



Universiteit
Leiden

Medieval Arabic Literature from the Leiden Library

Applicants

Eligible proposals must have at least two applicants from Humanities, preferably from two different institutes.

Supervisor Name	Institute
Dr. Arnoud Vrolijk	Leiden University Library
Dr. Peter Webb	Leiden Institute for Area Studies

Project description

Provide a brief description of the project (max. 300 words)

The Leiden University Library's Arabic manuscript collection is renowned as one of Europe's richest. Its manuscripts have formed the basis of critical editions for manifold classic pre-modern Arabic literary texts, but much of the collection nonetheless remains unpublished, accessible only to specialists via physical consultation in the Library. Moreover, since most pre-modern Arabic literature is, in general, untranslated, the achievements of early Muslim civilisation have been restricted to specialist scholars. To increase public awareness and enjoyment of Arabic writing, publishers have recently launched new initiatives to produce more critical editions of pre-modern texts with accompanying translations, and NYU Press' Library of Arabic Literature, the current leading platform for such publications, has approved a proposal by Peter Webb (LIAS) to produce a new volume based on Leiden manuscripts.

The text is *Sarḥ al-'uyūn fī sharḥ Risālah Ibn Zaydūn* ("Pasturing at the Fonts of Knowledge: Ibn Zaydūn's Letter explained") by the Egyptian belle-lettrist, Ibn Nubāta (d.768/1366). It is a commentary on a famous letter written by the earlier Andalusian Ibn Zaydūn (d.463/1071), and it contains a wealth of details about pre-Islamic and early Islamic-era Arabs (alongside some Persians and Greeks too) which aims to explain everything a learned reader was 'supposed to know' about what medieval Muslims considered the foundations of their civilisation. One version of the book, based on Cairo manuscripts has been published, but the Leiden manuscripts have never been consulted, and the Library of Arabic Literature is keen to produce a new version.

With the help of Research Trainees, we will realise this goal. The trainees will study the manuscripts with the help of the Collection's curator, Arnoud Vrolijk, and they will work closely with Peter Webb to produce a critical Arabic edition from which Webb will prepare a translation for the Library of Arabic Literature.

Research Trainee Profile

Each proposal requests two Research Trainees. Describe the general tasks of the research trainees, whether they need any preliminary knowledge (regarding the topic and/or research methods) and which skills the research trainees should have. Also specify which type of students are eligible to apply (Ba, Ma, ResMa).

BA3, MA and ResMA students can apply to the traineeship. Research Trainees should have a demonstrable knowledge of Arabic at an advanced level (B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). They should also be familiar with the medieval history of the Middle East.

General tasks of each of the Research Trainees:

- Reading the Leiden manuscripts of *Sarḥ al-'uyūn*, comparing their texts with the printed Cairo edition and with other manuscripts (detailed under the "Planning" heading below);
- Typing a Word format version of the manuscript, editing it to the critical standards of the Library of Arabic Literature;
- Assisting with the translation of the text (the translation is the responsibility of Peter Webb: students will participate in bi-weekly sessions in March/April where the translations will be discussed alongside theoretical discussions of translation theory and translating for modern audiences); and
- Attending regular meetings with publishers where Trainees will be exposed to the business side of academic publishing (we have secured the agreement of Maurits van den Boogert at Brill to host meetings; we are also hopeful that if this proposal is approved, the Library of Arabic Literature can invite the Research Trainees to visit their office (in Abu Dhabi) for first-hand experience of their production of books).

Collaboration

If applicable: Describe how your research improves collaboration and cross-pollination between the disciplines involved (max. 300 words)

The research project involves a variety of scholarly disciplines and practical applications. From the scholarly perspective, the project engages the philological skills of Arabic literary studies (LIAS) and codicological expertise of curating Arabic manuscripts (the Library). Arabists often rely on printed editions of pre-modern works, and the study of Ibn Nubāta's text relied on the Cairo edition: this has disadvantages of rarefying one version of a manuscript, without paying heed to the transmission history of the book in medieval Islam, and the practice of pre-modern copyists. The Leiden University Library has much experience in studying Oriental manuscripts, and will provide valuable assistance in enabling better understanding of the physical path of the book from Ibn Nubāta's creation to the extant forms in its surviving manuscripts. Research Trainees will thus benefit from this collaboration: the philological work of reading and translating pre-modern Arabic, alongside the codicological expertise needed to study manuscripts as objects.

The resultant published book will benefit scholars of history, religion and literature given the breadth of material Ibn Nubāta included in his commentary.

In terms of practical application, we intend that this proposed project will promote relationships between the University and publishers. NYU Press' Library of Arabic Literature is currently the leading forum for producing open-access editions of Arabic texts and accessible translations for broad audiences. Peter Webb has published one volume in their series (2017), and this project will facilitate deeper collaboration, and in addition, the Research Trainees will be afforded experience with the business aspects of publishing in Middle East Studies, exposing them to potentials by which their scholarly expertise can be used post-graduation for their future careers.

Deliverables

Enumerate intended project results: papers, research proposals or otherwise. (max 200 words)

A book published by the Library of Arabic Literature containing a study, critical edition of the Arabic text, and an English translation of Ibn Nubāta's *Sarḥ al-'uyūn*. The students' work will contribute to the production of the Arabic critical edition and translation of the book's opening segment.

Planning

Provide a breakdown of the project into phases with tentative timing (max 150 words)

January – February = Preliminary study of 8 manuscripts (Leiden x4 (with emphasis on Or 705(1) and Or 817); British Library OR 20; Cairo Dār al-Kutub 5127 *Adab*), comparing them with the printed edition (ed. Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Beirut: 1998) to determine the transmission history of the text.

March – April = Preparation of 10 pages of Arabic text (c. 15% of the total), compiled as a critical edition based on criteria to be determined from the preliminary study, above.

April – May = Peter Webb will translate the 10 pages of Arabic, students will attend sessions to discuss the translation and study theories and methods of translating literature for publication.

April – August = Further preparation of the Arabic edition, with the aim to complete at least 40 pages of the manuscript Arabic text = 70% of the total text.

Student Application

Provide information on how to apply e.g. required documents for application (resume, motivation letter etc.) and an email address where student applications should be sent to.

Prospective trainees should apply by email to p.a.webb@hum.leidenuniv.nl, sending a CV, a motivation letter, and a transcript of courses (including grades) in PDF format.