

Cambridge University Library Islamic manuscript collection. Origins and content.

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Abstract:

The Islamic manuscript collection has been acquired by Cambridge University Library from many sources over the period of the past four centuries. Most of these have been acquired from private donations and were originally closely allied with the start of Arabic teaching in the early seventeenth century. Many other collections followed and a chronology of significant donations is described with details of each donor and something of the contents of each collection. Major collections such as those of Erpenius, George Lewis, J.L. Burckhardt, E.H. Palmer and E.G. Browne are dealt with in more detail. Some important individual manuscripts are also described and examples are given of manuscripts with interesting codicology or illumination. A description of the collection's management within the Library and a history of its cataloguing is also given.

keywords: Cambridge; Islamic; manuscripts; history; collectors; acquisitions; 17th – 20th centuries; Arabic teaching; codicology; cataloguing.

Introduction

Cambridge University Library has been actively collecting Islamic manuscripts for almost four centuries and consequently it has holdings of significant size and importance. The first acquisitions were closely connected with the University's establishment of Arabic study in the early decades of the seventeenth century. The driving force behind this development was Abraham Wheelocke (1593-1653), a scholar of both Arabic and Anglo-Saxon studies, also the University Librarian from 1629-1653, and whose enthusiasm for Arabic studies initiated the first acquisitions. In 1632, his associate, Sir Thomas Adams (1586-1668), a wealthy parliamentarian and later Lord Mayor of London, provided the financial support to found a lectureship (later a Chair) of Arabic at Wheelocke's persuasion and the latter became the first incumbent.¹ The early seventeenth century was a time of significant development in Arabic studies in England and in Europe. Cambridge, Oxford, Paris and Leiden all became important centres, so the acquisition of texts to support study became one of overriding importance to those attempting to further this cause. The reasons behind this increased interest in Arabic studies include the importance to Christian academics of the links between the Arabic and Hebrew languages which opened up the possibility of a better understanding of the Bible text. Knowledge of Arabic also aimed to improve communication with the Christian communities existing in the Middle East which were situated in Arabic speaking regions. Knowledge of Arabic in order to read the Qur'an in the original version, with the intention at that time of refuting its beliefs, was a significant driving force as was the possibility of conversion of Muslims to Christianity. Medieval Islamic society had also made important discoveries and advances in medical and mathematical knowledge and had also retained knowledge in these areas from the Classical world which had been lost to European culture, but which European scholars were keen to regain access. Finally, a fluency in Arabic was also seen as a significant advantage for diplomatic and trading purposes. The Levant Company, for instance, founded

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¹ John Claud Trewinard Oates, *Cambridge University Library: a history, (1), from the beginnings to the Copyright Act of Queen Anne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

in 1592 and based in Aleppo and Smyrna, opened up important trading links with Europe and included in its successes was the importation of some of the manuscripts existing in European collections.² Cambridge's very first Islamic manuscript acquisition was a Qur'an (Ii.6.48) given by William Bedwell in 1631. Bedwell (1561-1632) was reputed to be the first scholar in England to attempt a serious study of Arabic since Medieval times. He worked for the most part as a solitary scholar, though he also taught students, and corresponded with other Arabic scholars both in England and in Europe. His progress was severely hampered by a lack of original Arabic texts and he found that the lack of dictionaries, grammars and literary works available to him significantly limited his progress.³ He began work on his own Arabic dictionary in 1592, a project which lasted the rest of his life and which still exists, in its original unpublished form in the Library's collection (Hh.5.1-7, Hh.6.1-2) [Fig.1]. Many of the manuscript collections arrived by the donation or bequest of scholars and travellers, most, but not all, having some Cambridge connection. Others were purchased by knowledgeable curators who contributed to the development of the collection over the centuries. The complete listing of donors contains over seventy names, from individuals giving just one or two volumes to major benefactors with large collections such as those of Erpenius, George Lewis, J.L. Burckhardt, E.H. Palmer and E.G. Browne. A chronological listing of the most notable collections is described below. Some details are taken from an earlier listing by Andrew Dalby.⁴ Call numbers of the manuscripts in the individual collections are cited where these are sequential.

Provenances

1632 – *Erpenius* - The manuscript collection of the Dutch Arabist Thomas Van Erpe (1584-1624), known as Erpenius, was purchased from his widow. Erpenius, Professor of Arabic at the University of Leiden (1613-24), developed a distinguished reputation in Arabic studies throughout Europe. During his lifetime he had amassed a valuable collection of Arabic texts and when he died prematurely of the plague in 1624, he left around 90 manuscripts, 150 printed books and a printing press with an Arabic font. It was understood at the time that all of these were intended to be sold to the University of Leiden and negotiations on this matter proceeded with Thomas's widow.

At the same time in Cambridge, Wheelocke was keen to develop a collection of Arabic texts and he realised that the Erpenius manuscripts would be a valuable acquisition. In 1625, of George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham (1592-1628) [Fig.2], and favourite of King James 1 was visiting The Hague on diplomatic business. He knew of Cambridge's interest in the Erpenius collection and intervened in the negotiations with an offer of a cash payment of £500 to the widow for the manuscripts. They were then swiftly removed to England, much to the confusion and disappointment of those in Leiden who had been too slow to conclude their deal.

The following year, the Duke was elected Chancellor of Cambridge University and realised that the gift of the manuscripts could be used to improve his standing in the University. However, the Duke's assassination in 1628 brought his political career to an abrupt end and the manuscripts became the property of his widow, Katherine, Duchess of Buckingham and remained in her possession for several years while the complexities of the Duke's will were resolved. After Wheelocke and others begged the Duchess for their transfer to the Library, they finally arrived in Cambridge in 1632.

The earliest available listing in the Library's Donor's Book (Oo.7.52) records 87 manuscripts in the collection and of these 58 are in Arabic or Persian. Others are in Hebrew, Syriac, and Malay and there was one Chinese printed book, the earliest Chinese printed book in the Library's collections to this day. The

² Gerald J Toomer, *Eastern wisdom and learning: the study of arabic in seventeenth-century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³ Alastair Hamilton, *William Bedwell the Arabist: 1563-1632* (Leiden: Brill, 1985).

⁴ Andrew Dalby, "A Dictionary of Oriental Collections in Cambridge University Library", *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, IX (1988): 248-80.

collection is very much a scholar's collection with copies of grammar books and dictionaries, Qur'an texts and commentaries and poetry, very much the texts Wheelocke needed for his own studies and teaching. The collection also contains a manuscript of the Gospels translated into Arabic (Gg.5.33). This collection laid the foundation for the Library's Middle Eastern manuscript collection, and later, partly as a result of its acquisition, other collections came to join it.⁵

1655 - *Hobart* – Nicholas Hobart (c. 1605-57) was a student and later Fellow of King's College (1624-50) who served for a short time as secretary to Sir Thomas Bendish on the latter's appointment as ambassador and agent for the affairs of the Levant Company in Constantinople in 1647. The collection consists of 17 manuscripts in Arabic, Persian and Turkish, mainly dictionaries, grammars, glossaries and histories.

1715 - *George I* - The gift from King George I (1660-1727) brought to the Library the valuable collection amassed over many years by the scholar John Moore (1646-1714), Bishop of Ely. After Moore's death, his library was bought by the King who donated it to Cambridge the following year. It was primarily an English and European language collection containing over 30,000 volumes, including almost 1800 manuscripts but among the manuscripts there were over sixty Islamic texts in Arabic, Persian or Turkish. How these came to be in John Moore's possession is not altogether clear, but some at least, could have been from the collection of the French scholar of Arabic, Isaac Casaubon (1559-1614), whose library was inherited by his son Meric and, after his father's death, sold on to other collectors. The Islamic manuscripts are wide in scope including many religious texts, but also examples of poetry and history. Especially interesting and unusual is the copy of *'El breve compendio de nuestra santa ley alçunna'* (Dd.9.49). The treatise in Aljamiado composed in Spain in the third decade of the 16th century.

1727 - *Lewis* - A significant gift to the Library was made by the Rev. George Lewis (d. 1730) who donated a cabinet containing a collection of 76 Arabic and Persian manuscripts (numbered Add.178-254) and some other curiosities collected in India. These are housed in their own original dark wooden cabinet with brass handles, which is at present situated on the Library's fourth floor landing. Lewis, originally educated at Queens' College, formed this collection while he was Chaplain to the East India Company settlement at Fort St George (now Madras) between 1692 and 1714. He was a gifted linguist, proficient in Persian, and his time in India coincided with a growing interest in England for copies of original texts from Middle Eastern and Indian countries. The collection mostly consists of Persian texts but there are also volumes in Arabic and in Indian languages. The texts within the collection include Qur'ans, dictionaries, epics, also histories and volumes of poetry, including Nizāmī, Sa'dī and Ḥāfiẓ. Along with the manuscripts came an assortment of curiosities including coins, weights, inscriptions and two sets of miniature Indian playing cards. The curiosities were considered a tourist attraction for visitors to the Library in the eighteenth century.⁶ A contemporary catalogue of the manuscript collection, probably by Lewis himself, gives a list of the manuscripts with short descriptions (Add.2587). A very beautifully illuminated manuscript, a Persian version of the *Cosmography*, *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt* (The Wonders of Creation), by Zakariyā' ibn Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī, (ca. 1203-1283) was given to the Library separately by the son of Archdeacon Lewis in 1770 (Nn.3.74).

1806 - *East India Company* - A gift of three finely illuminated manuscripts, a Qur'an (Nn.3.75), a *Kulliyāt* of Sa'dī, (Add.270) and a *Shāhnāmāh* of Firdausi (Add.269), from the Library of Tipu Sultan were presented to the Library by the Directors of the East India Company. After Tipu Sultan was defeated and killed by the British in 1799, his extensive library was removed into the hands of the East India Company in Calcutta. The *Kulliyāt* and *Shāhnāmāh* manuscripts record the donation from the 'Library, East India House, 15th August

⁵ Edward Granville Browne, *A Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896).

⁶ David McKitterick, *Cambridge University Library: a history (2): the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

1806' in the hand of Charles Wilkins (1749-1836) the eminent oriental scholar and East India Company librarian.

1806 - *Buchanan* – The Rev. Claudius Buchanan (1766-1815) was chaplain to the East India Company and later a teacher of classics at the College of Fort William in Calcutta. He collected manuscripts during his travels in India and his gifts to the Library were mainly in Hebrew and Syriac but he also donated an illuminated address in Arabic, Persian and Turkish to the Marquess Wellesley (Governor-General of the Presidency of Fort William) in Persian (Add.286).

1819 - *Burckhardt* - The Swiss explorer and traveller John Lewis Burckhardt (1784-1817) was a native of Basel but after travelling to London and meeting Sir Joseph Banks, the President of the Africa Association, he accepted a commission to make an exploratory crossing of the North African continent from Cairo to the Niger with the aim of discovering the river's source. In preparation for his expedition, he was sent to Cambridge to learn Arabic, mineralogy and medical skills. He formed a lifelong friendship with Edward Daniel Clarke (1769-1822), also a traveller and collector of antiquities, who was Professor of Mineralogy. From 1809 to 1817, Burckhardt travelled widely in the Near East in Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Arabia. He was one of the first Europeans for many centuries to visit Petra and later spent some time in Mecca. During his travels Burckhardt purchased Arabic manuscripts and his collection grew to impressive dimensions. He waited in vain for a suitable camel caravan to complete his original plan to cross the desert from the Nile to the Niger but he fell ill and died in October 1817. He was buried in Cairo.

He bequeathed his collection of more than 300 Arabic manuscripts to the University Library in recognition of his days in Cambridge as a student, perhaps influenced by his friendship with Daniel Clarke who had subsequently become University Librarian (1917-22). The collection, numbered

Qq.1 – 300, includes many of the Library's oldest Arabic manuscripts; few are illuminated but there are examples with beautiful and elegant script. The collection contains many important historical texts, early Arabic poetry, folk tales and a complete text of the *Alf laylah wa-laylah* (Arabian nights) in four volumes (Qq.106-109). The collection also includes the earliest Arabic manuscript written on paper (dating from AD 1037) in this collection, containing two texts, the *Kitāb al-mu'ammārīn* (Book of the long-lived) and *Kitāb al-waṣāyā* (Book of injunctions) of Abū Ḥātim Sahl ibn Muḥammad al-Sijistānī (Qq.285).

1867-1869 - *Lofft* - A collection of 32 manuscripts in Persian and Arabic collected in India by Robert Emlyn Lofft (1783-1847) during the time he was regimental interpreter in the Bengal army, 1804-20. They were given to the Library by his son R.E. Lofft of Troston Hall near Bury St Edmunds. They are mainly grammars, histories and works of poetry and are numbered Add.407-430 and 580-588.

1871 – *Williams* - Henry Griffin Williams (c.1817-1870) was a Cambridge student and later Fellow of Emmanuel College. He was ordained in 1842 and became a deacon of Ely. He held the Professorship of Arabic (1854-1870) and on his death he left a collection of 100 volumes of Arabic and Persian manuscripts which contain texts on language, poetry and history. The source of his collection is uncertain but he published, with Fāris al-Shidyāq (1805-87), *A Practical Grammar of the Arabic Language*. Fāris was a scholar of wide-ranging interests and contacts, widely travelled both in the Middle East and Europe, including a short period living in Cambridge. So possibly the latter was a contributor to this collection. They are numbered Add.746-800.

1873-1874 - *Wright* – William Wright (1830-1889) was a Cambridge scholar who had previously studied in Halle, Leiden, London and Dublin working on Arabic and Syriac texts. He is also known as a renowned cataloguer of Syriac manuscripts collections both at the British Museum and at Cambridge. He was Professor of Arabic at Cambridge from 1870-1889 and on his death he left 21 Arabic and Persian manuscripts to the Library, numbered Add.743, 886-888, 1079-1094 which contain texts on grammar and poetry. It was his brother, Dr Daniel Wright (1833–1902) who acquired the fine collection of early Tibetan and Indian manuscripts from Nepal for the Library.

1878 - *Palmer* – Edward Henry Palmer (1840-1882) was a native of Cambridge, he grew up and went to school in the city and, in 1860, gained a place to study at St John's College where he later became a Fellow. He had a natural talent for languages and made rapid progress, especially in learning Urdu, Persian and Arabic. In 1867, he was chosen to join an expedition established by the Palestine Exploration Society to survey the Sinai region, the main aim being investigate evidence found in place names and inscriptions which shed light on the Exodus story and to attempt to trace the route by which the ancient Israelites had crossed the Sinai Peninsula. Palmer returned to Cambridge after his travels where he studied, lectured, and was eventually appointed to the Lord Almoner's Chair of Arabic in 1871. During this time, he wrote a Persian dictionary, an Arabic grammar, translations of poetry and, probably the best known of his works, a translation of the Qur'an.

Palmer's life came to a tragic end in June 1882 after he was asked to take part in a secret intelligence mission for the British government in the Sinai. Gladstone's government decided that an invasion of Egypt was the only way to destroy the threat to British interests represented by the Arab nationalist movement in that region. Palmer was asked to take part in a secret mission to find out the attitude of the Arab tribes in the Sinai to such an attack and to attempt to break their allegiance to 'Urābī Pasha, the nationalist leader. Setting out with two army officers to meet Bedouin leaders and arrange terms of allegiance, they were all led into an ambush, taken prisoner, and the next day were shot dead. A search-party found the remains and they were brought back to England and buried in the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral.

Palmer's manuscript collection, all of which were probably collected on his mission to survey the Sinai, was bought from Palmer's executor, C. F. Tyrwhitt-Drake, who travelled with Palmer; they came to the Library in 1878. They are all incomplete fragments of the Qur'an text on parchment and are among the earliest manuscripts in the Library's collection dating from the 8th and 9th centuries CE. They are numbered Add.1115-1150.

1888 - *Badger* – A donation of 18 manuscripts was made by his widow from the collection of Rev. George Percy Badger (1815-1888). He was a Maltese and Arabic scholar, also a missionary to the Nestorians and he travelled widely in his early years in Malta, the Middle East and India. He wrote on Arabic history, literature and his own travels, and in 1881 completed his 'English-Arabic lexicon'. The collection contains the original manuscript copy of the dictionary plus his notes on its compilation. The Arabic texts are numbered Add.2890-2914.⁷

1889 - *Chance* – Frank Chance (1825-1897) was a member of the Committee for the Revised Standard Version of the Old Testament. He studied and practised medicine but he was also a noted Hebrew scholar and able linguist. He bequeathed to the Library 18 Arabic manuscripts, some on language and others are texts of folk stories, they are numbered Add.3482-3499.

1894 - *Robertson Smith* – William Robertson Smith (1846 –1894) was born near Aberdeen, later studied at Aberdeen University after which he decided to enter the Church. He became friendly with John Ferguson McLennan who encouraged his interest in social anthropology, which was to become a significant influence as his life and thinking. In 1870, he was elected Professor of Hebrew at Aberdeen Free Church College and was ordained to the ministry.

In 1875 he was commissioned to write a number of articles on biblical topics in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. His articles approached religious topics without endorsing the text of the Bible as the literal truth. The College investigators found Robertson Smith's articles incompatible with his position as a teacher for the ministry. He reacted by demanding he be formally tried for heresy and subsequently he was removed from his Professorship.

In 1883 he moved to Cambridge where he became Professor of Arabic (1889-1894), a Fellow of Christ's College and he also held the post of University Librarian (1886-1889). He also donated his manuscripts

⁷ Geoffrey Roper, "George Percy Badger (1815–1888)", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 11:2 (1984): 140-55.

which are primarily Arabic texts but also others in Persian and Turkish; they are dictionaries, histories, poetry and Arabic translations of books of the Bible, numbered Add.3174-3203.

1894 - *T. Brooks Bumpstead* – The donor of a very fine illuminated copy of the *Khamsah* (Five poems) of Nizāmī Ganjavī. This manuscript contains thirty illustrations of the poems painted in Indian style; it is undated, but its style indicates it was probably copied in the 17th century (Add.3139).

1894 - *Bensly* - The widow of Robert Lubbock Bensly (1831-1893) donated books and manuscripts from the library of her husband, the renowned Hebrew, Syriac and Biblical scholar. He was notable for his painstaking accuracy with textual works and his exhaustive knowledge of Syriac literature. He was also an Under-Librarian in the University Library (1864-76) and, in 1887, he became Lord Almoner's Professor of Arabic, a position he retained until his death. He travelled abroad only twice, both times to visit Egypt. The second visit was to St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai to work on the decipherment of the Syriac palimpsest of the Gospels discovered there on an earlier occasion by Agnes Lewis and Margaret Gibson. The visit to Sinai was long and arduous and Bensly died in Cambridge three days after his return in 1893. His collection contains 62 manuscripts and includes texts in Arabic, Syriac and some in Persian containing texts of stories and legends. They are numbered Add.3210, 3212-3272.

1900 - *Wilkinson* – A collection of 62 manuscripts in Malay was donated by R.J. Wilkinson (1867-1941). These are mainly short stories and histories of Persian or Indian origin and are numbered Add.3755-3816.

1903 - *Cowell* – Edward Byles Cowell (1826-1903) was the first Professor of Sanskrit at Cambridge, from 1867 until his death, but his interests also included Persian and he was a noted translator of Persian poetry. In 1858 he discovered a manuscript of 'Umar Khayyām's *Rubā'īyyāt* in the Asiatic Society's library in Kolkata and sent a copy to London for his friend and student, Edward Fitzgerald, who subsequently produced the famous English translations of the text in 1859. On Cowell's death, the Library received a donation of 63 Persian manuscripts, mostly history and volumes of poetry which are numbered Or.235-296.

1916 - *Le Strange* – Guy Le Strange (1854-1933) was an English oriental scholar, best known for his book *Palestine under the Moslems*, first published in 1890. He is notable for the work he did in the field of the historical geography of the Middle East and his editing of Persian geographical texts. He gave 2 manuscripts (numbered G.5 and 8) and a collection of letters (L.1-3) to E.G. Browne; they are included in the printed catalogue of Browne's collection.

1924 - *Adie* - Walter Sibbald Adie (1872-1956) was a Fellow of Trinity College who served in the Indian Civil Service (1896-1929) and became a collector of manuscripts. In 1924 the Library selected 72 Arabic and Persian manuscripts from his collection for the Library. The collection contains examples of fine calligraphy and illumination and they are numbered Or.1042-1075, 1596-1635.

1934 - *Browne* – Edward Granville Browne (1862-1926) [Fig.3] was one of the University's most renowned scholars of Middle Eastern languages and cultures. Originally, he intended to follow a career in medicine, but as a young man became interested and sympathetic to the Turks in their struggle against Russia in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-8. This interest started him on the track of studying Turkish and from then on his dedication to the study of Middle Eastern language and culture lasted for the rest of his life. He visited Constantinople briefly in 1882, then in May 1887, after election to a Fellowship at Pembroke College, he had the opportunity he needed to travel. His journey across Persia (in 1887-8) is narrated in his travelogue *A year amongst the Persians*.⁸ He travelled across the country, visiting many of the cities and rural communities, meeting the native inhabitants. Also during his travels, he collected manuscripts which he later sent back to Cambridge.

⁸ Edward Granville Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians: Impressions as to the Life, Character, & Thought of the People of Persia, Received During Twelve Months' Residence in that Country in the Years 1887-1888* (London: A. and C. Black, 1893).

On his return to Cambridge he became a lecturer in Persian, and later Professor of Arabic (1902-26). His most significant work was his *Literary History of Persia* (1906-1924). His religious interest in the Islamic faith centred not on the mainstream orthodoxies but on the Babis on which topic he wrote extensively. Browne also sympathised with the fortunes of the Persian National movement during the period of 1905-1909, taking an active part in influencing British opinion. He corresponded directly with Iranian state officials whom he invited to his house in Cambridge. When the constitutionalists were defeated he withdrew from the political arena and spent the rest of his life in scholarly pursuits.

His manuscript collection of 468 volumes was begun with 2 Persian poetry texts acquired in 1882 on his visit to Constantinople. The real nucleus was formed in 1887-8 during his visit to Persia, and includes 30 volumes on the Babi sect. From 1890, the collection expanded steadily by purchases from other collections. From J.J. Naaman in Baghdad he acquired 39 manuscripts, in 1917, 64 manuscripts the Houtum-Schindler collection and in 1920 he acquired the Belshah collection of 100 manuscripts. The manuscripts cover a wide range of subjects but poetry texts figure prominently and because of his early interest in medicine there are interesting medical manuscripts. A catalogue of his collection was later published by his student and successor Professor R.A. Nicholson.⁹

1936 - *Lewis and Gibson* – Agnes Smith Lewis (1843-1926) and her twin sister Margaret Dunlop Gibson (1843-1920) were Semitic scholars born in Scotland to a father whose wealth was able to finance their education, academic pursuits and their travels in Europe and the Middle East. They were both gifted language scholars and by 1890 they had settled in Cambridge where they began to study Syriac. They made several expeditions to the Sinai and in 1892 discovered in St. Catharine's Monastery several of the earliest Syriac version of the Gospels then currently known, which provided fresh stimulus to New Testament studies. They have also become well-known in connection with the discovery, with Solomon Schechter, of the Library's famous Cairo Genizah collection. Quite apart from these successes they also regularly purchased and one particularly interesting example was purchased in Cairo in 1895. It is a palimpsest containing several layers of Arabic and Syriac texts, including some leaves of a very early Quran text (Or.1287) and is described in more detail below.

1943 – *Gayer-Anderson* – Robert Grenville Gayer-Anderson (1881-1945) had an early career in the army including service in Egypt. He later resided in Cairo and became a collector of antiquities. He donated the famous statue of the cat god Bastet to the British Museum and other antiquities to the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. The manuscript collection he donated (Or.1354-62 and 1369-70) consists of Arabic and Persian manuscripts including a copy of Firdausi's *Shāhnāmah* (Or.1354).

1945 - *Nicholson* – Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (1868-1945), was a historian and translator of literature, especially Persian mystical texts. He was also Sir Thomas Adams Professor of Arabic, 1926-34. He bequeathed to the Library 186 manuscripts in Arabic, Persian and Turkish. Many of these were inherited from his grandfather John Nicholson, a merchant trading in the Middle East, who first encouraged his grandson's interest in the subject. The subject content is wide in range but many are literary and religious texts reflecting his interest in mystical literature. They are numbered Or.1415-1588 and Or.1662-1675.

1977 - *Michaelides* - George Anastase Michaelides (1900-1973), a Cairo antiques dealer with a deep interest in the history and daily life of Egypt from its early civilizations to the Islamic age. He was the former owner of a large collection of single leaves of papyrus, parchment and paper, which was bought by the Library in 1977. About 1700 of the texts are in Arabic, others in Judaeo-Arabic, Hebrew or Coptic, the earliest dated to 707 CE. This collection comprises personal letters, legal texts, accounts, literary texts, recipes and other documents. These have been numbered and listed and some, mainly those in Arabic, have been catalogued. The collection is now available online at <<http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/michaelides>>.

⁹ Reynold A Nicholson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Oriental MSS. belonging to the late EG Browne*, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932).

Contents of the collection

The total number of Islamic manuscript texts is around 4,500 individual works including numerous instances of separate items bound together into the same physical volume. Of the total number of texts around 2,200 are in Arabic, 2,000 in Persian, around 300 in Ottoman Turkish, and small numbers in Malay and in other languages. There are 64 manuscript works dated before 1495 CE and a further 28 undated manuscripts thought to be from the 10th-15th centuries CE. The manuscripts originate from very diverse areas of the Islamic world; from the Arabian Peninsula, Turkey, North Africa, Iraq, Iran, Spain, North India and Southeast Asia. Most of the manuscripts in the collection are scribal copies of existing texts some are examples of unique texts.¹⁰

The collection is especially noted for its copies of the Qur'an, either complete or fragmentary; there are around 110 examples in all. These also include many of the oldest manuscripts in the collection including fragments written in Hijazi and Kufic (more recently described as Abbasid) script dating from the earliest centuries of the Islamic era. One fragment, probably written in the eighth century CE, in Hijazi script, contains verses from the *Sūrat al-Anfāl* (Add.1125) [Fig.4]. Fragments of another from the 9th century CE, in a Kufic style and containing verses from the *Sūrat Al Imrān*, contain a note stating that it formed part of a manuscript donated as a *waqf* endowment to a mosque in Tyre in 875 CE by Amajūr, the governor of Damascus (Add.1116). The leaves of the Qur'an of Amajūr were later scattered into various collections and only a small number of folios came to Cambridge.¹¹

Another significant Qur'an text, already mentioned, is that of the Lewis palimpsest written on parchment containing some leaves of an ancient Qur'an text (Or.1287). The text on the top layer is a set of Christian homilies written in Arabic from the end of the 9th or the beginning of the 10th century. Some of the lower texts are in Syriac, and some are from the Septuagint version of the Bible in Greek. Among the Syriac quires there are 44 leaves of early Arabic script lying crossways to the upper script and which Agnes Lewis realised were from the text of the Qur'an. These were also studied by her colleague the Rev. Alphonse Mingana (1878-1937), best known for his connection with the manuscript collections at the University of Birmingham. The writing was identified as from an early Qur'an text containing possible variants in the reading of the text dating from its very early origins.¹² In 1902 the manuscript was rebound in London and soon afterwards it was loaned for display at an international exhibition in Leipzig but it disappeared at the outbreak of the First World War. Its whereabouts was unknown for many years but it was eventually rediscovered and, in 1936, it was returned to Cambridge in accordance with the wishes set out in Agnes Lewis's will. The text itself continues to be studied and deciphered by scholars, most recently from images taken with variant spectroscopy and under improved lighting conditions in order to research the lower layer of text. Later researchers have questioned the findings made in the early days, especially those of Mingana.¹³

Examples of Qur'an texts from later centuries also exist in the collection including one with opening pages in Mamluk style (Add.838) and another produced in Spain decorated in typical Maghribi style (Dd.2.54). From around the 11th century there was a move towards more elaborate decoration of the script when richly-decorated Qur'an texts were produced. There are several examples of highly illuminated Qur'an texts from the 16th and later centuries CE originating from Iran or North India. An impressive example of such a

¹⁰ Edward Granville Browne, *A hand-list of the Muhammadan manuscripts: including all those written in the Arabic character, preserved in the library of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge: University Press, 1900).

¹¹ See François Déroche, "The Qur'an of Amājūr", in *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 5 (1990-1991), 59-66.

¹² Alphonse Mingana and Agnes Smith Lewis, eds., *Leaves from three ancient Qur'ans, possibly pre-Othmānic, with a list of their variants* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914)

¹³ Alba Fedeli, "Mingana and the manuscript of Mrs. Agnes Smith Lewis, one century later", *Manuscripta orientalia*, 11:3 (2005), 3-7.

Qur'an, characterised by a number of richly decorated opening pages, lavishly decorated with gold leaf, was written in 1840 CE in Iran for a princely ruler (Add.576).

The collection is also rich in prayer books including numerous copies of the *Dalā'il al-khayrāt* and examples of commentaries on the Qur'an in varying styles. One of the commentaries is the oldest Persian manuscript in the Library, dated 1231 CE, though E.G. Browne dated it to a much earlier time, probably the 10th or even 9th century CE. This so-called 'Cambridge *Tafsīr*' (Mm.4.15) is the oldest extant copy of a Persian Qur'anic commentary.¹⁴ It is from the Erpenius collection and includes the second half of a Qur'an commentary in Old Persian together with the text in Arabic. The collection also contains a small number of Bible texts including a copy of the Gospels translated into Arabic (Gg.5.33), also from the Erpenius collection and an early example of a translation of the Gospels into Persian from the Lewis collection (Add.230).

The collection is also notable for the number of texts relating to grammar and lexicography, which are found especially in the earlier collections. This reflects the need of the collectors of the 17th century for manuscripts relating to language learning at a time when such resources were a rarity in England and gaining access to good resources for learning the language was fraught with difficulty. One notable manuscript contains the commentary of al-Makkūdi (d. 1404) on one of the most popular Arabic grammatical works, the *Alfiyah* of Ibn Mālik (d. 1274). The significance of this manuscript resides in the fact that it has preserved marginalia and commentaries written by its former owner, Thomas Erpenius, the author of the first scientific grammar of Arabic written in Europe. Erpenius later wrote his own Arabic grammar which became a standard text used in European places of learning for centuries. Due to the difficulties faced by the lack of available dictionaries, there are notable examples of the English scholars producing their own such as the Arabic dictionary of William Bedwell (Hh.5.1-7, Hh.6.1-2) which has already been mentioned, and in the nineteenth century that of George Percy Badger (Add.2904-5). George Lewis attempted to produce his own Persian dictionary but this was left unfinished (Add.253) [Fig.5].

The collection is also rich in interesting historical, scientific and literary works. One of the most noted of the historical texts is the 13th-century history, the *Ta'rikh jazīrat Šiqillīyah* (The history of the island of Sicily) describing the first Muslim invasion of Sicily in 827 to 965 CE, and which describes events there under Muslim rule (Dd.5.35.2). Another unique historical work is the *Ta'rikh* of Aḥmad Ibn Abī Ya'qūb dated to 1684 CE (Qq.10) [Fig.6]. There is a copy in two volumes of a Turkish translation of Ṭabarī's History (Mm.4.16).

The collection is rich in medical manuscripts which were much valued by the early European scholars for whom the medical and scientific knowledge of the Islamic world was of significant interest. E.G. Browne who himself studied medicine took a special interest in collecting these, many of which are illustrated with drawings, diagrams and charts. There is a work on anatomy with illustrations of the body, the *Tashriḥ-i manṣūrī* by Manṣūr ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad who flourished around 1400 CE (P.22) and there is also a copy of the third book of the highly influential *Qānūn* of Avicenna dealing with disease of the eyes, ears, mouth and tongue (P.5). An example of a very early mathematical text is the volume of Euclid, after the version of Thābit ibn Qurrah al-Ḥarrānī, probably from the 13th century (Add.1075).

Literary manuscripts were not numerous before the arrival of the Lewis collection in 1727, after which poetical works, especially many in Persian, were added in greater numbers and now comprise more than 600 texts. The Lewis collection itself included many of the major Persian poets including Firdausī, Rūmī, Sa'dī, Ḥafīz and Niẓāmī and many lesser-known writers also.

In Arabic there are two copies of the very early Arabic verses, the *Dīwān al-ḥamāsah* by Abū Tammām Ḥabīb ibn Aws (Qq.213, 296) dating from 1172 and 1196 CE. There is a copy of the complete text of *Alf laylah wa-laylah* (Thousand and One Nights) (Qq.106-9) and a complete copy of the romance *Sīrat 'Antar* (Qq.94-105), both from the Burckhardt Collection.

¹⁴ Edward G Browne, "Description of an Old Persian Commentary on the Qur'án", *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 26:3 (1894): 417-524.

Almost all of the manuscripts originated in the Middle East, arriving by the various means already described, but a small but very interesting set of the manuscripts collection consists of those which were written by British and European scholars mainly for their own use. In other cases, scholars have annotated and commented on the texts they have used in their studies and left archives of their notes and correspondence. The manuscript dictionaries of Bedwell and Lewis have already been mentioned but dating from the 18th century, there are the notebooks of John Lewis Burckhardt, showing his attempts to learn Arabic grammar in preparation for his trip to Aleppo; also his documents and letters relating to the contacts he made in during his journey through Syria and Egypt (Add.273, and 282). There are also envelopes of letters, drawings and notes from Burckhardt's travels sent to the library after his death (Add.173-185).

Later Cambridge scholars including William Robertson-Smith, E.G. Browne, R.A. Nicholson, R.L. Bunsly, Percy Badger and Arthur Arberry have also left many examples of their translations and working notebooks in the collection. Many of these collections are included in the Library's 'Janus' catalogue of archive collections at <<http://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/>>. Browne's papers include correspondence to and from Babi religious leaders and important and unique documents on the development of the faith, also correspondence relating to his political interests in the Persian National movement during the period of 1905-1909.

Codicology

Almost all of the manuscripts are in the form of codex volumes although there are a few examples of texts on scrolls, some single leaf documents or fragmentary items, as well as a few examples of writing on wood or leather. Most of the texts are written on vellum or paper, and bindings are mainly made from leather, although there are examples of wooden bindings (Add.115) and several with intricate painted decoration on lacquer (Add.576). Most of the bindings originate in the Middle East with the characteristic flat spine and the '*lisān*' flap over the fore edge of the text. There are numerous examples of bindings with details in blind stamping, some with the tooled decorative borders and others with medallion designs often with detailing in gold. However, some of the collections, such as the major part of the Burckhardt collection, have been rebound in a European style presumably after their acquisition by the Library. Other examples show evidence of repairs either before or after their acquisition by the Library.

The texts also display a range of script styles. The most common script found in the Arabic manuscripts is the traditional '*naskh*' style, with some regional variations, but many other more decorative styles are also represented especially in the headings or on opening leaves of manuscripts. Two very early examples of Qur'an texts are written in the 'Hijazi' style from the 8th century and have originated in the Arabian Peninsula. There are up to 100 manuscript fragments written in the 'Kufic' style and dating from the 9th and 10th centuries, including the Qur'an fragments from the collection of E.H. Palmer. Some of the Maghribi manuscripts incorporated more colours in the text, including yellow, green and blue as is the style in this tradition. One interesting Qur'an fragment from the end of the 13th century contains the whole text written in gold ink with vocalisation in colour in a rather angular Kufic style (Or.476).

Texts in the collection display many examples of fine calligraphy and there are some examples of items produced specifically to display calligraphic skill. This includes the Lewis Scrapbook (Add. 254) which contains examples of calligraphy collected by Rev. Lewis for his own interest. Most of the examples consist of letters addressed to Lewis by various correspondents in Persian, Arabic and Turkish representing almost all the styles of calligraphy commonly used in the Islamic world at the time. There is an album of specimens of calligraphy in different styles of '*naskh*' script containing Qur'an extracts and *ḥadīth* (Oo.6.36) and an album of Persian calligraphy, folded in harmonica style (Or.2509).

Illuminated examples

The great majority of the manuscripts in the collection are plain, even primitive, written texts but there are some examples of fine illumination, often of great beauty and intricacy showing evidence of considerable

skill and expense in their production. Such examples include the three manuscripts donated to the Library from the East India Company in 1806. The large folio manuscript of the Qur'an (Nn.3.75) originating from the library of Tipu Sultan has a double opening page with two decorated medallions, followed by an illuminated double carpet page with two intricate headpieces containing the Fātiḥa; the main text of the volume is followed by double pages of prayers and by the Falnama. The illuminator has used gold, lapis lazuli, red and green colours liberally in the decoration, with some text in white ink. The date of production of the manuscript is not given, but there are dates of ownership of 1618 CE and 1655 CE at the beginning of the volume.

The copy of Firdawsī's *Shāhnāmāh* from the same collection (Add.269) is also a beautifully illuminated text with eleven full page pictures illustrating scenes from the text. The double page frontispiece depicting Sulaymān and Bilqīs enthroned is followed by a very fine double page illumination in gold and other colours. This example was probably copied in the 16th or 17th century CE. The seal on the first page appears to be that of Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, Sultan of Golkunda, 1565-1612 with the date 1603/4 CE.

The volume of Sa'dī's *Kulliyāt* (Add.270), the third item in this collection, also contains many fine illuminated pages with paintings set in the centre of the text. A fine copy of the *Khamsah* of Nizāmī (Add.3139) presented to the Library in 1894 and dating from the 17th century or earlier has full page miniatures depicting scenes from the text. The collection of George Lewis contains several examples of illuminated manuscripts but the most impressive example is the volume presented by his son, a richly illuminated 16th-century copy of the Persian version of al-Qazwini's *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt*, or (The Wonders of creation) (Nn.3.74). It contains Arabic quotations written with gold and has numerous finely executed illuminated miniatures and coloured diagrams.

Apart from the Qur'ans and the poetry texts there are examples of medical and scientific manuscripts which have diagrams and drawings; also geographical works with maps and sketch plans, some of them in colour. The *Šuwar al-aqālīm* from the Browne collection has interesting diagrammatic maps of the Middle East and Mediterranean regions (K 1).

Cataloguing the collection

A number of attempts have been made in the past to create a comprehensive catalogue of the Islamic manuscripts. Some of the collections have original listings made of their contents made by the owners themselves, such as Lewis's own catalogue of his collection (Add. 2587) and Buchanan's catalogue describing his own collection (Add.4223).

As far as the numbering system is concerned, the manuscripts acquired from 1632 until the early 19th century were assigned, on their arrival in the Library, call numbers beginning Dd. to Oo., each followed by a sequential running number. The 'Add' or 'Additional' sequence of numbering was introduced with the acquisition of the Lewis collection in 1727 and grew in size with the steady influx of additions arriving in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Burckhardt collection, arriving in 1819, was allocated numbers beginning with the letters Qq. In 1901 the number sequence beginning Or. was introduced and is still in use today for new manuscript acquisitions.

The first comprehensive printed catalogues were written by Professor E.G. Browne and published in 1896, 1900 and 1922 and already cited. These were based on his detailed survey of all the manuscripts present in the collection at that time. His own manuscript collection was catalogued by his student R.A. Nicholson and published in 1932. In 1952, Arthur Arberry¹⁵ completed a further catalogue of the manuscripts which had come to the Library since the completion of the Browne catalogues. No further attempts were made towards a comprehensive catalogue until 2010 when the Government-funded Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) awarded funding to Oxford and Cambridge jointly to produce an on-line catalogue of the Islamic collections of both the Bodleian Library and Cambridge University Library. This was completed in

¹⁵ Arthur John Arberry, *A second supplementary hand-list of the Muhammadan manuscripts in the University and Colleges of Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952).

2012 and named 'Fihrist'; it is available on-line at <www.fihrist.org.uk>. More recently, further libraries have joined the cataloguing scheme with the aim of developing a UK-wide union catalogue of Islamic manuscript holdings. In 2012, Cambridge University Library launched its 'Digital Library', which contains a significant and ever-growing collection of the Islamic manuscripts with detailed descriptive records alongside high quality images of the complete texts. This is available on-line at <cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/Islamic> and contains images of some of the manuscripts mentioned in this description.

The collection in context

It is clear that the Islamic manuscript collection holds a significant place in relation to the development of Arabic teaching and learning which spread in the early 17th century in England and in some other countries of Western Europe. Progress in this area of learning relied heavily on the collection of manuscripts by a small number of dedicated scholars or by agents and travellers collecting manuscripts on their behalf. It was relatively rare at that time for scholars from European countries to travel to the Middle East themselves and none of the collectors of the Cambridge manuscripts were known to have done so until the time of Burckhardt and Palmer in the nineteenth century. However, other individuals did travel in these regions because they were soldiers, diplomats, traders or missionaries and the collection has benefitted greatly from their efforts. From the late nineteenth century, scholars such as E.G. Browne, Guy Le Strange and others did travel more widely and often collected their own manuscripts quite intentionally as part of their explorations.

In Cambridge itself, it is notable that the teaching of Arabic has continued in an unbroken tradition from the time of its foundation in 1632 until the present day, though it did not flourish consistently through the centuries with the same degree of success. Teaching in Persian developed towards the end of the nineteenth century and Turkish during the early part of the twentieth, though the teaching of these subjects were very reliant on the skills and interests of the individual academics present at the time. The Cambridge Islamic scholars have made a notable contribution to Middle Eastern studies over these centuries and produced scholars of international standing renowned for their pioneering efforts and the depth and spread of their interests. The contents of the manuscript collections, as well as their value in their own right, serve as a token of their dedication and frequently an insight into their own endeavours.

[Captions for figures]

Fig. 1. Two folios of the *Lexicum arabicum* of William Bedwell (1561-1632) presented to the Library by the author in 1631, one of nine volumes. Hh.6.1, f. 182-3.

Fig. 2. George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham (1592-1624), Chancellor of the University, 1626-8, who bought the Library of oriental manuscripts collected by Erpenius (1584-1624). A portrait in oils painted by Michiel Jansz. van Mierevelt (1566-1641) in 1625, and owned by the Library.

Fig. 3. Portrait of Edward Granville Browne; photograph taken around 1900; from the Library's E.G. Browne archive.

Fig. 4. Single bifolium Fragment of a Qur'an written in Hijazi script probably from the second century A.H. /eighth century A.D., containing verses from the Sura al-Anfāl. From the collection of E.H. Palmer. Add.1125, f. 1.

Fig. 5. The first part (letter *alif* only) of an unfinished Persian-Latin dictionary, written by George Lewis (d.1830) originally planned on a larger scale. Edmund Castell and Al- Ṭabarī are both cited as authorities. Add.253, f. 64.

Fig. 6. *Ta'rikh* of Aḥmad Ibn Abī Ya'qūb, d. 897. From the bequest of J.L. Burckhardt, 1819. Qq.10, f. 1.