventeenth century European paper — often of inferior quality — began to be used more widely in many parts of the Muslim world, from Egypt and Morocco through to India and South-East Asia. Many Islamic manuscripts copied in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries are written on European paper. In South-East Asia, manuscripts were written on a variety of other materials, including lontar (palm leaf) and bamboo. This persisted late into the nineteenth century, although by the late seventeenth century European (usually Dutch) paper was displacing traditional materials. Javanese paper produced from tree bark was also used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
There were many great centres associated with the writing and copying of Islamic manuscripts. In the first centuries after the Hegira, cities such as Baghdad, Cordoba and Damascus were well known for their important public and private libraries, many of which had large manuscript-copying centres attached. In the tenth century AD it was estimated by one Muslim writer that between seventy and eighty thousand manuscripts were copied every year in Cordoba. As these cities declined in importance — because of their shifting political and economic fortunes — others rose to take their place. Delhi, Isfahan, Istanbul and Tabriz all became flourishing centres for Islamic manuscript production in the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries. Further east in Sumatra, the Sultanate of Aceh became a centre for Malay Islamic literature; and, in the eighteenth century, the courts of Surakarta and Yogyakarta in central Java became leading centres for the emergence of a vibrant Hindu-Islamic manuscript tradition. In the Arab world, Cairo emerged as the leading centre for Islamic manuscript writing, and to this day continues to be a major centre for Arab publishing.

Throughout the Muslim world the written word has always played a powerful role in shaping intellectual, philosophical and religious ideas. Manuscripts have always been accorded great respect and scholars and writers have occupied prominent positions in society. In particular, manuscript copies of the Qur'an were considered to be of special importance as each manuscript was an exact copy of the original word of God as spoken to Muhammad, the Prophet. When Europeans began collecting Islamic manuscripts and taking them back to their home countries, they were thus building on a long tradition — already well established in Muslim societies — of seeing manuscripts as ways of extending intellectual frontiers and broadening man’s understanding of the world which God had created and in which man lived. For Europeans, these manuscripts provided important insights into the Muslim intellectual experience and gave Western scholars the opportunity to learn, often for the first time, about Islam and Muslim achievements in medicine, philosophy, historiography, science and literature. The Islamic collections which developed in Western Europe and North America were therefore a fundamental bridge in communication between East and West.

The eight West European countries selected for study in this book are not the only countries in Western Europe to have collections of Islamic manuscripts. There are also collections in Portugal, Switzerland, Belgium, Sweden, Austria and Finland. These collections have not been included because the aim of the book is to concentrate on collections of major international significance, such as the British Library in London, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin and the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, or on collections which have a particularly interesting historical dimension, such as the Royal Library in Copenhagen and the Escorial in Spain. Neither does the book attempt to be an exhaustive study of every single collection in the countries examined. Private collections are not reviewed, and the emphasis is on the most important public collections. These
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Britain and Ireland

We understand it has been of late years a frequent practice among our sevants, especially in Bengali, to make collections of oriental manuscripts, many of which have afterwards been brought into this country.

Letter from Court of Directors, East India Company, 25 May 1798

Manuscripts are fast perishing in the East; and it is almost the duty of a traveller to rescue as many as he can from destruction.

Claudius James Rich, Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan etc.
London: James Duncan, 1836

Britain's connection with the Islamic world is one of the strongest of any country in the West. Through trade and, later, the development of empire, the British found themselves coming into direct contact with all parts of the Muslim world, from Muslim West Africa through to Ottoman Turkey, Egypt and the Sudan, Persia, India, the Sultanates of Malaya and the Far Eastern islands of Java and Sumatra. Apart from North Africa and Russian Central Asia, there is scarcely a single part of the Islamic world with which Britain has not at one time or another had substantial involvement.

The history of this extraordinary relationship — dating back to the seventeenth century — has led to Britain possessing a rich variety of Islamic manuscripts in all the major languages of the Islamic world — Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Malay — and in many of the minor African, Indian and South Asian languages. Britain's principal collections are housed in libraries and learned societies scattered the length and breadth of the country, from London, Cambridge and Oxford in the south of England to Birmingham in the Midlands, Leeds and Manchester in the north and Glasgow and Edinburgh in Scotland.

The early links between Britain and Islam were tenuous and mainly connected with Muslim Spain and the Crusades. English scholars such as Michael Scot (1175-1235), an astrologer and noted alchemist, and Adelard of Bath, the twelfth-century tutor to King Henry II, both spent some time in the great centres of Islamic learning at Cordoba and Toledo studying scientific and philosophical texts. Through these scholars some ideas about the Muslim