

Vanishing Orientalism in Leiden

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For centuries orientalists had at least two important sites to visit in Leiden: the University Library, and Brill's Bookshop. Many scholars combined their research in the famous Legatum Warnerianum collections with the acquisition of books, both from the East and the West, at the bookshop, which was at only a stroll from the library. Brill's was famous in the world of learning for its scholarly editions and for its catalogues of new and second-hand books. University libraries all over the world hold important collections acquired in Leiden.

For me a visit to the antiquarian bookshop was always a treat. Its premises looked as if time had stood still for decades. The work of generations of scholars was gathered here, which contributed to an atmosphere of stateliness and solemnity. The shop's austerity also inspired excitement. The persevering book hunter could always cherish hope that his quest for a new catch might be gratified. Many rare books could only be found here, sitting on dust covered shelves, often inscribed with dedications from one famous scholar to another, or adorned with marginal notes of an intellectual ancestor.

In February 2006 Mr Rijk Smitskamp, the present owner of the bookshop, decided to close business after more than three centuries of service to the world of learning. This decision marked the end of an era of a certain style of scholarship, in which the study of Muslim societies was dominated by a philological approach, for which the amassing of all-encompassing libraries, public as well as private, was an important tool. The vanishing of this prominent institution in the intellectual infrastructure of Leiden prompts me to give a short historical sketch of the relationships between the bookshop and the development of Islamic studies.¹

For more than four centuries the city of Leiden has enjoyed a reputation in the study of Oriental languages and cultures. This fame was both linked to the scholars of its university, and to activities of printers and booksellers. Since 1683 a bookshop, which later became known as Brill's Bookshop was one of the landmarks in this infrastructure of Oriental studies. The present owner's decision to close shop in February 2006 is an occasion for reflection on the changes in scholarship on Muslim societies and the sources it uses.

History

In 1683 Jordaen Luchtman established a publishing house cum bookshop at the Rapenburg, in the centre of Leiden which soon became famous for its scholarly publications in the fields of theology, classics, and orientalia. In 1848 Evert Jan Brill acquired the firm and continued business under his own name. In 1872 the firm changed hands again, but its new owners A.P.M. van Oordt and F. de Stoppelaar retained the name Brill. In 1894 Van Oordt and De Stoppelaar decided to concentrate on publishing, and on dealing in books on oriental and colonial studies, selling the rest of their stock, some 250,000 volumes, to two former employees, who started their own bookshop and auction house.

From the nineteenth century onwards Luchtman and Brill became famous for their publications on oriental studies. Brill could print almost any text in any oriental language. Many of the editions and studies published by Luchtman and Brill were the result of a close cooperation with eminent orientalists connected to Leiden University. For example, in 1732 Luchtman published its first edition of a text in Arabic, a *Life of Saladin*, prepared by the Professor of Arabic, Albert Schultens. Brill undertook several prestigious projects with scholars from Leiden University and their foreign colleagues, such as the edition of a series of classical geographical texts in Arabic (1870-1894) and of the multivolume history of al-Tabari (1879-1901). In both ventures the work of Michaël Jan de Goeje, Professor of Arabic at Leiden

University, was essential. The publication of the first and second edition *Encyclopaedia of Islam* was also possible thanks to the offices of scholars from Leiden and Utrecht.

Oriental connections

Brill's bookshop also sold foreign publications, which were otherwise difficult to obtain. Its catalogues, which were published from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, are important sources for our knowledge of the materials which orientalists could obtain

for their studies. Again, the collaboration between Leiden scholars and Brill's authors abroad with the bookshop proved vital: these gentlemen sent books from the East as well as their own books to be sold through the bookshop.

For example, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, who visited Mecca at the expense of the Dutch government in 1885, encouraged Brill's to acquire a fair number of copies of a famous work on the history of Islamic conquests by Ahmad Dahlan, a mufti in Mecca and a close acquaintance of Snouck, which had just been published in Mecca. The last copy from this stock was sold only this spring to a collector in the Arabian Peninsula. Snouck Hurgronje was also instrumental, together with M.Th. Houtsma and their Swedish colleague Carlo Landberg, in the acquisition of several collections of oriental manuscripts from Amin al-Madani, a learned shaykh from Madina, described in a series of catalogues issued between 1883 and 1889. One collection was sold to the Leiden library another went to Princeton in 1900. The trade in oriental manuscripts, in languages as diverse as Arabic, Ottoman, Persian, Ethiopian, Chinese, Mongol, and Tibetan, would become another specialty of Brill's.

For more than a century the books from the estates of many famous European orientalists were sold after their death to Brill's, which made them available again to their intellectual heirs. This resulted in monumental catalogues, such as of the libraries of René Basset, Enno Littman, Franz Taeschner, and Oscar Löfgren. Some of these collections were the beginnings of new university libraries. Thus, Joseph Schacht's famous library on Islamic law was sold to Kuala Lumpur.

Early editions and manuscripts

When the present owner Mr Rijk Smitskamp, educated as a classical scholar, started to work at Brill's in 1970, he gradually made himself acquainted with the riches that had accumulated in the bookshop during more than a century. In the course of the years he transformed the enterprise from a firm dealing in second hand books into an antiquarian bookshop of renown, specialized in scholarly and rare works.

Unlike his predecessors he did not consider the old books as outdated and less valuable. He realized the importance of the large stock of nineteenth century publications and marketed these as antiquarian books of considerable interest and value. His extensive knowledge of the books offered for sale became more and more visible in the catalogues, both in the composition of the collections offered, and in his learned descriptions. His own specialty became the history of oriental printing in Europe, for which he created a monument in the three volumes of *Philologia orientalis* (1976-1991).

One day an itinerant Turkish merchant in sheep's intestines and pistachio nuts, who in his youth had enjoyed an Islamic education, visited Mr Smitskamp in order to sell some manuscripts. During his tours in the Anatolian countryside he encountered old books in a largely forgotten script for which the owners did not have much use any more.

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monographs based
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After he had found out that these discarded books turned out to be valuables abroad, he sent for several years mailbags, full of manuscripts, to Leiden. A few years later he was followed by a Turkish professor and connoisseur of the Islamic heritage, who used his contacts in Western Asia to furnish Brill's with manuscripts.

As in the nineteenth century, Smitskamp invited Leiden University scholars to contribute to lavishly produced catalogues, such as the famous catalogue 500 on Arabic manuscripts compiled by Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld and Qasim al-Samarrai in 1978. This collection, like many others since the 1970s, ended up in the Near East.

Closing shop

In 1992 Messrs Brill decided to sell the bookshop, thus ending the ancient combination of the publishing and selling of books. At about the same time they had also given up the printing of books. Its famous printing house, with all its movable type of oriental scripts and the specialist knowledge of its typographers, which had given Leiden fame for centuries, was relinquished. Fortunately, Mr Smitskamp was so courageous as to continue business as an antiquarian bookseller under his own name.

However, in recent years important changes in the antiquarian book trade have come about by the spread of the use of the Internet. The publication of printed catalogues embodying the fruit of years of studying and collecting became somewhat obsolete, and in any case expensive, like the maintenance of prestigious premises in the centre of town. The commerce in books again requires new skills, such as the practice of electronic marketing and sales.² No successor dared to take over the venerable bookshop. At the last moment a booklover from the Arabian Peninsula bought the books on Islam and the Middle East, as the nucleus of a new scholarly library which he intended to establish.

At the end of 2005 Mr Smitskamp decided to close his bookshop with the publication of a catalogue of important works from the republic of letters (no. 653), to which his firm had been offering its services since 1683. The remaining stock, the bulky result of centuries of bookselling, and including the valuable reference library studies compiled by Mr Smitskamp, will be auctioned in several sessions by Burgersdijk & Niermans, the firm established by two former Brill employees in 1894.³

With the decision to close the Oriental Antiquarium a long tradition of dealing in books from and about the East has come to an end. Gone are the days in which a student, after a studious morning in the University Library, could walk leisurely to the Nieuwe Rijn, and browse for a bookish lunch. Its nooks and crannies, where on bright days incoming sunrays would transform the dust fluttering down among the towering bookcases into speckles of gold, held unexpected treasures brought together during three centuries by generations of scholars, printers, and booksellers.

Vanishing Orientalism

However, the closure of the bookshop implies more than the vanishing of a bibliophiles' sanctuary. Almost simultaneously the oriental reading room of the university library was closed, and its staff cut down. These developments are part of important changes in the academic study of oriental languages and cultures which have taken place in recent years. The concept of Orientalism as a designation of a field of study has come under severe attack. Since the publication of Said's seminal essay in 1978, the term is rather looked down upon, as the sign of an old-fashioned, antiquarian approach to research, or the expression of bygone view of things political.

Philology, which flourished in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, stressed the importance of the study of texts, especially in the form of collecting and editing of manuscripts. Brockelmann's *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, all published by Brill, are outstanding



PHOTO BY SMITSKAMP ORIENTAL ANTIQUARIUM, 2006

Smitskamp Oriental Antiquarium, Leiden

embodiments of this textual approach. During the last three decades social scientists have criticized the primacy of philology in the study of Muslim societies and gradually taken over its place. The Orient does not need a special branch of scholarship, but should be studied as all other human societies, using a diversity of disciplines, in which knowledge of languages is only an auxiliary science. This is for example the approach which underlies the ISIM programme.

The production of books and articles shows these changes. English-language monographs based on "field work" have replaced editions of unique texts, full of exotic characters. Meanwhile the Orient has changed from a passive object of research into a multitude of modern states, some of which hold considerable funds for research and the construction of new identities. Patrons from Arabia, Malaysia and Japan, who bought manuscripts as well as antiquarian European studies, made the Oriental Antiquarium flourish. The trade in oriental manuscripts changed drastically. On the one hand the removal of the written heritage of "traditional" societies was severely criticized. On the other hand prosperous states and private collectors from the East acquired a "proper" past and tradition in less well-off countries and at London auctions, sometimes for skyrocketing prices.

The techniques and instruments of the humanities have also been profoundly altered. Laptops and virtual libraries have replaced writing-desks and bookcases, just as shorter trips have come instead of lengthy expeditions or stays as advisers for native affairs, which would be exploited during an academic career. Internet trading and digitalization have made books from all over the world much more easily accessible. A bookshop, which encompasses the entire Orient from a philological perspective, does not seem to be a viable institution anymore in the light of a profoundly altered vision of scholarship.

In this light the history of three centuries of oriental bookselling in Leiden is a source for reflection on course of scholarship in our field. The bookshop's archives offer a unique image of changes in ideas about the study of Muslim societies, and as such deserve conservation and further exploration.

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Notes

1. See, for instance: J.T.P. Bruijn, "Collective Studies of the Muslim World: Institutions, Projects and Collections," in *Leiden Oriental Connections 1850-1940*, ed. Willem Otterspeer (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 94-114; J.M. Van Ophuysen, *E. J. Brill: Three Centuries of Scholarly Publishing. Since 1683* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994); Jan Just Witkam, "A Giant Fades Away," *Ezelsoor: Newsletter of the Department of Book and Digital Media Studies* (Leiden), Spring 2006, 1-6.
2. The electronic address of the bookshop is: www.oriental.demon.nl.
3. The catalogues of the successive auctions can be consulted at their website: www.b-n.nl.