France

In order to satisfy my passion for furnishing my library with original books, please purchase any rare and valuable manuscripts which you can identify in whatever language they might be.

Letter from Cardinal Mazarin in 1643 to Jean de la Haye, the French Ambassador at the Ottoman Court

France and the Muslim world were destined to have a close relationship from the early years of Islam. In 711, Arab armies under Tariq ibn Ziyad landed in southern Spain, and by 719 had crossed the Pyrenees and established their first settlements in France, mainly in the south-east around Narbonne. For a few brief years, it seemed as though the Arabs would repeat the success they had enjoyed in Spain and occupy most of France. In 725 Carcassonne and Nîmes were conquered. Arab armies began moving up the valley of the Rhône. In 732, the Governor of Spain, Abd-ar-Rahmân al-Ghâfirî, occupied Bordeaux, and prepared to march north to seize the Frankish towns of Tours and Poitiers. This, however, was to be the high-water mark of Arab power in France. In October 732, midway between Tours and Poitiers, Abd-ar-Rahmân and his army were defeated by the Prince of the Franks, Charles Martel (688–741). This battle — known to future generations in Muslim Spain as ‘The Pavement of the Martyrs’ — was a severe setback for Arab expansionism in France. Although Arab armies succeeded in occupying Arles and Avignon in 744, the Franks had demonstrated their ability to resist, and the fervor that had carried the Arabs through Spain between 711 and 719 could no longer be sustained. In 738, Charles Martel drove the Arabs out of the valley of the Rhône. Thereafter the Frankish Christian advance was inexorable, and all the major towns which had fallen into Arab hands were recovered. In 759 Narbonne, the first bastion of Arab rule in France, was lost to the Franks. This effectively marked the end of a Muslim presence in France, an era which had lasted just forty years. For various reasons — a combination of economic and strategic factors — the Arabs never again succeeded in occupying even the south-eastern part of France. The Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne (771–814) in fact carried the struggle across the Pyrenees into Spain. In 778 he mounted an expedition against Zaragoza which, however, was unsuccessful. His retreat through the mountains ended in defeat for his rearguard at Roncesvalles, and inspired the famous epic poem Le Chanson de Roland.

801, Charlemagne returned, seizing Barcelona. An uneasy truce settled over the frontier areas between the Arabs and the Franks. Attempts by Arab armies to recapture Narbonne in 793 and 814 produced no results.

In the two centuries following this early encounter, trade and scholarly contact were the characteristics of the relationship between the Frankish kingdoms and the Arab principalities. Even at the height of the caliphate of Cordoba during the reign of Abd-ar-Rahmân III (912–61), no attempt was made to march north across the Pyrenees. Scholars from towns and cities in France travelled instead to Cordoba, Toledo and Seville to study in the libraries and universities of Moorish Spain. This was the era of which it has been said that ‘if the North wanted the best in science, medicine, agriculture, industry or civilised living it must go to Spain to learn’.

However, these were also the centuries that witnessed the great struggle between Christians and Muslims in Spain, a struggle which was to involve Frenchmen from north of the Pyrenees and prefigure their later role in the Crusades in recovering Palestine for Christendom. In Spain, Frenchmen such as Roger of Tosno from Normandy and Sancho-William, Duke of Gascony, were active in supporting the Spanish Christians in their battles against the caliphate of Cordoba. In 1063, the Pope, Alexander II, officially promised an indulgence to all Christians who fought for the Cross in Spain. This marked a turning-point. The Crusades in Spain now took on the aspect of a holy war. French armies streamed across the Pyrenees, prominent among them those of the Count of Aquitaine and Roucy. In 1078, Hugh I, Duke of Burgundy, led an army into Spain in support of his brother-in-law, Alfonso VI of Castile. Thus the climate was right for a wider struggle against the Muslims. When in November 1095 Pope Urban II issued a call for a Crusade to free the Holy Land from Muslim rule, his appeal was greeted with enthusiasm across Western Europe, and received a particularly strong response in France.

Frenchmen were prominent through all phases of the Crusades, from their beginnings in 1096 until their final demise three centuries later at the battle of Nicopolis in 1376. Among leading Frenchmen to take part in the first Crusade were Raymond IV, Count of Toulouse, Robert, Duke of Normandy, Stephen, Count of Blois and Godfrey of Bouillon, Duke of Lorraine, who following the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 became known as ‘Advocatus Sancti Sepulchri’, Defender of the Holy Sepulchre. In all subsequent Crusades, Frenchmen were active and provided the majority of settlers and soldiers in the Holy Land, being particularly notable in the military orders of the Knights of the Temple (Templars) and Knights of the Hospital (Hospitallers). French kings also participated in the Crusades. King Philip Augustus fought with King Richard I of England in the Third Crusade (1188–92), and in 1249 Louis IX led a Crusade to Egypt and seized the town of Damietta in the Delta. This victory, however, was short-lived, and the Crusader armies were subsequently defeated in 1250. Louis ending up briefly as a prisoner of the Sultan, Turanshah. Louis’s enthusiasm for the Crusades was not dimmed by this experience. He embarked on an ill-fated expedition in July 1270 to try to convert the Emir of Tunis. The
Emir had no intention of being converted, and Louis died of fever outside the walls of Carthage on 25 August 1270.

The three centuries of close contact between France and the Muslim Near East occasioned by the Crusades led to exchanges of ideas in various areas, mainly to the benefit of the Franks. Medicine, science, agriculture and engineering were all subjects in which the Arabs were often further advanced than their contemporaries in Western Europe. French knights returning from the Crusades brought back with them new ideas with which to update their previous practices in these areas. Some French settlers in the Holy Land also made genuine attempts to try to understand Islam and Muslim culture. Many of them — particularly those who were born in Outremer — spoke and wrote Arabic fluently. Such a person was the great historian of Outremer, William, Archbishop of Tyre, whose *Historia rerum in paribus transmarinis gestarum* (History of Deeds Done beyond the Seas) is considered one of the great works of medieval historiography. Although educated in France, he spent most of his life in the Holy Land. If any Arabic manuscripts reached France during this period — possibly brought back by scholars such as William of Tyre — they have not survived.

On balance, however, the Crusades embittered and damaged relations between the West and the Muslim world. Western perceptions of Islam as a hostile and dangerous religion were matched by Muslim suspicions of Christianity as an ideology which had unleashed military adventurism against them and brought suffering and destruction to much of the eastern Mediterranean. These prejudices were to colour the succeeding centuries, and to be strongly reinforced by the Ottoman Turkish seizure of Constantinople in 1453 and the subsequent Muslim advance into eastern Europe. France, however, was never to lose her interest in the Muslim Near East. Although there would be no further religious Crusades, France would continue to exercise a role as the political protector of Eastern Christians — particularly Catholics — and at the end of the eighteenth century mount once again a major military expedition to Egypt.

In the sixteenth century France was wracked by the Wars of Religion, a series of civil wars between Roman Catholics and Protestants (Huguenots) that threatened at one stage to destroy the country, turning it on itself. Events such as the massacre of St Bartholomew’s Day (August 1572) decimated the Protestant political élite, and struck at the intellectual heart of the nation. Nevertheless, it was an era of scholarly ferment in France. Calvinism and the Protestant Reformation had broken the unity of Catholic thought which had been such a feature of French national life. Sixteenth-century French philosophers such as Jean Bodin and Guillaume Postel began to approach Islam from a new direction, attempting to see some ground for common dialogue. Postel was very much in the tradition of the seventeenth-century Protestant Islamic scholars — men such as Erpenius, Pococke, Golius and Scaliger — in concentrating on Islam within the framework of biblical studies. He was an outstanding linguist, and claimed to have a good working knowl-

edge of Arabic, Persian and Turkish. In 1575 he published, in Paris, his *Des histoires orientales*, a study of some of the Muslim histories of the East. Jean Bodin, in his *Colloquium heptapleron*, included a speech by a former Christian who had converted to Islam. In the speech the Muslim convert showed no regrets about having abandoned Christianity, and Bodin used this device to argue for greater appreciation and understanding of the Muslim religion.

Throughout the sixteenth century, French foreign relations were concerned to a great degree with Ottoman Turkey. French fear of the rising power of the Habsburgs induced Francis I (1494–1547) to conclude, in 1528, an extraordinary political alliance with Sultan Suleiman (1520–66). Although the basis of this alliance was military cooperation, Francis I was able to use it to put pressure on the Sultan to extend toleration and protection to Christians living in the Ottoman territories. In 1534, the first official French Ambassador to the Sultan’s court, Jean de la Forêt, reached Istanbul. Many aspects of this alliance were to remain secret, but they are known to have included plans, subsequently abandoned, for a joint Franco-Turkish attack on Italy. There is no doubt, however, that the alliance enabled the French to maintain an important political position within the Ottoman Empire, and meant that throughout the sixteenth century, and even well into the seventeenth, France had the closest relations with Muslim Turkey of any country in the Christian West. In 1566 Charles IX (1550–74) further strengthened this alliance in an agreement between himself and Sultan Selim II (1566–74) known as the Capitulations. This allowed for the establishment of a pre-eminent French trading position throughout the Ottoman Empire, and French merchants and officials were allowed full freedom of worship. Both rulers obtained what they wanted out of such an agreement: Charles IX, a preferential political and trading position for France in the Ottoman domains, and Selim II an assurance that the Christian West would never unite against Islam. French political and commercial needs had removed France’s relations with the Islam world to the opposite end of that spectrum which once had placed King Philip and King Louis IX at the head of military Crusades against the Muslims in Palestine and Egypt. Now, France sought to achieve its aims through diplomacy and cooperation rather than through overt aggression. Essentially, though, the aims remained much the same: France was to have a leading role in the Near East, and to be the protector of Christendom.

The seventeenth century brought continuing French involvement with the Islamic world, particularly in Turkey and the Levant. With the Wars of Religion in France at a close, and the political victory of Roman Catholicism assured (in 1629, La Rochelle, the last bastion of French Protestantism, surrendered to the Catholic armies of Cardinal Richelieu), the stage was set for a flowering of Catholic zeal. The reign of Louis XIII (1601–43) was characterized by a desire to promote the new ideas of a reformed Roman Catholicism, and once again France looked towards the Muslim East as an area where these ideals might be promoted.
Under the influence of men like Joseph le Clerc du Tremblay, the leading Capuchin at the court of Louis XIII, the French religious orders saw themselves once again as the spearhead of a French political and religious advance into the heartlands of the Ottoman Empire. Du Tremblay seriously believed that he could again revive the military crusading spirit in France, and that the East could be won for Christianity. He wanted Charles de Gonzague, Duke of Nevers and a distant descendant of the last Byzantine emperors, to lead the expedition. He hoped that Europe's Catholic rulers would unite behind his plans. Unfortunately for du Tremblay, the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War disrupted his political and military ambitions. Nevertheless, he was not to be discouraged, and with the support of the King and Cardinal Richelieu he channelled his energies into a plan for a Capuchin conversion of the East, particularly the Orthodox Christian East. Capitalizing on the strong French political position in the Ottoman Empire, the Capuchins and the Jesuits were able to build up for themselves a solid network of religious missions throughout the Near East. The conversions they made were all confined to the existing Orthodox Christian population. There is no evidence at all that any Muslims were converted (nor would such a thing have been permitted by the Ottoman government in Istanbul).

It was the reign of Louis XIV (1661–1715), however, that saw the real expansion of French links with the East. Supported by his brilliant First Minister, Jean Baptiste Colbert (1619–83), Louis encouraged scientific expeditions to the Levant and the Far East. For the first time, serious attempts were made to collect Islamic manuscripts for the purposes of study and research. In 1664, near the beginning of his long reign, Le Compagnie des Indes Orientales was founded for trade with India and the East. Up until this point, France had largely ignored the Muslim world outside the Ottoman Empire. This was a serious oversight as far as Colbert was concerned. He was acutely aware of the strong trading position which the English and the Dutch were building for themselves in India, Ceylon and Java, and he was determined that France should not fall behind in these areas. In 1674 a French settlement in Pondicherry on the Coromandel coast was established. This was located south of Madras, the centre of the English East India Company's operations in southern India, and was obviously sited there as a direct challenge to the English. Colbert's interest in the East led in 1669 to the founding of the Ecole des Jeunes de Langues, a training centre in the languages of the Orient. Its aim was to provide a competent body of translators in languages such as Turkish and Arabic. Parallel with this was an attempt to build up France's collections of Islamic manuscripts through purchase or through the commissioning of special expeditions to the East. It was as a result of Colbert's initiatives that the manuscripts of the scholar Gilbert Gaulmin (1585–1663) were purchased for the Bodleian Library, and the expeditions of J. B. Vansleb to the Near East and of Jean-François Petit de la Croix to Central Asia took place with the specific aim of acquiring Turkish and Persian manuscripts.

Louis XIV also continued to give close attention to France's traditional sphere of influence in the Islamic world: the Ottoman Empire. At the beginning of Louis's personal rule in 1661, relations between the French and the Ottomans had cooled. Louis did not rush immediately to improve them, but after ten years on the throne decided that the time had arrived to strengthen the traditional alliance. In June 1673, the capitulations were formally renewed, and French influence in the Ottoman territories was confirmed. France once again found itself very much in the role of the political protector of Catholicism in the Orient, in particular of Maronite Christians.

Church and state interest in the East was paralleled in the latter half of the seventeenth century by growing literary and scholarly interest in Islam. In 1697 there appeared a book which was to have a major influence on French, and indeed west European, attitudes to Islam for a century to come. This was Barthélemy d'Herbelot de Molainville's Bibliothèque orientale, a dictionary on the Orient. According to Galland, who wrote the preface, the Bibliothèque was the result of many years of research among original Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts, so for the first time there was a book about the Muslim world based on Muslim sources. The Bibliothèque was conceived by d'Herbelot as being the first part of a two-part work on the Orient. The second part — given the name of Florilège, or anthology — was never written. The Bibliothèque was not just a history of the East, and of its Islamic kingdoms and dynasties, but also a wider-ranging study of the social and cultural forces at work in the East. In this d'Herbelot's work was truly pioneering, although like many of his contemporaries in Europe he still saw Islam, basically, as a threat. Equally influential in creating an image of the Muslim world in the West was another book which appeared in France in 1704 for the first time. This was Antoine Galland's translation of Alif-Laila wa Layla ("The Thousand and One Nights"). In his translation Galland created a world of magicians, genii, noble handsome princes, seductive princesses and wicked viziers. It was a potent mix, and has exerted an influence on Western attitudes to Islam which has survived until the present time. Galland's translation can also be seen as inspiring much of the romantic French writing about the Muslim world which came into vogue in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, characterized by authors such as Chateaubriand, Nerval and Loti. In 1717 there appeared Louis d'Avreux's Voyage dans le Palestine vers le grand emir, chef des princes arabe du desert, connus sous le nom de Bédouins. This was the first ever serious description of the life and customs of the Bedouin Arabs.

Throughout the eighteenth century, French interest in the Islamic East remained strong. Political and commercial links with the Ottoman Empire were maintained. The French merchant community in Istanbul became so powerful that it organized itself as a formal community, with its own elected assemblies and officials. By the middle of the eighteenth century it was in a position to challenge the controlling role of the Marseilles Chamber of Commerce, the organization hitherto responsible for French trade with Turkey and the Levant. An increasing interest was shown in Eastern culture and art. In
1731 the Regent, Philippe d’Orléans, dispatched a mission to Turkey to collect Turkish, Persian, and Arabic manuscripts.

In India, the eighteenth century witnessed the bid for empire. By 1740, Pondicherry was the main centre for French operations throughout the subcontinent, and there were subsidiary settlements at Chandannagar in Bengal, Masulipatam on the Coromandel coast, and Malabar. In 1742, J. F. Dupleix (1697–1763) was appointed Governor of Pondicherry. He was to emerge as the spearhead of French attempts to expand their military and political role in India. Dupleix was a brilliant politician and diplomat. By a series of astute military and political moves, he managed to acquire a pre-eminent position in southern India (for the Compagnie des Indes Orientales), and appointed Salabat Jan as Nizam of Hyderabad. But the French triumph was short-lived. The British had discovered, in Robert Clive (1725–74), a military and political genius to rival Dupleix. This, coupled with lack of official French government support for Dupleix at critical points in his career and his eventual recall and replacement by Godeheu in 1754, spelt the doom of French attempts at empire in India. A series of battles between the French and the English throughout the decade 1759–66 ended in the eventual defeat of the French, and the surrender of Pondicherry by the Comte de Lally on 16 January 1761. French power in India was effectively at an end. News of this reverse did not unduly upset the French government. It had never been more than lukewarm about involvement in India. France had arrived late to the subcontinent. Support for political and military intervention in Indian affairs — so characteristic of English policy at this time — was not a strong feature of French policy in India. Even Dupleix discovered that he did not have the wholehearted backing of either the Compagnie or the French government.

With the loss of its Indian settlements, French interest in the Muslim world became even more strongly concentrated on the Ottoman Empire, and the eastern Mediterranean. It would not be until Napoleon’s time that France would again look out towards India and the Far East.

The French link with India also had a strong cultural dimension. The first manuscripts from India reached France in the early years of the eighteenth century. They were sent by the Jesuit missionaries P. Lé Gac, P. Calmette and P. Pons in response to a request from the Abbé Bignon, the Royal Librarian. But the dominant figure in the eighteenth-century Franco-Indian cultural relationship was Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805), who at the age of 28 completed a translation of the Avesta at Surat in India and brought back with him to France an extraordinary collection of Indian and Persian manuscripts. Along with Sir William Jones in British India and J. C. van Radermacher in Dutch Java, he was very much part of that great flowering of western European scholarly interest in Asia which has been termed ‘The Indies Enlightenment’ — an opening of the European mind to the culture and civilization of the world beyond the confines of the Mediterranean and northern Europe.

In 1789, the French Revolution broke out. Four years later the monarchy had been abolished, the King and Queen beheaded and the traditional ruling élite scattered and largely extinguished. In the midst of all this turmoil and change, time was none the less found to develop several important aspects of French involvement with the Muslim world. On 30 March 1793 the École des Langues Orientales Vivantes was founded in order to teach Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Tartar and Malay. This new school supplemented the work of the college founded by Colbert in 1669. Also, in 1795, the Committee of Public Safety issued Constantín-François Volney’s Arabic grammar, entitled Simplification des langues orientales. Volney had travelled to Egypt and Syria in 1782. He became acutely aware of the importance of having a good knowledge of Arabic if a serious attempt was to be made to understand the societies and cultures of the Arab world. He therefore spent a number of months in Lebanon studying Arabic, and on his return to France began work on his two-volume book Voyage en Egypte et en Syrie, published in 1787.6

Imprisoned during the Reign of Terror under Robespierre, Volney nevertheless found the time to compose his Simplification des langues orientales, which he described as ‘a precious work for our political and commercial relations in the Levant’.7 Following his release in 1794, he petitioned the convention to publish the book. Eventually, approval was given for the project by the Committee of Public Safety, and the book appeared in 1795. It was a work of major importance and contributed to the development of a strong French interest in Arabic grammar and language.

In 1798 there took place an event which was to transform French relations with the Muslim world: Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Egypt. In many ways this was the culmination of centuries of French involvement in the eastern Mediterranean, an involvement that stretched back to the era of the Crusades. In other ways it marked a radical departure from previous French interventions with the Islamic East. Napoleon invaded Egypt in the new prevailing spirit of Western imperialism and scientific superiority. He came to Egypt not only to dominate it with military force, but to record what he found there in a scientific and scholarly fashion. It was a most extraordinary adventure, and had far-reaching consequences.

Napoleon and his army landed at Alexandria on 1 July 1798. By the end of the month he had advanced on and seized Cairo. He planned to move south as far as Aswan, and east towards Palestine. He proclaimed his sympathies for Islam. Writing in France, Volney trumpeted the rebirth of the Arab nation. Napoleon’s military ambitions were, however, checked by the British. On 1 August 1798, Admiral Nelson destroyed the French fleet at the Battle of Aboukir Bay. From that moment, Napoleon’s military ambitions in Egypt were doomed. In the short term, however, the defeat did not prevent Napoleon from pressing ahead with his plans.

To accompany him on his expedition to Egypt, Napoleon had assembled a Commission of Arts and Sciences, which was to investigate all aspects of Egypt, both ancient and modern. The Commission was composed of 165 engineers, cartographers, architects, artists, botanists, biologists, historians and
mathematicians. Its brief was truly universal in scope, and Napoleon lent it his full support and patronage. The administrative responsibilities of the Commission were vested in the Institute of Egypt, founded in Cairo on 22 August 1798. Napoleon named himself Vice-President of the Institute. There were sections concerned with the sciences, literature and the arts. Its offices became the centre of the largest ever scholarly study attempted by a single European country of a Muslim society and culture. Material was gathered from all corners of Egypt, sifted, sorted, categorized. Teams of artists and scientists, among them the engineers Duvalliers and Jolliot, the gifted painter Dutertre and the artist Jacques Nicolas Couté, worked with energy and enthusiasm. The result was to be the Description de l’Égypte, which would appear in installments between 1809 and 1828. The original edition had 23 volumes — ten of text and thirteen of illustrations.

Napoleon’s military ambitions in Egypt, in contrast to his scientific aims, were short-lived. Realizing that the destruction of his fleet left the army isolated, he departed for Europe on 22 August 1799. Two years later, in September 1801, the French army in Egypt surrendered to the British. Most of the Commission returned to France to continue their work there, together with their collections of rocks, plants, birds and animals. As tribute, the British retained certain of the more impressive French finds, including the Rosetta Stone.

Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt, though it was over within the first year of the nineteenth century, was to have profound consequences for France’s relations with the Muslim world for the next 150 years. First, it confirmed French interest and involvement in the Muslim countries that bordered the Mediterranean region — Egypt, Syria and Palestine (this interest would soon extend to Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco) — but through the publication of the Description de l’Égypte it also established for France a dominating position in academic scholarship concerning Egypt for most of the nineteenth century.

At the apex of the French scholarly pyramid for most of the nineteenth century stood one man, who had a powerful influence not only on French Islamic studies but also on Islamic scholarship throughout Europe. This man was Baron Silvestre de Sacy. His first post was as a teacher at the Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes. He was to become Director of the School in 1822. He worked closely with Napoleon and the French Foreign Ministry in its relations with Muslims. He was first President of the Société Asiatique and Curator of Oriental Manuscripts at the Royal Library. He was without doubt France’s premier nineteenth-century Arabic scholar, author of numerous works on Arabic grammar and literature, including the famous Chrestomathie arabe, an anthology of Arabic poetry. De Sacy dominated Arabic studies in Europe throughout the nineteenth century. He provided a framework and structure for approaching the study of Arabic language and literature which had been previously been lacking both in France itself and Europe generally. His influence on the nineteenth-century European approach to Islam and the Arabs cannot be underestimated. Islamic scholars such as...

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Ernest Renan drew their inspiration directly from him. He was the authority to be quoted in departments of oriental and Islamic studies from St Petersburg to Madrid.

Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt between 1798 and 1801 was followed by further French military incursions into Muslim countries. In 1830 the French King Charles X (1757–1836) sent a naval and military expedition against Algiers. The proclamation to the citizen of Algiers was drafted by de Sacy in his capacity as official adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Algeria was to remain under French control for over 130 years; it would not be until 1962 that the country would regain its independence. In 1880 France invaded Tunisia, in order to prevent it from falling into Italian hands, and in 1912 Morocco was declared a French protectorate. At the close of the nineteenth century France was also active in West Africa: in 1890 Segou in Mali was seized, and by 1912 French rule was established in Mauritania, Senegal and most of Muslim West Africa (apart from northern Nigeria and northern Ghana, which were under British control). In the Levant, the traditional areas of French interest and influence, Syria and Lebanon, were of particular concern to the government in Paris.

In 1860, following the massacres of Christians in Damascus, the Emperor Napoleon III dispatched an army of 12,000 troops to Syria and Lebanon to protect the interests of the Christians on the Near East. The result was the Organic Statute of June 1861, which gave autonomy to most of the Christian area of Lebanon. In 1920, following the collapse of Ottoman power in the Levant, both Lebanon and Syria passed under direct French rule. French armies found themselves in control of territories for which their ancestors had fought and died in the Crusades of eight centuries before. In the context of French links with the Near East, it was in many ways an inevitable repetition of history. The French mandate over Lebanon and Syria would last until after the Second World War.

French political and military involvement in the Muslim Near East was reflected in an amazing outburst of literary and scholarly interest by French writers and scholars. The nineteenth century saw Gustave Flaubert’s Salammbô, and Hérodias, written following a trip he made to Egypt in 1849, Gérard de Nerval’s Journey to the Orient, published in 1851, and the imaginative outpourings of Lamartine and Chateaubriand. All of them, though they journeyed to the Near East, had also internalized the fantasies of Galland and The Thousand and One Nights. Their writings bolster the image of a Muslim East spiced with mystery, sensuality and the exotic. French painters, such as Delacroix, also reflected this approach, with scenes from harems and dimly lit mosques and caravanserais predominating. The French encounter with the Islamic East in the nineteenth century was not only based on hard political and military realities, but also closely intertwined with the imagination and the fantasy of escape into what appeared to be a more colourful and romantic world.

In the twentieth century, French scholarly interest in the Islamic world...
Stephan Roman

continued, with particularly close connections being developed with Algeria and the Maghreb. William Marçais (1872–1956) compiled his four-volume series entitled *Les Traditions islamiques*. André Basset (1895–1956), Professor of Berber Languages at the School of Oriental Languages, was particularly famous for his studies on Berber linguistics. Jean Deyri and Paul Pelliot helped establish Turkish studies as a discipline in its own right. Jean Cantineau (1899–1956), Professor of Arabic at the School of Oriental Languages, became famous for his researches into Arabic linguistics. Prosper Rocard (1974–1952) spent much of his time in Morocco, where he was very involved in working with the French government in the field of Islamic and Moorish art. Between 1898 and 1952, he wrote over sixty books or articles dealing with Moroccan and Berber art, architecture, pottery and carpets. Because of its strong interest in the eastern Mediterranean, France continues to maintain research centres in Syria, Turkey and Egypt. Prominent among these are the Institut Français d’Études Arabes in Damascus, the French Institute for Oriental Archaeology in Cairo and the Institut Français d’Archéologie in Beirut. Direct French political control in North Africa and the Levant has declined since the end of the Second World War, but there is no doubt that France still maintains a close cultural and economic interest both in the Muslim countries that border the Mediterranean region and in those in West Africa. This interest is bolstered by the large numbers of Muslim immigrants from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco who have arrived in France since the 1960s.

French collections of Islamic manuscripts are concentrated mainly in Paris, although there are important collections in several provincial cities, notably Strasbourg and Avignon. This centralization of the collections reflects France’s political and cultural centralization, which has always been such a feature of French history over the last 400 years. It also reflects the important role played by the French monarchy and government in supporting links — political, economic and cultural — with the Muslim world. The first serious collections of Islamic manuscripts were made by the French kings.

**The Bibliothèque Nationale**

The Bibliothèque Nationale (National Library) in Paris is without doubt the premier centre for Islamic collections in Paris, and in France. The Bibliothèque Nationale was originally known as the Royal Library, and dates back to the reign of Louis XII (1499–1515), who brought together a number of previously separate collections. By 1518 the library had a collection of 1,626 volumes, including two in Arabic. However, it was to be the reign of Francis I (1515–47) who was responsible for the real growth in the collections. Francis I was sympathetic to the new humanist traditions then becoming fashionable in Europe. His library reflected these tastes, with books and manuscripts in Greek, Latin, French and Arabic. In 1544, the royal collections were transferred from Blois to Fontainebleau. An inventory of the holdings revealed the presence of 40 Hebrew, Syriac and Arabic volumes.

The reign of Henry II (1547–59) saw a lavish outlay on the binding of books and manuscripts in the Bibliothèque’s collections. It has been suggested that the impetus for this came from the Islamic book-bindings in the Fontainebleau library. The library was further expanded during the reign of Catherine de Medici (1519–89) and transferred to Paris around 1570. This was a sensible move. Paris was the hub of government and commerce. The collections could now begin to play a truly national role. In 1622, during the reign of Louis XIII, the first catalogue was produced, listing over 6,000 works. During the reign of Louis XIV, Jean-Baptiste Colbert took a strong interest in the library. Between 1661 and 1683, he added many new books and manuscripts to the collections, and took a keen interest in Islamic manuscripts.

The library was in no sense a public library. It was not until 1735 that it was partially opened to the public, and then for only a couple of days a week. In 1789, with the outbreak of the French Revolution, an uncertain future faced the library. Two of its principal librarians were executed during the Reign of Terror. Radical politicians who loathed any associations with kingship and monarchy demanded its destruction on the grounds that such an institution intimately associated with the Bourbon tyrants could only spread reactionary and evil ideas. However, the library not only survived but prospered, because all the books and manuscripts seized from private aristocratic and religious collections during the revolution ended up eventually in the store-rooms of the Bibliothèque Nationale. As a result of this mass confiscation of private libraries, the Bibliothèque acquired 100,000 printed books and 70,000 manuscripts.

By 1818 the holdings of the Bibliothèque Nationale stood at 800,000 books and manuscripts. Throughout the nineteenth century the Library continued to expand, with many new additions to its collections, particularly during the administration of Leopold Delisle (1874–1905). Currently, the Bibliothèque has over 20 million items, including eight million books, 800,000 maps and 180,000 manuscripts. The Islamic manuscript collections at the Bibliothèque Nationale are located in the Division of Oriental Manuscripts. The printed books are held in the Department of Printed Books. Manuscripts are held in all the principal languages of the Islamic world — Arabic, Turkish, Persian — as well as in Urdu, Bengali, Malay and Javanese. The Islamic collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale have turned it into one of the most important centres for research into the Muslim world anywhere in Western Europe.

The Arabic manuscript collections constitute the largest of the Islamic manuscript collections held by the Bibliothèque Nationale. There are currently around 12,000 Arabic Islamic manuscripts. The origins of this valuable collection date back at least as far as the reign of Francis I, when an inventory of the Royal Library officially stated that there were officially six Arabic manuscripts, four of which were described as being copies of the Qur’an. Six
further manuscripts were added by Catherine de Medicci, mainly medical texts, and one copy of the Qur’an. Further Arabic manuscripts which had originally belonged to the private collections of the Bishop of Chartres, Philippe Hurault, were added to the Royal Library by a decree of 8 March 1622.  

However, it was to be the reign of King Louis XIV that was to see the real expansion in the Arabic manuscript collections at the Bibliothèque Nationale. Between 1667 and 1682 there was a substantial growth in the size of the collections, as a result of the new oriental policy of Louis and his First Minister, Colbert. Colbert was unlike any other previous royal minister. He was not a cardinal, although he owed his rise to the patronage of Mazarin. He was the son of a minor royal official and he began his career as a clerk in a banker’s office, from there progressing to become chief assistant to Mazarin. Louis saw in him an astute economic adviser, and he soon won the King’s confidence. Together they set out to reform the French economy, and in the process reformed many other areas of French life. Colbert oversaw the establishment of new industries, improved the road and canal systems in order to assist trade (the famous Canal du Midi linking Toulouse with the Mediterranean was one of his great achievements), created an Academy of Sciences and sponsored the publication of the Encyclopedia of Arts and Crafts, codified the legal system, and unified the internal customs and excise.

Jean-Baptiste Colbert was also very much the architect of French expansion in the East. It has already been noted that it was during his term of office that the French East India Company — Le Compagnie des Indes Orientales — was founded and closer relations with the Ottoman Empire made a corner-stone of French oriental policy. In 1667 the Royal Library, under direct pressure from Colbert, acquired the manuscript collection of the magistrate Gilbert Gaulmin (1585–1665). This was the first major acquisition of Islamic manuscripts made by the Library. Two hundred and thirty-three Arabic texts were obtained as a result. Gaulmin was a scholar and an important legal figure in the government.

Colbert did not rest here, however. In 1668, he decided that the Islamic manuscripts collected by Cardinal Mazarin (1602–61) and bequeathed in 1661 to the Collège des Quatre-Nations should be incorporated into the Royal Library. An exchange was arranged with the college whereby various documents held by the Royal Library were passed over in return for 164 Arabic manuscripts in Mazarin’s collections. Among the items thus acquired by the Royal Library was a valuable copy of an important compilation of theological writings made by Rashid al-Din. Several of the manuscripts had once belonged to the scholar Nicolas Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637) before having been acquired by Mazarin.

Colbert was also responsible for organizing a number of scholarly missions to the Near East, in order to bring back Islamic manuscripts. One of the most fruitful was that of Johann Vansleb (1653–79). Vansleb was a German, who while in Rome became a Dominican and who in 1671 was sent by Colbert on an expedition to Egypt and the Levant. In 1671 he was in Cyprus and Syria, in 1673 in Cairo and a year later he had reached Smyrna in Turkey. He travelled ceaselessly for over three years, and his primary aim was to acquire manuscripts. When he returned to Paris, he brought with him over 600 manuscripts, including about 395 Arabic texts. Among the most valuable items was a copy of a treatise on natural history by Ibn Baitar.

Vansleb’s mission was not unique, however. In 1670 Colbert had also sent Jean-François Petit de la Croix (1653–1713), a noted oriental scholar, on a trip to Egypt, Palestine, Persia and Turkey. De la Croix brought back with him fourteen volumes of Arabic manuscripts. In 1669 the Syrian Pierre Diiyah of Aleppo returned with five Arabic manuscripts, three of which dated from the thirteenth century. Other expeditions sponsored by Colbert included those to Turkey of Antoine Galland (1646–1715), the translator of The Arabian Nights, who brought back nineteen volumes in Arabic, including volumes from The Arabian Nights, and Jean Foy-Vailant (1632–1706), the famous doctor and numismatist. Colbert also appealed to all French consuls and merchants in the Near East to assist as far as they could in the acquisition of Islamic manuscripts.

As the valuable consignments reached Paris, they were, on the instructions of Colbert, sorted out by Etienne Baluze (1630–1718), the Minister’s own librarian. Although Baluze ensured that many important manuscripts were sent to the Royal Library, he also directed a number of precious texts to Colbert’s personal library, the Colbertine, which as a result of the Minister’s keen interest in books and manuscripts was assuming an importance rivalling that of the Royal Library. Without doubt, Colbert can be described as the great patron of oriental manuscript collecting in France in the seventeenth century. His dedication to this field, and his encouragement of scholars to travel on missions to the East, ensured a leading position for the Royal Library in the ranking of oriental collections in Europe. In 1682, an inventory of the Arabic manuscripts held by the Royal Library listed a total of 897. After Colbert’s departure from power, royal patronage for Arabic manuscript collecting continued. In 1700, Maurice Le Tellier (1642–1737), Archbishop of Rheims, offered the King his valuable collection of seven volumes of Arabic manuscripts. The offer was accepted. It would seem that there was an ulterior motive behind this. Le Tellier, for some reason still unknown, appears to have taken a strong dislike to oriental manuscripts. This dislike extended to deciding to get rid of all oriental manuscripts held in the Archbishop’s library. In a letter dated 21 March 1701, Galland à Huet, commissioned by the King to visit Istanbul in order to acquire manuscripts, refers to ‘the great aversion’ which the Archbishop of Rheims had for oriental manuscripts, and to the fact that the Archbishop had even suggested to the King that Galland à Huet’s terms of reference should deliberately exclude the collecting of oriental manuscripts. It would seem an extraordinary proposition that a scholar should be sent to a Muslim country with a ban on collecting Islamic manuscripts. It is unlikely that the Archbishop’s recommendations were accepted. Also in 1700, a Syrian doctor in Damascus, Nasrullah ibn Gilda, sent Louis a small collec-
tion of Arabic manuscripts, which included several sacred Druze texts. These were incorporated into the Royal Library.

In 1672, the Library acquired the valuable manuscript collection of Melchisedech Thévenot (1620–92). This included 125 Arabic manuscripts. Thévenot had become the Royal Librarian in 1684, by which time he was already a noted scholar in French academic circles. Many travellers and orientalist scholars used to meet regularly at his house for discussions about the latest advances in science and the arts, and he played an important part in the founding, in 1666, of the Academy of Sciences. The manuscripts, originally sold on Thévenot’s death to several bookshops, were bought back by the Royal Library in 1712.

The death of Louis XIV was followed by the regency of Philippe d’Orléans (1715–23). D’Orléans maintained the policy begun by Colbert and Louis of supporting the acquisition of oriental manuscripts. Twenty-one Arabic manuscripts collected by the traveller and archaeologist Paul Lucas (1664–1737) during his expeditions to the Levant in 1708 and 1718 were acquired for the Royal Library in 1718. Then in 1719 a major acquisition of Arabic manuscripts was made. This was the collection of Philibert de la Mare (1615–87), who was Adviser to the Parlement of Burgundy. De la Mare was considered one of the great eccentrics of Dijon (the town where he lived) and his interest in Islamic manuscripts was not entirely understood by his fellow citizens, residents of one of France’s smaller provincial capitals. However, news of de la Mare’s collection of sixty Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Coptic manuscripts reached the ears of the Royal Librarian, the Abbot Jean-Faul Bigon (1662–1745), and in 1719 he obtained permission from the Regent to acquire the manuscripts for the Library. Not all de la Mare’s texts are by Muslim authors, however — there are several important Christian Arab writers included in the collection.

The reign of Louis XV (1715–74) saw the acquisition of several important collections by the Royal Library. In 1731, 200 Arabic manuscripts were brought back by François Sevin and Michel Fourmont as a result of their mission to Turkey. Altogether, they acquired over 600 volumes of manuscripts, the majority being in Arabic, Turkish and Persian. Thirty of the Arabic manuscripts appear to have been acquired from P. de Campaya, a Jesuit missionary who was living in Damascus. During their travels around the Ottoman provinces, Sevin and Fourmont received great help from the French Ambassador to the Sultan’s court, the Marquis de Villeneuve, who ensured that the extensive French network of missionary and trading contacts was placed at the two men’s disposal. It was during the period of the Marquis de Villeneuve’s ambassadorship that French influence in the Ottoman Empire reached its zenith. On 28 May 1740, the Sultan Mahmut I signed a new version of the capitulations, the treaty linking France and the Ottomans. This new version, with 85 articles, gave the French an unrivalled position in the Ottoman Empire.

In 1732, the oriental manuscripts acquired by Colbert and previously housed in his own private collection were incorporated into the Royal Library; this collection contained some of the most valuable Arabic, Persian and Turkish texts hitherto known. In 1752, more collections were added to the Library’s collections. Among the most precious items were twenty copies of the Qur'an, including a very fine fifteenth-century example, described by Vajda as being 'Orné de tapis et de sarlos, somptueusement entumiré, revêtu d'une reliure orientale, dont les plats sont enrichis de médaillons ou et argent'. There were also valuable botanical texts, written in the thirteenth century.

Throughout the reign of Louis XV, Arabic manuscript collections continued to reach the Royal Library. Among the most noteworthy were those of Benoît de Maillet (1656–1738), former Consul-General and Inspector General of French Establishments in the Near East. He bequeathed 44 Arabic manuscripts. In 1770, five volumes of manuscripts were acquired from the magistrate and famous collector, Michel Begou (1638–1710). Following the accession of Louis XVI (1774–93), six Arabic manuscripts acquired by Captain Jean-Baptiste Gentil (1728–99) were bought for the Royal Library. Gentil had obtained the manuscripts while serving with the Compagnie des Indes Orientales in northern Bengal. Gentil’s collections of Persian, Indian and Sanskrit manuscripts are more famous, however.

There is no doubt that the earlier enthusiasm for collecting Arabic and Islamic manuscripts was declining in the closing years of the ancien régime. French political influence in the Ottoman Empire was weakening. In India, the British were now the strongest European power. The final years of the reign of Louis XVI revealed very little evidence of any real interest in the Islamic manuscript collections of the Royal Library. The last major collection to be acquired by the ancien régime before its demise was that of Etienne le Grand (1724–84). Le Grand had had a colourful career. After spending much of his life as a dragoon in Istanbul, Alexandria, Tripoli, Cairo and Aleppo, he had ended up as the King’s interpreter for oriental languages. In 1784 he died, and his collection of thirty-three manuscripts was auctioned. The Royal Library bought twenty of them. Eighteenth-century Arab manuscripts.

The Revolution, which spelt the doom of the Bourbon dynasty, also led to major developments in the Arabic collections at the Royal Library — now renamed the Bibliothèque Nationale (National Library). Following the suppression of the religious orders, it was decided in 1795 that the books and manuscripts held by the religious houses in Paris should be transferred to the Bibliothèque Nationale. The religious orders had over the years built up fine libraries, and many of them included impressive collections of Arabic manuscripts. Among the religious houses which had such collections were the Convent of the Jacobins of the Rue Saint-Honoré, the House of the Cordeliers, the Institute of the Augustins and the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. The Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés had two important orientalist collections, both of which were moved to the Bibliothèque Nationale. The first was that of Louis XIV’s Chancelier, Pierre Séguier (1588–1672), and the second
that of the scholar Abbé Eusèbe Renaudot (1646–1720). Renaudot was one of France’s leading orientalist scholars during the reign of Louis XIV, and a prominent Jansenist. Séguier’s collection was composed of 350 oriental manuscripts, the majority of them in Arabic. Many of them had been obtained by Séguier’s agents in the Near East, but several had been bought from Antoine Galland following his return from Turkey. The Chancellor’s library had been bequeathed to the Abbey in 1731 by Séguier’s nephew, the Bishop of Metz, Henri-Charles du Cambout de Coislin (1664–1732). On 20 August 1794, the library of the Abbey was set on fire. Many valuable items were lost. It is not really possible to say how many of the Abbey’s oriental manuscripts eventually reached the safety of the Bibliothèque Nationale.

Another important collection to reach the Bibliothèque Nationale at this time was that of the Sorbonne. The Sorbonne had been the recipient of many valuable oriental manuscripts, including the collection of Cardinal Richelieu, which was composed of around 300 Arabic, Persian and Turkish texts. All of these were sent to the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1796 when the Sorbonne library was officially closed.

The final years of the eighteenth century witnessed Napoleon’s famous expedition to Egypt, and the creation of the Institut d’Égypte, dedicated to research and study into all aspects of Egyptian life and culture. Over twenty Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts were acquired by the various scholars attached to the Institute, and these were deposited with the Bibliothèque on 9 March 1803. They covered a wide variety of subjects, and included manuscripts on science, medicine, astronomy, literature and history. Among the scholars who were most active in collecting Islamic texts were the orientalists Jean-Michel de Venture de Paradis (1742–99) and Jean-Joseph Marcel (1776–1854). Marcel was also responsible for establishing the first ever printing press in Egypt, on 15 January 1801.21

The French invasion of Algeria in 1830 led to a small collection of nine Arabic manuscripts reaching the Bibliothèque Nationale. In 1833, the single largest acquisition of Arabic manuscripts ever made by the Bibliothèque Nationale reached Paris. This was the collection of one man: Jean Louis Aselin de Cherbourg (1772–1822). Cherbourg was the French consul in Egypt. He was a product of that French interest and commitment to the eastern Mediterranean which had culminated in the scientific and cultural expeditions of Napoleon and the Institut d’Égypte. Cherbourg, though a political agent, was also a scholar, and in that sense his career and interests paralleled those of many of his English contemporaries, men such as Claudius James Rich (1786–1821), who promoted British political interests while at the same time displaying a keen interest in the culture and civilization of the country in which they were working. Cherbourg’s career in Egypt was set against the aftermath of the defeat of Napoleon’s army of occupation by the British in 1801. He therefore had a difficult political role to play. Suspicions of a possible revival of French political and military interest in Egypt remained strong. The British in particular were aware how close Napoleon had come to creating a

French empire in the Near East, which would have directly threatened British interests in Persia and India. There was no doubt that Cherbourg’s political and diplomatic initiatives in Cairo were closely monitored. However, it was Cherbourg’s scholarly interests that consumed much of his time and energy. If the French had not been defeated in political and military terms, they were pre-eminent over every other European nation in regard to scholarly research into Egypt, and its culture and achievements.

The series of research reports known as the Description d’Égypte, mentioned previously, formed a basis for Cherbourg’s whole career in Egypt. In 1820, Louis XVIII decreed that a second edition of the Description should be produced despite the fact that the first edition was still not completed. Over 2,000 people were employed full time on the project. Cherbourg’s interest in Arabic manuscript collecting must therefore be set against this background. He saw himself as part of the French scholarly tradition in Egypt, and the manuscripts he sought out covered a wide range of subjects and interests, reflecting the universality of approach endorsed by the Committee of Arts and Sciences in 1798. Altogether Cherbourg acquired 1,515 Arabic manuscripts, all of which were sent to the Bibliothèque Nationale. Among the most impressive items in this collection is a copy of Al-Idrisi’s famous geography, with 68 colour maps of the world, and a history of Egypt, covering the period 1688–1805, written by Abd ar-Rahmān al Gabarti. This text is notable for being the first history of Egypt written by a Muslim author to cover the French invasion and occupation of 1798–1801.

Following the acquisition of Cherbourg’s Arabic manuscripts, smaller collections continued to reach the Bibliothèque Nationale throughout the nineteenth century. Among the most important were those of Antoine du Caurray (1775–1853), who had been Director of the French school at Pera in Istanbul, and also an interpreter for the French Ambassador. He bequeathed sixty Arabic manuscripts. In 1835, the Bibliothèque bought the manuscript collection which had once belonged to Frédéric Schultz (1799–1829), who had been sent by the French government on a mission to the Middle East in 1826 and had died in a massacre in Kurdistan in 1829.

In July 1866, eighteen Arabic manuscripts were offered to the Bibliothèque by Dr Antoine Clot — more popularly known as Clot Bey (1796–1866), Clot Bey was a French citizen who spent most of his career in Egypt, where he was responsible for organizing a health service and establishing the hospital of Abu Zabel, close to Cairo. His reputation was so pre-eminent in the medical field that Gustave Flaubert, travelling in Egypt in 1850, refers to the well-maintained public hospitals of Cairo, which he describes as ‘the work of Clot Bey — his hand is still to be seen’.22 Clot Bey’s manuscripts mainly cover medical subjects.

In July 1867, Eugène Pougade (1815–85) sent the Bibliothèque his collection of eighteen Arabic manuscripts, fifteen of which concerned the Druze religion. Pougade was a French diplomat based in Beirut, and had spent several years travelling in the Druze areas of Lebanon. In 1871, one of the Bibliothèque’s
great treasures was acquired. This was a copy, in thirty-six volumes, of the famous Bedouin romantic tale, Antar and Ablar. The manuscript had been bought by Armand Caussin de Perceval (1784–1871), who was Professor of Arabic at the Collège de France. Seven years later, the first French translation based upon Perceval’s manuscript appeared. This was Marcel Devic’s Les Aventures d’Antar, fils de Chechid, Roman arabe des temps Anter-Islamiqiques, which was published in 1878 by the Société Asiatique de l’École des Langues Orientales Vivantes.

On 12 November 1892, there arrived at the Bibliothèque Nationale four crates, weighing over 300 kilos. They had been sent by Colonel Louis Archinard (1830–1932). Inside were over 518 manuscript volumes from the library of Ahmad al-Kabir al-Madani, a sheikh in western Africa, whose capital was located at Segou in present-day Mali. Segou was the centre of a powerful West African Muslim tribal confederacy, which had been created by Sheikh Ahmad’s father, al-Hajj Umar (1794–1864) and which drew its inspiration from the religious order founded by the Algerian teacher Ahmad al-Tijani (1737–1815). The order subsequently became known as Al-Tijaniyya. Umar launched his holy war in 1852, and after conquering large areas of western Africa, including the city of Timbuktu, had an empire stretching from the Niger to Upper Senegal. Following his death, in 1864, the French decided that Umar’s empire was too great a threat to their interests in western Africa, and in 1890 an expedition was mounted against Sheikh Ahmad’s capital, Segou, under the command of Colonel Louis Archinard. Following the seizure of Segou, the manuscripts were sent to Paris in 1892. They constitute one of the most valuable collections of West African Muslim literature anywhere in the world, being particularly valuable as a guide to how government and state were organized and administered in nineteenth-century West Africa. Altogether there are around 4,000 Arabic manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale which originated from Segou.

The manuscripts cover several important periods in the rule of Hajj Umar and his son Sheikh Ahmad. The earliest date from the period 1841–52, and cover subjects such as law, theology, the Makkah pilgrimage and travellers’ tales. This was also the period in which one of the most famous Tijaniyya texts was produced, under the patronage of Hajj Umar. This is entitled al Kitaab Ruhb hizb al-Rahim at-ta muhbar hizb al-rajiin. An original copy of this text is contained in the collection held in Paris. Many of the manuscripts were written during the reigns of Uthman, Abdullahi and Muhammad Bello, the rulers of the Caliphate of Sokoto. The second group of manuscripts date from 1852–64, commencing with Hajj Umar’s declaration of holy war against West African pagan tribes in 1852. These mainly consist of writings justifyingihad, and include a considerable number of military directives and orders. The final group covers the period 1864–90, when despite the decline in the power of the empire, its scholarly reputation stood at an all-time high and Muslim scholars from all over western and northern Africa journeyed to Sheikh Ahmad’s court. Many of the manuscripts from this period are copies

of correspondence sent or received by the Sheikh and his principal court advisers. There is also an extraordinary number of talismans and magical texts, which give an interesting insight into the strange mix of local traditions and orthodoxy that characterized West African Islam during this period.

In 1899, the Bibliothèque Nationale acquired the collections of Charles Schefer (1870–1928), the founder of the library of the École des Langues Orientales Vivantes (School of Oriental Languages). This was a composite collection of 700 Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts, of which 406 were in Arabic. Schefer had — as befitted his interest in Islamic art, science and literature — acquired an interesting and in many ways unusual collection. Among the manuscripts which entered the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1899 was a beautifully illustrated edition of the Maqamat of Hariri, and fragments of a Qur’an of such great artistic quality that, in the fourteenth century, the Sultan Barquq had offered it to one of the important mosques in Cairo, seeing it as a work of both spiritual and artistic excellence.

In the early twentieth century, the Arabic manuscript collections were further strengthened by the gifts of the orientalist Adolphe Decourdeconanche (1844–1915). Decourdeconanche presented 158 manuscripts over a period of eleven years (1905–16). The last group, numbering 46 manuscripts, was handed over in January 1916 by the executor of Decourdeconanche’s will, Mademoiselle Wendling. Decourdeconanche was also responsible for increasing the Bibliothèque Nationale’s holdings of Persian and Turkish manuscripts. The Decourdeconanche manuscripts are particularly strong in such subjects as jurisprudence, grammar and medicine. Among the most important Arabic texts is a late-fourteenth-century jurisprudence text, written by Abu Riya, and an early copy of the Maqamat of Hariri. The rare items include a fragment of the Qur’an probably copied by the famous calligrapher, Yaqtû al-Mustasîmî, and an early-fourteenth-century fragment from the Kitab al-Fatâh of Zamakhshari. Decourdeconanche specialized in the folklore of the Ottoman Turks, and spent considerable time travelling around Turkey and Egypt. He made his single greatest acquisition from the library of the Grand Vizier of the Ottoman court, Mehmet Kibrizî Pasha. From the Grand Vizier’s library, for example, is a magnificent specimen of Egyptian calligraphy from the final period of Maneluke rule in Egypt, shortly before the beginning of the Ottoman occupation. It is a Qur’an, richly illustrated and comparable with the finest Indo-Persian art produced at the court of the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb. Most of the manuscripts date from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.

The manuscript collections of Georges Marteau (1858–1916) were deposited with the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1916. Marteau’s collections contained mainly Persian manuscripts, but among the Arabic texts was a Qur’an, richly illuminated by the famous calligrapher Yaqtû al-Mustasîmî. In 1922, a collection of manuscripts acquired by Henry Poggon (1853–1921), the former French Consul in Syria and Iraq, reached the Bibliothèque Nationale. Many of the manuscripts are modern copies of earlier classical Arabic texts. The first
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catalogue of the Arabic manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale dates back to the seventeenth century. Pierre Diyb, a Maronite from Syria, and the orientalist scholar Petil de la Croix worked on a listing of Arabic manuscripts held by the then Royal Library. This listing was completed by Barthélemy d’Herbelot (1625–95) and Eusèbe Renaudot (1646–1720), and included in the first volume of the Catalogue général des manuscrits de la bibliothèque du Roi. Another Maronite, Joseph Ascri, was given the job in the years that followed of cataloguing the Arabic manuscripts which entered the Royal Library, and in 1739 there appeared the Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum bibliothecae regiae. This catalogue listed a total of 1,626 Arabic manuscript titles. No further catalogue was produced during the days of the ancien régime. In the nineteenth century, work was started on a new catalogue. This was begun by the Italian scholar, Michele Amari (1806–89). He was author of The History of the Muslims of Sicily, and later a Minister of Education in a unified Italy. When Amari left for Italy in 1859, the projected catalogue was abandoned for some years, and then resumed in 1867, by Hartwig Derenberg (1844–1908). When Derenberg left the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1870, the responsibility was passed to M. Le Baron Mac Guckin de Slane (1803–78), one of France’s most prominent Arabic scholars. Although he had almost retired when he took on the task, he approached it with great energy and enthusiasm, and at his death in 1878 the catalogue was almost complete. In 1883 the first fascicle of the Catalogue des manuscrits arabes de la Bibliothèque nationale appeared. It was a major scholarly achievement, and a total of 4,665 Arabic manuscripts were included. After 1883, special catalogues were issued for some of the major collections that entered the library, most noticeably the Schefer and Decoumenane collections. In 1925, Gabriel-Edgard Blochet (1870–1937) published a Catalogue des manuscrits arabes du ministère de l’Éducation, and from 1926 acquisitions (1884–1924). This listed 2,088 Arabic manuscripts which had entered the Bibliothèque Nationale in the period 1883–1924, and brought the number of catalogued manuscripts up to 6,753.

In 1953 Professor Georges Vajda issued his Index général des manuscrits arabes musulmans de la Bibliothèque nationale de Paris. In 1978, the Library published a Catalogue des manuscrits arabes by Georges Vajda and Yvette Sauvin. This listed all the Arabic manuscripts which had entered the Bibliothèque Nationale since the publication of Blochet’s catalogue in 1925.

In 1985 there appeared the Inventaire de la Bibliothèque Ummarienne de Segou, by Nourreddine Ghali and Louis Brenner. This was the first complete listing of the 518 volumes (containing 4,000 manuscripts) from the library of Al-Hajj Umar al-Futi and Ahmad al-Madani. The project to catalogue the manuscripts was funded by a United States organization, the National Endowment for the Humanities at Yale University.

Turkish Collections

The Turkish manuscripts held by the Bibliothèque Nationale number about 2,000 titles. Because of France’s long-standing political, commercial and cultural relations with the Ottoman Empire, it is not surprising that this is an important and valuable collection. It contains a cross section of classic Ottoman Turkish writing in a wide variety of subjects.

Many of the scholars and travellers who acquired Arabic manuscripts also acquired Turkish and Persian texts. There is evidence of Turkish manuscripts reaching the Royal Library as early as 1616. In that year the French Ambassador, Harlay de Sancy, wrote to the King’s Librarian, de Thou, promising to send him valuable manuscripts. In 1643, Mazarin wrote to Jean de la Haye in Istanbul asking him to search for ‘livres curieux’. De la Haye was French Ambassador to the Ottoman court between 1639 and 1660, and ended his diplomatic career by being imprisoned for a supposed failure to settle a debt he had incurred. Whether this was true or not, or whether (more likely) the Sultan simply wished him out of the way, will never be accurately known. But de la Haye’s arrest illustrates vividly the often precarious relationship that existed between the French and the Ottomans during this period.

In 1668, the Royal Library acquired its first major collections of Turkish manuscripts, when a hundred manuscripts which had belonged to the scholar Gilbert Gaulmin and fifty which had been acquired by Cardinal Mazarin were sent to the library on the instructions of the King’s Minister, Colbert. In 1712, fifty more Turkish manuscripts which had belonged to the Royal Librarian, Melchisedéch Thévenot (who had died in 1692), were bought by the Library. In 1732, Colbert’s own collections were merged with those of the Royal Library. Among the Turkish manuscripts was a valuable copy of the Miraj Name, which had been acquired by Antoine Galland in 1672 for 25 piastres. This was decorated with sixty-three illuminated designs in the Timurid style. Galland and Petil de la Croix had both operated under the patronage of Colbert in their travels to the East, and consequently many of the most valuable texts which they acquired during their travels passed into the Minister’s private library. The same was also true of the manuscripts dispatched to Colbert by French consuls throughout the Ottoman Empire. In 1672 they had received direct instructions from Colbert on the importance of buying Islamic manuscripts for the Royal Library. By 1739, the Turkish manuscripts in the Library numbered over 400. The most recent additions were those acquired by François Sevin and Michel Fournout during their travels to Istanbul and the Ottoman provinces in 1731.

As in the case of the Arabic manuscripts it was the French Revolution which was to see a major growth in the number of Turkish manuscripts held by the Bibliothèque Nationale. From the great monasteries and convent libraries of Paris appeared several hundred Turkish manuscripts, all of which were added to the collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale. Among these were over 130 Turkish manuscripts from the Convent of Saint-Germain-des-Prés which reached the Library in 1796. Many of them had originally belonged to Pierre Séguier and Eusèbe Renaudot. From the Sorbonne arrived twenty manuscripts bequeathed by Richelieu, and from the Oratory forty which had been in the possession of Antoine Galland.
In the nineteenth century, the first Turkish manuscripts to reach the Bibliothèque Nationale were those of General Menou, who had been one of Napoleon's leading generals during the Egyptian campaigns of 1798–1801. Menou deposited fifteen Turkish manuscripts in the Library. Menou became a Muslim during his time in Egypt, acquiring the name of Abdullah. His English engravings openly derided the conversion, claiming that he had done it only so that he could marry a pretty Muslim girl with whom he had apparently become infatuated. Others saw in it a cynical attempt to win over Egyptian support for the French occupation of Egypt. At one time Napoleon himself was suspected of having considered conversion to Islam in order to establish once and for all the French presence in Egypt and the Levant. Although there is no doubt that Napoleon showed himself to be sympathetic to Islam, and encouraged the view that he had come to purify Egypt from the greedy, corrupt grasp of the Mamelukes, he is known to have disapproved of Abdullah Menou's conversion, and described Menou as being 'covered with ridicule' as a result of what he had done.30

In 1853 the Bibliothèque Nationale acquired about thirty Turkish manuscripts from Du Cauray, who had lived for a long time in Istanbul. In 1899 Charles Schofer's collection of Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts entered the Library. Among them were 239 Turkish manuscripts. These were followed in 1915 by 112 Turkish manuscripts from the bequest of Adolphe Decourdemanche (1844–1915). Finally, in 1966, 150 Turkish manuscripts which had belonged to Professor Jean Deny entered the Library. Deny is one of the great names in French Turkish studies. Deny, together with the scholar Paul Pelliot, worked hard to establish Turology as a recognized area of oriental studies in France. Deny held the Chair of Turkish at the Ecole Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes, and contributed in particular to the development of Ottoman Turkish studies. The Turkish manuscripts collected over the last 350 years and now held in the Bibliothèque Nationale reflect the full spectrum of Turkish literature, covering all the main periods of Turkish history. From the pre-Ottoman period comes a 1383 copy of a Turkish translation of Nizamî's Khusran ve Shirin by Quh el-Din. From Herat, where an extraordinary synthesis of Turkish and Persian culture took place, come a number of important early Turkish texts, including works by the poet Ali Sher Neval (d. 1501). But Islamic literature in central and western Asia during this period was dominated by the Persian language, and centres of Turkish literary culture tended to be short-lived and geographically limited. However, the era of Ottoman power was soon to dawn, and with it would come the great renaissance and expansion of Turkish culture. With the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottoman Turks now had a capital city of world stature, and they set about creating a centre of Islamic culture and learning that would rival the golden days of Umayyad Cordoba and Abbasid Baghdad. Under the rule of Mehmed II and Suleiman the Magnificent, Istanbul was transformed into the imperial capital of a new confident Islam. From this period, the Bibliothèque Nationale possesses many important manuscripts, including two fine copies of the Bahriye of the Ottoman Admiral, Piri Reis (originally produced in 1523), with its excellent descriptions of the eastern and western Mediterranean coasts. The better of the Bibliothèque's two copies dates from the latter half of the sixteenth century.31

There are nine manuscripts by the great Ottoman poet, Baqlî (d. 1600). There are a number of important historiographical works from the end of the fifteenth century, many of them dedicated to the lives of one or two particular sultans. An example is the Ghezawat-i Khair el-Din Pasha, which tells the life history of Khair el-Din — Barbarossa. The Bibliothèque also possesses a copy of the rare manuscript Tevarikhi Osman by the early-sixteenth-century historian Kemal Pasha Zade. This is a history of the Ottoman dynasty.32

Important seventeenth-century manuscripts include the Jihan Nūma (World Mirror), the geographical work by the famous Ottoman scholar Kâtîb Çelebi (d. 1658). The author researched extensively into Eastern and Western geographical sources before producing the treatise, and it is considered to be the most authoritative geography of western Europe produced in the Muslim world before the nineteenth century.33 There is a copy of Hezarfen Hüseyin Efendi's Tenkîh al-Tevârîh, completed in 1673. Hezarfen was one of the few Ottoman historians to be genuinely interested in foreign cultures and societies, and his Tenkîh al-Tevârîh covers the history of America, the East Indies, China and India. He drew widely on European sources, and is known to have been a friend of the French orientalist scholars Antoine Galland and Petit de la Croix. Undoubtedly, the copy in the Bibliothèque reached France as a result of this friendship. There is also a copy of the Seyyâh-Nâme, the famous travel book by Evliya Çelebi (d. 1662), who was one of the most adventurous of all Ottoman travellers. Ten volumes he describes the various countries in Europe which he explored, and some also which he never reached.34

Many of the Turkish manuscripts held by the Bibliothèque Nationale also contain fine examples of the Turkish art of miniature painting, which reached its peak in the high noon of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Among the outstanding examples held by the Bibliothèque are the Mûrîd Nâme and the Layla ve Majnun of Fuzuli. There is a richly illustrated copy of the Hudaiqat al-suâda, a late sixteenth-century manuscript about the family of the Prophet, and the first Turkish text on the history of art, Menagîb-ê hunnerveram (Treatise on the Past and Present Turkish and Persian Artists), produced by Mustafa Ali in 1587 in the reign of Sultan Murad III (1574–95). The Bibliothèque holds three copies.35 There are also several fine astrological manuscripts, including works by Nakâç Osman. Modern Turkish manuscripts include the private papers of Samir Pasha, who was a senior government official under Muhammad Ali. These are very important in that they provide an insight into the history of the Ottoman Empire during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. There are also a number of literary and poetical works dating from the nineteenth century.

The Turkish collections were first listed in the Catalogue général des
manuscripts of the Bibliothèque du Roi, and the 1739 Catalogus codicum manusciptorum bibliotaeae regiae. But it was 1932-3 before the first separate catalogue was produced. This was compiled by E. Blochet and was entitled Catalogue des manuscrits turcs. It was issued by the Bibliothèque Nationale in two volumes, and covers 1,815 manuscripts. To date, there has been no substantive revision of the catalogue.

Persian Collections

The Persian collections in the Bibliothèque Nationale number about 2,500 manuscripts. Persian-language texts also include items produced at the Indo-Persian courts of Mughal India. Although direct French involvement with India came fairly late and was relatively brief in terms of playing a decisive role in Indian affairs, the French cultural and intellectual interest in India was strong, and in Hyacinth Anquetil-Duperron produced one of the outstanding figures of the 'Indies Enlightenment'. French political and commercial links with Persia were never as strong as her links with the Arab Near East and the Ottoman Empire, but interest in Persian literature, history and art was a consistent theme in French oriental scholarship. Many of the same collectors of Arabic and Turkish manuscripts, among the most notable being Gilbert Gaulmin, Colbert, Schefer, Decourdemanche and Marteau, also acquired Persian manuscripts.

There is no need to repeat here the biographical details concerning these collectors, since they have already been covered in the sections on Arabic and Turkish manuscripts. The first major acquisition of Persian manuscripts was in 1668, when the library of the scholar Gilbert Gaulmin was bought for the Royal Library by Colbert. Gaulmin's collection of Islamic manuscripts included 267 Persian texts. This acquisition established the Royal Library as an important centre for the study of Persian literature in western Europe, putting it on a par with the University of Leiden and the University of Oxford (Bodleian Library). Colbert — in his enthusiasm to extend French political and commercial interests in India — was aware that Persian was the official language of the Mughal Empire, and was therefore keen that the Royal Library should have as good a collection of Persian manuscripts as possible. He gave instructions to his agents throughout the Ottoman Empire, and to scholars such as Petit-Croix and Antoine Galland to collect Persian manuscripts in addition to Turkish and Arabic texts. The expedition of François Sevin and Michel Fourmont to the Ottoman provinces in 1731–2 also yielded a large number of Persian manuscripts. Colbert's own collection of Persian texts passed to the Royal Library in 1732.

In 1796, the Bibliothèque Nationale received several important collections of Persian manuscripts as a result of the suppression of the religious orders. One of the most famous of these was the collection of the Jansenist scholar, the Abbé Renaudot (1646–1702). Renaudot had bequeathed his manuscripts to the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and from here they were moved to the

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Bibliothèque Nationale on the orders of a revolutionary committee. Renaudot had acquired his Persian manuscripts from a number of sources, but one of his principal contacts was the scholar Barthelemy d'Herbelot de Molainville (1625–95), the author of the famous Bibliothèque orientale. While researching for his book, d'Herbelot had visited Florence, and worked on the Islamic manuscripts held in the Biblioteca Mediceo-Laurenziana, the library of the Medici family. He was a guest of the Grand Duke Cosimo III, who on d'Herbelot's departure made him a presentation of some of the Persian manuscripts in the Florentine Library. These manuscripts had been collected by two brothers, Giovanni Battista Vecchietti (1552–1619) and Gerolamo Vecchietti (1557–1640), during their travels to Syria, Iraq, Iran and India between 1591 and 1597, and 1598 and 1607. The Vecchietti brothers approached the task of collecting Persian and Arabic manuscripts with the enthusiasm and thirst for knowledge that was so characteristic of the Italian humanist renaissance. It was appropriate therefore that their Persian manuscripts should end up being presented to the foremost French oriental scholar of his day, a man who sought to write about the Islamic world in the new spirit of eighteenth-century rationality and enlightenment. It appears that at some stage, d'Herbelot passed the Persian manuscripts to his friend, the Abbé Renaudot. Among the texts are late-fifteenth-century copies of Nizami's Hamshah, a copy of Hīsābī's Divān and Háfez's Layla va Majnun. All of these were acquired by the Vecchietti brothers in Cairo.

In the early nineteenth century two collections of Persian manuscripts reached the Bibliothèque Nationale, both of which had been acquired during the eighteenth century in India. The first collection was that of the scholar, Hyacinth Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805), one of France's greatest orientalists and a leading member of the 'Indies Enlightenment', the movement which led to the flowering of European intellectual and scientific interest in all aspects of the East.

Anquetil-Duperron is chiefly remembered for his translations of the Avesta at Surat in 1759 and the Upanishads in Paris in 1786, but his interest in the Orient extended to embrace Muslim cultures and ideas. He was an extraordinary personality, encompassing in his world vision contradictory religious views and philosophies. He was a Jansenist, a Catholic and a Hindu. He was fascinated by Islam. When he set out for India in the middle years of the eighteenth century, he was on a quest to discover the origins of the Bible in Asia. But in India he discovered instead early Avestan texts, which set him on the path of exploring non-Christian religions. Anquetil-Duperron was dazzled by what he read and saw around him. For him and many of his European contemporaries in the East — men like Sir William Jones in Calcutta and Jacob Cornellis van Radermacher in Java — the hitherto assured world of Christian European superiority over the rest of mankind could no longer be sustained. The translation of Avestan, Hindu and Persian literatures which Anquetil-Duperron presented to an astonished readership in France and western Europe opened the vision of an Orient which was the inheritor and
transmitter of a culture as ancient and as civilized as that in the West. Anquetil-Duperron’s collection of Persian and Indian manuscripts numbered around one hundred. They include examples of Indo-Persian (Mughal) philosophical and religious texts, and have been described as one of the most brilliant collections of manuscripts held in the Bibliothèque Nationale.

Twenty-three Persian manuscripts acquired in India by Antoine Louis Henri Poilier (1741–95) were received by the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1827. Poilier was a Swiss Protestant of French origin, and in 1758 joined his uncle Paul-Philippe Poilier in India. Paul-Philippe was then in the service of the English East India Company, and his nephew soon found work under his patronage. Antoine Poilier established a reputation for himself as a cartographer, and the Company commissioned several maps from him, as well as giving him responsibility for strengthening the fortifications of Calcutta.29 There then followed an exciting and colourful career, one which brought him into close contact with Indian Mughal culture and civilization. In 1773, despairing of promotion within the English East India Company, he decided to take service with the Vizier of Oudh, the Nawab Shuja-ul-Daula, who was an ally of the British. Poilier was given responsibility for strengthening the Vizier’s castles and forts, settling at the Vizier’s court at Faizabad. Following a disagreement with Shuja-ul-Daula’s successor, Asaf-ul-Daula, Poilier moved to Delhi in 1775, and for the next five years was in the service of the Mughal Emperor, Shah Alam II. In 1780 a reconciliation seems to have been effected with the Vizier, and Poilier returned to Oudh. With English East India Company support, he was able to take up residence in Lucknow.30

Lucknow at this time was becoming something of a centre for Europeans interested in Mughal art and culture. Men like Richard Johnson, General Claude Martin and Colonel Gentili were all based there, and displayed a lively interest in Mughal civilization, painting in particular. There is no doubt that Poilier — with his sympathy for and experience of life at the Indo-Persian courts of Mughal India — would have been warmly welcomed by this group. It was at Lucknow that Poilier began to achieve his reputation as a bibliophile and collector of manuscripts. He appears to have been considered by contemporaries as a discriminating buyer. Like many other Company servants he is also known to have commissioned drawings, paintings and copies of manuscripts. Poilier corresponded with Sir William Jones and in 1784 he became a member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.31 He thus shared fully in that movement already described — the Indies Enlightenment — and was firmly in a tradition stretching back to Anquetil-Duperron. In 1788, Poilier returned to Europe and was murdered seven years later when thieves broke into his house near Avignon, during the closing years of the Revolution. Thus a man who had survived the intrigues and dangers of life in Mughal India and who had dedicated his later years to promoting greater understanding between cultures, died at the hands of fellow Europeans motivated by greed and desire for the treasures he had brought back with him from the East.

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Among Poilier’s Persian manuscripts which were sold by his son to the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1827 is a late-fifteenth-century copy from Shiraz of the poems of Khosrow Dehlavi, a two-volume anthology of Persian poetry commissioned by the Sultan of Kabul in 1486, an eighteenth-century history of Mughal India and a copy of the Bustan of Sa’di.

In 1889, the Persian manuscripts of Charles Schefer (1820–98) were received, numbering around two hundred. Between 1905 and 1916 Decourdemanche presented his collection of Persian manuscripts. In 1916, George Marteau bequeathed his important collection of Persian illuminated manuscripts to the Bibliothèque Nationale. Altogether, there are eighteen Persian manuscripts together with thirty-five manuscript leaves in the Marteau collection. Though not numerous compared to those making up many previous bequests, the manuscripts are considered to be among the finest in the Bibliothèque’s Persian collections. A special catalogue was issued in 1923.

The Marteau manuscripts are of great interest and importance for the study of Persian art history. Among the most outstanding items are fragments from a manuscript concerning the fables of Bidpai, which was copied in the middle of the twelfth century. It is one of the oldest known examples anywhere in the world of early Muslim painting. There is an early-fourteenth-century copy of Firdausi’s Shah-nama, the Book of Kings, produced in Tauris for the Vizier Fadl Allah Rashid-al-Din. There is copy of a treatise on medicine, copied in 1410 at Isfahan for one of the Timurid princes. It is famous for its beautiful miniatures, characteristic of Persian illuminated art in the era of Shah Rukh Bahadur. There are also among the Marteau manuscripts fine early-sixteenth-century copies of the poems of Shahi, produced for the royal court of Herat, and examples of the elegant calligraphy of some of Persia’s most famous calligraphers. All the manuscripts contain examples of the high-quality art being produced in the Persian-speaking world between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly at the courts of the Safavid rulers. The Marteau collection is without doubt one of the great treasures of the Islamic holdings at the Bibliothèque Nationale.

The Persian manuscripts at the Bibliothèque cover a wide range of subjects. There are a large number dealing with Islamic theology, both Sunni and Shi’ite. There are also works on poetry, metaphysics, philosophy, geography and medicine. Many of the manuscripts also cover the history of the Persian-speaking world. There are nearly 300 texts dealing with the local histories of cities and regions in Persia, and of ruling Persian dynasties. There are over 100 manuscripts detailing the history of India and the Mughal emperors. There are also valuable treatises on astronomy, the natural sciences and medicine produced at the courts of Persia and Mughal India.32 The Bibliothèque Nationale also possesses a number of important manuscript copies of the Rubāʿiyyat of Omar Khayyām.

The first separate catalogue of the Persian manuscripts at the Bibliothèque was not published until 1905, when Blechot compiled the first volume of the Catalogue des manuscrits persans. Prior to that, Persian manuscripts had been
listed in the general manuscript catalogues of the Bibliothèque Nationale. Altogether, Blochet produced four volumes of his Persian catalogue, a task which took him almost thirty years (volume 4 was not issued until 1934). The manuscripts listed in Blochet's catalogue number 2,481. Recent additions are listed in a supplementary handwritten catalogue. Apart from this main catalogue there is the 1923 Notices sur les manuscrits persans et arabes de la collection Marten, produced by Blochet, and a special catalogue of the manuscripts of the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, published in Hungary in 1933 and compiled by Dr. Barthélémy Callik.

The Bibliothèque Nationale also contains manuscripts in other Islamic languages. There is a small collection of Punjabi and Bengali manuscripts (numbering about twenty items altogether), and about 260 manuscripts from South-East Asia. These include seventeen Batak, eleven Malay and 204 Javanese manuscripts. French involvement in Muslim South-East Asia never paralleled her involvement in the Muslim Near and Middle East. Consequently, French collections of manuscripts from this region do not rival the collections built up by Britain and The Netherlands, both of which had a long imperial role in the region. The provenance of the Javanese manuscripts is not clearly known, but some of them appear to date from the early nineteenth century and were probably collected during the brief era of French influence in Java under the governorship of Herman Willem Daendels (1762-1818). Daendels was a staunch supporter of Napoleon Bonaparte, and in 1810 hoisted the French flag in Java after the French annexation of The Netherlands. His recall to France was followed by the English invasion of Java (1811) and an end to French dreams of an empire in South-East Asia.

Mention should also be made at this point of the Bibliothèque Nationale's important collection of Islamic printed books. Those brought in from the Muslim world mainly date from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, though there are some interesting examples of Arabic Christian books from the eighteenth century. The Bibliothèque Nationale is particularly strong in Arabic books from Egypt, North Africa and the Levant. There is also a good collection of nineteenth-century Ottoman and modern Turkish books.

Because of its pre-eminent role on the French library scene, and patronage by both the pre- and post-Revolutionary governments, the Bibliothèque Nationale has by far the largest collection of Islamic manuscripts anywhere in France. No other library rivals it. Before the French Revolution, several of the religious houses — notably the Sorbonne and the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés — had collections that equalled those of the Royal Library, but following the integration of their collections with those of the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1796, this ceased to be the case. Even so, there are a number of important Islamic collections, which though they do not rival those of the Bibliothèque Nationale in size, are none the less worth reviewing.
Schefer himself travelled frequently to the Middle East, particularly Cairo. In a letter dated 2 February 1874 he wrote that ‘the Viceroy [in Egypt] has ordered that books printed in Bulaq during the past year should be handed to me.’ Bulaq near Cairo was the first printing house established in the Arab world, and was created by Muhammad Ali in 1825. Throughout the nineteenth century, it set and maintained standards of excellence for publishing in the Arabic script, and Bulaq’s books were considered to be superb examples of typographic design. The Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes has one of the best collections in Europe of books published at Bulaq. Among the books that Schefer acquired during his 1874 trip were two copies of *Al Layla wa Layla, The Thousand and One Nights*. By 1897, when Lambrecht produced the Ecole’s first complete Arabic printed books catalogue, there were 3,196 titles in the collection. They included copies of most of the Arabic-language books published up to that date in Egypt, Istanbul, Makkah, Syria, North Africa and the Dutch East Indies. At the same time as Arabic printed books were being acquired, Schefer and Lambrecht were also active in buying printed and manuscript texts in Persian, Turkish and Urdu.

Throughout the twentieth century, the Ecole has continued the policy established by Schefer. There has been an active acquisition policy based on collaboration with foreign libraries and bookshops, and missions have been sent out when it was felt that collections needed a particular boost. Such a mission was headed in 1932 by Henri Massé, Professor of Persian. It spent several months in Iran, searching out Persian printed books and rare manuscripts. Currently, the Ecole holds over 50,000 books in Arabic, with smaller collections in Persian and Turkish. Lambrecht’s 1897 catalogue was the first substantive catalogue produced on the Arabic collections. Work is now under way on a complete revision and updating which will cover Arabic printed books acquired in the period up to 1976.

**The Société Asiatique**

The Société Asiatique was founded in 1822, and its first President was the dominant figure in nineteenth-century French Arabic studies: Benoît Silvestre de Sacy. It stands very much in the tradition of other Western-inspired orientalist learned societies, such as the Asiatic Society in Bengal (1784) and the Royal Asiatic Society in London (1823). Its aim was to ‘draw the attention of the public to the scientific, literary, or poetic productions of the Orient, to those facts about the Orient that could be relevant to Europe, to those discoveries and works of all kinds of which the Oriental peoples could become the subject.’ It has become one of the most influential organizations involved in French scholarship concerning the Muslim world, and apart from Sacy it has numbered several key scholars, such as Sylvain Lévi, among its presidents. Most of the important figures in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Islamic studies have been members of the Société.

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The Société was founded at the beginning of the epoch which marked French expansion into North and West Africa. In 1830, Algiers fell under French rule and the occupation was followed by direct French involvement in Tunisia, Morocco and much of West Africa. It is therefore not surprising that many of the Islamic manuscripts and printed books acquired by the Société reflect this new-found imperial role. Many of the scholars and savants associated with the Société during this period focused their research upon North Africa — men like André Basset, for instance, who was Professor of Berber at the Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes.

The manuscripts at the Société number around sixty, and almost all of them originate from North Africa. They mostly date from the nineteenth century, and are of Algerian provenance. They include manuscripts on Arabic and Berber law, theology and grammar, as well as copies of Berber songs and tales. A catalogue of all the manuscripts was compiled by Georges Vajda and issued in volume 238 of the *Journal asiatique* in 1950.

The Société Asiatique also has an important collection of printed books, covering a wide range of subjects relating to Muslim countries. There are texts on history, geography, politics, religion, art and scholarship. The Islamic printed books collection at the Société ranks as one of the most important in France after those of the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes.

**The Institut de France**

The library of the Institut de France also has a small collection of Islamic manuscripts. The Institut was founded in 1795, by revolutionary edict, as a merger of several academies. Its library was created by bringing together collections of confiscated books from the private libraries of the ancien régime aristocracy. It has collections of Arabic manuscripts made by Claude-Charles Faurier (1772-1843) and the archaeologist G. de Gironcourt. De Gironcourt led an expedition to French Sudan in 1911 and brought back twelve manuscripts, written in Arabic and relating to the customs and traditions of West African Muslim tribes. The Institut also has a collection of Persian manuscripts, including copies of the *Gulistan* and the *Diwan* of Sa’di. Turkish manuscripts include an interesting collection of Eastern Turkish texts and copies of Turkish prayers. These were mainly acquired in the late nineteenth century. There is no special catalogue of the Islamic manuscripts at the Institut. They are included in the 1928 edition of the *Catalogue général Paris* (Bibliothèque de l’Institut), *ancien et nouveau fonds.*

**Collections outside Paris**

Outside Paris, there are at least fifteen provincial towns which have small collections of Islamic manuscripts. These collections often number only two or three items. For example, the Municipal Library in Albi has a single copy of the
Qur'ān. Several of the large provincial cities — principally Bordeaux, Avignon, Aix-en-Provence, Marseilles and Strasbourg — have larger collections, which include manuscripts in Arabic, Persian and Turkish. Often, these manuscripts were brought back from North Africa by colonial civil servants, travellers and scholars who were either based in the region or visited it in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Avignon Municipal Library, for example, has a collection of nine Arabic manuscripts, all of them originating from Algeria. This collection, though small, is one of the more valuable of the provincial collections. Among the manuscripts are two beautifully illustrated late-eighteenth-century/early-nineteenth-century copies of the Qur'ān. The other manuscripts include prayer formulas, texts on grammar and medicine. All of them date from the same period as the copies of the Qur'ān, and are excellent examples of Algerian Arabic calligraphy.41

The Municipal Library in Marseilles has a collection of 35 Arabic and four Turkish manuscripts. Marseilles had a long connection with the Ottoman Empire. Under Louis XIV, it was designated a free port for trade with the Ottomans, and its Chamber of Commerce was given responsibility for all merchants leaving France for the East. Until the Revolution it also had overall economic control of French trade throughout the Ottoman Empire. In view of this, it is surprising that it does not have a larger collection of Arabic and Turkish manuscripts. But given the powerful role of Paris in this field, particularly during the time of Colbert, it is perhaps understandable that Marseilles was rarely allowed to keep manuscripts. Merchants and travellers were always encouraged to send their acquisitions on to Paris, where they were either incorporated into the Royal Library or into one of the great private collections such as the Colbertine.

Bordeaux — despite the fact that its trade orientation was with the Americas rather than the Muslim East — has a collection of 23 Arabic and Persian manuscripts. Most of these were donated by a citizen of Bordeaux, Dr Gachet, who gave them to the Municipal Library in 1921. They are mainly nineteenth-century manuscripts from North Africa. A catalogue of the collection was issued in 1932.

The most famous of the provincial collections is undoubtedly that of the University of Strasbourg. Currently, the University has over three million books and nearly 6,000 manuscripts. Islamic manuscripts number 212 Arabic, two Persian and 21 Turkish manuscripts. The University Library — like the city of Strasbourg — has had a chequered and often violent history. It is situated in the province of Alsace-Lorraine, a region over which Germany and France were frequently in dispute.

Strasbourg was part of France until 1870 and the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. As part of their agreement to end the war, the Prussians — who had long laid claim to the city — seized the region of Alsace-Lorraine, and Strasbourg passed under German administration. A university was established, with a new University and State Library attached, the

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Kaiserlich Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek. The Strasbourg town library buildings had been destroyed in the bombardment of the city, but most of their collections had survived, and these were transferred to the new library.

Following the First World War, Strasbourg was reoccupied by France, and in 1926 the library was given the new name ‘Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire’. In 1944, the library was severely damaged by bombardment, and parts of the collection were damaged or destroyed. Since the Second World War it has experienced a period of steady and sustained growth.

Despite the traumas of the past century, the Islamic collections at Strasbourg have continued to develop. Fortunately, only a few of the Arabic manuscripts appear to have been lost as a result of the 1944 bombardment. The collection was largely built up in the period of German rule (1870–1918), and Strasbourg, as an important provincial city, benefited from the strong German orientalist tradition, which encouraged the development of Islamic scholarship and Islamic collections throughout many different regions of Germany.

In 1963, the University acquired one of its most valuable collections — the Persian and Arabic manuscripts of Joseph–Arthur, Comte de Gobineau. Acclaimed in his time as one of the great French orientalists of the nineteenth century, Gobineau stands in the same tradition as Sayy and Renan. In recent years, however, Gobineau has come in for a certain amount of criticism, principally as a result of his writings on racial inferiority and superiority. These ideas were conveyed in Gobineau’s Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines (1853–5). It is, of course, hard to judge how far a man like Gobineau was a determined racist, and how far he was typical of his time and generation. He was, however, a noted scholar, and his collection of Persian manuscripts, particular, are an important addition to the collections of Strasbourg University.

The first catalogue of Strasbourg’s Islamic manuscripts was compiled in 1881 by Dr S. Landauer. It only covers a small part of the present collection, as most manuscripts were acquired after 1881. It is entitled Katalog der hebräischen, arabischen, persischen und türkischen Handschriften der Kaiserlichen Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek zu Strassburg. In 1964, Aserogobough, an Iranian scholar, produced a catalogue of the Persian manuscripts entitled Catalogue critique des manuscrits persans de la Bibliothèque nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg. This catalogue was jointly issued by the Universities of Tehran and Strasbourg. Turkish manuscripts are partially listed in Landauer’s 1881 catalogue, but also in the 1923 edition of the Catalogue général. A more complete listing of Arabic manuscripts is also to be found here.

France’s links with the Muslim world — particularly Mediterranean Arab countries — remains strong. There are several million North African Arabs settled in France — mainly from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco — and well-established Arab communities exist in many French cities, such as Marseilles,
Toulouse and Paris. French economic and cultural links with North African countries also continue to be a predominant feature of the Franco-Muslim relationship in the latter part of the twentieth century.

There are many centres for Islamic studies in France today. Pre-eminent among them is the Ecole Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes in Paris, offering courses in all the major Islamic languages. The Sorbonne is another important centre, and it offers courses in Arabic language and literature, Islamic history, Indian languages and literature and Islamic studies in general. The Collège de France, where a Chair in Arabic was founded as far back as 1587, is still active in providing courses in Islamic civilization and Arabic language. The University of Paris has an Institute of Iranian studies. The University of Bordeaux has a department of Arabic language and Islamic studies. The University of Lyons has an Arabic Studies Institute, and the Institute for Research into the Contemporary Arab World (Institut de Recherches sur le Monde Arabe Contemporain) is also based there. The University of Aix (Marseilles) has departments in Islamic studies and Islamic civilization, and a centre for research into the contemporary Arab East. The University of Human Sciences in Strasbourg has an Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies.

In addition, there are many learned societies and research institutions, including the Société Asiatique, founded in 1822, the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations) in Paris, and the Institut de Monde Arabe, which has become one of the most important centres in Western Europe for the study of the contemporary Arab world. Among the influential publications covering the Islamic world is the Journal asiatique, the oldest and most famous oriental studies journal in France, the Cahiers de l’Orient contemporain and the Revue d’École Nationale des Langues Vivantes. There is also now a lively publishing industry linked to the Muslim ethnic minorities in France. This publishes mainly in Arabic.

France’s collection of Islamic manuscripts reflect France’s present and past preoccupation with the Islamic world bordering the Mediterranean — Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. It was predominantly this world which absorbed the interest of French scholars, writers, travellers, politicians and traders. The manuscripts which now reside in French collections are therefore an important witness to the special relationship which has developed, a relationship which not only has strong historical roots, but also continues to exert a powerful influence on the present development of Franco-Muslim cultural, political and economic links.

References
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28 Ibid. p. 81.


31 Ibid.


37 Ibid. p. 99-100.

38 Ibid. p. 101.


42 Ibid. p. 25.

43 Ibid. p. 24.


Germany

*Through acquaintance with the literature of the East, the student is carried beyond the narrow limits of European prejudices and associations. . . Oriental pursuits are of the highest philosophical importance.*

Aloys Sprenger (1813-93)

The relationship between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Islamic world draws on a well-established and highly regarded tradition of academic scholarship which can be traced back to the sixteenth century. It has earned for German scholarship an important position in the development of Western thinking about the Muslim world.

The German connection with Islam, however, is fundamentally different from that developed by Britain, France or The Netherlands. It is a connection based largely on diplomatic and scholarly interchange. It could almost be described as a textual relationship, for although the Germans have contributed many of the most important academic texts in Western Islamic scholarship, this has been done without the support of the strong political and economic links which have been so characteristic of the British, French and Dutch relationships with the Muslim world.

There was never a sustained German colonial presence in any Muslim country, and certainly nothing in the tradition of the English and Dutch trading companies. German travellers and scholars journeying to Muslim countries were therefore not as numerous as those from Britain or France. There were, of course, diplomatic links — links with the Ottoman Empire were particularly strong — and individual German scholars did make efforts to travel in India, Egypt, Syria and Persia. But, on the whole, Islamic scholarship flourished in a more theoretical atmosphere than was the case in other Western European countries. The German experience of Islam and the Islamic world has largely been an experience of the intellect, a contact developed by scholars and writers in search of experience and learning, not by soldiers and traders in quest of power and spices.

German scholars of Islam had little of that direct stimulation of interest in the Muslim world engendered by the development of close political economic and cultural relations which their British, French and Dutch colleagues were able to benefit from. There was no German empire in India or the East Indies.