

*Introduction*

*450 Years of  
Middle Eastern  
Studies and  
Collections at  
Leiden University  
and NINO*

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*INTERPRES LEGATI  
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On 8 February 2025 Leiden University will be celebrating its 450th anniversary. From the very start, Middle Eastern languages, cultures and religions have been a subject of special interest. That this interest is as lively as ever is amply shown by the festive opening, in the autumn of 2024, of a specially dedicated Middle Eastern Library.

This Middle Eastern Library expresses the ultimate convergence of the collections of both the university and the Netherlands Institute for the Near East (NINO). It is conceived as a place of contemplation, a neutral zone where one may study, reflect and discuss in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

This introduction tries to give a *tour d'horizon* of the development of Middle Eastern and North African studies at Leiden University and subsequently NINO in relation to the growth of their library collections, with an emphasis on the collections of special historical or scholarly value. It serves as an introduction to more than fifty contributions of scholars and librarians who are intimately familiar with diverse aspects of the collections, both ancient and modern. May they inspire you as they have inspired me.

#### EXPLORING HOLY SCRIPTURE

On a chilly day in February, 1575, a rather makeshift pageant wound its way through the streets of Leiden to celebrate the foundation of the first university

Artist's impression of the new  
Middle Eastern Library, Leiden,  
2024.





in the Netherlands. Only four months earlier the town had narrowly escaped from a prolonged siege by the Spanish army and its mercenaries, despatched to quench the Dutch Revolt. The political climate was still unstable: the university was founded on the order of the Protestant leader of the revolt, Prince William I of Orange, but its charter is nevertheless in the name of His Most Catholic Majesty Philip II, King of Spain and Lord of the Netherlands. During the ceremony a copy of the Bible was paraded through the city, marking the fact that the new university was to educate young gentlemen for the Calvinist clergy. One should not forget, however, that the Old Testament is mostly in Hebrew, an Oriental language. Indeed, the first

**Engraving of the Leiden University Library in 1610, after Johannes Cornelisz van 't Woudt. [© Courtesy University of Amsterdam, Special Collections]**

book to enter the nascent University Library as a gift from the Prince of Orange was a polyglot Bible printed in Antwerp, not only in Greek and Latin but also in the Oriental languages Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac. This magnificent work, dedicated to King Philip, expresses the academic interest in Hebrew and its cognate languages which originated in Europe in the early years of the sixteenth century,

with the ultimate purpose of fathoming the true meaning of Holy Scripture. It is therefore only reasonable to assume that without Christianity, after all a Middle Eastern religion, the study of Oriental languages would never have attracted the scholarly attention it actually did.

### FOREIGN AID

Despite all the lofty purposes, the newly founded University of Leiden had great difficulty attracting a professor who was qualified to teach Hebrew. The first who donned the gown was a certain Hermann Rennecher or Rennecherus from Westphalia, Germany, who was appointed in the summer of 1575. Unfortunately, the man turned out to be an alcoholic with a violent streak, and after a series of tavern brawls the Governors of the university sent him packing in 1578. The next to teach *Lingua Sacra* was Johannes Drusius or Van den Driesche, a Protestant from Oudenaarde in the Southern Netherlands and a well-respected scholar. He represents a generation of Flemish Protestants who found life under a Spanish Catholic regime increasingly irksome and migrated northwards, especially after the Fall of Antwerp in 1585. From that city came Franciscus Raphelengius (1539–1597), who took over from Drusius in 1586. Raphelengius or Van Ravelingen was the son-in-law of the famous printer Christophe Plantin, and he had been actively engaged in the editing of the Antwerp polyglot Bible. Raphelengius took charge of the branch of the Plantinian printing office in Leiden. There he designed an Arabic typeface, which made him the first of his generation to print Arabic with moveable lead type outside Rome. He was also the first to teach Arabic at Leiden.

### SCALIGER

The most illustrious foreign scholar who came to Leiden during the early years of the university was the French Protestant Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609). A universal scholar in the best humanist tradition, he based his celebrity reputation on his text editions of Greek and Latin authors

from Antiquity. It was only after protracted negotiations that he deigned to come to Leiden in 1593. Exempt from all teaching duties, he served exclusively as the “Ornament of Leiden University”. He gathered a circle of talented students and scholars around him, and especially during the last phase of his career immersed himself increasingly in Arabic. In 1609 he died a bachelor after a life of complete dedication to scholarship. His bequest to the university comprised about 200 early printed books on Oriental studies, around twenty Hebrew or Aramaic manuscripts as well as 50 manuscripts in the languages of the Islamicate Middle East: Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish. This collection forms the core of the extensive Oriental holdings of Leiden University Libraries.

### THE FIRST UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

In 1595, twenty years after its foundation, Leiden University found a permanent home for its growing library collections in the Beguinage Chapel on the Rapenburg canal, not far from the central university building. After the first phase it became customary to appoint one of the professors as librarian, assisted by *amanuenses* (clerks). A hand-coloured engraving from 1610, after a drawing by Jan Cornelisz van 't Woudt, shows the rows of books in cases called *plutei*, chained to railings to prevent theft. In the front, close to the entrance, is a special bookcase with closed doors that are embellished with an inscription and a heraldic device. It is the case that contains Scaliger's collection, which has been given pride of place.

### BIRTH OF A LOCAL TRADITION

The first Dutchman to gain pre-eminence in Arabic studies was Thomas Erpenius (1584–1624). Studying liberal arts in Leiden from 1602, he obtained his master's degree in 1608. Although he was one of the privileged students who had access to Scaliger's circle, he received no tuition in Arabic. He first went to England, but afterwards travelled to Paris, where he was welcomed by luminaries such as Isaac Casaubon and Étienne Hubert. In 1611, when living

in Conflans near Paris, he made the acquaintance of Ahmad ibn Qasim al-Hajari, a *Morisco* or Muslim refugee from Spain, who worked as a diplomat in the service of Muley Zidan, sultan of Morocco. Al-Hajari helped Erpenius with his Arabic and also discussed the tenets of Islam with him. In 1612 Erpenius returned from his European travels and established himself in Leiden with uncertain prospects for his future.

Meanwhile, the Twelve Years' Truce between the Dutch Republic and Habsburg Spain, which lasted from 1609 to 1621, caused a profound change in the foreign policy of the Dutch. In 1610 they concluded a treaty with the Moroccan sultan. In 1612 a far more powerful ruler, Sultan Ahmed I of the vast Ottoman Empire, chose to add the Dutch to his ring of anti-Habsburg allies by granting them a charter or *Ahdname* with extensive trading privileges and the right to nominate an ambassador to his court and consuls in designated places of commerce such as Smyrna (Izmir), Aleppo and Cairo. For the Dutch Republic these privileges meant a veritable economic lifeline.

One year later, in 1613, the governors of Leiden University decided to create a new chair for Arabic and other Oriental languages (Hebrew, however, excepted), with Erpenius as its first nominee. In his inaugural lecture "On the Excellence and Dignity of the Arabic Language" Erpenius waxed eloquent about the beauty of Arabic poetry and the stores of knowledge preserved in Arabic scientific and historical texts. During the rest of his short career, Erpenius concentrated on Arabic text editions, primers for students and, most importantly, an Arabic grammar that would remain in use as a standard work for more than two centuries. He was also a very practical man: when printing facilities in Arabic became unavailable in Leiden he established his own Oriental printing press, named "Typographia Erpeniana" after himself. In 1624 Erpenius succumbed to the Plague at the age of forty. His printing materials were sold to the university printer Isaac Elzevier for the astonishing sum of 8,000 Dutch guilders, but his collection of circa



Thomas Erpenius (1584–1624), first professor of Arabic in Leiden from 1613. Anonymous oil portrait, undated. [UBL Icones 69]

80 Oriental manuscripts is now in the Cambridge University Library.

#### ADVENTURES ABROAD

It may be difficult to believe, but when Erpenius became professor at Leiden in 1613, not a single Dutch Orientalist had ever set foot in the Middle East or North Africa. His pupil Jacobus Golius (1596–1667) was the first who took advantage of the new Dutch diplomatic network in the area. Between 1622 and 1624 he accompanied a diplomatic mission to Morocco, and after his appointment as professor of Arabic in 1625 he travelled first to Aleppo and then to Istanbul, where he stayed as a guest of the first Dutch ambassador. He returned to the Netherlands only in 1629. On his travels he bought more than 200 Middle Eastern manuscripts for Leiden University. In addition, Golius acquired an even larger collection for his private library. The

greater part of this latter collection is now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. A man of many talents, Golius was also an accomplished scientist, and his manuscript collections contain many prize items on algebra, geometry, mechanics and astronomy.

Golius's fame rests mainly on his *Lexicon Arabico-Latinum*, a large folio volume printed by the Leiden firm of Elzevier in 1653. The work is based on the Arabic lexicographical manuscripts that he had acquired on his travels. Like Erpenius's Arabic grammar, this dictionary would be the main work of reference for European Orientalists until the nineteenth century.

Golius also prepared a Persian dictionary, which was published posthumously by the Cambridge scholar Edmund Castell as an appendix to his *Lexicon Heptaglotton* or "Dictionary in Seven Languages" (London, 1669). Throughout the seventeenth century, Persian studies flourished to some extent in the Netherlands, without doubt prompted by the Safavid Shah 'Abbas the Great, who fostered trade relations with the Dutch Republic and invited Dutch artists to his court in Isfahan. The first Leiden scholars who made forays into the domain of Persian were Scaliger and Raphelengius, who wondered about the similarities between Persian and Dutch, both Indo-European languages. Raphelengius's Persian dictionary in Hebrew script survives in a manuscript copy by Scaliger (UBL Or. 2019). Moreover, the Leiden scholar Ludovicus de Dieu published a small Persian grammar, *Rudimenta linguae Persicae*, printed by Elzevier in 1639.

#### LEVINUS WARNER, THE COLLECTOR

Nevertheless, the most important Dutch Orientalist of the seventeenth century – at least from a librarian's point of view – was not a Dutchman at all but a German who never held an academic position in the Netherlands. Levinus Warner (circa 1618–1665) matriculated as a student at Leiden in 1638. He studied Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish under Golius and Hebrew under Constantijn L'Empereur. After his graduation in 1644

he obtained funds from high dignitaries and merchants and travelled overland to Istanbul, where he arrived in 1645. There he carved out a career for himself in the Dutch community, eventually rising to the post of *resident* or diplomatic representative of the Dutch Republic to the court of the Ottoman sultan. The emoluments from this position allowed him to follow his great passion: collecting rare Middle Eastern manuscripts. From the Dutch residence in the leafy suburb of Pera, Warner operated a small network of mainly Syrian Christians, who scoured the antiquarian bookshops for him and attended the auctions of prominent Ottoman literati. During the twenty years that Warner lived in Istanbul, he collected about 900 Middle Eastern

**Jacobus Golius (1596–1667), professor of Arabic and Mathematics at Leiden. Oil painting by Hieronymus van der Mij, dating from c. 1735–1736. [UBL Icones 81]**



manuscripts in Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish. His interest in Jewish and Hebrew culture, and in particular the heterodox community of the Karaites, is reflected in his collection of nearly 80 manuscripts and more than 200 early printed books in Hebrew. In 1665, when only in his late forties, Warner died suddenly of a fever without ever having seen Germany or the Netherlands again. In his will he stipulated that his entire collection should go to Leiden University. The Warner collection meant an enormous increase in the Leiden Oriental manuscript holdings, and its impact was such that the entire Oriental collection is still known as “Warner’s Legacy” (*Legatum Warnerianum*). The University Library took such pride in this acquisition that it published a new catalogue in 1674, in which the new Oriental treasures could be admired in detail.

#### THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

After Golius’s death in 1667 the study of the languages of the Islamicate Middle East at Leiden fell into a void, from which it would emerge only six

decades later. In 1710 the University appointed Johannes Heyman, who had served as pastor to the Dutch merchant community of Smyrna. Incidentally, this made him the last scholar from Leiden who actually travelled to the Middle East until the late nineteenth century. This surprising lack of wanderlust was caused by two independent currents in scholarship: the first was a growing awareness that the classical Arabic texts on mathematics or medicine had little new to offer in the face of the rapid development of Western science. Secondly, Oriental studies underwent a complete reorientation, which shifted from a genuine interest in the history, languages and cultures of the Muslim Middle East to the narrow domain of Biblical philology. A prominent representative of this latter tendency is Albert Schultens (1686–1750), who was appointed professor of Oriental languages and “Hebrew Antiquities” in 1732.

Ever since the sixteenth century there had been an awareness that Arabic, a close cognate of Hebrew, could be of service to explain obscure passages in the Old Testament. This approach gained considerable vogue among Protestant scholars, who preached a return “ad Fontes” (“Back to the Sources”). This was in direct contrast with Catholic Orthodoxy, which held fast to the authority of the Latin Vulgate of St Jerome and took a dim view of philological exercises. In the approach of the Protestant theologians, Arabic was a “dialect” or “daughter” of Hebrew, the Primeval Language, and could thus act as a “handmaid of Theology”. Albert Schultens took a bold step forward by declaring that the Hebrew language was “worn” by the ages and was no longer reliable as a textual witness. He also held that Arabic was not a daughter of Hebrew but a “twin sister” of equal standing, with the



Albert Schultens (1686–1750), professor of Oriental languages at Leiden. Oil painting by Hieronymus van der Mij, dated 1736. [UBL Icones 144]

added advantage that Arabic had survived in its pristine form in the isolation of the Arabian desert.

### INTERPRES LEGATI WARNERIANI

By 1729 the Oriental manuscript collections at Leiden had fallen into complete disarray through lack of care and the necessary expertise. The governors of the university tried to remedy the situation by appointing Albert Schultens as the first *Interpres Legati Warneriani* or “Interpreter of the Warner Legacy”, who would assume prime responsibility for the Oriental manuscript collections. Unfortunately, Albert Schultens’s appointment as *Interpres* did not lead to a significant expansion of the collection. The first acquisition of any note after Warner was made only following the death of Albert Schultens’ son and successor Jan Jacob (1716–1778). When his collection came up for auction in 1780, the university bought about 80 Oriental manuscripts.

### THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY

The third and last of the Schultens dynasty was Hendrik Albert, professor at Leiden from 1779 until his untimely death in 1793. His suave appearance and rhetorical talent took Oriental scholarship into the Romantic Era, with his declamations of Arabic poetry that brought tears to the eyes of his audience. In the first half of the nineteenth century, however, few Middle East scholars seem to warrant our special attention, except for the fact that some of them redirected their attention towards other areas of interest. Hendrik Arent Hamaker (1789–1835), professor of Oriental languages from 1817 to 1835, was the first to dedicate himself to the study of Phoenician. Taco Roorda (1801–1874), for instance, published a grammar of Hebrew, but in later life taught Javanese at the Dutch training college for colonial civil servants in Leiden.

One of the nineteenth-century Leiden scholars of Islamic history who gained international recognition was Reinhart Pieter Anne Dozy (1820–1883). Steeped in the French scholarly tradition, he was an admirer of the principles of the Enlighten-

ment and the French Revolution, and an inveterate enemy of the clergy. In 1861 he published his magnum opus *Histoire des musulmans d’Espagne*, the first serious description of the history of Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula.

Dozy also started a multi-volume catalogue in Latin of the “Oriental” (that is, Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish) manuscripts in the Leiden University Library, which appeared in 6 volumes between 1851 and 1877 (*Catalogus Codicum Orientalium Bibliothecae Academiae Lugduno Batavae*, usually abbreviated to *CCO*). Some of the volumes were co-authored by Petrus (Pieter) de Jong (1832–1890), who also prepared a catalogue of the 265 mostly Islamic manuscripts of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences, an important and large collection which had been given as a permanent loan to Leiden University in 1856. Pieter de Jong was also the first in the modern era to be appointed specifically as lecturer of Persian and (Ottoman) Turkish in 1859, which was converted in 1866 into a full professorship. In 1868, however, De Jong accepted an offer from the University of Utrecht to become professor of Hebrew and Israelite Antiquities.

The description of the Hebrew manuscript collection was left to the well-known Austro-Hungarian scholar and bibliographer Moritz Steinschneider (1816–1907). His *Catalogus Codicum Hebraeorum Bibliothecae Academiae Lugduno-Batavae* was published by Brill in 1858, while Steinschneider was simultaneously working on another catalogue of the Hebrew manuscripts in the Bodleian Library.

### MICHAEL JAN DE GOEJE

Nevertheless, there is only one towering figure in the landscape of nineteenth-century Middle East studies in Leiden, and that is Michael Jan de Goeje (1836–1909). He went up to Leiden in 1854 to study theology, and in 1856 switched to the Faculty of Letters, where he studied under Dozy. Like his predecessors, De Goeje contributed to the *Catalogus Codicum Orientalium* mentioned above. In 1869





Michael Jan de Goeje (1836–1909), professor of Arabic at Leiden. Charcoal portrait by Thérèse Schwartze, c. 1905. [UBL Icones 279]

he was appointed both full professor of Oriental languages and *Interpres Legati Warneriani*. In 1876, in the wake of a comprehensive reform of higher education, he was formally nominated professor of Arabic. Like many other European scholars of his day, De Goeje viewed the Orient through texts, either printed or handwritten. Rather than engaging with the contemporary East, he reached back to the glorious epoch of the early Islamic empires, and this world was waiting for him on the shelves of the Leiden University Library. Deeply influenced by modern theories of textual criticism, mostly propounded by German scholars such as Karl Lachmann, De Goeje sought to reconstitute the written heritage of early Islam. His most important achievement was the edition of the *Annals* of Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (839–923), a comprehensive history of the early Islamic empires. With the help of a group of fellow scholars from all over Europe and beyond he traced the lost volumes of this vast work and reconstructed the text. The edition was printed between 1879 and 1901 by the Leiden firm of Brill, and with its 9,500 pages it was the largest Arabic text that ever appeared in hand-set type.

For a scholar such as De Goeje it is hardly surprising that he could not be persuaded to travel to the Orient, with the single exception of a conference in Algiers towards the end of his life. Fortunately, the Orient came to him: in 1883 Amin ibn Hasan al-Madani, an Arab bookseller originally from Medina, made his appearance at the International Colonial and Export Exhibition in Amsterdam. In his luggage he carried more than 650 Arabic manuscripts, which he hoped to sell to interested customers. Hopeless though this task seemed, he was ultimately successful when the Swedish Arabist Carlo Landberg intervened and managed the sale of the manuscripts to Brill's antiquarian bookshop. Not much later the collection entered the Leiden University Library after De Goeje had secured a generous grant from the Dutch government. It was the largest acquisition of Middle Eastern manuscripts since the time of Levinus Warner in the seventeenth century. De Goeje set to work to include the Madani collection in a new *Catalogus Codicum Arabicorum* (usually abbreviated to *CCA*, Leiden, 1888–....), but his death in 1909 prevented its completion.

#### ARMENIAN MANUSCRIPTS

In 1906, the year of De Goeje's retirement, Leiden University Library received a generous gift of 55 Armenian manuscripts (UBL Or. 5476–5530). They were a donation from the British scholar James Rendel Harris (1852–1941), who in 1896 spent six months in Turkey, organising relief work for the victims of the Armenian pogroms. The manuscripts, mostly of a religious nature and embellished with exquisite miniatures, had probably been entrusted to him by owners who have remained anonymous ever since. As a token of recognition, Leiden Uni-

versity conferred an honorary doctorate on Rendel Harris in 1909.

### CHRISTIAAN SNOUCK HURGRONJE AND COLONIAL RULE

The philological tradition of Dutch Orientalism was suddenly upset by the enigmatic figure of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936). The career of this brilliant but controversial scholar largely coincides with the rapid transformation of Dutch colonial rule in the Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia). An increasing exploitation of the country's natural resources led to a firmer grip on native society and more interference with, and knowledge of, the languages, religions and cultures of the people. And this is where Academia stepped in. It is perhaps difficult to imagine how Snouck Hurgronje, an Arabist by training, could rise to

pre-eminence in the re-invention of Dutch colonialism, but he did. As the son of a defrocked Protestant minister in the deepest province, his start in life was hardly propitious. Nevertheless, he gained access to Leiden University in 1874 as a student of theology. He soon gave this up for Arabic and obtained his doctor's degree in 1880 as a pupil of De Goeje.

Let us take a quick look at his rise to fame: in 1884–1885 he travelled to Arabia, converted to Islam and stayed several months in Mecca, the cradle of Islam, with the main purpose of following the movements of radical Indonesian Muslims. There he took photographs with the help of a local doctor called al-Sayyid 'Abd al-Ghaffar ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Baghdadi. In the late summer of 1885 he was forced to leave Mecca, but returned home with sufficient information to write a two-volume work on the Holy City, *Mekka*, enriched with two albums of plates. In 1889 he obtained a position as adviser to the colonial administration on Muslim and indigenous affairs and departed for the capital Batavia (now Jakarta). In the war against the independent state of Aceh (Sumatra), which had been dragging on since 1873, Snouck Hurgronje's intelligence on local Islam and Acehnese religious leaders proved highly valuable to the military, which greatly enhanced his reputation.

In 1906 he returned to the Netherlands, where he succeeded Michael Jan de Goeje as professor of Arabic in Leiden. Rather than pondering over Medieval historical texts together with his disciples, he took charge of the education of students who wished to pursue a career in the colonies. This gave him a political influence — albeit informal — that was previously unheard of.



*Mekkanischer Arzt* ("Meccan Doctor"), Portrait of 'Abd al-Ghaffar, Snouck's companion and photographer in Mecca. Photo by C. Snouck Hurgronje, [1885]. [UBL Or. 26.403: 26]

### OOSTERS INSTITUUT (ORIENTAL INSTITUTE)

On the occasion of Snouck Hurgronje's retirement in 1927 a group of friends and close colleagues founded the Oosters Instituut (Oriental Institute, not to be confused with NINO, which dates from 1939). It is a charity that first allowed Snouck Hurgronje to maintain a foothold outside Leiden University, but soon evolved into a promoter of Middle Eastern and Islam Studies by awarding grants to promising young scholars and providing funds for endowed professorial chairs and acquisition purposes. The Oriental Institute flourishes to the present day.

Snouck Hurgronje died in 1936, leaving his extensive academic library and circa 900 Oriental manuscripts to Leiden University Library; his archive followed suit in 1958. Soon after Snouck's death his patrician mansion at Rapenburg 61 was sold on very favourable terms to the Leids Universiteits Fonds, a charity which in turn put it at the disposal of the Middle East Studies community to serve as an institute, with lecture rooms and staff offices. There they remained until their removal to the new Humanities complex on Witte Singel-Doelen in the early 1980s.

Only a few years after Snouck Hurgronje's death, in 1942, the Japanese army invaded the Netherlands East Indies and Dutch rule evaporated overnight. In spite of concerted efforts of the Dutch to regain control of the colonies after the Second World War, their role in Asia was over.

### HOTZ COLLECTION

In 1935, not long before his death, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje played a decisive role in the donation of the private library of the Rotterdam entrepreneur Albert P.H. Hotz (1855–1930). As a young man Hotz had travelled on several occasions to Persia (Iran), where he engaged in various business enterprises such as carpet weaving, import & export, banking and oil prospecting. He took many photographs of Persia and also acquired exposures from Western studio photographers who were active in the same area, such as Antoin Sevrin

and Ernst Hoeltzer. In 1883 he was responsible for organising the Persian wing at the International Colonial and Export Exhibition in Amsterdam. Later in his career, during World War I, Hotz was Dutch consul in Beirut.

Hotz knew no Oriental languages, and his library, consisting of circa 6,500 titles, hundreds of offprints, more than 20 photo albums and circa 250 Qajar-style watercolours, reveals the tastes and interests of the affluent and well-educated layman. The books, mostly in English, French and German, reflect the heyday of Orientalist exoticism in the late nineteenth century with their luxurious bindings and beautiful lithographed illustrations.

### WENSINCK AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

It is nothing less than amazing to see how Oriental studies at Leiden retook their academic course after Snouck's retirement in 1927. The scholar who succeeded him as professor of Arabic was Arent Jan Wensinck (1882–1939), who had previously occupied the chair of Hebrew and Israelite Antiquities from 1912 onwards. Wensinck was deeply involved in the editing of the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, which was published by Brill in German, French and English in five volumes between 1913 and 1938. It was uncontestedly the most important project of international cooperation in European Orientalist scholarship. Wensinck started as assistant to the editor-in-chief M.Th. Houtsma in 1908, and subsequently as his successor from 1924 until his death in 1939. The *Encyclopaedia of Islam* still thrives and is now in its third edition.

Wensinck is also known as the moving force behind the *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane*, a finding aid to the *Hadith* or utterances of the Prophet Muhammad, the most important source of Islamic creed and law after the Qur'an. Wensinck witnessed the publication of the second volume just before his death, but the project would continue for decades to come. The final volume, by Jan Just Witkam and Wim Raven, appeared in 1988. Understandably, this work was

welcomed with open arms in the Muslim world and even led to a number of pirate editions – invariably a sign of popularity.

#### POST-WAR CHALLENGES AND A NEW FUTURE

The end of the Dutch colonial adventure in Indonesia had far-reaching consequences for the European community of scholars and professionals. Many returned to the Netherlands, where new employment had to be found for them. Fortunately, those who had been groomed by Snouck Hurgronje for the colonial civil service or education were well versed in Indonesian languages and Arabic alike. An excellent example is Petrus (Piet) Voorhoeve (1899–1996), who repatriated after the war to become curator of Oriental manuscripts at Leiden University until his retirement in 1959. In 1957 he published a very useful *Handlist of Arabic Manuscripts in the Leiden University Library and Other Collections in the Netherlands*, but after his retirement he went on to publish catalogues of the Acehnese and Batak manuscripts at Leiden.

Another case in point is Gerardus Willebrordus Joannes (“Hari”) Drewes (1899–1992), who after studying under Snouck Hurgronje went to the East Indies in 1925. In 1935 he was nominated professor at the *Rechtshoogeschool* (Law School) of Batavia, where he taught Islam, Islamic Law and Indonesian languages. After the Second World War he resumed his duties, this time at the provisional University of Indonesia, but in 1947 he returned to the Netherlands to accept the chair of Malay at Leiden. From 1953 onwards he taught “Institutions of Islam,” while the Silesian German Joseph Schacht (1902–1969) was appointed as professor of Arabic. The two did not get on very well together and eventually, in 1959, Schacht left the country to accept a professorship at Columbia University, New York City. Drewes took over Schacht’s duties as professor of Arabic until his retirement in 1970, but until the end of his life he devoted himself to the study of Indonesian Islam. It seemed as if Indonesia would continue to dominate the curriculum, but things were soon to change.

Since the second half of the nineteenth century it had been customary for Leiden to appoint an Arabist as chaired professor, flanked by a lecturer for Persian and Turkish combined. In 1953, however, Karl E.O. Jahn (1906–1985) became the first chaired professor for Persian and Turkish. He is best known for his studies on the *Jami‘ al-Tawarikh* or “Compendium of Histories” by a vizier of the Il-Khanid (Mongol) dynasty in Persia, Rashid al-Din Fadl Allah (1247–1318). Jahn retired in 1973.

The presence of a full professor of Turkish encouraged the University Library to acquire Ottoman Turkish collections that stand out through their size or importance. The first is a collection of circa 10,000 printed volumes in Ottoman Turkish, part of which reputedly belonged to the “mad” sultan Murad V, who reigned only for several months in 1876 before being deposed by Abdülhamid II. The purchase was arranged in 1962 by Professor A.A. Cense, director of the Netherlands Institute in Istanbul, a subsidiary of the Netherlands Institute for the Near East (NINO) in Leiden. It may very well be the largest collection of Ottoman books outside Turkey.

Less than a decade later, in 1970, the Library bought 130 Ottoman manuscripts that had previously belonged to the German scholar Franz Gustav Taeschner, professor at the University of Münster (1888–1967). A man of considerable private means, he had collected these manuscripts on his regular visits to Istanbul’s “Sahafar” used book market. The most spectacularly illuminated or illustrated items, however, had previously been impounded as war booty by the Soviet Army towards the end of the Second World War. They were never returned.

In 1960, the university opted unequivocally for modernity when Jan Brugman (1923–2004) was named professor with the specific assignment to teach contemporary Arabic literature and culture. When based in Cairo as a junior diplomat he had moved freely in circles of modern Egyptian poets and novelists, spending his evenings with them in Café Riche or Le Grillon. Later in life this served him well when preparing his most important



publication, a bibliography of modern Egyptian literature. He retired in 1987, and after his death in 2004 important selections from his library came to Leiden.

In 1960, almost simultaneously with Brugman's appointment, a young Egyptian named 'Abd al-Ghani 'Abbas al-Fatatri ("Abdul"), born in Tanta in 1936, enrolled as a guest student of Mineralogy at Leiden University. Several years later, in 1964, he started supplying Arabic and also Ottoman manuscripts to curators Roelof Roolvink, Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld and later Jan Just Witkam; first they bought only isolated items, but soon took them off his hands by the dozen. By the time he ended his activities in 1995, he had sold hundreds of manuscripts to Leiden.

Also in 1960, a young Tunisian scholar, Mohamed Rached Hamzaoui (1934–2018), found employment as a teacher of Arabic, the first time that Leiden students were actually confronted with a native speaker. He left in 1964. Another fundamental change was the first appointment of a woman scholar, Barbara Flemming (1930–2020), as professor of Turkish in 1976 (no longer combined with Persian). She was succeeded in 1997 by Erik-Jan Zürcher (b. 1953), a specialist of the history of the early Turkish Republic, an able administrator and the supervisor of a few dozen PhD students.

From the 1970s onwards, fundamental changes occurred in Dutch society when large numbers of immigrant labourers arrived from Turkey and Morocco. Academia responded to the situation by



A richly illuminated Ottoman Turkish manuscript in the Taeschner collection, mid-19th century. [UBL Or. 11.058, f. 3b]

Right: 'Abd al-Ghani 'Abbas al-Fatatri, purveyor of Oriental manuscripts to Leiden, anonymous photo, no date. [© Courtesy Dr R.J. Demarée]

opening up new areas of research. In 1974 Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld (1943–2021) left the University Library, where he was curator, and joined the Faculty of Theology, engaging in dialogue with a growing Muslim population. In 1992 he was appointed professor of the Religious History of Islam in Europe. Léon Buskens (b. 1962) wrote a thesis on Islamic Law and family relations in Morocco in 1993 and was nominated professor of Law and Culture in Islamic Societies in 2009. There was a linguistic side to this reorientation, too: Harry Stroomeer and Maarten Kossmann research Berber languages, the native idiom of many Dutch citizens of Moroccan origin. Petra de Bruijn teaches and researches modern Turkish literature, theatre, film and television drama.

These new developments also left their traces in the Middle Eastern collections: through the mediation of Leiden scholars such as Léon Buskens and Nico Kaptein, the Library got in touch with Mostapha Naji (1951–2000), an antiquarian bookseller from Rabat. Between 1990 and 2000, the year of his untimely death, he sold about 485 Arabic and Berber manuscripts to Leiden, with the result that Leiden now has the second-largest collection of Berber manuscripts in Europe after the Fonds Arsène Roux in Aix-en-Provence, France. He also sold circa 500 early lithographed books from Fès, and after his death his private scholarly library came to Leiden through the courtesy of his heirs.

Other Leiden scholars have proved that the Classical heritage is still relevant for contemporary Middle Eastern studies. As an example I will cite only a few names: Remke Kruk (b. 1942) conducts research on the popular Arabic epic in the Middle Ages, and studies the Medieval scientific tradition of the Middle East, embedded as it is in the post-classical Greek or Hellenistic tradition. Her pupil and successor Petra Sijpesteijn (b. 1971) researches the birth of legitimacy and statehood in the early Arab Empire after the conquest in the 7th century CE, as well as the rise of the Islamic society. Gabriëlle van den Berg studies the impact of Firdawsi's *Shahnamah*, the national epic of Iran, and its im-



Remke Kruk, professor of Arabic at Leiden, 1991–2007. Oil painting by Adolfo Ramón, [2018]. [Leiden University, collection AHM, © Courtesy of the artist]

pact on the Persian classical tradition: as an icon of the Persian culture, it was well received in a climate of growing awareness of national identity. Holger Gzella (b. 1974), formerly professor of Hebrew and Aramaic, wrote a highly accessible overview for a general audience of Aramaic as the first world language. On the other hand, there were also losses to sustain. To name but one example: since the retirement of Erik-Jan Zürcher in 2018, there has been no chair of Turkish, an undesirable situation in a country with such a large minority of Turkish descent.

#### FOOTHOLDS IN THE ARAB WORLD

In the meantime, other initiatives were deployed to stay in touch with the contemporary Middle East and North Africa. In 1971, for instance, the Nether-

lands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies was opened in Zamalek, Cairo, later rechristened Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo and administered from Leiden. The institute has an excellent library – divided into an Arabic/Islamic and an Egyptology section – which was led for many years by Anita Keizers until she became librarian of NINO in 2012.

Decades later, in 2005, the Netherlands Institute in Morocco (NIMAR) was opened in Rabat, Morocco, with Paolo de Mas and Jan Hoogland as its first directors. Finally, in 2016, it was brought under the wings of the Faculty of Humanities of Leiden University. The institute, currently headed by Professor Léon Buskens, plays an essential role as a local branch of Leiden University Libraries, acting as an agent for the acquisition of publications from the Arab World for Leiden, while at the same time developing a well-provided library for the needs of its visitors. Among the visitors of both institutes are many undergraduates from Leiden, who spend a term in Cairo or Rabat for their education and a good deal of local flavour.

### A NEW CENTRAL LIBRARY

By the late 1970s the old University Library was bursting at the seams. The big sprawling complex on the Rapenburg canal even contained the remains of the Beguinage Chapel, where it had all begun in 1595. A new central library on Witte Singel was designed by Bart van Kasteel. It was – and still is – a beautiful building, which opened in 1983.

Many changes occurred in the Oriental collections. A new department was created under curator Jan Just Witkam (b. 1945), who headed a team of three assistant curators and a reading room attendant. The department had two reading rooms, one of which was devoted to Oriental manuscript

studies. Witkam was the epitome of the scholar-librarian, who out-purchased and out-catalogued all his predecessors. He also encouraged his fellow scholars to prepare detailed catalogues for the monograph series *Codices Manuscripti*. The most impressive of these was a catalogue of the Turkish manuscripts, a multi-volume work of incomparable learning by Jan Schmidt. Witkam also compiled an inventory of all the extant manuscripts and published it after his retirement from the Library in 2005. In 2001 he was appointed professor of Palaeography and Codicology of the Islamic World, a chair he occupied until 2010.

### CONSERVATION & RESTORATION

The gradual increase in the use of the special collections unavoidably resulted in extra strain on their physical condition, with the risk of serious damage in the long run. In 2000, when Paul Gerretsen was director of the University Library, it was decided that an adequate conservation and restoration facility should be established. Karin Scheper (b. 1970), a professional conservation specialist, was asked to realise this idea. In 2014 she obtained a doctoral degree for her dissertation “The Islamic

Former Oriental reading room,  
central University Library,  
Witte Singel, c. 1996–1998.  
Photo by Wim Vreeburg. [UBL  
BA2 F 38.1]



Bookbinding Tradition”, later published by Brill as *The Technique of Islamic Bookbinding* (2015, 2nd ed. 2018). Her thesis, expressing a profound interest in the materiality of the Middle Eastern book or manuscript, was awarded a prize by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences.

## A NEW CENTURY

In 2005 the university appointed a new librarian and director, Kurt De Belder, with the specific assignment to usher the Library into the twenty-first century. A new, comprehensive department of Special Collections was created, with a spacious reading room and two reference libraries. An ambitious programme was started to enhance the visibility of the Oriental collections in education and research with the help of digitisation and the creation of online collection guides. In the meantime, Witkam’s inventory was converted to create basic bibliographic records in the online catalogue for (almost) all Oriental manuscripts, a *sine qua non* for any successful digitisation project.

Another such *sine qua non* for digitisation is money: in the past two decades liberal financial support has been obtained from Government sources, for instance the national *Metamorfoze* project, which allowed the Library to digitise the extensive archive of Snouck Hurgronje in three consecutive projects. In addition, a large set of historic photo albums, mostly from Jeddah, Mecca and the Hijaz, were digitised with the generous financial aid of the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, Riyadh (Saudi Arabia). These albums had previously been transferred from the Oriental Institute to the Library in 1996. The entire Hebrew manuscript collection was digitised with the support of the National Library of Israel and the Friedberg Jewish Manuscript Society. The Princeton professor Sabine Schmidtke organised funding – mostly from the National Endowment for the Humanities – that allowed Leiden’s select collection of Yemeni manuscripts to be digitised as part of her Zaydi Manuscript Tradition project. Last but not least, a commercial partner such



Intricately constructed manuscript from Yemen on Arabic language, mid-19th century CE. [UBL Or. 6698, f. 12a]

as Brill (since recently De Gruyter Brill) helped digitise the core Islamic manuscript collections of the Library (Raphelengius, Scaliger, Golius collections; Turkish manuscripts of Levinus Warner).

In 2016 the Library was gifted the extensive audio collection of the ethnomusicologist Wouter Swets (1930–2016) by his heirs, who had formerly played in his musical ensembles. They also made additional funds available for cataloguing purposes. Other notable donations were the scholarly archive of the Leiden professor G.W.J. Drewes by his daughter Harmine Drewes, who kindly gave further financial support to have the archive inventoried; furthermore, there were substantial



additions to the archive of G.F. Pijper, professor of Arabic and Islam at the University of Amsterdam. We should also mention the donation of the Yemen collection of the Amsterdam scholar Kees Brouwer, and the purchase of a valuable collection of *Mahjar* literature from the NINO scholar Kees Nijland (“Mahjar” is the collective term for emigré Arabic literature from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mainly from the Americas).

Among the scholars and professional booksellers who supplied manuscript and archival materials to Leiden University Libraries we should furthermore mention Dr Frederick de Jong (b. 1944), since 2009 emeritus professor of the Languages and Cultures of the Islamic World at the University of Utrecht. Among his research interests are the mystic brotherhoods of Islam (*turuq*) and the Uyghur people of Xinjiang, China. In the course of time he has shared many items of his collection that reveal not only his scholarly expertise but also a discerning eye. Another bookseller of note is Mr Hoessein A. Bechan Qaadiri, originally from Paramaribo, Suriname, but since many years living in The Hague. From 1989 onwards, he has supplied many interesting manuscripts and lithographed books in Arabic and Persian from the Indian subcontinent to Leiden University Libraries.

Finally, additional funds were generously made available for acquisition purposes by the Friends of the Leiden University Libraries and the Oriental Institute foundation. For the creation of inventories of various newly acquired archival collections, the Library is deeply indebted to Hans van de Velde, a former employee of the Oriental Manuscripts reading room.

## THE NETHERLANDS INSTITUTE FOR THE NEAR EAST (NINO)

It is perhaps incongruous that this paragraph on the Ancient Near East should follow only after a survey of early modern and modern Middle Eastern studies. It should be borne in mind, however, that the study of the Ancient Near East at Leiden is of a much more recent date: it was only in the nineteenth century that hieroglyphs and cuneiform script were properly understood, thus giving access to the written sources. Pieter A.A. Boeser was the first Dutch Egyptologist to be awarded a lectureship in 1910; the first professor of Assyriology, Gerard J. Thierry, was appointed in 1913.

It was a few decades later, on 17 August 1939, that Adriaan de Buck (1892–1959), extraordinary professor of Egyptology, and Franz (Frans) M.T. de Liagre Böhl (1882–1976), since 1927 ordinary professor in the Languages and History of Babylonia and Assyria, proceeded to found what is now the Netherlands Institute for the Near East (NINO), assuming the role of directors. Its premises at Noordeindeplein 4A, an elegant, white-stuccoed mansion, were put at their disposal by the generosity of C.H.J. van Haften, a member of the minor nobility (in fact, NINO has always had a certain *je ne sais quoi* in that respect). In later years the neighbouring townhouse at No. 6A was also acquired. Yet the most important founder was Arie A. Kampman (1911–1977), an able administrator and indefatigable networker, who for many decades took charge of the daily affairs of the institute.

NINO was by no means the first independent academic institute that was founded among Leiden Orientalists. The Kern Institute for South Asian studies, for instance, had preceded it in 1925, as had Snouck Hurgronje’s Oriental Institute in



**NINO building at Noordeindeplein, 1939–1982. Photo dated 2008. [NINO Photo collection, © Courtesy Dr R.J. Demarée]**



**Portrait of Arie A. Kampman (1911–1977), co-founder of NINO. Unknown photographer, undated. [NINO Photo collection]**

1927. We must assume that such institutes provided additional financial means and other facilities that Leiden University itself could or would not provide.

NINO describes its mission currently as follows:

The Netherlands Institute for the Near East is a pillar of Dutch research on the Ancient Near East and Egypt. NINO maintains an internationally renowned open-shelf library, holds important collections of cuneiform tablets and other Near Eastern objects, publishes scientific journals and monographic series, and offers a variety of funding instruments.

In 1958 NINO founded a subsidiary institute in Istanbul, the Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul (Netherlands Historical-Archaeological Institute in Istanbul), now known as the Netherlands Institute in Turkey (NIT). Formerly based at the historical *Palais de Hollande*, the Dutch legation in Beyoğlu/Pera, Istanbul, it currently has premises in a building of Koç University in the immediate vicinity.

## PUBLICATIONS

Almost from their very inception, NINO and its subsidiary in Istanbul have issued an impressive range of publications, such as:

- ♦ *Bibliotheca Orientalis* (1943–....). A critical review of scholarly publications on the Ancient Near East and beyond.
- ♦ *Annual Egyptological Bibliography* (1947–2009). Between 1994 and 2009 edited by NINO.
- ♦ *Publications de l'Institut historique et archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul*, usually abbreviated to *PIHANS* (1956–....). A monograph series of Middle Eastern studies in general.
- ♦ *Anatolica: Annuaire international pour les Civilisations de l'Asie antérieure* (1967–....). Yearbook published by the Netherlands Institute in Turkey. “On the history and archaeology of Anatolia and adjacent regions from prehistory to the Ottoman era.”

- ♦ *Egyptologische Bijdragen = Egyptological Publications* (1982–....).

## LIBRARY

The NINO library holds an academic research collection of circa 47,000 volumes. It is a non-circulating, open access library. The main fields of interest are Egyptology, Assyriology, Archaeology, and the Ancient Near East in general. The library is currently staffed by Anita Keizers (subject librarian Ancient Near East), Mariette Keuken (subject librarian Egyptology) and Odile Hoogzaad (staff member Document Processing & Metadata).

In 1977, when the Oriental Institute foundation left the Snouck Hurgronje house at Rapenburg 61 and joined NINO at Noordeindeplein, it was agreed that NINO would curate the Oriental Institute's collection of books and artefacts.

## SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

The NINO library possesses a number of special collections that stand out through their rarity or scholarly value. We shall mention only a few:

- ♦ The Böhl collection of circa 3,000 cuneiform tablets and related objects, collected in the first half of the last century by Professor Franz (Frans) M.T. de Liagre Böhl (1882–1976).
- ♦ The Scholten collection of circa 14,000 negatives and 13,000 photo prints (both with many doubles), 67 photo albums and archival materials, made or collected by François (Frank) Scholten (1881–1942), who lived in Palestine between 1921 and 1923. Scholten had the intention of creating a comprehensive series of illustrated books on Palestine, based on contemporary scenery in relation to the holy books of the revealed religions (Bible, Talmud and Qur'an). Only two parts were ever published.
- ♦ The Sayyida Salme / Emily Ruete / Rudolph Said Ruete collection. The story of a Zanzibari Arabian princess (1844–1924) who in 1866 eloped with the German merchant Rudolph Heinrich Ruete (1839–1870), established herself in Hamburg, Germany, and sought a role for herself as mediator



Frank Scholten (1881–1942),  
(self-?) portrait with fez, c.  
1923. [NINO Photo collection]

between East and West. Her son Rudolph Said (1869–1946), who shared his mother's ambition, donated the collection in 1937 to the Oriental Institute. After 1977 it was curated by NINO.

## CONVERGENCE WITH LEIDEN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Ever since the early 1980s, when library management became more challenging because of the introduction of computer technology, there has been a growing consensus at NINO that their li-

brary was a self-contained unit, but that it would be both impractical and undesirable to continue in complete isolation. The process of gradual convergence with the main library network of the university started, in fact, in 1982, when NINO left its premises at Noordeindeplein and moved to the new Humanities complex at Witte Singel-Doelen, practically next door to the University Library. At roughly the same time, efforts were undertaken by NINO to convert their card catalogue into machine-readable data. The automated library system they chose was Pica, the same as the one used by the University Library. Many years later, in 2017, NINO and the university agreed on a much closer cooperation. As a result, the library staff formally transitioned to Leiden University Libraries with effect from 2018. And finally, in 2024, the NINO library merged with the Middle East reference collections of Leiden University Libraries and jointly moved to the new Middle Eastern Library in the completely gutted and remodelled Herta Mohr building.

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