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Britain and Ireland

We understand it has been of late years a frequent practice among our sevants, especially in Bengal, 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 Islamic 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 Aedelard 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
world reached Britain. For example, the first book printed in England in 1477, *The Dicts and Sayings of the Philosophers*, was based on the Arabic *Kitāb Mukhtar al-hikam wa-mahasin al-kilam*, which had been written in Egypt in 1053. Some Muslim ideas also surface in the writings of English poets and philosophers of the period, men like Geoffrey Chaucer and Roger Bacon. Primarily, however, the period between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries was characterized by the Crusades, and Britain shared in the confused and complex ideas that these created in the West about Islamic religion and culture.

English and Scottish contingents actively participated in all the expeditions to the East, particularly in the Third Crusade (1187–92), in which King Richard I — Richard the Lionheart — played a dramatic and at times questionable role. There were English and Scottish knights in the military orders of the Temple and the Hospital, and both orders in their turn were closely involved with the military aristocracy of England and Scotland. The Crusades, however, led to no great flowering of scholarship or learning about the Muslim East, and there is no evidence that any of the crusading knights who returned to Britain from the Holy Land brought with them Arabic manuscripts, or attempted to turn their military experiences to scholarly pursuits.

It was not until the seventeenth century that a real interest in Islam began to appear in England. As in the Netherlands, this was due to two major factors — first, an interest in biblical scholarship, and secondly, the close trading links with the Muslim world that were developing. The Protestant Reformation encouraged English scholars — men like William Bedwell (1562–1632), Edward Pococke (1604–91) and Thomas Hyde (1636–1703) — to study Arabic with the aim of understanding the Bible texts better, and possibly even of enabling Protestantism to enter into a dialogue with Islam, as a means of opposing Catholicism.1

Before 1632, when Cambridge University established a Chair of Arabic, and 1634, when Archbishop Laud created a similar Chair at Oxford, there was no serious provision for the teaching of Arabic anywhere in England. Laud, later to pay with his life during the Puritan Revolution for being considered an over-zealous supporter of the Carolingian establishment and the State Church, was a man of a remarkably broad vision. Besides creating a Chair of Arabic, he also took a keen interest in the development of the first Islamic manuscript collections in England, through his letter of instruction issued to the Levant Company in 1634 ‘requiring that each of their ships returning from the East should bring back one Persian or Arabic manuscript’.2

Parallel with the growing scholarly interest being shown in Islamic studies was the interest stimulated by trading links with the Muslim East. At the same time as Dutch merchants were reaching the Ottoman Empire and the coasts of Java, their English counterparts were also engaged in similar ventures. In 1580, the Levant Company of London was established. An English Ambassador was dispatched to Istanbul and several important factories were set up, most notably in Aleppo, which was to remain a leading English trading centre until well into the eighteenth century. There seem to have been close links between the scholars in England and the merchants in the Levant. The seventeenth-century historian Edward Pococke, for example, spent five years (1630–35) in Aleppo, under the aegis of the English merchants. During this period he was able to consult Robert Huntington, Chaplain to the English merchant community in Aleppo (1671–81) and John Greaves, Professor of Astronomy at Oxford and a close friend of Edward Pococke, were active in studying and collecting Arabic, Persian and Turkish texts, many of which found their way back to the universities in Oxford and Cambridge.3

In the year 1600, nineteen years after the creation of the Levant Company, the English East India Company was granted its first charter by Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603). The merchants who reached the Indian domain of the Mughal emperors found a court culture that was Muslim in its religious beliefs and Persian in its administrative and commercial structure. Persian was the official language of the Mughal Empire, and as a result the study of classical Persian became a necessary area of study for East India Company officials who were sent to India. Out of this early trading relationship developed the British Empire in the Indian subcontinent and the cultural and scholarly interest in the religious, philosophies and beliefs of India that accompanied the development of this empire. In all this, the Muslim culture of India was to play a prominent part. The Mughal Empire had reached its height in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, first during the reign of Shah Akbar (1556–1605) and later under the redoubtable Shah Aurangzeb Alamgir I (1658–1707). During this period, particularly during the reign of Akbar and Jahangir (1605–27), a flowering of art and culture took place. Painting, music and architecture all reached new heights of excellence, culminating in the great mausoleum of the Taj Mahal built between 1632 and 1654 by Shah Jahan I (1628–57). Complementing all this was the magnificent literary culture of Mughal India, Persian in origin, but gradually evolving through a synthesis with northern Indian dialects to produce Urdu, the great language of Indo-Muslim civilization.4 The Mughal emperors were great bibliophiles, and not only did they collect valuable Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts, but they also commissioned new copies of these manuscripts, many of them finely illustrated, and were themselves responsible for writing many books.

It was with this highly articulate and literate Indo-Muslim culture that the English merchant adventurers were to come into increasingly close contact. As Mughal power declined in the eighteenth century, the East India Company was drawn more and more into direct political control of large areas of the Empire, particularly the provinces along the east coast, centred around Calcutta and Madras. By the mid-nineteenth century, when the last of the Mughal emperors was sent into exile in Burma for his supposed part in the Indian Mutiny (1857), the predominantly Muslim areas of the Indian subcontinent — namely, Baluchistan, the Punjab, Bengal, Sind and Delhi — had all passed into British imperial control.

British scholarly interest in India — both Muslim and Hindu — paralleled
the country's growing economic and political involvement in the subcontinent. A seventeenth-century employee of the Company, John Marshall, who died in 1677, studied Persian manuscripts and translated several of them into English. He seems, however, to have been rather an isolated example, and there is no real evidence that there were at this stage any close links between scholarship and trade such as characterized the Levant Company and its relations with Oxford and Cambridge in the seventeenth century. The real development of interest among Company officials in the Islamic culture of the Indian subcontinent flowered in the eighteenth century. Sir William Jones (1746–94), famous for his extensive knowledge of Arabic and Persian culture, founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 in order to enquire into the history, and the antiquities, arts, sciences and literature, of Asia. Warren Hastings (1732–1818), Governor-General of Bengal in 1774, did much to encourage Indian studies while Richard Johnson, a servant of the East India Company between 1770 and 1790, assembled an important collection of Indo-Muslim and Persian manuscripts. Between 1800 and 1850, the Company also ran a college in England where prospective East India officials were taught Arabic, Persian and Urdu, as well as other Indian languages. There was also a sister college at Benares which mirrored the functions of the English college, but in addition was an important centre for research into India and had an important collection of books and manuscripts.

At the same time as English merchants were reaching the heartlands of the Mughal Empire, others had penetrated further east to the fabled Spice Islands of Java, the Moluccas and Sumatra. Throughout the seventeenth century, these merchants tried to establish themselves in areas that were increasingly falling under Dutch influence. The Dutch conquest in 1619 of Jayakarta on the north-west Java coast provided the Verenigde Oost Indische Compagnie with a stronghold from which to consolidate its power base throughout Java, Sumatra and the Malay peninsula. The English, based at Banten on Java's west coast, were unable to provide any serious competition to the Dutch, who by the middle of the seventeenth century were clearly emerging as the pre-eminent power in the East Indies. By the turn of the eighteenth century the English had been driven out of Java and had been left with a precarious foothold on the Sumatran west coast at Bengkulu, where they founded Fort York and later Fort Marlborough.

The nineteenth century, however, was to see a resurgence of British interest in the area, and the establishment of a strong British presence on the Malay peninsula. In 1811, following the collapse of the Verenigde Oost Indische Compagnie (1799) and the French annexation of The Netherlands (1810), the English invaded Java, and remained there until 1816 under the administration of Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781–1826), one of the most charismatic figures in the whole history of the British Empire in the East. Raffles and his contemporaries, men like John Crawford (1783–1868), John Leyden (1775–1811), Colin MacKenzie (1753–1821) and William Marsden (1754–1836), contributed to the great development of interest by Britain in Far Eastern studies, in particular in the cultures of the Malay peninsula, Sumatra and Java. Although the British would return the East Indies to the Dutch in 1816, and give up their last foothold in Sumatra (Bengkulu) in 1824, they were now firmly established on the Malay peninsula, through the founding of Singapore and the acquisition of Dutch-controlled towns such as Malacca (as exchanges for British possessions in Sumatra). The British would remain in control of Malaysia and Singapore until 1957. Direct British interest in Far Eastern Islam would thus continue well into the mid-twentieth century.

The nineteenth century was also characterized by British imperial expansion in Muslim Africa and the Arabian Gulf. Britain was active in both western and eastern Africa, particularly in Nigeria, Egypt, the Sudan and the Kenyan and Tanzanian coasts. In 1882, the British occupied Egypt, partly as a result of the Arab revolt of 1881 but also so as to ensure their routes to India and the East through the Suez Canal. Egypt was formally declared a British Protectorate in 1914. In 1883, General Charles Gordon died at Khartoum, defending the city against the troops of the Mahdi. Fifteen years later — in 1898 — a British expeditionary force under Kitchener captured Omdurman, the capital of the Dervish Empire of the Mahdi's successor, the Khalifa Abdullah, and proclaimed an Anglo-Egyptian protectorate that was to last until 1956. In 1900, the British occupied Nigeria, and the Fulani Sultanate of Sokoto, and its dependent principalities of Kano, Gombe, Kabbi and Katsina, all passed into British control. In 1914 Nigeria was officially declared a colony and a protectorate. In 1920, the German colony of Deutsche-Ost Afrika (Tanzania) fell into British hands, as a result of the German defeat in the First World War. This meant that the majority of Muslim East Africa — including the island of Zanzibar and the Kenyan port city of Mombasa — was now under British imperial jurisdiction. Paralleling this expansion of British power in Africa, British influence in the Arabian peninsula and other parts of the Middle East was also increasing. In 1861 Bahrain became a British protectorate, followed by the Hadramaut in 1882, Oman in 1891–2, Kuwait in 1899 and Qatar in 1916. The collapse of Ottoman imperial power in 1918–19 also gave Britain the chance to move into Palestine—Trans-Jordan and Iraq. In 1923, the British supported the establishment of a Hashemite monarchy in Trans-Jordan. The Hashemites had been supported by the British in their fight against the Ottoman Turks, and for a while also managed to maintain an independent kingdom in western Arabia (Hejaz) until driven out by Ibn Saud in 1925. In 1921 a Hashemite kingdom was also established in Iraq, under British suzerainty. This was to survive until 1958.

Outside the direct British imperial orbit were Muslim countries such as Iran (Persia) and Afghanistan, which were the subject of increasing British interest throughout the nineteenth century, and, in the case of Iran, into the twentieth century. Iran — first under the rule of the Qajar Shahs and then later under the Pahlavis — managed to maintain a precarious independence between the rival imperial powers of Russia and Britain. The latter were particularly concerned to establish a strong, independent Iran which would keep the
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Russians away from the Gulf and from trying to enter India. Linked to this was the growing interest in the development of the Iranian oil industry. In 1908 the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company struck oil at Masjid Sulaizan and British commercial interest in Iran was confirmed. This direct interest would last until the Mussadeq era in the early 1950s, and would include the period 1907–45, when Britain assumed direct control of large areas of south-eastern Iran, in order to protect its territories in India. This concern with India also motivated Britain in its relations with Afghanistan. Fear of Russian attempts to subvert British India through Afghanistan led to several attempts by the British to control the country, all of them unsuccessful. The most spectacular failure led to the ill-fated retreat of the British garrison from Kabul in 1842, in which there was but one survivor out of 16,000 men. This extraordinary diversity of British imperial and commercial links with the Muslim world led to a corresponding growth of British scholarly interest in the countries over which Britain had either direct or indirect control. In 1823 the Royal Asiatic Society was founded, and in 1901 the Royal Central Asian Society. Oriental studies were started at London University in 1836, and at Manchester University in 1851. The nineteenth century and early twentieth century were characterized by travellers and scholars such as Edward Lane (1801–76), who lived in Cairo for many years and eventually produced a famous Arabic-English dictionary; Sir Richard Burton (1821–90), whose series of bizarre and extraordinary adventures through Africa, India and the Middle East culminated in the first full English translation of *Alif Layla we Layla* (the Thousand and One Nights); Charles Doughty (1843–1926), whose travels in central Arabia in the 1870s led to the high literary prose of *Arabia Desert*; T.E. Lawrence (1888–1935), author of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, the classic tale of the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Turks; Edward FitzGerald (1809–93), the translator of the Persian poem *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*; and Sir George Grierson (1851–1941), who for thirty years worked on the Linguistic Survey of India, an analysis of over 800 languages and dialects.

Owing to the complex and extensive relationship between Britain and the Muslim world, it is no surprise that the British collections of Islamic manuscripts are currently among the finest anywhere in the West. These collections have been built up over a long period of time, beginning in the seventeenth century, and reflect the diversity of Britain’s imperial, commercial and scholarly interests in large areas of the Islamic world.

England

London

London is the main centre for Islamic manuscript collections in Britain, and institutions with substantial collections include the British Library (now responsible also for the India Office Library), the School of Oriental and

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African Studies at London University, the Royal Asiatic Society and the Wellcome Institute of Medicine.

The British Library and the India Office Library

The British Library was created in 1973 as Britain’s national library and incorporated the library components of the British Museum. The Museum itself dates back to 1753, when an Act of Parliament established a trust to look after the collections of ‘Sir Hans Sloane of Chelsea in the County of Middlesex’. In 1757 King George II decided to incorporate the Old Royal Library with the Sloane collections, and the British Museum was officially opened on 15 January 1759. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Museum library grew dramatically, and books and manuscripts were collected from all parts of the Empire. Since much of the Empire lay in Muslim territories, it was quite natural that a large number of Islamic manuscripts should therefore reach the Museum. By 1866 there were 7,000 separate volumes of oriental manuscripts (though this also included materials in Sanskrit, Hebrew and other non-Muslim Eastern languages). In October 1866, John Winter Jones (1805–81), who was Principal Librarian of the Museum, suggested that a section, with its own Keeper, be created specially to look after oriental manuscripts. Agreement for this idea was given by the Board of Trustees and in 1867 the Department of Oriental Manuscripts was established. In 1891 it became the Department of Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books and remained a department of the British Museum until 1973, when it was formally transferred to the newly created British Library. In 1988 it was renamed the Oriental Collections. As presently constituted, the Islamic manuscripts at the British Library help make up the largest single collection of oriental manuscripts anywhere in Britain and one of the most valuable in the world. There are currently around 7,000 Arabic manuscripts, 3,000 Persian manuscripts, 1,700 Turkish manuscripts and 365 Urdu manuscripts, as well as smaller collections of Pashto, Swahili, Javanese, Sundanese and Malay manuscripts. The Arabic manuscripts in the Oriental Collections can trace their origins back to the earliest days of the Museum in the mid-eighteenth century, when 120 Arabic manuscripts are listed as having formed part of the original collections that made up the British Museum foundation collections. However, not until the early nineteenth century was there any significant expansion in the size of the collection. This expansion was largely due to the activities of Claudius James Rich (1786–1821), a man who epitomizes the new era of the scholar-administrators, the political servants of Empire and Trade who developed a strong interest in the history and culture of the countries to which an increasingly imperially minded Britain now dispatched them. Rich was also to bequeath important collections of Persian and Turkish manuscripts to the Museum, and so it is worth spending some time looking in
detail at his career and at the reasons that led to his lifelong interest in Islamic manuscript collecting.

He was born on 28 March 1786, the illegitimate son of Colonel Charles Coburn, and spent his early life in Britain. However, it soon became apparent that he was no ordinary young man — by the age of 17 he was already fluent in Arabic, Persian and Turkish. At the turn of the nineteenth century such natural talents were quickly noted, and they led him to the offices of the East India Company in Leadenhall Street, London. In January 1804 he was appointed to a writership position on the Bombay establishment of the Company. He then spent a most extraordinary three and a half years travelling out to his new post. He was barely 18 years old when he began his travels, which were to take him through Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and then across to Bombay, which he reached in September 1807. In January 1808 his deep interest in the Islamic cultures of the Near and Middle East was rewarded when he was appointed Resident for the Honourable East India Company at the court of the Pasha of Baghdad, a position he took up in May of that same year. Apart from an extended leave in Europe between 1813 and 1816, taken on grounds of ill health, Rich spent the rest of his life in the Middle East, travelling extensively throughout the region.

Like his exact contemporary Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781–1826), who combined a high sense of imperial duty with scholarly passion, Rich displayed zeal and an extraordinary sense of intellectual enquiry in his short life. He was not only closely involved in all the political machinations that characterized the life of an agent of the East India Company — settling trade disputes with the Pasha of Baghdad, sorting out difficulties into which travelling Britons had strayed, and generally keeping a close watch and keeping a close watch on the events which might affect British political and commercial interests in the region — but he was also very busy travelling through the territories assigned to him by the Company and investigating the numerous historical and archaeological sites.

In 1813 and again in 1816 he visited Babylon, in 1820 Nineveh, and in 1821 Persepolis. Wherever he went, he was busy sketching, mapping and surveying everything he saw. It was during this period that he was also busy collecting the Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts which were subsequently to find a home in the British Museum. His motives in acquiring these manuscripts were rooted not only in his own personal interest in the literature and culture of the Islamic world, but also in a strong sense of concern at what he considered to be a disappearing cultural heritage. Rich can therefore be fairly described as one of the first Europeans who genuinely sought to recover manuscripts in order to save them for posterity. In 1820, while on a trip around Mosul, he wrote: ‘Manuscripts are fast perishing in the East; and it is almost the duty of a traveller to rescue them from destruction.’ This for him seems to have been a strongly motivating factor in the building up of his collections. By 1813, when he returned to Europe, Rich had collected 392 Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts, and in 1814 he published in Vienna his first catalogue of the collection.

When Rich returned to Baghdad in 1816, he continued his collecting, and in 1821, when he died in Shiraz in Persia, a victim of a cholera epidemic sweeping the town, he left a collection of 801 manuscripts, 390 of them being in Arabic. In 1825 his collection was purchased for the Museum by Act of Parliament for £7,000. This represented a great deal of money in the early nineteenth century and attests to the great value of the manuscripts.

The Museum’s interest in Arabic manuscripts was further strengthened in 1831, when it acquired the Arundel collection of manuscripts. This had been formed in the seventeenth century by the Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel (1592–1646), and was mainly composed of medieval and Renaissance texts dealing with English and French literature and various religious and biblical subjects. Among these, however, were 43 Arabic manuscripts acquired for Arundel by Thomas Roe, who was English Ambassador to the Ottoman court between 1626 and 1628. Earlier (1615–19) he had been the English envoy to the court of Jehangir. Arundel participated closely in the intellectual flowering that surrounded the Carolingian court in the closing years of Charles I’s reign. He was an antiquarian — a friend of Camden and Selden — a humanist scholar — he acquired part of the collection of the Renaissance scholar, Bilibaldus Pirckheimer (1470–1530) — and an accomplished diplomat, leading missions to Holland and the Palatinate. His interest in Arabic manuscripts reflected very much the intellectual spirit of the age, and the growing English scholarly interest in the religion and civilization of Islam. It was at this time also that Archbishop Laud was building up the Oxford collections of Islamic manuscripts. Arundel’s collections first passed to the Royal Society in 1666, and then in 1831 to the British Museum.

In 1834 the Arabic manuscript collection of William Brown Hodgson (1801–71) was bought for the Museum. This numbered 224 manuscripts. Hodgson was American consul in Tunis, where he had spent some of his leisure-time collecting Maghrebi manuscripts. In 1839, a smaller collection of 45 Arabic manuscripts reached the Museum, donated by the sons of Major William Yule (1764–1839). Yule had been in the service of the East India Company between 1781 and 1806, and some of the manuscripts had originated in the libraries of the kings of Oudh, whose territories eventually passed into British control, and were part of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Other collections bought in the nineteenth century by the Museum included those collected by Colonel Robert Taylor (1788–1852), who had succeeded Rich as political Resident in Baghdad. This collection of 246 Arabic manuscripts was purchased in 1852. In 1886, the collections of Alfred von Kremer (1829–89) were bought by the library. Von Kremer had lived in Damascus and Cairo between 1849 and 1880, and had assembled a very interesting number of Arabic manuscript volumes (198 in total) which illustrated the early period of Islam. In 1889, 328 Zaidi Muslim manuscripts from Yemen, which had been collected by the Austrian scholar Dr Edward Glaser during his travels in southwestern Arabia, were purchased by the Museum. This collection makes the British Library today one of the most important centres in Europe, together
with the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan and Leiden University in The Netherlands, for the study of Yemeni Zaidite literature. Between 1891 and 1893, the Museum also acquired the Arabic manuscripts of the famous nineteenth-century Arabic scholar, Edward William Lane (1801–76), who was the author of the Lexicon, a classic lexicography of the Arabic language, and the Manners and Customs of the Egyptians, an entertaining study of the social customs of the nineteenth-century Egyptians, had spent over thirty years in Cairo, and during this period had acquired 65 lexicographical Arabic manuscripts and a number of other manuscripts dealing with popular tales. Between 1889 and 1891, the Museum acquired a large number of Iraqi manuscripts (173 volumes), mostly on jurisprudence and grammar. These had been collected by Sir Wallis Budge (1857–1934) who was Keeper at the British Museum between 1894 and 1924. Other smaller collections which reached the library in the late nineteenth century included a few Arabic manuscripts deposited by General Charles George Gordon (1833–85), who met his death in Khartoum defending the city against the forces of the Mahdi. These are mainly manuscripts collected by Gordon during his time as Governor-General in the Sudan (1877–80) and during a rather strange interlude in Palestine (1883), when he indulged in extraordinary — and at times mystical — reflections on the origin of the Ark and Eve’s eating of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. His deep interest in religious matters led him to study Islam, and throughout the closing years of his life he held a deep respect for Islam as a religious force.

In 1918 there arrived in the Museum Library a bequest from Darea, Baroness Zouche. This included a small collection of Arabic manuscripts which had been built up by Robert Curzon, in the 1830s. Behind their acquisition lies a tale that illustrates perfectly the mixture of fate and daring that characterized much of the collecting by foreign travellers of manuscripts in the nineteenth century. Robert Curzon has been described as ‘a young man of wealth, enterprise and infinite humour’. In the 1830s he travelled to the Nitrian convents in the deserts of western Egypt in search of lost Greek manuscripts which he hoped would help him with material for his proposed book on the history of writing. When he reached the Souriani Convent in the Nitrian deserts, he met the Abbot, who at first denied that there were any collections of manuscripts in the Convent. However, a dose of a strong drink described as ‘sweet pink rosaglio’ ensured that the merry Abbot totteringly led the way to a secret cellar filled with loose manuscript folios. Some of the heavier volumes were being used as lids for jars. The Abbot, not really understanding what value these seemingly worthless scraps of paper could possibly have, sold them to Curzon without needing much persuasion. The texts included several Arabic manuscripts. In their great days the Christian monasteries of the western Egyptian deserts had been centres of scholarship and high learning. But those days had long passed, and the monks who now guarded the buildings were often ignorant, and frequently unable to read. Like Rich, Curzon brought back manuscripts to Europe which would not have survived much longer in their country of origin.

Britain and Ireland

Since 1918, about 1,500 additional Arabic manuscripts have entered the Oriental Collections, bringing the current total to around 7,000. The majority of these are Islamic Arab manuscripts, though there are of course a number of Christian Arabic manuscripts, particularly biblical texts, and some by authors of unidentified religious beliefs.

The complete collection is wide in its scope, covering an impressive range of subjects. There is a fine collection of Qur’āns, including possibly the oldest Qur’ān ever brought to Europe. This is written in Kufic script and probably dates from the second-century hegira. There is also a richly illustrated seven-volume copy of a Qur’ān prepared for Sultan Rukn-al-Dīn Balbars, the scourge of both the Mongols and the Crusaders.

Another valuable Qur’ān is a mid-thirteenth century copy in a fine Maghrebi script, probably executed in Al Andalus. There are valuable historical works, such as the Kitāb al-Maghāzī by Al-Waqīqī, an account of the campaigns of Muhammad, copied in AH 564 (AD 1168/7), and Al-Muhālibah by Muhammad bin Habīb, a description of Arabia during the time of the Prophet. There are scientific and medical texts, such as a rare illustrated translation into Arabic of Dioscorides’ Materia medica. This was acquired by Wallis Budge in Mosul (Iraq) between 1889 and 1891, and dates from AH 735 (AD 1337). There is a valuable copy of Ibn Bakhtishu’s Manāfi‘ al-Hayawan and an illustrated Maqama‘ of Al-Harīrī. There are twelfth-century manuscripts dealing with mysticism, such as copies of al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah and a fourteenth-century copy of the previously unknown work Kanz al-Tawqī‘ by Al-Qushayri. There are texts on Islamic jurisprudence covering the Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali and Shia schools. There are tenth-century philosophical tracts by al-Fārābī, and grammar and philology manuscripts dating from the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, including a copy of Thīmār al-sirāḥ by Al-Dinawari. There are several hundred dictionaries, and glossaries, including works by Ibn Durayd.

Apart from it Arabic manuscript collections, the Department also has a collection of about 50,000 Arabic printed books. The earliest editions come from European presses established in Italy and Germany, but from the early nineteenth century onwards, increasing numbers began to arrive from Egypt and the Levant, and include books published in Arabic and Turkish and printed by the press established by Muhammad Ali at Bulaq, near Cairo. The Department also holds about 250 periodical titles, which includes copies of many early periodicals published in Beirut and Cairo. The first catalogue of the Arabic manuscripts held in the British Museum was issued in 1847. This was the Catalogus codicum manusciptorum orientalium qui in Museo Britannico asservatur. It was compiled by William Cureton, who came to the Museum from the Bodleian Library. A Continuatio section was issued by Cureton in 1852, and two further supplements by Charles Rieu in 1871 and 1894.

Rieu (1820–1902) was the son of Swiss parents, and studied Semitic literature in Bonn, Leiden, St Petersburg, Vienna and Paris, before being
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appointed Keeper of the new Department of Oriental Manuscripts in 1867. The Catalogus codicum covered about 2,000 Arabic manuscripts. Rieu’s 1894 supplement listed another 1,500 manuscripts. In 1912 there appeared the Ellis and Edwards Descriptive List of the Arabic Manuscripts Acquired by the Trustees of the British Museum since 1894, which covered a further 900 items. Acquisitions since 1912, numbering about 1,700 manuscripts, have been listed on a card catalogue. The first catalogue of Arabic printed books in the British Museum was issued in two volumes between 1894 and 1901. Eight thousand titles are listed. In 1926, a supplementary catalogue appeared, listing another 5,000 items. This was compiled by A. S. Fulton and A. G. Ellis. In 1959, a second supplementary catalogue of Arabic printed books in the British Museum appeared, detailing 4,500 items. This was followed in 1976 by the four-volume Third Supplementary Catalogue of Arabic printed books in the British Library (1958–69), covering 9,000 titles. Martin Lings and Yassin Safadi were responsible for compiling this. Hugh Goodacre brought out the Four Supplementary Catalogue, which covers the years 1970–80 and lists 10,000 items. Arabic periodicals and newspapers held by the Department and in other libraries in Britain are listed in Yassin Safadi and Paul Auchterlonie’s Union Catalogue of Arabic Serials and Newspapers in British Libraries, published in London in 1977.

The Persian manuscript collections in the Oriental Collections are the finest in Britain after those of the India Office Library. There are currently about 4,000 manuscripts in the collection. Among these are examples of the extraordinary refined Persian art of miniature painting, and the highly elaborate calligraphy characteristic of many Persian manuscripts. Despite Britain’s close trading interests with the Mughal Empire in the eighteenth century, it was not until the nineteenth century that the British Museum began to acquire Persian manuscripts in any large numbers. Before then, the principal collections to reach the Museum library were those of Dr Thomas Hyde, Bodley’s Librarian between 1665 and 1700, who had acquired a number of Persian manuscripts, and two East India Company officials, Captain Charles Hamilton and Nathaniel Brassey Halhed. In 1825, the Museum acquired the Persian collections of James Grant, an eighteenth-century servant of the Company who had purchased his manuscripts mainly during the period of Warren Hastings (1774–85). However, as with the Arabic manuscript collections, it was the acquisition of Claudius James Rich’s Persian manuscripts that really launched the Museum on the path towards building up a valuable resource of Persian manuscripts. Over 300 of the volumes in the Rich bequest contained Persian manuscripts, and the items collected once again demonstrated the talents of one of the Company’s most gifted servants, selecting manuscripts not only of great historical value, but those which represented a cross-section of Persian classical writing, by authors known and unknown.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Museum’s Persian collections were steadily augmented by manuscripts which reached Britain from Company servants in India and, after 1857, from Crown servants of the imperial government. Notable among these were the 232 history and poetry manuscripts of Major William Yule, who had been Assistant Resident in Lucknow and Delhi. His collection of Arabic manuscripts has already been noted.

In 1862, the collections of Major-General Sir John Malcolm (1764–1839) entered the Museum. Malcolm, like Rich, is an example of the Company official who was able to combine a high degree of devotion to administrative, military and political embroilments with enthusiasm for scholarly pursuits and interests. He was sent on political missions to Tehran in 1801 and 1808, the principal aim of which was to counter French influence in Persia. He took part in military expeditions against the Marathas and the Pindaris (1817–18), and he rose to become one of the great liberal administrators of British India. Malcolm was a firm believer in the desirability of Western education and Western ideas for India, but believed that this could only be done through respecting traditional institutions and feelings. In his ‘Memoir on Central India’, he wrote: ‘Let us proceed on a course of gradual improvement and when our rule ceases, as cease it must, we shall as a nation have the proud boast that we have preferred the civilisation to the continued subjection of India.’ In his pursuit of this goal, Malcolm studied Persian culture and literature. He was particularly versed in the classical poets of Persia. In 1815 he published A History of Persia, in 1827 Sketches of Persia. Although the manuscripts collected by him were not numerous (47 volumes altogether) they were among the most valuable Persian manuscripts to be acquired by the Museum in the nineteenth century. There are richly illustrated copies of both the Shāh-nāma and the Bustān of Sa’îdī, as well as copies of works on Persian literary criticism. It is thought that he acquired many of these during his political missions to Persia at the turn of the nineteenth century. In 1865, a collection built up by William Erskine (1773–1852), the son-in-law of Rich, entered the Library. Erskine was the author of The History of India under the First Two Sovereigns of the House of Timur, Baber and Humayum, first published in 1854. In 1868, the collections of Colonel George William Hamilton (1807–68) were acquired by the Museum. Hamilton had lived through the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and was responsible for saving many Persian and Arabic manuscripts which were on the point of being destroyed either during the mutiny itself or in its aftermath. Several of the bound volumes in his collection bear the stamp of the Royal Library of the kings of Oudh.

In 1878, 429 Persian manuscripts collected by Sir Henry M. Elliott (1808–54), Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, were bequeathed to the Museum library. Elliott was the author of the monumental The History of India As Told by Its Own Historians (published in London, 1867–77). This was a translation of the major Persian-language histories of India and greatly expanded the work begun by William Erskine. Like Hamilton, Elliott was also interested in the Indo-Persian literature of Mughul India, and was responsible for an important survey of Indian literature. Between 1883 and 1895, Sidney Churchill, Persian Secretary to the British Legation at Tehran, sent across to
the British Museum about 250 manuscripts, several of them of great rarity value. These manuscripts mainly dealt with poetry and history.

The Department's Persian manuscripts cover a wide range of subjects, including most branches of the humanities and sciences, but are particularly strong in history and literature. These two subject areas were the chief interests of those who collected the manuscripts — men such as Erskine, Malcolm, Hamilton and Elliott. The manuscripts mainly date from between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries, and include many finely illustrated works such as a sixteenth-century copy of the *Khamshah* of Nizāmī, made by the renowned calligrapher Shah Mahmūd, who worked on the manuscript for four years between 1539 and 1543. Nizāmī's epic *Sikander*, illustrated by the famous painter, Bihzad, and a copy of the *Anwār-i-Suhaili*, commissioned by the sixteenth-century Mughal emperor Akbar. This had taken six years to complete.

The Persian printed books in the Oriental Collections number about 10,000 and include nineteenth-century works produced at the royal presses in Persia. Many of these were presented by Sidney Churchill in the late nineteenth century. The first catalogue of Persian manuscripts held by the British Library was compiled by Charles Rieu between 1879 and 1883. It appeared under the title of *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum* and covered 2,336 manuscripts, arranged by subject. In 1895, Rieu issued a supplement to the catalogue, listing another 425 titles. In 1968, the *Handlist of Persian Manuscripts* was issued, listing manuscripts acquired by the British Museum between 1895 and 1966. This was compiled by G. M. Meredith-Owens. Because of the great richness of Persian manuscript illustrative work, a special catalogue was published in 1977, compiled by N. M. Titley. This is entitled *Persian Illustrated Manuscripts: Catalogue and Subject Index of Miniatures from Persian Manuscripts and Albums in the British Library and British Museum*. It describes in considerable detail over 11,000 miniatures which are held in the British Library's collections, and included in this listing are Mughal miniatures. The Persian printed books collection is available in a printed catalogue covering acquisitions up to 1922, and on a card catalogue for items acquired after 1922.

The Department's Turkish manuscripts number 1,700 altogether. This includes manuscripts in Eastern Turkish, Azeri and Ottoman. The original collections of Turkish manuscripts formed part of the library created by Robert and Edward Harley, the first and second Earls of Oxford, in the eighteenth century. The Harleian Library was to form one of the foundation collections in the British Museum. The Harleys were great collectors, specializing in the manuscripts of the great classical authors and medieval texts such as the *Roman de la Rose*. Their Turkish manuscripts numbered 34, mainly poetry. In 1826, the Turkish manuscripts of Claudius Rich entered the library. These amounted to 124 volumes. Rich's Turkish manuscripts — as with his Persian and Arabic collections — transformed the Turkish holding of the Museum into a depository of national importance. In 1872, a further 49 manuscripts were purchased from M. Jaba, the Russian Consul in Erzerum on the Black Sea. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were nearly 500 volumes of Turkish manuscripts in the Museum library. Most of these date from between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries and were produced in western Turkey. There are several finely illustrated works dating back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Eastern Turkish manuscripts in the collection include a valuable Turkish-Persian dictionary, and some very early material from the fourteenth century AD. As with the Persian collections, there are some very important examples of miniature paintings, particularly from the Ottoman period. In 1888, Charles Rieu issued a catalogue of the Turkish manuscripts in the British Museum, which described 483 manuscripts and listed the finely illuminated ones, as well as those produced prior to 1483. Turkish manuscripts acquired between 1888 and 1958 are covered by a typed catalogue called *Temporary Handlist of Turkish Manuscripts*. There are about 6,000 Turkish printed books in the Museum's collections, but to date there is no printed catalogue of this collection.

Manuscripts written in the Islamic languages of the Indian subcontinent include those in Urdu, Pashto and Bengali. Urdu developed essentially as the literary language of the Mughal Empire, and was a blend of original North Indian languages (derived from Sanskrit and Hindi), Arabic and Persian. The Museum has a collection of 365 Urdu manuscripts, and these were mainly collected by men like William Erskine, Sir Henry Elliott and Colonel George Hamilton, the same scholars who specialized in collecting Persian language manuscripts in India in the nineteenth century. Reflecting their interests in poetry, history and geography, the Urdu manuscripts are broadly in the same subject areas. I. F. Blumhardt issued the first catalogue of the Museum's Urdu collections in 1899. The latest catalogue of Urdu manuscripts in the British Library was produced by Q. M. Haq, and includes a detailed description of the 47 items acquired since 1897. The Department also has a collection of over 22,000 printed books in Urdu, dating back to the earliest examples of Urdu printing in India. The first catalogue of these was issued in 1889, and covers 3,400 titles. A supplement was issued in 1908 listing another 4,200 titles.

Finally, we turn to the South-East Asian manuscript collections of the British Library. These include Batak, Buginese, Javanese, Malay, Madurese and Makassarese (Sulawesi) items, and were built up in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries following Britain's involvement with Malaysia and Indonesia.

More than any other single person, John Crawford (1783-1868) is responsible for the collection of Indonesian manuscripts now held in the British Library. Crawford formed part of the extraordinary group of scholar-administrators who first brought South-East Asian studies to prominence in the early years of the nineteenth century, anticipating Britain's new imperial role in that part of the world. The coterie included Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781-1826), William Marsden (1754-1836), the author of the *History of*
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Sumatra (1783) and the Dictionary of the Malayen Language (1812), Colin MacKenzie (1753–1821) and John Leyden (1775–1811), the gifted scholar of Asian languages who died at Batavia, aged only 36, four weeks after the British occupation of Java had begun.

John Crawfurd first reached Malaysia in 1808, and began his study of Malay at Penang. In 1811, he accompanied Raffles to Java and remained on the island throughout the whole period of the British occupation.22 Between 1811 and 1814 he was the Resident of Yogyakarta. In June 1812 Raffles mounted an expedition against the court of the Sultan of Yogyakarta and sacked the kraton, or royal palace, carrying off many of the original manuscripts held there. It was during this episode that Crawfurd acquired his valuable collection of Javanean manuscripts. In 1814, he acquired Buginese and Makassarese manuscripts following his expedition to Makassar (Sulawesi). During the years that he was Resident of Singapore (1823–26), Crawfurd continued to build up an impressive library of South-East Asian materials. It is one of the paradoxes surrounding men like Raffles and Crawfurd that, while they were involved in incidents such as the sacking of the Yogyakarta royal court, they were not the less scholars of great authority and prepared to display an unusual sensitivity to the local cultures in which they found themselves. During his time in Java, Crawfurd established close contacts with several of the leading Javanean aristocrats, in particular Prince Pakualam I of Yogyakarta.22 He also spoke fluent Malay and Javanean, and began studying Old Javanean. He was the author of the three-volume History of the Indonesian Archipelago (1820), a major contribution to historical knowledge about South-East Asia. In 1842 he sold his collections of Indonesian manuscripts to the British Museum.

These manuscripts cover a wide range of subjects and date mainly from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. There is a heavy emphasis on court documents and papers, including accounts of the civil wars that split the Javanean royal family in the mid-eighteenth century. There are also manuscripts dealing with Javanean legends and history, and mystical works. Several of the items are richly decorated in colours and gilt. The majority of the texts are in the Javanean script, but several are in Arabic (Pegon) script. The Makassarese manuscripts in the British Library's collection include a Makassarese version of the Malay Hikayat Amir Hamzah, legal texts, and manuscripts dealing with the history of the area. The Buginese manuscripts include private royal diaries acquired by Crawfurd, following the seizure of the Kingdom of Bone, and a number of religious treatises, sometimes in Arabic script. Again, these date mainly from the late eighteenth century.21 The Malay manuscripts held by the British Library were mainly acquired from Crawfurd, and include letters, as well as histories. Batak items, usually written on bamboo cylinders or tree bark, include texts that were acquired by people such as Baron Oscar van Kessel, who in 1844 travelled extensively in the Batak country of North Sumatra. The most complete catalogue of the South-East Asian collections in the British Library is Ricklefs and Voorhoeve's.

Indonesian Manuscripts in Great Britain, published in 1977. It is a comprehensive listing of all the main manuscript holdings in British collections. There are also several Dutch-language catalogues of the British Library collections, including G. K. Niemans's De Maleuse Handschriften in het British Museum. M. C. Ricklefs has produced An Inventory of the Javanean Manuscript Collection in the British Museum.23 In addition to the manuscript holdings of the British Library, there are also about 5,000 printed books in modern Indonesian and Malay, 1,000 books in Javanean (including a few textbooks in Old Javanean) and about 160 books in Batak and Bugis/Makassar. The Islamic manuscript collections of the India Office Library rank second in importance to those of the Oriental Collections. The India Office Library, although it retains its own separate premises and name, has been administratively part of the British Library since 1982.

The Library was originally founded in 1801 by the Company Directors of the Honourable East India Company in order to act as a repository for books and manuscripts acquired by Company servants working in the East.24 This meant that it collected materials arriving from an area stretching from the eastern coasts of Arabia through to the islands of Indonesia. The Sanskrit scholar Charles Wilkins (1749–1836) was appointed its first curator in February 1801. Within a few years a policy of deliberate acquisition had been decided upon. The Library was transferred to the newly created India Office in 1858, following the dissolution of the East India Company that year. In 1947, following the independence of India, the Library passed under the control of the Foreign Office, and in 1973 it was transferred to the British Library. Today, the India Office Library concentrates on collecting materials in Indology (which includes India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tibet, Sri Lanka, Burma, Malaysia and Indonesia). However, because of the historical interests of the East India Company in the Islamic world, it also has a very important collection of manuscripts and printed books in Persian, Arabic and Turkish.

There are approximately 4,500 Arabic manuscripts (in 3,000 volumes) in the India Office Library.25 These manuscripts were mainly acquired from India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although many of them originated in Persia. The first Arabic manuscripts acquired by the India Office Library were acquired in 1806. These are now known as the Tipu Sultan Collection and came originally from the library of Tipu Sultan of Mysore. Ninety-four Arabic manuscripts were acquired. Tipu Sultan was ruler of Mysore between 1782 and 1799, and had in 1798 entered into an alliance with the French. The Marquess Wellesley was dispatched with a British army to the south of India, and Tipu Sultan was killed defending his capital of Seringapatam on 6 May 1799. His valuable library was broken up and some of the Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts were sent back to the India Office Library in London.

In 1807, Richard Johnson's collection was purchased. Johnson (1753–1807) was an employee of the Bengal Civil Service between 1770 and 1790, Assistant Resident at Lucknow from 1780 to 1782 and Chairman of the Central Bank of India between 1786 and 1790. He was a man of considerable culture and
erudition, and during his time in Lucknow and Hyderabad (1780–85) he was active in collecting both Arabic and Persian manuscripts. The Arabic manuscripts numbered 141 texts.

In 1809, 72 Arabic manuscripts were purchased from Warren Hastings (1732–1818). Hastings was one of the most colourful characters in the history of the East India Company. Between 1774 and 1785 he was Governor-General, and embarked on an ambitious policy of reforming the administration of the Company in India, including tackling the delicate issue of revenue and tax-collection (by which Company servants had often illegally been able to enrich themselves). It was a long, hard struggle and Hastings aroused much opposition. On numerous occasions he found he had to compromise in order to maintain the support of his Council members. But the mood in England was not sympathetic to compromise. For a long time there had been growing resentment at the wealth of the returning East India Company grandees, or ‘Nawabs’ as they were often mockingly referred to because of their ostentatious display of what many considered to be ill-gotten riches. The English public was looking for a scapegoat, and Hastings was to be the victim. In 1787, following his return from India, he was arraigned before the House of Lords on 23 separate charges of corruption. In effect, he was being accused of abetting the corruption that was now associated with the East India Company. There was also an increasing feeling that the moral principles which were taking hold of British public life in England should apply in India. For six years, Hastings fought his case, and eventually in 1793 he was acquitted. He was, however, barred from ever again holding public office, and he was financially ruined. In 1809 he sold his valuable collection of Arabic and Persian manuscripts to the India Office Library. He was probably in need of money. Hastings’s collection of Islamic manuscripts had been built up over many years and reflected his deep interest in Indian and Islamic culture. He was one of the most outstanding exemplars of the East India official who sought to contribute positively to the building of bridges between East and West. He knew Persian, Bengali, Urdu and some Arabic. In 1781 he founded a Muslim Madrasah, or College of Arabic Studies, at Calcutta, and supported the foundation of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784. The sale of his manuscripts to the Company library was thus an act of great sacrifice for him, because he had collected them not just as working documents but in the spirit of a scholar and a humanist.

In 1853, 434 Arabic manuscripts belonging to the so-called Bijapur Collection entered the India Office Library. These manuscripts were the remnants of the valuable library of the Adil Shahi dynasty of Bijapur. The Adil Shahi sultanate had been founded in 1489 by Yusuf Adil Khan, Governor of Bijapur, and had in fact encompassed a sizeable area of south India. Yusuf Adil Khan, it was widely rumoured, was a son of Sultan Murad II of Turkey and had been brought up secretly in Persia. Whatever the truth of these tales, he was a devout Shia, and in 1502 declared Shism to be the state religion of Bijapur. The dynasty survived until 1686, when Sikandar, the ninth Sultan of Bijapur, was defeated by the Emperor Aurangzeb and carried off into captivity. In the two centuries of its existence the Adil Shahi sultanate was famous for its patronage of the arts and architecture. Fine libraries were built in places like Ahmadnagar and Bijapur, and the Royal Library at Bijapur had a famous collection of both Arabic and Persian texts, as befitted the capital of one of southern India’s leading Muslim states. After the defeat of Sikandar the Royal Library continued to flourish, but by the middle of the eighteenth century it was in a state of decay. By 1853, both the town of Bijapur and its once famous library were in ruins, and the British decided to save the whole manuscript collection. Those texts that still survived after so many years of neglect were sent to the India Office Library, where they constituted the single largest consignment of Arabic manuscripts received by the library up to that date.

In 1876, the manuscripts from the former library of the Mughal emperors in Delhi reached London. The 3,710 volumes contained 2,900 Arabic manuscripts, many of them dealing with mystical and Sufi subjects. The library of the Mughal emperors was already in existence in 1638, when a seventeenth-century European traveller passing through Delhi commented on its ‘four and twenty thousand manuscripts, so richly bound that they were valued at six million four hundred and sixty three thousand seven hundred and thirty one rupees’. The two centuries between 1638 and 1858, when the last Mughal emperor was sent into exile, these very extensive collections appear to have been sadly depleted, and only a quarter of the collection brought to London dated from before the seventeenth century. In 1859, the Royal Library of the Mughal emperors numbered 4,830 volumes, containing around 8,000 separate manuscripts. At a sale organized by the government in the same year, 1,210 volumes — containing approximately 2,000 manuscripts — were sold to private collectors. The remaining 3,710 volumes were eventually dispatched in 1876 to the India Office Library, where they remain to this day.

In the same year the Royal Society deposited — on permanent loan to the India Office — a collection of 46 Arabic manuscripts. Thirty-six of these manuscripts had been collected by Sir William Jones (1746–94), the great Sanskrit scholar and the founder of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. They had been presented to the Royal Society in 1792 by Sir William and Lady Jones. The other ten had been a bequest from Burjorjee Sorabjee Ashburner. Although Jones is primarily associated with Hindu and Sanskrit studies, he also had a deep interest and respect for Islamic culture, and undertook translations of Arabic and Persian literature in an attempt to show the West how rich was the variety of poetry and philosophy in the non-European world. Valuable Arabic manuscripts in the India Office Library include the Kitab al-afla'a of Ibn al-Sikkit, dated AH 461 (AD 1069), the Kitab al-khityara'in of Al-Mufaddal al-Dabbî and the Tahâl mudâlah Ibn al-Ârabî by Amr Allâh al-Bâhari, Al-Wafa' bi-gharh al-Isâfâta by Abd al-Basit al-Bu'qini and a fragment of the rare Al-Il-mân bi-tariikh al-'Il-mân al-Islâm of Ibn Qâdi Shubbah. The first printed catalogue of the Arabic manuscripts held by the India
Office appeared in 1877. This was compiled by Otto Loth and describes the 1,076 Arabic manuscripts then held by the Library. Further volumes of the catalogue were issued in 1930 (Qur'anic literature), 1936 (Sufism and ethics), 1937 (Fiqh) and 1940 (Kalam). These are known as Fascicules I–IV of Volume II. Volume III covers Hadith, philosophy, mathematics, history, lexicography and sciences.

The Persian manuscript collections of the India Office Library are justifiably famous. There are altogether 6,500 manuscripts in about 5,000 volumes. They constitute the single largest collection of Persian manuscripts now extant either in Britain or anywhere in the Western world. They were collected largely in India, where Persian was the court language of the Mughal Empire, and British merchants and Company officials learnt the language not only out of scholarly interest but also in order to carry out matters of trade and government. Although written in the Persian script, a great number of the manuscripts were actually produced at the courts of the Mughal emperors and reflect the close cultural relations that existed between Persia and India. Many of them are richly illustrated in Shirazi, Isfahani and Indian styles.

The main collectors of the Persian manuscripts which found their way to the India Office Library are frequently the same individuals responsible for the Arabic manuscript collections. Richard Johnson (1753–1807) sold to the Library his 716 Persian manuscripts in 1807. Among these are some of the finest illustrated Persian manuscripts ever to reach the West, with miniatures from the sixteenth century, executed in the Khurasani and Isfahani styles. Three hundred and one Persian manuscripts which had once belonged to the famous Bibliotheca Leydeniana, created by John Leyden (1775–1811), were purchased in 1824. Leyden, who had accompanied Thomas Raffles to Batavia in 1811 and died there of malaria, had built up a library of over 2,300 manuscripts, the majority in the south Indian languages, but some also in Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic.

Two hundred and eighty-six Persian manuscripts were also part of the Tipu Sultan Collection which reached the India Office Library in 1806. Two thousand seven hundred Persian manuscripts arrived at the Library in 1876, the remnants of the once-great Royal Library of the Mughal emperors in Delhi. In the same year, the Royal Society's collections of 200 Persian manuscripts — bequeathed by Sir William Jones and Burjorjee Ashburner — were added to the Library's collections.

In 1860, a collection of 215 Persian manuscripts belonging to the Company's East India College at Haileybury were passed to the India Office Library. The College had originally been established in 1801 by the Directors of the East India Company in order to provide a basic training in the languages, customs, laws and traditions of India. The founding of the College marked the beginnings of a serious attempt to create an English Civil Service for India. In 1860, with the demise of the Company, the College was closed and its manuscript collections returned to the government.

The 146 Persian manuscripts belonging to the Gaekwar of Baroda, which reached the Library in the late 1870s, had a history bound up with a tale of poison and intrigue, and reflect the often uneasy relationship between the British administration and its client Indian princes in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Baroda was a state which formed part of Gujarat. Until 1876, the Gaekwar, or ruler of Baroda had enjoyed a largely independent existence. Baroda was not a principality which was administered directly by the British administration in Calcutta. It was allowed to run its own affairs with minimal interference, although there was a British Resident appointed to deal with what was considered as unreasonable behaviour, such as attempts to stir up trouble or mismanagement of state finances. It was unusual for the Resident to intervene directly and very rare for a client prince to be deposed or forced to abdicate. But in 1876 this is what happened to the Gaekwar. It would appear that he was strongly implicated in an attempt to poison the British Resident. The central government took matters into its own hands. The Gaekwar was deposed, his principality ceased to be a client state and was absorbed into the territories directly administered by the British Raj. The library of the Gaekwar was broken up. A large number of his valuable Persian manuscripts eventually reached the India Office.

In 1912, the Persian manuscripts belonging to the Indo-European scholar, William Irvine, were purchased. The Irvine Collection greatly strengthened the Library's holdings of manuscripts dealing with Indian history. The Persian manuscript collections cover a wide range of subjects and schools. The oldest manuscript dates back to AH 523 (AD 1129) and is a copy of a part of Surâbâdî's Taṣfîr. Other valuable manuscripts include the famous 'dream book' of Tipu Sultan, the Batâbâh collection of 70 Mughal sânâds, one of the oldest extant copies of a manuscript of the works of Amir Khusrau, dated AH 866–7 (AD 1462), and a finely written copy, in flowing Nasta'liq calligraphy, of Khusrau's Layâl va Majnûn, which once belonged to the Sultan Ali Mashhadi. But the great glory of the Persian manuscript collections lies undoubtedly in their rich and colourful illustrations, or miniatures, numbering well over 2,000. The earliest Persian illustrated text in the collections is a group of six divans dated AH 713–14 (AD 1313–15) which were originally in the possession of Shah Isma'il Safavi. The school of Shirazi illuminated painting is strongly represented in the collections. These date mainly from the sixteenth century, and include a richly illustrated copy of the Shah-nâmah, dating from AD 1560, which once belonged to Warren Hastings, and probably contains some of the finest examples of Shirazi miniature painting now in the possession of the India Office Library. The Isfahani school of manuscript illustration is also well represented, with Shah-nâmahs dated AH 1012 (AD 1604) and AH 1022 (AD 1624). The post-Safavid style is represented by a copy of the Shah-nâmahs produced in AH 1225 (AD 1810), an account of the reign of Fath Ali Shah.

The first printed catalogue of the Persian manuscript collections was published in Oxford between 1903 and 1937. This two-volume edition contains
details of 3,076 Persian manuscripts, covering acquisitions up to 1902. It was compiled by Hermann Ethé, Volume 2 having been revised by Edward Edwards. The Delhi and Royal Society collections are not included, however. The Delhi manuscript catalogues are as yet unpublished. (One of them is a rather incomplete and inaccurate Handlist of Persian Manuscripts in the Delhi Collection, produced around 1869 by H. Blockman.) Volume 3 of the main Persian catalogue, which is still in preparation, will cover the manuscripts from the Delhi Collection as well as accessions since 1902. There is also an illustrated catalogue to 1,344 miniatures in the Persian manuscript collections. This was published in 1976 under the title of Persian Paintings in the India Office Library: a descriptive catalogue.

The Persian printed book collection numbers about 7,000 titles, and was largely built up between 1867 and 1948, when a copy of every printed book produced in British India was automatically passed over to the Library, as a result of the Indian Press and Registration of Books Act of 1867. Since 1936, it has proved necessary to concentrate on certain subjects in Persian books (as in Arabic books), and these subjects are history and religious and classical literature. Turkish manuscripts in the India Office Library number thirty-nine, and are described in a Library handlist. There is no printed catalogue. Most of the manuscripts were acquired by nineteenth-century travellers to Turkey and by officials of the East India Company.

Urdu manuscripts in the India Office collections number about 310. They were derived largely from the Delhi collections (101 manuscripts) and those of William Johnson (18 manuscripts), John Leyden (38 manuscripts) and William Irvine (20 manuscripts). Two hundred and sixty-nine of the manuscripts are listed in J. F. Blumhardt’s 1926 Catalogue of the Hindustani Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office. There is also a collection of several thousand Urdu printed books. There are 60 Pushti manuscripts, and these are described in Blumhardt and MacKenzie’s 1965 Catalogue of Pashto Manuscripts in the Libraries of the British Isles.

The Library’s South-East Asian Islamic manuscripts are mainly in Malay and Javanese. The Javanese manuscripts number ninety-five. They are a mixture of paper and palm-leaf manuscripts. They are entirely derived from the collections of Colin MacKenzie (1753-1821), except for one manuscript. MacKenzie began his career in India and 1782, when he was appointed to the position of Second Lieutenant in the Madras Engineers. By 1810 he had risen to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. During his time in India, he worked closely with the scholar John Leyden, and became deeply interested in Indian history and archaeology. In 1811, he was involved in Raffles’ expeditionary force to seize Java, and was a participant at the sack of the royal court of Yogyakarta (June 1812). It would appear that most of the Javanese manuscripts that he acquired derived from this episode. His interest in Indian history and culture now widened to include Javanese antiquities. He returned to India in 1813 and in 1819 became Surveyor-General. The manuscripts acquired by MacKenzie include Arabic-language texts, such as one which deals with the use of stones and jewels, Arabic-script (Pegon) texts mainly covering religious subjects and a large number of Javanese-script manuscripts, often describing government treaties, or episodes from the history of Java. A good example of the latter is the Babad Kartsura, dated 31 August 1796, which is ‘a history of the Prince Truno Jaya and the Weerapatty until the election of Pangerang Pooger to the Emperor’. Almost all the manuscripts appear to date from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. MacKenzie eventually sold his manuscripts to the East India Company.

The Library’s Malay manuscripts number thirty-two, one of which is a bamboo manuscript. The majority of the manuscripts were collected by John Leyden, with a few coming from MacKenzie’s collections. The manuscripts include an Islamic catechism, in Arabic, with an interlinear Malay translation ascribed to Abul-Laith Muhammad ibn Abi Nasr ibn Ibrahim al-Samarkandi, Malay vocabularies, stories such as the Hikayat Putera Jaya Pati, which tells the magical adventures of Putera Jaya Pati, son of King Kalawandu of Langgam Jaya — it dates from AH 1221 (AD 1806) — and a medical treatise entitled Kitab Obat-obat dan Azimat, ‘Tay, which is dated 17 May 1813. Again, like the Javanese manuscripts, the Malay manuscripts are mainly from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The Javanese and Malay manuscript collections of the India Office Library are all described in detail in Ricklefs and Voorhoeve’s Indonesian Manuscripts in Great Britain, published by Oxford University Press in 1977. Earlier catalogues of these collections were in Dutch, and include Keyzer’s 1854 catalogue De Javansche Handschriften te London and van der Turk’s 1849 Kort Verslag van de Maleische Handschriften in het East India House te London.

The India Office Library also has small collections of Malay (including Indonesian) and Javanese printed books, numbering about 1,000 titles altogether. No printed catalogues exist of these collections, and acquisition is on a rather spasmodic basis.

School of Oriental and African Studies (London University)

The Islamic manuscript collections of the University of London are now housed in the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). The School is a constituent college of the University of London, and was founded in 1916 as a result of agitation by the Royal Asiatic Society to create an academic institution in Britain where oriental languages and cultures could be exclusively studied. The library at SOAS is principally a collection of printed books, not a manuscript collection. It comprises a collection of 60,000 volumes in the field of Islamic and Middle Eastern subjects. Its total stock — in Western and oriental languages — is around 500,000 books.

The Islamic manuscript collections of the SOAS library originally came from the University’s central library and the libraries of University College
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and King's College. They were passed over to SOAS in 1917. Among the main
collections are 400 Arabic, 135 Malay, 56 Javanese, 414 Persian, 67 Swahili
and 45 Turkish manuscripts.

The Arabic manuscripts cover the traditional Islamic disciplines such as
Tafsir, Hadith and Fiqh, but there are also works on mathematics, astronomy,
medicine, falconry, archery and the military sciences. Some of these originated
in the Sudan during the nineteenth century, and form part of the collection
compiled by Professor Holt during his researches on the Mahdi and the Sudan.
These were presented in 1977. Others formed part of the collection of the
orientalist William Marsden (1754–1836), who in 1835 had presented them to
King's College, London. In 1981 Adam Gacek published a catalogue of the
Arabic manuscripts in the library of the School of Oriental and African
Studies. It was updated in 1985. Among the notable Arabic manuscripts in
the SOAS collections are manuscript copies by the famous calligrapher Alā al-Dīn
Ibn Shams al-Halabi of the poems of Ibn al-Muṭrūḥ. These date to the latter
half of the fifteenth century AD.

The Persian manuscripts, numbering 414, were mainly acquired from
Marsden's bequest to King's College in 1835 and from a collection built up by
D. D. Dickson. This collection, numbering 109 manuscripts, was presented in
1942. Among the most valuable items is an AH 978 (AD 1600) copy of Husain
Vaiz Kāshfī’s Anwār-i-Suhālī, a manuscript with 27 fine miniatures. The 135
Malay manuscripts and the core collections of 56 Javanese manuscripts held
by the library originate mainly from the collections of William Marsden,
Charles Blagden (1864–1949) and Richard Winstedt (1878–1966). Marsden was
Irish-born and educated, and was about to accept a post in Dublin University
in 1770 when he was persuaded to seek his fortune with the East India
Company. In 1771 he was posted to the Company's outposts of Bengkulu
(Bengkulu) on the western coast of Sumatra and stayed there for nine years.
During this time he acquired an interest in Malay, and in the history of
Sumatra. On his return to London, he first went into private business, but then
transferred to the Admiralty, eventually rising to the position of First
Secretary. But he never lost his interest in Sumatra or in Malay studies, and the
manuscripts which he had managed to collect while he was in the Far East
formed the basis of his researches and writings. In 1783, only four years after
his return from Bengkoolen, he published his History of Sumatra, the first book
in English to open up the island, its culture, traditions and peoples to a
Western readership. He went on in 1812 to publish his Dictionary of the
Malayan Language and Grammar of the Malayan Language. Marsden can
rightly be considered one of the founders of scholarship in Malay and
Indonesian studies. Among Marsden's Malay manuscripts are texts written in
south-Sumatran literary Malay in Renceng script, as well as a collection of
several hundred Malay letters written by the late-eighteenth century rulers of
Malay sultanates and addressed to Captain Francis Light, RN, First Super-
intendent of Prince of Wales Island (Penang) from 1786 to 1791, and Captain
James Scott. There are also letters from rulers in different parts of Sumatra,

principally Palembang, Aceh, Jambi and the Minangkabau areas.

Other Malay manuscripts were collected by Charles Blagden, who began life
in Malaya in the Straits Settlements Civil Service in 1888, but left in 1897
owing to ill health, and eventually, in 1917, became a lecturer in Malay in the
School of Oriental Studies. His particular interest lay in Malay vocabulary,
and several of his manuscripts reflect this interest. Finally, the Malay manu-
script collections of Richard Olaf Winstedt (1878–1966) are worth noting.
Ricklefs and Voorhoeve describe him as the ‘most prolific of all scholars of
Malaya; his influence on Malay studies was probably greater than that of
anyone’. Between 1921 and 1931 he was President of Raffles College,
Singapore, and in 1935 he became Reader in Malay at the School of Oriental
and African Studies, a position he held until his retirement in 1946. He is
famous for his Malay Grammar, published in 1913, but he went on to produce
a rich variety of publications in Malay studies. Most of the manuscripts he
acquired were produced in the early twentieth century. Details of all the Malay
manuscripts in the SOAS collections are listed in the Ricklefs and Voorhoeve
catalogue, Indonesian Manuscripts in Great Britain.

Finally, SOAS probably has a small but interesting collection of Swahili
manuscripts, collected on the Mombasa coast by William Taylor and William
Hickens in about 1890. There were presented by Mrs E. Hickens. Among the
most valuable of these texts are five notebooks with Swahili tales, proverbs,
riddles, songs and vocabulary.

The Wellcome Institute

A collection of Islamic manuscripts not widely known, but particularly strong
in medical and scientific texts, is that of the Wellcome Institute for the History
of Medicine. The manuscripts are located in the library of the Institute, which
was founded in the late nineteenth century. Sir Henry Wellcome (1853–1936)
was American-born, but settled in Britain, and through his pharmaceutical
company, the Wellcome Foundation, was able to set up world-wide business
interests. However, his true passion lay in archaeology, anthropology and the
history of medicine and science, and between 1897 and his death he embarked
upon a mission to create one of the world's greatest oriental manuscript collec-
tions in these subject areas. His interests ranged right across the Middle and
Far East, and his agents — notably Dr Païra Mall, a highly talented Indian
doctor, with a knowledge of the Indian languages, Persian and Arabic —
collected manuscripts not only in all the major Islamic languages, but also in
Sanskrit, Pali, Hindi, Tamil, Burmese, Thai, Chinese and Tibetan. Sir Henry
Wellcome was representative of a new type of Islamic manuscript collector
who by the end of the nineteenth century had arrived on the scene. Such a
collector would be an international business tycoon, with a sympathy for and
interest in oriental culture, and with the necessary funds to send agents to all
corners of the world in search of the texts he sought to obtain. Wellcome was
one of a number of such figures, both European and American, who now
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changed the nature of manuscript collecting. They had a variety of motives — scholarship, a fascination with exotica and orientalism, the desire to seek good financial investments for the future, the need even to acquire instant culture and prestige. But they had several things in common: great financial wealth, usually achieved through international business interests, and the services of agents world-wide who could collect on their behalf. Wellcome and his kind were therefore able to build up large — and often impressive — collections of manuscripts in a short space of time. By the time of his death in 1936, Wellcome had established a top position for his Institute library in the ranking of Islamic and orientalist collections in the West, particularly in regard to medical and scientific texts.

The Arabic manuscripts number about seven hundred altogether. Two hundred of these cover medical and scientific subjects, with alchemy, astrology, zoology and veterinary medicine strongly represented. They were mainly acquired from North Africa and the Middle East. Among the most outstanding items is an original copy of Razí’s medical treatise Kitāb-al-Hawa, produced at Tabriz (Iran) in the year AH 669 (AD 1271), and a richly gilded copy of Ibn Sīnā’s Al-Qānûn fi al-tibb, dated AH 1042 (AD 1632). This copy is particularly notable for its lacquered covers, beautifully illustrated with medical scenes. It is clear from many of the Arabic manuscripts in the Wellcome collections that they were not collected at random, without any idea of what was being obtained, but were the result of a competent scholarly assessment matched by a sharp sense of business acumen. The manuscripts are not only aesthetic, and textually valuable, but also sound financial purchases. This reflects the close partnership that existed between Wellcome and his agents such as Dr Paire Mall. A catalogue of the medical and scientific Arabic manuscripts was produced by Dr A. Z. Iskander in 1967. This covered 245 works in all. It was entitled A Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts on Medicine and Science in the Wellcome Historical Medical Library.

The Persian manuscripts in the collection number over 600. The majority of them cover medical subjects and related disciplines such as alchemy; some are herbal treatises. There are also texts on alchemy and astrology. They appear to have been mainly collected by Dr Mall, and reflect his scholarly appreciation of medical illustration. The miniatures and anatomical drawings are among the finest in their field. Outstanding texts include a Persian translation of a Sanskrit book on veterinary medicine which is entitled (in Persian) Faras-nâma, the Book of the Horse. It appears to have been translated by Abdullah Khan, who was Veterinary Surgeon to the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan (1628–54). It is illustrated with 37 miniature drawings of the horse. Another interesting Persian manuscript is the horoscope of the Timurid prince, Iskandar, from the year AH 913 (AD 1510). This contains some excellent examples of early Shiraz illustrative work. The Turkish manuscripts number about 23 and are entirely concerned with medicine, astrology and magic, but there are among them a copy of the rare Kâsîkh-i-bûrda (Eulogy of the Robe) dating from AH 1053 (AD 1653).³⁶

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Other Islamic-language manuscripts to be found in the collection include 40 Urdu manuscripts, again many on medical subjects, and 30 Malay manuscripts. There are also 14 Batak manuscripts, ten of which are written on tree bark, in a variety of Batak sub-scripts including Karo-Batak, Tobo-Batak and Dairu-Batak. They date mainly from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and deal with medicine and magic, including treatises on how to combat inimical magic. Finally, there are ten Javanese manuscripts, eight of which are written on palm leaf.

Unfortunately, apart from the Arabic manuscripts, there are no printed catalogues for any of the other Islamic manuscripts held by the Wellcome Trust (the organization which administers the library and carries out research in medical and pharmaceutical subjects). This means that the Islamic manuscripts in the library are, regrettably, not as widely known as they might be.

The Royal Asiatic Society

Among the most important collections in the Royal Asiatic Society are the Javanese and Malay manuscripts, presented to the Society in 1830 by Lady Raffles, the widow of Thomas Stamford Raffles, (1781–1826). Raffles is one of the most fascinating characters in British imperial history. He began his career in the Far East in 1805, when he was dispatched by the East India Company to Penang in Malaysia. In 1811 he headed the British expeditionary force which seized Java from the Dutch. Between 1811 and 1816 he was Lieutenant Governor of Java, and in a few years established for himself a reputation as an outstanding scholar and administrator.

It was during his time in Java that he wrote the now famous History of Java, and helped uncover the ruins of the great Buddhist Sanctuary of Borobudur near Yogyakarta. Raffles took a passionate interest in Javanese culture and literature. He studied the language, and learnt much about the traditions and customs of the people he ruled over. He became a great advocate of continued English rule in Java, and argued strongly against the island’s being returned to Dutch rule, which he considered to have been repressive and lacking in imagination. He revived the activities of the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences, and encouraged the Dutch colonial elite to take an interest in new scientific and cultural ideas. Yet Raffles was also determined to enforce English control throughout former Dutch possessions in the Indies, and suppressed any attempts by the local princes to reassert their independence in the wake of the Dutch defeat. In June 1812, Raffles led an army against the Sultan of Yogyakarta and sacked the Kraton, the Sultan’s royal palace. It was as a result of this that he acquired some of his important Javanese manuscripts. These had originally been located in the private library of the Sultan, and Raffles immediately realized the value and importance of what had fallen into his hands. He and John Crawford (1783–1868) divided the manuscript collection between them. The majority of the Raffles Javanese manuscripts
The great majority of Oxford's original Islamic manuscript collections are to be found in the Bodleian Library. The Bodleian was established in 1598 by Sir Thomas Bodley, a Fellow of Merton College and an envoy of the English government to the States-General of the Netherlands. In a letter addressed to the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University and dated 23 February 1598, Bodley offered to create a library and pay for its upkeep. His offer was accepted. It may seem strange that a university of Oxford's prestige and antiquity (for even by the end of the sixteenth century it could look back on a scholarly history of some four hundred years) should have had no library, but in fact what Bodley was setting out to create was a central university library. The individual colleges — many of them exceedingly wealthy and well endowed — had by that date good collections of books and manuscripts (in Western languages), but the university itself was impoverished and unable to support a library that would cater for the whole university and not for a particular college. Attempts had been made before — particularly by Duke Humphrey, the youngest brother of King Henry V — to create such a central university collection, but lack of adequate funding, and then the Reformation, led to its disintegration. Bodley's great achievement was not only to set up the library but also to endow it, so that it could continue to operate and acquire books and manuscripts.

The present collections of Islamic manuscripts at the Bodleian date from the reign of King Charles I (1625–49) and are associated primarily with his ill-fated Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud. Interest in Islamic studies developed late in England. It was not until 1632 that a Chair of Arabic was created at Cambridge University, and it was another two years before a similar Chair was established at Oxford, with the support of Archbishop Laud. Interest in Islam in England was from the start strongly rooted in Protestant theology and was inspired by Dutch scholars such as Thomas Erpenius and James Gortius of Leiden University.

Archbishop Laud, seen by the Puritan revolutionary opponents of King Charles I as the epitome of state religious oppression, was a man of unusual scholarship and talent, and represented one of the finer examples of the Stuart renaissance as it existed in the period 1635–40, before the long shadows of the impending civil war began to divide and embattle the land. Laud had a deep interest in classical Greek and Latin culture, as well as in the flowering of early European culture (particularly the Carolingian period). His interest in Greek manuscripts, however, led him towards the Near East and towards the culture and civilization of Islam, which also drew strong inspiration — at least in its earlier years — from Greek ideas and philosophy.

As has already been mentioned, in 1634 Laud obtained a royal letter to the Levant Company, then actively trading in the Near East, requiring that each of its ships returning from the East should bring one Persian or Arabic manuscript back. These manuscripts were delivered to the Archbishop and formed the basis of his Islamic manuscript collections. Another source of supply was
Laud's friend, John Greaves, Professor of Geometry at Gresham College, London, who went out to Alexandria and Constantinople in 1638 on Laud's behalf and collected a number of valuable Arabic manuscripts — usually translations from the Greek — of mathematical texts. Edward Pococke, first Laudian Professor of Arabic (in 1636) and between 1630 and 1636 Chaplain in Aleppo to the merchants of the Levant Company, acquired further manuscripts for Laud. He was a notable Arabic scholar, and in later years went on to build up his own collection of Arabic manuscripts, all of which were sold to the Bodleian after his death in 1691.

Laud's interest in Islamic studies also drew him into close contact with European scholars such as Hugh Grotius, the seventeenth-century Dutch orientalist. The story is told of how Grotius contacted Pococke when he heard that Laud was in the Tower of London, awaiting trial on grounds of treason. He asked Pococke to urge Laud to escape while there was still time. Arrangements could be made to assist him. Pococke carried the message to Laud, who replied that flight was what his enemies most wanted, and his dignity would not allow it. The story reflects how close-knit the European orientalist circle at this period was. To Grotius, Laud was the scholar-bishop, the patron of Islamic studies in England, and a man trying to build bridges between the Muslim and European worlds. To the Puritan revolutionaries, Laud was the epitome of state church oppression and the upholder of the absolute monarchy of Charles Stuart. Laud's orientalist friends and interests could not save him. He was beheaded in 1645.

Laud's requests of Arabic manuscripts to the Bodleian were made between 1635 and 1640 during his time as Chancellor of the University, and helped turn Oxford into one of the great centres of Arabic scholarship in Protestant Europe. The purchase of manuscripts belonging to Edward Pococke and Robert Huntington (also Chaplain to the English community in Aleppo) helped strengthen the Bodleian's Islamic collections considerably, as did those of the lawyer, John Selden. In 1713 the oriental collection of Narcissus Marsh, Archbishop of Armagh, was acquired by the library. Marsh's collection contained many manuscripts which had been sent to him by Robert Huntington of Aleppo. There was also a large number of manuscripts which Marsh had acquired from James Golius, the Dutch orientalist.

At this stage, Oxford's Islamic manuscript collections, like Cambridge's collections, reflect two things: a strong interest in Arabic manuscripts owing to seventeenth-century English Protestant interest in classics and theology, and the trading/merchant links with the Ottoman Empire, particularly the Levant. In this, England's earliest Islamic collections resemble those being established in the Netherlands, where the merchant-diplomat Levinus Warner, based in Constantinople, and the Protestant scholar and theologian, Thomas Erpenius, reflect the two strands — commercial and theological — that together helped create the foundation Dutch orientalist collections at Leiden.

Among the Arabic manuscripts acquired by the Bodleian Library in the seventeenth century were manuscripts by such authors as Imād al-Dīn al-

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Isfahān (d. 1201), Al-Dhababī (d. 1348), Al-Masūdī (d. 956), Abū Al-Fidā (d. 1331), Al-Mākin (d. 1273) and Al-Saffāt (d. 1363). These manuscripts were mainly biased towards Arabic history, a subject that fascinated scholars such as Edward Pococke, who in his Specimen historiae Arabum (1650) produced the first serious evaluation by an English historian of early Islamic history. The Arabic manuscript collections acquired by the Bodleian Library during this period were the finest then held by any British library, and helped create the flowering of Islamic scholarship that took place in England in the eighteenth century.

In 1787 the first catalogue of the Bodleian's Arabic collections was produced. This was John Uri's Bibliothecae Bodleianae codicum manuscriptorum orientalium. Altogether, 1,324 Arabic manuscripts are listed, of which 1,219 are Islamic. Supplements were issued by Alexander Nicoll in 1821 and Edward Bouverie Pusey in 1835. Pusey spent seven years completing and revising the work of his predecessors. When the catalogue was issued it made him one of the great European Arabists of his day. He did not, however, find it either a refreshing or inspiring task. He wrote in later years that 'when engaged with the Arabic catalogue I have, as I rose to the drudgery, envied the very bricklayers whom I saw at work in the streets.' By then, further acquisitions had brought the total number of Islamic Arabic manuscripts up to 1,642.

After the great collection building of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the number of Arabic manuscripts acquired by the Bodleian Library in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century fell away sharply. Interest in this period shifted to Persian manuscripts, reflecting Britain's imperial involvement with Mughal India. However, Arabic manuscripts were not ignored, and in 1843 the Bodleian bought the manuscript collections of James Bruce, the explorer of the Nile and author of the famous Travels (1790). Bruce, whose account of his colourful and exotic adventures in Ethiopia was widely disbelieved at the time, caused a sensation in London literary and court circles with his stories of the remote Christian kingdom in eastern Africa to which he had journeyed in 1769, searching for the origins of the Nile. However, he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society and received by the King, though many others were quick to doubt the validity of his tales, including Samuel Johnson and Horace Walpole. The latter wrote sarcastically on 10 July 1774:

Africa is, indeed coming into fashion. There is just returned a Mr Bruce who has lived three years in the court of Abyssinia and breakfasted every morning with Maids of Honour on live oxen... Oh yes; we shall have negro butchers and French cooks will be laid aside.

Notwithstanding the jibes and thinly veiled insults which he received, Bruce went on to compose an account of his travels, and was even working on a second edition when, on 26 April 1794, he tumbled headlong down a flight of stairs to his death. His collection of important Ethiopian and Arabic
manuscripts, acquired during his travels, was sold to the Bodleian in 1843 for £1,000. Bruce himself had valued it at £25,000 in 1773, but had been unable to find a buyer, despite several offers he made to the British Museum.

In 1872, the Arabic manuscripts which had once belonged to George Sale entered the Bodleian. Sale was the first scholar to publish the translation of the Qur’an, and he had accompanied it with a learned and detailed ‘preliminary discourse’. Sale had died in 1736, and his Arabic manuscripts had been bought by the Radcliffe Library in 1760 for the sum of £157 10s. One hundred and twelve years later they were passed over to the Bodleian. Subsequent acquisitions of Arabic manuscripts have been very limited. The total number of Arabic manuscripts in the Bodleian Library stands at around 2,110, the vast majority of which were acquired in the period before 1835. A card catalogue exists for those acquired after 1835.

The collections of Persian and Turkish manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, in contrast to the Arabic collections, underwent their period of greatest expansion in the nineteenth century, reflecting Britain’s increased involvement with India. The earliest Persian and Turkish texts to enter the library were deposited by Pococke, Greaves and Marsh. They have all been discussed in relation to their much larger Arabic bequests. Before 1844 it is estimated that there were, for example, only 177 Persian manuscripts in the Bodleian’s collections. But in that year, all this changed very dramatically. The collections of Sir William Ouseley were acquired for the library. Ouseley’s collection numbered over 400 manuscripts and included a richly illustrated fifteenth-century copy of the *Rubā‘iyāt* of Omar Khayyām — it was this copy which was to inspire Edward FitzGerald, the great Victorian poet, to make his translation into English of what has become the most famous Persian poem in the English-speaking world.44 Ouseley had acquired his manuscripts while travelling in Persia, where he had accompanied his brother, Sir Gore Ouseley, on a political mission. In 1845, the Bodleian acquired 100 manuscripts which had once belonged to General Alexander Walker. Walker had been Political Resident in Barado. In 1858–9, the Library made a great purchase when it managed to acquire the manuscript collection of Sir Gore Ouseley. Sir Gore’s collection had been built up over many years, beginning when he was residing at Lucknow, and continuing during his time as Ambassador Extraordinary to the Persian court (1810–14). Sir Gore’s interest in the East was to involve him in more than the study and collecting of Persian and Indian manuscripts. In 1823 he was one of the founder members of the Royal Asiatic Society. The Sir Gore Ouseley Collection has an intriguing history. It reached the Bodleian in two stages. The first 35 manuscripts were bought in 1858 from Sir Gore’s son, Sir Frederick. But the remaining manuscripts — over 600 in number — were destined for the British Museum. In 1888 they were in the possession of a Mr. J.B. Elliott, a retired officer of the Bengal Civil Service, who was old and blind and living in retirement in Patna. He had decided to bequeath the manuscripts to the British Museum, but was visited one day by Mr Fitz-Edward Hall, acting as an emissary on behalf of the Bodleian Library. By various means Hall persuaded Elliott to alter his will, as a result of which the collection passed into the possession of the Bodleian Library in 1859.45 In 1872, 254 Persian and Turkish manuscripts which had been collected by James Fraser (d. 1754) were bought for the Bodleian. Fraser had worked for the East India Company, and his manuscripts reputedly originated from the Royal Library of Isfahan. In the twentieth century, the Bodleian’s collections of Persian and Turkish manuscripts have been augmented by purchases from Tiflis in 1920 and by the acquisition of 84 manuscripts originally bequeathed in 1922 to the Indian Institute by E.H. Whinfield, a Persian scholar.

The Bodleian’s collection of Persian manuscripts is now one of the finest in any British library. It is particularly strong on Persian and Indian illustration. There are many manuscripts dating from the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a period when Persian art was in many ways at its finest. The Bihzad school of Persian art — founded by the pre-eminent court painter of the Safavid dynasty, who was captured at Herat in 1510, and installed as Director of the Royal Library — is well represented. There are richly illustrated examples of Bihzad’s style in copies of the Khamshah or epic poems of Nāwī. Indo-Persian Mughal art is to be found in copies of the picture-books produced for the courts of Jahangir and Shah Jahan.

There are currently 2,190 Persian and 280 Turkish manuscripts held by the Bodleian.46 In 1889, Dr Hermann Eitl produced the first part of a detailed listing of the collection called Catalogue of the Persian, Turkish, Hindustani and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library. A second part appeared in 1894. The original research for this had in large part been carried out by Professor Sachau of Berlin. In 1954 a third part entitled Additional Persian Manuscripts, was produced by Professor A.F.L. Beeston. The South-East Asian Islamic manuscripts in the Bodleian include twelve Malay, seventeen Javanese and seven Batak manuscripts. The first Malay manuscripts reached the Bodleian in 1635 and were presented by Archbishop Laud. The most important of these — and perhaps the oldest Malay manuscript in existence — is the *Hikayat Seri Rama*, written in Malay Jawi script. Although the story is based on the Hindu Ramayana, it has been given a strong Islamic Malay flavour, reflecting that curious blend of Islam and Hinduism so frequently found in South-East Asia. An interesting feature of this manuscript is that is it written on paper which appears to have originated in the Orient, and so suggests that there was already a developed Malay paper manuscript tradition before the arrival of European paper in the early seventeenth century. Another Malay-language manuscript bequeathed by Laud includes a letter dated AH 1024 (AD 1613) from Sultan Perkasa Alam of Aceh (in northern Sumatra) to King James I of England. Later Malay acquisitions to the Bodleian were copies of Dutch-Malay dictionaries, and letters from Sultan Alauddin Shah of Aceh sent to Queen Elizabeth I and to English merchants such as Sir Henry Middleton and Sir James Lancaster. These can be dated to the year AH 1011 (AD 1601/2), but they were not acquired by the Bodleian until 1834. The Javanese manuscripts include an early
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seventeenth-century palm-leaf manuscript copy of *Anging Darma* dated AH 1011 (AD 1602), as well as nineteenth-century copies of the Wayang Purwa tales, produced with coloured illustrations. The Batak manuscripts include copies written on round bamboo and cover subjects such as medicine, divination and major incantations. They date from the nineteenth century and were mainly acquired from auctions in The Netherlands. The South-East Asian Islamic manuscripts are listed in full in the Ricklefs and Voorhoeve catalogue *Indonesian Manuscripts in Great Britain*. There is also the 1910 catalogue by Greentree and Nicholson entitled *Catalogue of Malay Manuscripts and Manuscripts Relating to the Malay Language in the Bodleian Library*. This catalogue has been described as 'the best catalogue of Malay manuscripts ever'.

The Bodleian also has a collection of 9,500 Arabic printed books, 3,900 Persian printed books and 8,400 Turkish books.

Apart from those in the Bodleian, there are other smaller collections of Islamic manuscripts elsewhere in Oxford. The university is an important centre for Islamic studies in Britain, and this is reflected in the number of colleges and special research centres which have collections of manuscripts, books and journals on the Muslim world. Balliol College has six Arabic, three Persian and five Turkish manuscripts; Hertford College seven Persian manuscripts; All Souls College three Arabic and thirteen Persian manuscripts; St John's six Arabic and two Persian; and Wadham College three Arabic and two Persian. Most of these are copies of the Qur'ān. The Oriental Institute has a collection of over 12,000 books in all languages covering the Islamic lands. The Middle East Centre (part of St Antony's College) has a collection of 25,000 books and 450 periodicals dealing with the Arab countries in particular. Wadham College has a collection of 3,000 Persian books covering classical literary texts and the history of Iran up to 1905.

Cambridge

Oxford's traditional academic rival, the University of Cambridge, founded its Chair of Arabic in 1632. In that year, the Arabic scholar Abraham Wheelock (1593–1654) managed to persuade a city draper, Thomas Adams, to make an annual grant of £40 to establish a Chair of Arabic. In 1636 he agreed to fund the Chair in perpetuity. The university wrote to express its thanks, describing the study of Arabic at Cambridge as being 'to the good service of the King and State in our commerce with those Eastern nations'. This is the first ever acknowledgement to be found in the English language of the links between trade and the study of an Islamic language. Primarily, though, as at Oxford, the motivation for establishing Arabic studies at Cambridge lay in traditional scholarly interests, usually associated with the Protestant theological researches of the seventeenth century. Wheelock was succeeded at Cambridge by Edmund Castell, who held the Adams Professorship between 1667 and 1685. He was a noted Arabic lexicographer. His successor from 1685 to 1702 was John Luke, who before taking up his post had spent seven years in Smyrna as Chaplain to the Levant Company.

The first Islamic manuscripts to reach Cambridge University Library arrived in 1632, the same year as the Chair of Arabic was established. They had originally been collected by George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, in 1625–6 while he was on a visit to The Netherlands. Villiers had started his career as a favourite of King James I (1603–25), to whom he was affectionately known as 'Steenie'. Strong rumours at the time attributed the basis of their relationship to a homosexual infatuation on the King's part. Following James I's death in 1625 and the succession to the throne of his son Charles I (1625–49), Villiers was confirmed in his position as Minister of the King and set out on a visit to The Netherlands to try to pawn the English crown jewels for the bankrupt Stuart monarch. While there he took the opportunity of purchasing the library of the Dutch orientalist, Thomas Erpenius, which had recently come up for auction. Erpenius, who held the Chair of Arabic at Leiden University between 1613 and 1624, has been described as the father of Arabic studies in The Netherlands, and in Protestant Europe. It was a coup for Villiers to acquire his library, a loss felt keenly by Leiden University. Villiers was at this time Chancellor of Cambridge University and it was his intention to present the collection to the university. In 1628, however, before he had had time to fulfil his pledge, he was assassinated. It took four years and much petitioning by his widow before the manuscripts eventually reached Cambridge. The 85 manuscripts included texts in Arabic, Persian and Turkish, as well as single manuscripts in Malay and Javanese. In 1655, a collection of 20 manuscripts (mainly Arabic and Turkish) was presented by Nicholas Hobart. These included three manuscripts of the *Khībat al-Maʿārif*. Hobart had ordered them while he was in residence in Istanbul.

At this point, however, Islamic manuscript collecting at Cambridge seems to have faltered, and in the eighteenth century there were scarcely any new acquisitions by the university library apart from a collection of Persian manuscripts bequeathed by George Lewis, Archdeacon of Meath, in 1727. There seems to have been no consistent policy with regard to the types of manuscript to be collected, and the Cambridge orientalist Ockley, while working on his *History of the Saracens*, the first definitive study in English of Muslim history, actually had to go to Oxford to use manuscript sources there as he found so few at Cambridge. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the university possessed 166 Arabic, 78 Turkish and 114 Persian manuscripts. Cataloguing of the manuscripts was equally perfunctory and carried out in a random and unsystematic way. An eighteenth-century listing of some of the Islamic manuscripts has such descriptions as 'Thin, perhaps Turkish'. The early promise which Cambridge had displayed in Islamic studies was not fulfilled in the eighteenth century.

In the nineteenth century, however, the situation began to improve. The year 1819 marked a turning point. Johan Ludwig Burckhardt, who had studied medicine at Cambridge, bequeathed his outstanding collection of 300
Arabic manuscripts to the university. Burckhardt was one of the great explorers of the Arabian peninsula, author of *Travels in Arabia* (1829) and *Notes on the Bedouins and Wahhabys* (1830). He was by origin Swiss, but after studying in England he decided to place his services at the disposal of the African Association. The Association at this stage was anxiously seeking to identify the course of the River Niger, an essential step in establishing British influence in West Africa. Burckhardt decided that in order to find for himself his explorations to discover the Niger, he needed to study Arabic and immerse himself in Muslim customs and traditions. In doing this, it may be that he was thinking in terms of the strong hold that Arab merchants from North Africa had over the trade routes across the Sahara and into West Africa. He first went to Aleppo in Syria, took the name Ibrahim Ibn Abdullah, and plunged into a study of both Arabic language and Arabic literature. From Aleppo he made several journeys around the Levant, most notably to southern Jordan, where he was the first European to explore the lost Nabatean city of Petra, a discovery which astonished the Western world. In 1814 he travelled to Cairo, and then for the next two years travelled throughout Arabia, visiting Jeddah, Taif, Makkah and Medina. But his health was rapidly deteriorating. In 1816, while back in Cairo, and preparing himself at last to leave for West Africa, he died. His two books on Arabia and the nomadic tribes of the interior were published almost fifteen years after his death, and remain today among the most outstanding examples of literature on the Middle East. Burckhardt's manuscripts were collected during his travels in Syria, Egypt and Arabia, and were bequeathed in their entirety to the University of Cambridge along with his papers, letters and notebooks. It is probably the single most important Arabic manuscript collection held by the university today. Approximately 100 of the manuscripts in the collection deal with historical and geographical subjects.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Islamic manuscripts continued to reach the library from different sources, often bequeathed by officials of the East India Company or, later on, by the imperial governors who had been educated in Cambridge. Such a collection was that received in 1867-8 from R. E. Lofft. This mainly consisted of Persian manuscripts acquired by his father in India. In 1870, 100 volumes of Islamic manuscripts which had belonged to Professor H. G. Williams, who had been the Sir Thomas Adams Professor of Arabic between 1854 and 1870, were received by the university.

In 1926, the university was enriched by the important collection of 468 Persian and Arabic manuscripts which had belonged to Professor E. G. Browne, who had been Sir Thomas Adams Professor of Arabic. Browne's lasting fame, however, rests on his contributions to Persian studies. He is possibly the greatest Persian scholar whom Britain has ever produced. His death in 1926 was the occasion for a national day of mourning in Persia, officially sanctioned by the Persian government. Browne, however, was more than an academic. He was a traveller and an explorer, both in a geographical and metaphysical sense. He felt at home in Persia. He loved the country, the cul-
scripts have been acquired, bringing the total figure up to 2,652. Some of these are in Malay, Punjabi and other Islamic languages.60

There are 96 Malay manuscripts in the university’s library’s collections, mainly acquired by Richard James Wilkinson (1867–1941). Wilkinson is regarded as one of Britain’s most famous Malay scholars. He began his career in 1889 as a Straits Settlements cadet, and eventually went on to become Colonial Secretary in Singapore (1911–16). One of his most valuable publications was a Malay–English dictionary, published in 1932. In 1900 and again in 1910 while he was still in Malaya, he donated his Malay manuscripts to the University of Cambridge. Most of the manuscripts were produced in Malaya or Singapore in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and are described in detail in the Ricklefs and Voorhoeve catalogue Indonesian Manuscripts in Great Britain. The Dutch scholar, Dr Ph. S. van Ronkel, has also done a great deal of research on the Malay manuscripts in the University of Cambridge’s collections, and has produced several valuable articles in Dutch-language journals. Indian Islamic-language manuscripts in the University’s collections are particularly strong as a result of a collection originally acquired by King’s College library and now perpetually deposited in the University library. This collection, built up by an East India Company official, Edward Ephraim Pote, in the eighteenth century, includes over 200 Urdu manuscripts, many of them dating back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Pote’s collection of manuscripts was originally divided between King’s College and Eton College, and was reunited in the University library in 1970. The collection at King’s was first catalogued by E. H. Palmer in 1867 in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, and the Eton College collection was catalogued by D. S. Margoliouth in 1934.

The college libraries possess much smaller collections of Islamic manuscripts. The largest independent collections are those of Trinity College (89 Persian, Arabic and Turkish manuscripts), St John’s (39 Arabic and Persian), Christ’s College (70 Arabic, Persian and Turkish). The 254 manuscripts held originally by Corpus Christi College are now on permanent deposit to the central University Library. These were mainly collected in Lucknow, India, by Colonel Honoré, and are primarily Persian manuscripts of the Mughal period.

Cambridge University, like Oxford, also has a number of important centres specializing in the study of the Islamic world. The two most important are the Oriental Faculty, with over 12,000 books, including works which once belonged to Professors Browne and Arberry, and the Middle East Centre, with about 5,000 titles. This latter Centre is designated as specialist collection library for books and journals about the Arabian peninsula.

By far the largest collection of printed books in Islamic languages, however, is to be found at the central University Library, and dates back to the seventeenth century. Eighteenth-century collections of printed material are particularly strong.

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Birmingham: The Selby Oak Colleges

Birmingham is England’s second largest city, centre for much of the heavy engineering and industry that made the country a leading industrial power in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is now also one of the areas where Muslim immigrants from the Indian subcontinent have settled in relatively large numbers. It is therefore appropriate that it should be home to the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, established in 1975 at the Selby Oak Colleges.

The federation of colleges which bears the name Selby Oak — from the district of Birmingham in which most of them are located — was established in the nineteenth century, originally with Quaker financing. The Quaker religious community was particularly strong in Birmingham as many important industrialists were Quakers, most notably the Cadbury family, famous for their chocolate making. The Quakers, founded in the mid-seventeenth century by George Fox, have long emphasized education, self-improvement and religious toleration as cardinal virtues, and it was therefore not surprising that Quaker money should eventually be found to support the development of Islamic studies in one of the great centres of Quaker learning and scholarship, Woodbrooke College.

The interest of the Selby Oak Colleges in Islam dates back to 1913, with the arrival at Woodbrooke College, Birmingham, of Dr Alphonse Mingana. Mingana, who is largely responsible for the collection of Islamic manuscripts in the Selby Oak Colleges, was born in 1881 in Syria, and brought up in the Chaldean Christian Community. Religious persecution forced him to flee abroad, and he settled in England, where he became a noted Syrian scholar, and a close friend of Woodbrooke’s Director of Studies, Rendal Harris, a famous biblical scholar.61 In 1915 Mingana moved to Manchester, where he became curator of the collection of Arabic manuscripts at the John Rylands Library, and lecturer in Arabic. His association with Woodbrooke College continued, however, and in the 1920s, with encouragement and financial support from Edward Cadbury (a member of the chocolate manufacturing family), he travelled to Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Sinai in search of Arabic manuscripts (both Christian and Islamic). In 1932, Mingana left Manchester, and took up the position of curator of Arabic and Syriac manuscripts at the Selby Oak Colleges, a post he held until his death in 1937. Mingana’s great interest was in the whole area of Christian-Muslim relations, and he genuinely sought for ways in which this dialogue between the two faiths could be strengthened and deepened. The manuscripts which he collected reflect this interest. He acquired many of his Islamic manuscripts through a unique network based on his numerous church contacts in the Middle East with people such as the Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church and the abbots of the Egyptian desert monasteries.

Mingana’s collection of Islamic manuscripts numbers about 2,000 altogether, and includes works on mysticism, law, astronomy, history,