



Universiteit
Leiden

Arabic-Latin Dialogue at the Origins of Orientalism

Applicants

Supervisor Name	Discipline
Dr. Peter Webb	Arabic Studies (LIAS)
Dr. Christoph Pieper	Classics (LUCAS)

Project description

The proposed project examines a remarkable interaction between Arabic literature and Latin Humanism during the foundational layers of scholarly Orientalist study in the mid-seventeenth century. The interaction manifests via two manuscripts of an immensely-popular Arabic literary work, *Sarḥ al-ʿuyūn*, housed in the Leiden University Library. The book narrates stories of heroic characters from pre-Islamic Arabia and early Islam, a core of cultural repertoire about what was considered an ‘ancient past’ in the eyes of Muslims of the second millennium CE, who widely read *Sarḥ al-ʿuyūn* as an accessible handbook to learn the classic stories.

One of the manuscripts (Or.705/1) is a sixteenth-century Arabic copy, ostensibly like any of the several hundred copies circulating across the Middle East at the time, but distinguished because it was bought by Levinus Warner, Dutch Consul in Constantinople, who marked Latin annotations as he read. The second manuscript (Or.1104a) is even more distinguished: it was written by Warner himself c.1660, a Latin translation of *Sarḥ al-ʿuyūn* prepared in Constantinople with the assistance of Warner’s Syrian Christian friend, Nikulūs ibn Būtrūṣ. It is amongst the earliest scholarly translations of Arabic literature into a Western language, and since it was a translation of *Sarḥ al-ʿuyūn*, it affords unique insight into a ‘Western’ interaction with reading one of the ‘East’s best-sellers’ of the day.

The potentials of these hitherto un-studied manuscripts are great. They provide specific insight into the Arabic-language capabilities of a seventeenth-century Leiden-trained Arabist, and his approaches to translation. Warner’s reception of *Sarḥ al-ʿuyūn* can also be compared to those of his contemporary Turkish and Arabic readers to explore the multilingual and transregional impact of Arabic literature across varied interpretive communities. An early example of the translation of Arabic knowledge into Latin, the manuscripts also illuminate how early Orientalism took shape in dialogue with Arabic sources.

Research Trainee Profile

Two research trainees will transcribe Warner’s Latin manuscript annotations on Or. 705/1 and Warner’s Latin translation of *Sarḥ al-ʿuyūn* (Or. 1104a) and make draft translations of selected passages into English. The results will be analysed with the Supervisors.

Students will develop technical skills to read the manuscripts' handwritten Latin; the experience with non-canonical early seventeenth-century Latin writing will expand their repertoire of Latin reading from the classical and humanistic texts taught during the degree program.

Students will also be given relevant readings to discuss modern Polysystems Translation Theory methods with the Supervisors. Students will learn techniques to analyse the target context of translation, and how translations reshape source texts to fit target "cultural grids". This will expand their concepts of translation as a form of cultural encounter beyond simple linguistic equivalence. They will apply the theory to analyse the Latin translation of the Arabic and inform a blog article they will write at the end of the project.

In addition, students will receive codicological training from Dr. Webb to help them devise a lesson on bilingual manuscripts for the Leiden University Library-hosted Mouse&Manuscript online codicology textbook.

BA3, MA and ResMA students with good Latin knowledge and a keen interest in early modern Latin are eligible to apply. Knowledge of Arabic is beneficial, but not necessary, as the Supervisors will make translations available for the Arabic materials.

Collaboration

The background to this proposal is an ongoing project of Dr. Webb to study *Sarḥ al-ʿuyūn*'s reception and cultural impact across the wide communities who made and read the manuscripts. European readers constitute a major interpretive community, since the libraries of most seventeenth Western universities with interests in Oriental Studies contain at least one manuscript of *Sarḥ al-ʿuyūn* (e.g. Leiden and Oxford have four each), and the book played an important role in developing European knowledge of Arabic literary heritage and history. Specifically, Leiden Or.705/1 was subsequently recopied by an Orientalist who printed his own translation in Copenhagen in 1755.

Sarḥ al-ʿuyūn is therefore equally part of the Arabic and Ottoman literary heritage and European scholarly heritage, and to properly study its reception and impact, it is imperative to bring together the different receptions of the book in dialogue via an interdisciplinary framework. In this way, the book can be read as a conduit linking the disciplines of European intellectual history and Latin Humanism with Arabic literature, and shed new light onto the foundational layers of Orientalism. To achieve such aims, diverse linguistic skills are needed; hence this project combines LIAS Arabic scholarship and LUCAS Latin scholarship.

Dr. Webb's *Sarḥ al-ʿuyūn* project is ongoing, thus this traineeship is envisaged as the beginning of collaborations between LIAS and LUCAS on the Orient in Latin Humanism, a current growth field of study.

Deliverables

Students will:

1. Produce (i) a database collecting all Latin manuscript annotations, and (ii) a transcription of the Latin translation, to be used in on-going research project about the multilingual reception of *Sarḥ al-ʿuyūn* Arabic-Ottoman-Latin by Dr. Webb.
The database material will be a vital source for an academic journal article in preparation on European engagement with *Sarḥ al-ʿuyūn*, and a planned monograph on the reception history of *Sarḥ al-ʿuyūn* by Dr. Webb.
2. Write an online lesson about bilingual manuscripts for the Mouse&Manuscript digital codicology textbook (free, online resource (<https://mouse.digitalscholarship.nl/>), Dr. Webb is website content editor, website is hosted by the University Library).

3. Write a blog article for the Leiden Islam Blog on the story of Levinus Warner, the seventeenth-century Leiden-educated diplomat and his Arabic translation efforts in Ottoman Constantinople.

Planning

- February:* Students begin transcription, with initial close assistance of Dr. Pieper to familiarize them with the script of the seventeenth-century Latin hand in which the manuscripts are written.
- March-May:* Students continue transcription with bi-weekly meetings with Supervisors. As the manuscripts are studied, students will also receive codicological training with Dr. Webb regarding particularities of Middle Eastern manuscript formats.
- Mid-June:* Complete transcription of both Or.705/1 and Or.1104a. Organize the transcribed materials into database.
- June-July:* Students to study Translation Theory with Supervisors and apply the theories to make partial translations of selected passages.
- July-August:* Students write Mouse&Manuscript Lesson and Leiden Islam Blog article.

Student Application

Interested students can apply by sending a CV to Dr. Peter Webb (p.a.webb@hum.leidenuniv.nl).