Denmark

[His Royal Majesty] requests and requires that all manuscripts acquired during the journey to Arabia are sent to the Royal Library in Copenhagen.

Instruction
Royal Instructions for the Expedition to Arabia, Copenhagen 1760

Denmark’s association with the Islamic world is one that stretches back to the seventeenth century. During the reign of Frederick III (1648–70) the scholar Theodor Petraeus was sent by the Danish crown on an expedition to the East, returning with Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts. In 1616 the Danish East Asiatic Company — Det Ostasiatisk Kompani — was founded in order to trade with the Indies. A settlement was established at Tranquebar, south of Madras, in India, and would remain under Danish control until 1845. Trading stations were also created in West Africa, the most famous being Christiansborg on the Guinea coast. Although Danish commercial links with Africa and the East would never rival those of other European countries such as England or Holland, the Ostasiatiske Kompagni did establish for itself, particularly in the eighteenth century, a solid and prosperous overseas trading network which brought Denmark into direct contact with Muslim empires such as those of Mughal India and Safavid Persia. But it was to be King Frederick V (1746–66) who would create for Denmark a unique role in the development of links between Western Europe and the Muslim world. In 1761, under the direct patronage of the King, the most brilliant intellectual and scientific expedition ever assembled to that date by a European monarch for the study of an Arab country set out from Copenhagen. The south-west corner of the Arabian peninsula — fabled Yemen, the land of the Queen of Sheba — was the destination of the expedition. Among the team members were the famous Danish philologist, H. C. von Haven, the Swedish botanist, Pehr Forsskal, and the Frisian mathematician, Carsten Niebuhr. This expedition — about which more will be said later in the chapter — was an outstanding example of the ideas of the Enlightenment reaching out to the Muslim East.

King Frederick’s team of scholars were the direct precursors of other European intellectual initiatives to try to understand countries and cultures outside the European orbit. The Danish expedition was followed by the founding of the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences in Java in 1778, the Asiatic Society in Bengal in 1783, and Napoleon’s Institute of Egypt in 1798. Thus, as a result of the 1761–6 expedition, Denmark established for itself an important role in the developing relationship between the European and Islamic worlds. The manuscripts collected by von Haven helped turn Copenhagen into a leading centre for scholarship and study relating to the Muslim East. Throughout the nineteenth century, scholars of Islamic languages and literatures, including famous names such as Hammer-Purgstall, were in direct correspondence with Copenhagen about the collections of Islamic manuscripts held in Danish libraries. These collections were augmented by the bequests of travellers such as those made by Rasmus Rask in 1833 and C. T. Falbe in 1849.

In the twentieth century, Denmark’s interests in the Muslim East continued with the expeditions of Professor Arthur Christianesen to Persia in search of Islamic manuscripts.

The Royal Library, Copenhagen

The Royal Library in Copenhagen — Det Kongelige Bibliotek — is the principal repository of Islamic manuscripts in Denmark, and reflects the royal patronage of Islamic studies that was such a feature of Danish expeditions to the East. The Library was founded during the reign of King Frederick III in 1653, and has now developed into the largest library in Denmark, incorporating important national collections.

The Library’s Oriental Department has about 1,000 Islamic manuscripts, almost all of them in the three major languages of the Muslim world — Arabic, Persian and Turkish. It is estimated that there are 500 Arabic, 400 Persian and 100 Turkish or mixed Arabic/Persian/Turkish texts in the library.

It is not known when the first Islamic manuscripts reached the Royal Library, but it is thought to have been around the same time as the establishment of the Library. Although King Frederick had sponsored the expedition of the scholar Theodor Petraeus to Turkey and the Levant, the Arabic and Persian manuscripts which Petraeus brought back with him did not in fact end up in the Danish monarch’s collections. The majority of them were sold, on Petraeus’s death in 1682, to the Elector of Brandenburg, and were eventually incorporated into the Royal Library in Berlin. However, two of Petraeus’s manuscripts — both of them copies of the Qur’an — were sent to King Frederick, and are now to be found in the Royal Library.

Acquisitions throughout the rest of the seventeenth century and into the early eighteenth century were haphazard. In 1732 the Royal Library purchased — through auction — a further batch of Petraeus’s manuscripts. It was not until the middle years of the eighteenth century, however, that a serious attempt was made to develop a collection of Islamic manuscripts which would rival those being built up in other European countries. In 1746, King Frederick V had succeeded to the throne of Denmark. Frederick was the epitome of the
cultured, enlightened monarch. He chose as his Chief Ministers two men, Adam Gottlob Moltke (1709-92) and Johan Hartrig Bernstorff (1712-72), who were noted for their cosmopolitan and liberal approach to politics, arts and sciences. In 1756, J.D. Michaelis (1717-91), Professor of Oriental Languages at Göttingen University, wrote to Bernstorff and asked him whether he would approach Frederick V and interest him in the idea of a scientific expedition to Yemen in southern Arabia. Originally, Michaelis had in mind a relatively modest venture, but the idea caught the imagination of the Danish court. Both Moltke and Bernstorff were fired with enthusiasm, and the King as well saw great potential in an expedition to the Muslim world which would bring credit to the ideas of the Enlightenment, then so fashionable in Europe.

Frederick put aside personal funds for the planning and implementation of the project. A committee was established of Denmark’s leading scientists. Professor Michaelis was also called upon to help prepare background materials for the expedition. It was decided to send out a team of four scientists and an artist. A great search, taking four years, began for suitable people to make up this team. The five men eventually selected were chosen for different skills and strengths. The Dane, F.C. von Haven (1727-63), was a philologist and ethnologist who had studied Arabic under Michaelis in Göttingen. The Swede, Peter Forskål (1732-63), was a botanist and zoologist, and a student of the famous Swedish naturalist, Carl Linne. The Frisian, Carsten Niebuhr (1733-1815), was a mathematician and an astronomer. A Danish doctor, Christian C. Kramer (1732-63), was also attached to the expedition, as was a copperplate engraver, G.W. Baurefeind (1728-63). The team, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, was seen as an assembly of equals, and no leader was appointed. This was to have disastrous consequences. Von Haven saw himself as the natural leader by virtue of his age and Danish nationality. This aroused the resentment of other members of the expedition, particularly Forskål. Rifts opened up between the men, and the resentments would surface with a vengeance once the team had left Copenhagen.

A detailed list of 43 instructions was issued to the expedition. These were drawn up by a committee of scientists assisted by Christian Kalls, Professor of Oriental Languages and Literature at Copenhagen University, and issued under the signature of the King. Instruction 11 gave details on how the team should obtain Islamic manuscripts, and in particular which ones to obtain. Kalls recommended that manuscripts of the Qur’an should not be sought, as these were usually not offered to non-Muslims. The expedition instead should concentrate on texts covering subjects such as the Hadith and traditions, and also dictionaries. In instruction 11, it was also expressly stated that philology, physics and mathematics manuscripts should be collected. The other instructions gave detailed guidelines on the scientific aspects of the expedition, and on the botany, zoology and geology of Yemen, as well as on architecture, archaeology and social matters. There had never been a mission like it. It was a triumph for the principles of scientific enlightenment and was launched with no commercial or military aims in mind. Denmark had created for itself a unique position in the developing relationship between the European and Muslim worlds.

In January 1761, the expedition set sail from Helsingør in the Danish warship Greenlund. Violent storms forced the ship back to port three times before it finally managed to clear a passage into the open sea. It was an omen of the personal storms to come. The first call was Istanbul, which was reached on 30 July 1761. Here the team were guests of the Danish Consul, V.S. von Gahler (1706-88). Von Haven spent the next two months scouring the city for Arabic and Turkish manuscripts, in accordance with the royal instructions. He was a discriminating buyer. He did not accept the first manuscripts that were offered him, but spent considerable time selecting texts which he felt were of real value in the subjects that had been designated in the 43 instructions.

In order to make sure that he did acquire the best manuscripts, von Haven decided that he would study the Aleppo dialect of Arabic. He took as his teacher an old Turk, Mr Baruth, who had once worked in the manuscript collection at the Royal Library in Paris. Baruth, however, turned out to be a far from perfect teacher. Von Haven wrote that he failed to learn much Arabic from Baruth, who, it transpired, had little interest in either Arabic language or Arabic culture. However, he did have a library rich in Turkish, Persian and Arabic manuscripts, and von Haven managed to persuade him to part with a number of valuable items, including a copy of Ibn Khallikan’s biographical dictionary, al-Wafiyah.

On his forays into Istanbul in search of manuscripts, von Haven also had a number of adventures. One day, while in a bookshop, he was surrounded by a crowd of Turks who were angry because he would not buy an Arabic grammar text which he already had a copy of and so was not interested in. When he tried to leave the bookshop, he was prevented. The crowd grew larger and angrier. Mr Baruth who was accompanying him took fright and ran off. It was only the swift arrival of von Gahler’s guards that prevented matters getting out of hand. Subsequently, von Haven arranged for the booksellers to send the manuscripts they had for sale round to the Danish Legation for him to inspect. He obviously felt that this was a safer option than tangling with irate Turks in the side-streets of Istanbul.

Von Haven collected 36 manuscripts while in Istanbul, mainly on philology, grammar and poetry. He probably would have bought more, but time was pressing and the other members of the expedition were anxious to travel on to Cairo, their next port of call.

The manuscripts were dispatched to the Royal Library in Copenhagen. Among the texts sent back was a 1337 copy of the Kitāb al-Hamāsah (a poetry book) by Abū Tammām Habīb Ibn Aws al-Tāt, a 1303 illuminated copy of an Arabic lexicon, Kitāb al-Silāḥ by Abū Nasr al-Jauharī, a 1430 copy of a history manuscript by Abū-l-Walid al-Hanafi entitled Kitāb Rawdat al-munāẓir filīm al-Awālī wa-l-Awdhīr, and a 1229 geographical lexicon by Abū
Abdul Allâh called Mudjam al-Buldân. Many of the other manuscripts date from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.

On 8 September 1761 the team left Istanbul on board a Turkish merchant ship, which was mainly carrying female slaves to the markets of Alexandria and Cairo. They had exchanged their European clothes for more appropriate Arab robes. Already, however, the tensions between them were threatening to destroy the expedition before it had properly got under way. On 21 September, Forskal, Niebuhr and Baurenfeind sent a letter from Rhodes to von Gahler, in which they accused von Haven of planning to kill them. This extraordinary accusation reflects the degree of suspicion that existed between von Haven and the rest of the team. The origins of this accusation lay in a request, for two packs of arsenic, which von Haven had passed to Dr Kramer, while they were in Istanbul. When Dr Kramer had handed over the packs to von Haven, he claimed the latter had muttered strange and sinister threats against Forskal. It would seem that Kramer — who was von Haven’s main friend in the early part of the journey — felt isolated from the rest of the group and in order to ingratiate himself with Forskal passed over information which he felt might lead Forskal and Niebuhr to consider him a trusted friend. Kramer’s reports on von Haven may have contained a basis of truth, in that von Haven did purchase packs of arsenic and was known not to like Forskal, but the rest was based on pure conjecture, inflated by suspicion and mistrust.

On 27 September, the expedition reached Alexandria, where it was accommodated by the Danish consul, Von Haven and Kramer had their own rooms, while the others shared. This led to further friction between the team members, particularly as at one point Niebuhr ended up sleeping in the car port. Their time in Alexandria was spent touring the archaeological sites in the city — Pompey’s column, the catacombs and Cleopatra’s baths. Von Haven decided that he would not purchase any manuscripts in Alexandria, as he felt that Cairo would be a more profitable centre for the sort of texts that they were looking for. However, he was far from idle. As the historian of the team, he spent a lot of his time recording in great detail the monuments that they saw.

On 31 October the expedition left for Cairo, which they reached on 10 November. The accommodation arranged for them was below standard, and alternative rooms were quickly arranged. Von Haven went to stay with the French consul and Dr Kramer with the Dutch consul, while Baurenfeind found lodgings with the Franciscans. However, Forskal and Niebuhr decided they would stay in their original accommodation. The bitterness and hatred between von Haven and the other team members now reached a new peak. Von Haven found himself isolated and ostracized, and any suggestions he made were brushed aside by Forskal. The latter continued to send letters to von Gahler in Istanbul urging the removal of the Danish philologist. Von Haven confided in his diary in December 1761: ‘I have overlooked all Forskal’s impertinence towards me, his foolish and aggressive behaviour.'

Carsten Niebuhr’s sympathies, however, were clearly with Forskal. Niebuhr disliked von Haven’s expansive and patronizing manner, and the way he tried to assume leadership of the expedition. In Denmark there was considerable alarm and unease at the accusations being made by Forskal, and at the bitter divisions within the team itself. Eventually, on 9 February 1762, Bernstorff replied to the Danish consul, von Gahler, saying that von Haven would remain as part of the expedition and that King Frederick would be extremely displeased if the leading Danish scholar was to be removed. This message was conveyed — in separate letters — to each member of the expedition.

Von Haven himself seems to have been unaware of the damning correspondence about about him which was being sent back to von Gahler. He made no reference to the personal rivalries and difficulties he was experiencing in any of the letters which he himself sent to the Danish Consul. It seems he regarded these matters as concerning only the team members. He was also busy collecting Arabic manuscripts, and was lost in a world of old folios and classical Arabic poetry. He did not have the time to luxuriate in the bitter introspection that consumed Forskal and even Niebuhr.

He was busy recording in his journal all aspects of Egyptian life — wedding ceremonies, pilgrimages, slave markets and the position of women in Muslim society. He went to inspect ancient Egyptian mummies, and toured the pyramids. It would seem that he was contemplating writing, on his return to Denmark, a major work on the Muslim world, perhaps akin to Norden’s Travels in Egypt and Nubia, published in Copenhagen in 1755. That hope was never to be fulfilled. Von Haven, Niebuhr and Forskal purchased 78 Arabic and Persian manuscripts in Cairo, which they sent back to Copenhagen before the expedition’s departure to Yemen on 9 October 1762.

The majority of the Cairo texts date from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, though there are several from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, including a 1374 copy of a historical work by Abi Hadjala, a 1385 Divan by Shems al-Din al-Khatatbî, a 1138 Divan by Al-Andalusî and a 1124 Divan by Ibn al-Khayyat al-Dimishqi. The manuscripts cover subjects such as geography, poetry, biography, history and grammar. Medical and scientific texts were collected by Niebuhr and Forskal. These included a 1684 copy of a medical manuscript entitled Risâlat al-masulî al-shihabiyah fi-sinah al-tibbiyah by an anonymous author, a pharmacology text by Ibn al Baytâr entitled Kitâb al-Tibb and a 1730 copy of an early-fifteenth-century zoology manuscript by Muhammad al-Damiri called Hayat al-hayawanî. Along the way Niebuhr also collected a Druze catechism, which was dispatched with the rest of the manuscripts to Copenhagen in 1762. Von Haven also bought some early examples of Turkish printed books. These were also sent back to Copenhagen.

It was clearly von Haven’s intention to continue collecting manuscripts once the expedition reached Yemen. In the great mosque libraries of San‘a’ he
would have had unrivalled access to copies of the most famous texts in the
Muslim world. He would have doubtless sent a valuable collection back to
Copenhagen. But on 25 May 1763, seven months after the team's arrival in
Yemen, von Haven died from a fatal combination of malaria and pneumonia.
He had spent the last months of his life trapped on the coastal plain of the
Tihama, a part of Yemen which even to this day is notorious for the
prevalence of cerebral malaria. Less than two months later, on 11 July 1763,
Forskal himself died of malaria in the highlands of Yemen between Taiz and
Sanaa. He was perhaps the most gifted man on the entire expedition. The
Swedish scientist Linne mourned Forskal's death with the words: 'Science has
lost more than one can possibly say.'

In the nine months that he spent in Yemen, Forskal assiduously studied the
botany and biology of southern Arabia. His great triumph was to discover the
balsam tree of Makkah, a plant so rare that no one in Europe had even seen a

cutting.

The deaths of von Haven and Forskal were too much for the expedition to
sustain. After a brief stop in Sanaa, the remaining members made their way
back to the coast and on 21 August 1763 found passage on an English
merchant ship sailing for India. But death had not finished with them yet. On
29 August Baurenfeind died, followed on 10 February 1764 by Dr Kramer.
Alone, Carsten Niebuhr survived, making his way back to Copenhagen, which
he reached after many adventures in November 1767, almost seven years after
the expedition had departed. But it was a changed Denmark that awaited him.
King Frederick had died the year before, and von Bernstorff had been forced
out of office. There was no longer any real appreciation of what the expedition
had been about. Niebuhr sought an audience with the King, attempted
(unsuccesfully) to edit Forskal's papers, and wrote an account of the expedti-
on, entitled Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien, which was first published in
1772. Then, as if overcome by the oppression of all that he had endured, he
drifted away into provincial obscurity and peace, where he died over forty
years later, on 26 April 1815, still dreaming of 'the Asian night with its myriad
of stars.'

In Denmark, there was no enthusiasm for continuing the work which the
expedition had begun. But its achievements had not passed unnoticed in
other countries, and would be one of the inspirations behind other learned
expeditions to the East, particularly that sent by Napoleon to Egypt.

The manuscripts collected by von Haven and Niebuhr in Turkey and Egypt
between 1761 and 1762 established the Royal Library in Copenhagen as an
important centre for the study of Islamic texts. The scholar J. G. C. Adler used
the collection to work on his translations of the Druze catechism, and listed
thirty-four of the manuscripts as being of great importance for oriental
studies. No catalogue of the collection was produced, however, apart from the
brief handwritten notes which von Haven had sent on from Cairo in
Istanbul. A full catalogue would have to wait until the nineteenth century.

In 1785, the collections built up by Dr Johan Peter Flor reached the Royal

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Flor was in the service of the Danish East Asia Company, in
Transquebar, south of Madras, between 1761 and 1763. He assembled a collec-
tion of 258 Arabic and Persian manuscripts, among them many dealing with
historical and medical subjects. Transquebar was not Denmark's principal
trading post in India — this position was held by Serampore near Calcutta —
but it was the oldest Danish presence in the East, having been established in
1620. It established a scholarly reputation for itself by being one of the first
European settlements in the East to have a printing press.

In the late eighteenth century, 76 manuscripts (mainly Arabic, Persian and
Turkish) which had once belonged to the traveller Georg Høst reached the
Royal Library. Host had travelled in the Levant between 1760 and 1768
collecting texts for his researches on Morocco, and in particular Fez.

In the early nineteenth century, Professor D. G. Moldenhaven bequeathed
his collection of ten Arabic manuscripts to the Royal Library. He had bought
these at an auction in London in 1783, and they were passed over to the Royal
Library on his death in 1824. Moldenhaven was a keen advocate for a museum
to be opened so that the public should have a chance to see some of the rare
manuscripts held by the library. He was particularly struck by the fine illustra-
tive work in some of the manuscripts, and felt that it was a pity that the general
public had no access to them. Unfortunately, his plans for the museum did
not come to fruition. In 1830, Councillor of State J. H. Mundt presented the
Royal Library with several Arabic and Persian manuscripts collected by his
brother, Christopher Mundt, a regimental surgeon in one of the Danish
settlements in India.

Sometime between 1820 and 1850, a very interesting collection of Arabic
follies reached Copenhagen. These arrived from the Danish settlement of
Christiansborg on the Guinea coast. Denmark's connections with West Africa
stretch back to the early eighteenth century, and were to last well into the
nineteenth. In 1763, Romer, the Danish factor at Christiansborg, noted in his
report to the Company headquarters in Copenhagen: 'We have received many
Arabic books at Accra, which the Ashantis had plundered.'

The Ashantis were in close contact with the Danish traders on the coast, and
it is likely that the Arabic manuscripts were handed over as part of a barter
agreement, in return for commercial goods required by the Ashantis.
However, it seems unlikely that the manuscripts referred to by Romer in his
1763 report have in fact survived. In the early years of the nineteenth century,
the Danish Governor in Guinea, Schionning, fearing an inquiry into certain
suspicious aspects of his financial administration, had destroyed all the books
and records in his office.

It is thought that Romer's Arabic manuscripts were among the items
destroyed. Most of the folios preserved in the Royal Library date from the
early nineteenth century and appear to have originated from Kumasi, the
Ashanti capital in northern Ghana. The great majority of the folios are magic
formulas and personal letters, such as letters sent to or from the Ashanti
king. They give a fascinating insight into the traditions and customs of West
African Islam as practised in the hinterland of Ghana.

By the middle years of the nineteenth century, the lack of an effective catalogue was becoming something of an embarrassment. The oriental collections were growing in both number and importance. Apart from Islamic manuscripts, valuable collections of Buddhist and Sanskrit texts were also being built up, as a result of Denmark’s trading links with India. These included the manuscripts of Rasmus Rask, bequeathed in 1833. It was clear that something would have to be done to improve on the rather haphazard lists and registers that covered many of the language groupings. Professor J. L. Rasmussen had produced a catalogue of the Arabic and Persian texts held by the library, but it was by no means complete.

The Royal Librarian, Werlauff, approached the King, Frederick VI, for help in launching this major project. He had in mind two famous Danish oriental scholars, Professor Johansen and J. C. Lindberg, whom he felt sure would be able to carry out the task. Johansen was a scholar in Indian and Persian, and Lindberg in Arabic. Werlauff, in his appeal to the King, wrote that such a catalogue ‘would be received with applause by the intellectual community’:

The collection of oriental manuscripts here in the Royal Library is one of the most important in Europe. I do not need to draw your Highness’s attention to the honour that this [catalogue] would bring to our country in spreading light on this branch of science which all Europe is now interested in.16

On 25 November 1837, Frederick VI decided to give his support to the project. It was yet another example of the strong links between royal patronage and the encouragement of Islamic studies that so characterize Denmark’s relations with the Muslim world. Work began on the project almost immediately, with Professor Johansen turning his attention to the Arabic and Persian manuscripts. In 1840 he died after two years of exhaustive work. He left behind him an almost complete text for an Arabic and Persian catalogue of manuscripts. In 1844, the Indian scholar H. L. Westergaard returned from his travels in India, and at the request of the Royal Library began work on the Indian manuscripts in the collection. The Indian section of the catalogue was published first, and includes several manuscripts in Indian Muslim languages.

It was planned that all the oriental manuscripts held by the Royal Library would appear in a series called Codices orientales Bibliothecae Regiae Hafniensis jussu et auspiciis Regis Daniae augustissimi Christiani Octavi enumerati et descripti. (Frederick VI had died by the time the project got underway, and Christian VIII now sat on the throne.) The war between Denmark and Prussia (1848–50) delayed progress on the completion of series, but in 1851 the Arabic manuscripts catalogue appeared.

The manuscripts listed included those which had previously been held by the university library, and which had passed over to the Royal Library in 1845.

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The Arabic catalogue was based upon the work of both Rasmussen and Johansen. Altogether 309 Arabic manuscripts were listed in the 1851 catalogue. Many, as we have seen, originated from the 1761 Danish expedition to Egypt and Turkey, and others came from such sources as Dr Flor of Tranquebar.

In 1857, the catalogue of the Persian, Turkish and Hindustani manuscripts was published. This was compiled by Professor A. F. Mehren, who was at that time a lecturer in Semitic languages at the University of Copenhagen. One hundred and forty-three Persian, as well as two Malay texts, were listed. Many of the Persian manuscripts, largely collected by Dr Flor, date from sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, and are copies of much older texts. The 24 Turkish manuscripts include texts on religion, medicine and natural history, history, literature, poetry and astrology.

Overall, the three parts that together constitute the oriental catalogue are an impressive tribute to Denmark’s attempts to inform the world about its collections of Islamic and Indian manuscripts, and still today form the basis of the Royal Library’s oriental manuscript catalogues.

Although there continued to be sporadic acquisitions of Islamic manuscripts throughout the nineteenth century, it was not until the twentieth century that the Royal Library made its next major acquisition. This was the 56 Persian manuscripts which Professor Arthur Christiansen acquired on his journey to Persia in 1913.17 Christiansen set out on his expedition to Persia at the request of the Royal Library, as it was keen to improve its collections of Persian Islamic texts. A grant for the trip was obtained from the Carlsberg Foundation. Most of the manuscripts brought back date from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, though some originate from the seventeenth century. The subjects covered are mainly religious and literary. But the outstanding feature of Christiansen’s collection is the high quality of the book bindings. There are some fine lacquer covers with gilt decoration. Many of the manuscripts are illuminated with arabesque design, and there is a generous use of gold and other colours. Following the revolution of 1907, many Persian manuscripts vanished into private collections abroad, and Christiansen was therefore fortunate in being able to acquire so many fine texts, which were representative of the Persian manuscript tradition in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

After the First World War, the Royal Library bought Islamic manuscripts mainly from specialist dealers, such as Markert and Petters in Leipzig. Twenty Arabic, four Persian, five Javanese and a single Turkish manuscript were acquired in this way.

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In 1937, a collection of 21 Arabic, ten Persian and three Turkish manuscripts, which had belonged to the Chief Rabbi of Denmark, Professor David Simonsen, were bought for the Royal Library with support from the Carlsberg Foundation. Simonsen was an avid book and manuscript collector, and during his travels around Europe and the Middle East had acquired items that interested him.19
Other Centres

Denmark’s connections with the Islamic world continue to this day. Apart from the Royal Library — which remains the most important centre in Denmark for collections of Islamic manuscripts — there are several other centres specializing in Islamic and oriental studies. The Scandinavian Institute for Asian Studies has its headquarters in Copenhagen. The University of Copenhagen has a Department of Oriental Philology, as well as an Institute for Persian and Semitic Philology. There is also an Institute of East Asian Studies located within the university.

To this day, Denmark continues to display an interest and commitment to the study of the Muslim world, which reflects positively on that most extraordinary episode in its long relationship with the Islamic East, the Danish expedition of 1761–2 to the distant lands of the Imam of Yemen. The collection of manuscripts which von Have sent back to the Royal Library in Copenhagen has proved to be the foundation stone of one of Northern Europe’s most interesting and highly regarded collections.

References

4 Ibid.
8 Ibid. pp. 91–2.
9 Ibid. p. 20.
11 Letter describing death of Carsten Niebuhr, written by his son, dated April 1815.