



Universiteit Leiden

A Latin-Arabic Encounter: Leiden humanism and the East at the outset of Orientalism

Applicants

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

Project description

The connected history of cultural encounters between scholars of early modern Europe and the intellectual traditions of the Middle East is the centre of this project. We investigate a remarkable interaction between Arabic literature and Latin Humanism through the work of Levinus Warner (1618-1665), a Leiden-trained Arabist and Dutch counsel in Constantinople, whose writings are preserved in the Leiden University Library. Warner studied and collected Arabic manuscripts, including two copies of a then immensely-popular Arabic literary work, *Sarḥ al-‘uyūn*, a compendium of stories about heroic characters from pre-Islamic Arabia which constituted a key ‘classic’ corpus of Arabic culture. Like his contemporary Middle Eastern readers, Warner was keenly interested in *Sarḥ al-‘uyūn*: he copiously annotated one copy (Ms. Leiden Or.705/1), wrote a Latin translation (Ms. Leiden Or.1104a), and compiled notes on the culture and literature of the ancient Arabs in various notebooks (Mss. Leiden Or.1105-1107, 1114, 1131, 1139).

Warner’s works afford unique insight into a ‘Western’ interaction with reading one of the ‘East’s best-sellers’ of the day. His annotations witness his active reading process, evidencing how early Orientalists approached, understood, and interpreted Arabic literature. Warner’s notebooks enable the reconstruction of his intellectual environment: his sources, the topics he found interesting, and the intentions of his study. This project combines classical Arabic and Neo-Latin expertise to critically analyse Warner’s hitherto un-studied and un-published notebooks and manuscript marginalia. The results will enable unprecedentedly close investigation into the precise workings of early Orientalist scholarship, and yield new and specific evidence about the intellectual engagement, Arabic aptitude and appetites of Leiden-trained scholars. The findings will underwrite a detailed study of the genesis of Orientalist encounters with Arabic literature in the applicants’ current book project: a critical edition and analysis of Warner’s Latin translation of *Sarḥ al-‘uyūn* for Brill’s ‘History of Oriental Studies’ series.

Research Trainee Profile

Two research trainees will transcribe Warner’s Latin manuscript annotations on the 160 folios of Or.705/1 (Warner’s Arabic copy of *Sarḥ al-‘uyūn*), and survey six manuscript notebooks written by

Warner on Arabic literature and history, producing detailed itemised lists of the contents (Or.1105-1107, 1114, 1131, 1139). Students will record their research in two databases.

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 on Reception and current scholarly approaches to evaluate manuscript marginalia, and the nature of the marginalia will be discussed with the Supervisors to evaluate the purpose and meaning of Warner's notes and his reading practices. This will expand the Students' concepts of reading as a form of cultural encounter beyond simple translation of linguistic equivalence. They will apply their knowledge to analyse Warner's annotations and write a blog article.

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 proposal's background is Dr. Webb's ongoing study of *Sarḥ al-‘uyūn*'s cultural impact across its wide readership communities. Dr. Webb completed an Arabic edition/English translation of *Sarḥ al-‘uyūn* (in press, Library of Arabic Literature/NYU Press); the next stage investigates early-modern European readership who constituted a major interpretive community, since most seventeenth-century Western university libraries contain at least one manuscript (e.g. Leiden and Oxford have four each), and *Sarḥ al-‘uyūn* played an important role in developing European knowledge of Arabic literature.

Sarḥ al-‘uyūn is therefore equally part of the Arabic and European scholarly heritage, and an interdisciplinary framework marshalling diverse linguistic skills is consequently imperative to properly grasp the book's multiple receptions and transregional impact. Hence this project combines LIAS Arabic scholarship and LUCAS Latin scholarship. The Supervisors began their collaboration in 2022 with a Research Traineeship that transcribed Warner's Latin translation of *Sarḥ al-‘uyūn* (Or.1104/a). The project was successful: Brill wishes to publish the edition (co-edited by the Supervisors and Trainees) in their 'History of Oriental Studies' series.

The contents of Warner's notebooks and his marginal notes are crucial to understand his knowledge and working practices, and the data generated by the traineeship will be essential for the critical in-depth study that will accompany the collaborative Brill volume. The findings will significantly deepen the field's understanding of early-modern European engagement with Arabic literature and the foundational layers of Orientalism. The Supervisors will also collaborate to co-author a peer-reviewed article in a journal dedicated to Neo-Latin literature to spread awareness of the Latin component of Oriental studies. The results will benefit the Leiden Library by emphasising the hitherto underappreciated Latin-language manuscripts in the *Oriental* collections, and our collaboration also intends to organise a public event in the Library upon the book's publication to highlight Leiden's role in 17th-century Arabic literary studies.

Deliverables

The project's primary deliverable is the creation of two databases. Supervisors will use the datasets in their book project to (i) write the detailed study of Warner's translation of *Sarḥ al-‘uyūn*, and (ii) complete the critical edition of Warner's Latin/Arabic text.

Students' transcriptions will also provide data for the Supervisors' co-authored journal article on European engagement with *Sarḥ al-‘uyūn*, and a future planned monograph on the global reception history of *Sarḥ al-‘uyūn* by Dr. Webb.

Students will:

1. Produce a database of Latin manuscript annotations in Or.705/1, identifying and evaluating the nature of the notes, reader reactions and commentary.
2. Produce a database itemising the subjects, contents and named sources in Warner's Latin notebooks on Arabic literature and history. The data will be cross-referenced with printed texts contemporary with Warner and Arabic primary texts to reveal the intellectual environment of Warner's Arabic studies, enabling unique opportunities to reconstruct Warner's knowledge and interaction with Arabic literary traditions.
3. Transcribe selected notebook passages identified as drawn from *Sarḥ al-‘uyūn* or connected with Warner's project to translate *Sarḥ al-‘uyūn*.
4. Write a blog article for the Leiden Islam Blog on the early European scholarly interactions with Arabic literary culture in seventeenth-century Ottoman Constantinople.

Planning

Feb-March: Trainees begin transcription of Latin marginal notes of Or.705/1, with initial close assistance of Dr. Pieper to familiarize them with the script of the seventeenth-century Latin hand. Regular sessions continue with Dr. Webb for the bilingual Arabic/Latin notes. Trainees will receive codicological training with Dr. Webb regarding particularities of Middle Eastern manuscript formats.

April-May: Trainees complete study of marginal notes via bi-weekly meetings with Supervisors; compile all findings into database. Supervisors and Trainees begin survey of Warner's manuscript notebooks, devise workplan to itemise/index contents.

May-June: Trainees action workplan for Warner's notebooks, enter data into Excel spreadsheets; convene via bi-weekly meetings with Supervisors to evaluate material. End-June: Supervisors identify selected passages relevant to Warner's *Sarḥ al-‘uyūn* translation.

July-August: Trainees transcribe the selected passages in Warner's notebooks. In light of results discussed end-July with Supervisors, Trainees write Leiden Islam Blog article.

Student Application

Interested students may apply by sending a CV to Dr. Peter Webb (p.a.webb@hum.leidenuniv.nl) and Dr. Christoph Pieper (c.pieper@hum.leidenuniv.nl).