

Danish Oriental Studies

Between the Sacred and the Secular, the Local and the Global (1600–1850)

Jan Loop

1 Introduction

In 1813, the aspiring theologian and philologist Jens Lassen Rasmussen (1785–1826) returned to Denmark from his ‘peregrinatio academica’. Like many other Danish students before and after him, Rasmussen had profited from royal or public travel grants – in his case a Rosenkrantz stipend – to complete his theological education at foreign institutions. Among others, he had studied with the greatest Arabist of the time, Antoine Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1838) in Paris, and upon his return he became ‘lektor’ in oriental languages at the University of Copenhagen. In 1815, he was promoted to the chair of oriental philology, which had been established at the Philosophical Faculty with a specific focus on Biblical Hebrew in the wake of the Reformation in 1537, first held by Hans Tausen (1494–1561).¹ In the year before his promotion, in 1814, Rasmussen had published an essay with the title *Om Arabernes og Persernes Handel og Bekjendtskab med Rusland og Skandinavien i Middelalderen. En historisk-geographisk Undersøgelse*. The groundbreaking essay presented an economic history of global trade relations between Arabs, Persians and Scandinavians via Russian and Bulgar tribes. Rasmussen’s contemporaries in Denmark and beyond recognized the originality of the essay and were particularly impressed by his command of Arabic historical and geographical sources. The essay won a prize from the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters and was translated into English, French and Swedish, and Rasmussen produced a Latin version of the text, published in 1825 as *De orientis commercio cum Russia et Scandinavia medio aevo*.²

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- 1 See Frede Løkkegard, ‘Semitisk-østerlandsk filologi’ in P.J. Jensen and Leif Grane, (eds.), *Københavns Universitet 1479–1979*, (København 1992), 8: 477–522, 481. See also Ejvind Slottved, *Lærestole og lærere ved Københavns Universitet 1537–1977* (København, 1978), pp. 145–7 (D 7).
 - 2 *De orientis commercio cum Russia et Scandinavia medio aevo* (Copenhagen, 1825).

Rasmussen's study was not only a history of trade relations between geographically remote peoples, but also a reflection on the function of trade as a driver of long-distance cultural exchange and ethnographic knowledge production. The essay sought to make sense of the many Arab coins that had been discovered in Sweden, northern Germany, and Denmark, which suggested commercial relations, albeit probably indirect, between Northern Europeans and Arabs. The Professor of Oriental Languages at the University of Lund, Carl Johan Tornberg (1807–1877), later published a pioneering study of 'Kufic coins found in Swedish Soil' in 1848.³

Arabs, Rasmussen writes, would have traded in three directions: East (towards Persia, India and China), south from the Maghreb to the inner parts of Africa, and North through Armenia and the Caspian Sea to the lands of the Bulgarians, Russians, Slavs. Rasmussen, using Arabic sources, explores the knowledge Arabs had of the countries north of the Caspian Sea, with which, he argues, they had frequent contact. Rasmussen's central argument was that information about Scandinavia had made it to the medieval Arabs, even if they had never visited these distant regions and their knowledge was 'meget ufuldstændig' ('very sketchy').⁴

Among the many sources that Rasmussen used was the geographical treatise by the Persian scholar Abū Yaḥyā Zakariyyā ibn Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd al-Qazwīnī, *Āthār al-bilād wa-akhbār al-'ibād* (Monuments of the lands and historical traditions about their peoples), written in the 13th century. Rasmussen gives the title *Landenes Forunderligheder* (mirabilia terrarum), which refers to *'Ajā'ib al-buldān* (*Wonders of the Lands*), the title a number of manuscripts bear.⁵ He refers to a 'good manuscript in the collection of the Royal Library, Mssc. Reg. in 4to No. 53 (with some pages missing at the beginning)'.⁶ Another manuscript at the Danish Royal Library is Yāqūt Shihāb al-Dīn's *Kitāb Mu'jam al-Buldān* (*Dictionary of Countries*) in two volumes, written in the 12th century,

3 Carl Johann Tornberg, *Numi Cufici. Regii numophylacii homiensis quos omnes in terra Sueciae repertos*, 2 vols. (Uppsala, 1848). First studies on Arabic coins found in the Baltic Sea area were written already in the early 18th century. See for example Georg Jacob Kehr, *Monarchiae asiatico-saracenicae status, qualis VIII. et IX. post Christum natum seculo fuit, ex nummis argenteis prisca Arabum scriptura kufica, a monarchis arabicis al-Mansor, Harun-Raschid, al-Mamon, aliisque cunis, et nuper in littore maris balthici prope Gedanum e fossis, illustratus* (Leipzig, 1724). I am grateful to Bernd Roling for pointing this work out to me.

4 Rasmussen, *Om Arabernes*, p. 5.

5 <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/atar-al-belad-geographical-work>.

6 *Catalogus manuscriptorum codicum Persicorum, Arabicorum atque Turcicorum Magnae Regiae bibliothecae ... conscripsit J.L. Rasmussen, Anno 1814*, DKB, Archiv E70, fol. 8r. I have not been able to find this exact manuscript at the Royal Library.

which was the main source of Qazwīnī.⁷ In the first volume of Yāqūt's dictionary, Rasmussen found the story of Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān who was sent by Kalif al-Muqtadir in 921 AD on a diplomatic mission to the king of the Bulghārs of the Volga. Rasmussen quoted a long excerpt from a letter by ibn Faḍlān found in Yāqūt's dictionary. It was the first partial European translation of this important account of the government, religion and culture of the *Rūs* in Volga Bulgharia.⁸ 'What Abdallah Jacuti states about the Russians in his geographical lexicon is highly remarkable,' Rasmussen wrote. 'It seems to emerge from it that they had a similar religion, customs, and constitution to our Nordic ancestors.'⁹ For Rasmussen and his compatriots, who were so interested in everything related to the history of Scandinavian tribes and nations, the Arab report of this burial ritual among the Varganians was priceless. Even today it remains the most detailed source we have about the cultural and religious practices of this tribe and an important indication for their Scandinavian origin.

Rasmussen had a theological background, and the teaching of oriental languages at the University of Copenhagen was still centred on the instruction of Biblical Hebrew. After his appointment as ordinary professor of oriental philology, he published a Hebrew Grammar in Danish¹⁰ and conjugation and declension tables of the Hebrew language.¹¹ However, much of his scholarly work is unrelated to theological or Biblical themes and represents a secularized approach to oriental studies at the beginning of the 19th century. Apart from his pioneering study of economic and cultural relations between Scandinavians and Arabs, he also translated a variety of Arabic and Persian historical and literary works, including odes by Ḥāfiẓ, poems by 'Abd ar-Rahmān Jāmī and parts of the *Arabian Nights*.¹²

As such, Rasmussen's work and his essay on Scandinavian-Arab trade and cultural relations fits into traditional narratives that describe the history

7 It is today DKB, Ms. Cod. Arab. 99 and Cod. Arab. 100. See Irmeli Perho, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts*, 3 vols (Copenhagen, 2007), 1: 369–374 and below, p. 355. For Rasmussen's other sources see his 'Om Arabernes', pp. 6–8.

8 Ibn Faḍlān's account is an exceptional piece of ethnographic writing and has been newly translated by James Montgomery and published in the Library of Arabic Literature series. Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān, *Mission to the Volga*, trans. J. Montgomery (New York, 2017).

9 'Høist mærkværdigt er det, hvad Abdallah Jacuti i sit geografisk Lexikon anfører om Russerne, hvoraf synes at fremlyse, at disse have havt en lignede Religion, Sæder og Forfatning med vore nordisk Forfædre.'

10 *Kortfattet hebraisk Sproglære* (Copenhagen, 1815).

11 *Fuldstændige Konjugations- og Deklinations-Tabeller i det hebraiske Sprog* (Copenhagen 1818), reprinted 1821 and 1828.

12 Fontenay, Fr. de: *Jens Lassen Rasmussen in Dansk Biografisk Leksikon* https://biografiskleksikon.lex.dk/Jens_Lassen_Rasmussen.

of European Arabic studies as a linear development, a kind of liberation movement of a discipline that for centuries was exploited and curtailed as a handmaiden of theology and biblical studies.¹³ For early modern Europeans, oriental and Islamic studies primarily had a theological focus. They were anchored in *philologia sacra* – the learned explication of Scripture – as well as in religious controversy and mission. However, they were also a laboratory for new empirical methods in philology, history, and anthropology, comprising diverse cultures and languages over a wide expanse from North Africa to East Asia and, as the case of Denmark shows, this theological-philological moment was never completely detached from political and economic forces. As this essay will demonstrate, public funding and patronage, commercial interests, and diplomatic and scholarly networks were central factors that shaped the methods and focus of oriental studies in Denmark and in early modern Europe in general.

The chapter describes some of the milestones in the history of Danish oriental studies. It will focus on the contributions of pioneering scholars – but also of Danish politics, commerce and travel – to the growing manuscript collection at the Royal library, and to a changing European understanding of religion and culture in Northern Africa and the Middle East. It was this development, between the early 17th and the later 18th century, on which modern orientalist scholars like Jens Lassen Rasmussen could build.

2 A Lutheran Centre of Oriental Studies

In the seventeenth century, Copenhagen emerged as a centre of Lutheran oriental studies, an important node within a network of orientalist learning that crossed confessional boundaries, linking Leiden and Oxford with Paris, Istanbul, Cairo and Tranquebar. This was a crucial moment in the history of oriental scholarship in Western Europe. New diplomatic and mercantile networks linked centres of orientalist learning in the Islamic world – above all Istanbul, but also Cairo, Isfahan and Aleppo – with imperial centres in Western Europe. Through these networks thousands of manuscripts arrived in Leiden, Paris, Oxford or Copenhagen. Alongside this influx of texts and knowledge, a process of institutionalisation shaped oriental studies at different universities. In addition to numerous chairs of Hebrew all over Europe, chairs of Arabic were founded in Leiden (1599 and 1613), Heidelberg (1608), Cambridge (1632), and

¹³ The classical account of this development is Johann Fück, *Die arabischen Studien in Europa bis in den Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1955).

Oxford (1636). Oriental printing presses like the Medici Press in Rome made new scholarship and editions of key texts available to a European readership.¹⁴

Royal stipends, public and private patronage, and the creation of academic positions in the early 17th century provided an institutional context within which the orientalist tradition developed in Copenhagen. A driving force behind this development was Christen Friis til Kragerup (1581–1639), a powerful chancellor to the Danish king Christian IV who actively promoted the study and teaching of oriental languages at the University of Copenhagen.¹⁵ His interest is attributed to the influence of his teacher Herman Nielsen (1570–1629), professor of Hebrew at Copenhagen between 1610 and 1629. Christen Friis supported the orientalist interests of Hans Svane (1606–1668), who received a royal travel grant to study in Franeker, Leiden and Oxford in 1631 and 1634.¹⁶ In Franeker, Svane studied under the orientalist Sixtinus Amama, and in Paris he received instructions in Arabic from Gabriel Sionita, before being appointed in 1635 to the newly established extra-ordinary chair for oriental philology at Copenhagen's philosophical faculty, where he taught Syriac.¹⁷ In the same year, a letter sent by the king to the professorate ordered them to instruct another promising student, Frederik Andersen, then in Paris, to improve his knowledge of Arabic so that he could be appointed professor of Arabic as soon as the next position was available.¹⁸ However, nothing seems to have come out of this plan and the extraordinary professorship for oriental philology was discontinued

14 For surveys of the history of oriental studies in Christian Europe see *The Teaching and Learning of Arabic in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jan Loop, Charles Burnett and Alastair Hamilton (Leiden, 2017); Alastair Hamilton, *Arabs and Arabists: Selected Articles* (Leiden and Boston, 2022).

15 On the life of Christen Friis see Ole Degn, *Christian 4.s kansler. Christen Friis til Kragerup (1581–1639), som mennske og politiker* (Copenhagen, 1988).

16 Vello Helk, *Dansk-norske studierejser, fra reformationen til enevælden 1536–1660* (Odense, 1987), p. 393.

17 Steffen Heiberg, 'Hans Svane', *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, Gyldendal. Retrieved June 1, 2019.

18 'Da Kongen agter ved Universitetet at have en Mand, som er forfaren i det arabiske Sprog, og det berettes, at Fridericus Andreæ er vel øvet i de orientalske Sprog, skal de tilholde denne at lægge sig efter Kundskab i dette Sprog og siden, naar der i Fremtiden bliver et Professorat ledigt, forfremme ham dertil.' (Since the King intends to have a man at the University who is proficient in the Arabic language, and it is reported that Fridericus Andreæ is well-versed in the Oriental languages, they are to instruct him to pursue knowledge in this language and, when a professorship becomes available in the future, to promote him to that position). *Kancelliets Brevbøger vedrørende Danmarks indre Forhold, 1735–1736*, ed. E. Marquard (Copenhagen, 1940), p. 250, see Degn, *Christian 4.s kansler*, p. 72.

after Svane's death in 1646 by Friis' follower as chancellor, Christen Thomesen Sehested, who 'found it unnecessary that these languages were taught.'¹⁹

A number of dedications in printed works of the time testify to patronage of orientalist studies by Christen Friis. Herman Nielsen, in his book *Idea linguarum aramearum* from 1627, thanks Friis for his support of the 'studium Linguarum Orientalium' which had led, Nielsen writes, to the addition of a second, extraordinary professorship in Oriental Languages.²⁰

Johann Fabricius of Danzig, in the dedication to his *Specimen Arabicum* of 1637, also thanked Friis profusely for his support. Fabricius, who had visited Copenhagen in 1635 compares the Danish efforts to establish Copenhagen as a centre of Arabic studies to similar efforts in Paris and Leiden.²¹ It has been claimed that the Arabic types, which the Richel brothers in Rostock used to print Fabricius' book, were founded in Copenhagen.²² This is doubtful, but it is quite possible that Christen Friis supported the production of the types in Rostock with which the printing house of Johann Richel was equipped in 1636. Scholars of Rostock celebrated this acquisition with a number of poems and congratulatory publications, which were collected in a volume, *Typographia Arabica Nova*.²³ On 16 October 1636, the printer Johann Richel inaugurated his new Arabic types with a specimen print of Avicenna's *Qaṣīda al-naḥsīya* or

19 William Norvin, *København's Universitet i Reformationens og Orthodoxiens Tidsalder*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen, 1937–1940), 1: 201–2.

20 'Postquam Illustris & Magnifice Dn., Cancellarie, tibi Dominus animum addidit studium Linguarum Orientalium in hac Academia propagandi; in hoc sedulò incubuisit, quemadmodum quod sapienter cogitaras, tandem certo documento comprobare. Testatur hoc inter alia, nupere tuo auspicio et cura, Linguarum Orientalium Professore publico altero aucta professio.' Herman Nielsen, *Idea linguarum aramearum, per comparisonem unius cum altera et utriusque cum Hebræa, brevibus præceptis methodice comprehensa* (Copenhagen, 1627), sig. A2r–v.

21 'Cum raro totius Europæ ac tertio demum exemplo, quod Lugduni Batavorum Fortes quod Christianissimus Rex Parisiis instituerunt, idem ille Vester ac vere Christianus Rex in Arabum literis a vobis sperare videatur. Quas cum imposterum coli ornarique cupiat, non poterat in patrocinium meae operæ quisquam alius cum vobis devocari, quam ille Vester Magnus Cancellarius. Ita enim necesse erat, ut qui communi causa mereretis, eorum divisa apud me non esset gratia.' Johann Fabricius, *Specimen Arabicum quo exhibentur aliquot scripta Arabica partim in prosa, partim ligata oratione composita* (Rostock, 1637), sig.)(2r.

22 As claimed by Josée Balagna, *L'imprimerie arabe en Occident (xvi^e, xvii^e et xviii^e siècle)* (Paris, 1984), p. 71, with reference to Schnurrer, *Bibliotheca Arabica*, n. 70, p. 45, who doesn't make any such claim.

23 The only surviving copy is preserved at the University Library Gdansk. I thank Kasia Starczewska for providing me with photos of the booklet.

al-ʿaynīya, the *Ode on the Human Soul*. This popular poem had already been printed on a single sheet three years earlier in Leiden, as the recent discovery of a surviving copy in the Copenhagen collection shows.²⁴ The Richelius types were still available in Rostock in 1705, when they were used to print Grapius's edition of Aḥmad ibn ʿAbdallāh's letter to Maurice of Orange.²⁵

3 Danish Scholars Abroad

A document from 1639 shows how king and chancellor tried to control the correct use of Royal travel grants for theologians in the face of growing interest among students in other fashionable studies. In a letter from 3 February 1639 the king and his chancellor expressed their concern about reports that students who received the king's theological stipends 'do not apply themselves to theological studies with the diligence that, with God's help, they ought to, but rather some devote themselves more to languages and other [subjects], thereby wasting nearly all their time' ('iche med den flid sig giffuer paa Studium Theologicum, som de burde med Godz hielp att giøre, mens en deell sig meere befliter paa Linguas och anded och dermed mesten deris gansche thid bortdriffuer'). It is not clear what languages are meant, but at the end of the king's letter the study of oriental languages was explicitly regulated. It was ordered that stipend holders are only allowed to study oriental languages – probably Arabic, Ethiopic, and Syriac – under certain conditions:

'If there is a shortage of a skilled Hebraist well-versed in the Oriental languages, then one of the same scholarships must sometimes be used for this purpose, provided that the same person also pursues theological studies.'²⁶

24 DKB, DKB, Ms. OrArch. 1-8. My earlier claim, that the Rostock print from 1636 was the first print of this poem needs to be corrected. See Loop, 'Arabic Poetry as Teaching Material in Early Modern Grammars and Textbooks', in Loop, Alastair Hamilton and Charles Burnett (eds.), *The Teaching and Learning of Arabic in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, 2017), pp. 230–251; 238.

25 Zacharias Grapius, *Ahmet Ben-Abdala, Mohammedani epistola theologica de articulis quibusdam fidei...* (Rostock, 1705). See Smitskamp, *Philologia Orientalis* (Leiden, 1995), n. 288.

26 'Dog saa frembt defect och mangels bliffuer paa en fornemme Hebraeo och den well verseret er in Linguis Orientalibus, da maa och wndertiden it aff samme stipendium brugis därtill, dog at samme person thillige sig paa Studium Theologicum och begiffuer.' Forholdsregler med Hensyn til Theologer, der fik det kgl. Rejestipendium. 1639. 3. Februar. Printed in H.F. Førdam, 'Aktstykker til Universitets Historie 1621–60', in *Dansk Magazin*, 5 Række, 11, (Copenhagen, 1889–92), Nr. 130, pp. 15–16.

One Danish student who received his higher education abroad was a 'Fridericus a Boechwalt, Holsatus', who matriculated at the University of Leiden on 22 October 1622.²⁷

This student might be identical with the Friedrich von Buchwald, who, some years later, travelled to Cairo and brought back a collection of seven Kufic Qur'an fragments (Cod. Arab. 36–38; and 40–42). Four of these have an owner's mark 'Friderici a Bockwoldes' (Cod. Arab. 36–38 and 41), and Cod. Arab. 36 indicates that it was acquired in Cairo on 18 March 1626. Irmeli Perho conjectured that this was probably Friedrich von Buchwald (1605–1676), a brother of Wolf Buchwald (1588–1637), who had himself travelled extensively in Europe and the Middle East.²⁸

The seven manuscripts were probably taken from a depot at the Mosque of 'Amr ibn al-ʿĀs in al-Fuṣṭāṭ, from where a number of other Kufic manuscripts in European collections originate.²⁹ Testimony to the uniqueness and importance of Copenhagen's collection of Kufic manuscripts are facsimile copies of them, now in Paris,³⁰ and Rostock,³¹ to which I will return below.

Other Danish students of the 17th century also received a grounding in various oriental languages during their study tours, whether publicly or privately funded. Thomas Bang (1600–1661), for example, was supported by Holger Rosenkrantz the Learned (1574–1642). His travel route, like that of most other Danish students of the time, was restricted by the University's rule that only Lutheran institutions could be visited. Nevertheless, he is said to have also stayed in Franeker, where he studied oriental languages, as he did in Wittenberg, before becoming Professor of Hebrew at the University of Copenhagen in 1630. He later expressed a desire to study Syriac and Arabic with Gabriel Sionita in Paris, but it is unclear whether he ever managed to do this.³² One of Thomas Bang's students was Hans Wandal (1624–1675), who studied in Leiden in 1648, where he might also have improved his knowledge of Arabic with the famous professor of oriental languages there, Jacobus Golius. In 1652, Wandal became

27 *Album Studiosorum Academiae Lugduno Batavae 1575–1875* (Den Haag 1875), 1: col. 150.

28 Perho, *Catalogue*, 1: p. xx.

29 See François Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran dans les débuts de l'islam. Le codex Parisinopetropolitanus* (Leiden, 2009), 7.

30 BNF, Ms Arabe 580.

31 Rostock University Library, Ms. orient. 161.1, 'Calligraphiae arabicae specimina'; wrongly attributed to Salomon Negri in the catalogue (https://rosdok.uni-rostock.de/resolve/id/rosdok_document_0000015291) See below, p. 354.

32 Løkkegard, 'Semitisk-østerlandsk filologi', p. 486.

professor of Hebrew at Copenhagen.³³ His son Hans (1656–1710) followed in his footsteps and showed a particular interest in Arabic, which he read at Oxford, Cambridge and Leiden, before he returned to Denmark and became professor of oriental languages in Copenhagen in 1683.³⁴

Arguably the most interesting figure to emerge from this 17th-century Danish orientalist milieu was Theodor Peträus (d. 1672).

Born in Flensburg, Peträus matriculated at the University of Leiden on 16 December 1650.³⁵ Like other young students from Germany and Scandinavia, Peträus was attracted by the fame of Jacobus Golius.

Supported by a stipend from Frederik III Peträus studied Arabic with Golius there, but already in 1651 he made his first steps in Coptic, as shown by an Arabic-Coptic Lexicon in Peträus's hand, now at the Royal Library in Copenhagen.³⁶ Soon, his interest was caught by Ge'ez, the Ethiopic liturgical language. A small circle of students in Leiden dedicated their time to Ethiopic studies, a less crowded field than Hebrew and Arabic, in which ambitious young students felt they could still leave a mark as pioneers.³⁷ Together with Johann Georg Nissel (d. 1662), a native of the Palatinate, Peträus set up a printing press with Ethiopic types and edited a number of Arabic-Ethiopic versions of shorter Biblical texts, accompanied by Latin translations and commentaries.³⁸ A variant print of the Epistle of St James – *S. Jacobi Apostoli epistolae catholicae versio Arabica et Aethiopica* of 1654 – only carried Peträus's name, as well as a dedication to King Frederik III, in which the prospect of flourishing oriental studies at the University of Copenhagen is invoked.³⁹ The dedication

33 Jens Glebe-Møller, *Hans Wandal – 1624–1675, teolog i Dansk Biografisk Leksikon* på lex.dk. Hentet 12. juni 2025 fra https://biografiskleksikon.lex.dk/Hans_Wandal_-_1624-1675,_teolog.

34 Ibid.

35 *Album Studiorum Academiae Lugduno Batavae 1575–1875*, 1: col. 409.

36 DKB, Ms. E. don. var. 37 kvart. The entry at the end of the manuscript reads “Scripsi Leidae Ao 1641, 2 Febr, hora decima vesp. ex mutuo Cl. Do., Golii”. The date must be a mistake and should probably be 1651, see Erik Iversen, “Theodor Peträus og det 17. Aarhundredes orientalske Studier”, *Fund og Forskning* 9 (1962), pp. 79–113, p. 88ff. See also Hamilton, *The Copts and the West, 1439–182. The European Discovery of the Egyptian Church* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 252–3.

37 Jan Loop and Asaph Ben-Tov, ‘Scholarship and the Quest for Ethiopia in the Seventeenth Century. Hiob Ludolf and Johann Michael Wansleben’, in *Hiob Ludolf and Johann Michael Wansleben. Oriental Studies, Politics, and History between Gotha and Africa 1650–1700*, ed. A. Ben-Tov, J. Loop, M. Mulsow (Leiden, 2024), pp. 1–22.

38 A list of their edited works is given in Alfred Rahlfs, *Nissel und Petraeus, ihre äthiopischen Textausgaben und Typen* (Göttingen, 1917), pp. 271–84.

39 ‘Suscipe igitur quaeso, REX CLEMENTISSIME, serenâ fronte haec studiorum meorum Orientalium [αρχοθρηια], ceu mei erga T. SACRAM MAJESTAT. devotissimi cultûs ac venerationis documentum, ea summo favore pro innata Tua clementia fove, ac munificentia

and the academic promise of the young Danish scholar seem to have made an impression on the King and his advisors, and he was awarded a travel stipend for an expedition to the Orient, in order to complete his education, improve his linguistic skills, and collect manuscripts.⁴⁰ Between 1655 and 1659 Petræus travelled to Padua, Rome, Jerusalem, Istanbul, Egypt, from there to London and then back to Leiden, where he started to publish some of the Arabic, Coptic, and Ethiopic manuscripts he had copied and collected during his trip.⁴¹ Already during his stay in London in 1659, the printing house of Thomas Roycroft, which was also responsible for the printing of the London Polyglott Bible (1654–1657) and Hiob Ludolf's *Grammatica Aethiopica* (1661), produced a specimen edition of a Coptic – Arabic version of the first Psalm, together with a Latin translation, the Coptic being written in Greek characters.⁴² The specimen also included an 'approbatio' by leading English scholars (Brian Walton, Edward Pococke, Edmund Castell and others), who testified that they had seen the entire Coptic-Arabic Psalter translated and that they supported its publication.⁴³ However, this, like the many other edition projects Petræus toyed with, never materialised.

Four years later, Petræus printed another trilingual (Coptic, Arabic, Latin) version of the first Psalm in Leiden, together with his *Clavis Linguae Arabicae, Persicae et Turcicae*, a comparative lexicon of selected words in Arabic, Persian and Turkish. This was the only publication resulting from his extensive comparative linguistic studies, documented in his notebooks and manuscripts at the Royal library in Copenhagen and the Staatsbibliothek Berlin.⁴⁴ Among the manuscripts that testify to his scholarly work and his ambitious projects

Regia promove; quo tandem efficiatur, ut felicissimo Tuo auspicio et ductu hae linguae utilissimae, antiquitate celeberrimae, duarum mundi partium Dominae, et maxime genuinae Hebraeae matris tam venustae ac vetustae filiae, in celeberrima Tua Hafniensi Academia propagari, vigere ac florere incipiant, in maximum Ecclesiae Reipublicaeque literariae emolumentum et ornamentum, ac aeviternam Nominis Tui Augustui memoriam.' ('Thus, under Your most fortunate auspices and leadership, these most useful languages, celebrated for their antiquity, ruling over two parts of the world, and especially the most authentic daughters of the venerable and ancient Hebrew mother, may begin to be propagated, thrive, and flourish in Your renowned University of Copenhagen, to the great benefit and honour of the Church and the Republic of Letters, and to the eternal remembrance of Your August Name.')

40 Iversen, 'Petræus', p. 90.

41 See Rahlfs, *Nissel und Petraeus*.

42 Iversen, 'Petræus', p. 94.

43 Hamilton, *Copts and the West*, p. 262.

44 For more details see Paul Babinski, *World Literature. The Orientalist's Manuscript between the Ottoman Empire and Germany*. Dissertation presented to the Faculty of Princeton University, November 2020, p. 266–267.

is a specimen of a polyglot Qur'an, with the *al-Fātiḥa* written in Arabic, with Persian and Turkish interlinear versions, and a Latin translation by Peträus.⁴⁵ The Arabic, Persian and Turkish text was probably written by Shāhīn Qandī, an Armenian scribe whom Peträus had met during his stay in Leiden between 1600 and 1666. Several of Peträus's manuscripts in libraries all over Europe are copied in Shāhīn's beautiful handwriting. The Royal library in Copenhagen preserves the copy of an anonymous Turkish history of Süleyman I, *Dāstān-i Sulṭān Süleymān*, copied by Shahin and partially translated by Peträus.⁴⁶

The only other major work ever to appear in print – apart from the Ethiopian editions he produced with Nisselius – was the edition of the *Doctrina Christiana, Armenice in Latinum versa et publicata* which came out in 1667. It seems that Peträus had covered most of the expenses for this print himself, and that he was left with half of the copies, unable to find buyers. The venture bankrupted him, and he died destitute and desperate, a few years later, in Copenhagen.⁴⁷

4 Institutional Support – and Its Limits: the Case of Matthias Ancheren

Peträus's work and his repeated appeals for patronage led to several job offers – in 1664 there was a vacant professorship for oriental languages in Copenhagen which prompted him to send a number of gifts to King Frederik III, notably a beautiful Qur'an with a dedication to the King both in Latin and in Arabic⁴⁸ and a miniature Qur'an with a short Latin dedication.⁴⁹ These manuscripts appear in the earliest extant catalogue of manuscripts in the Royal library, a handwritten list by Peter Schumacher, librarian to the King from 1665.⁵⁰ However, the job was given to another applicant, Oluf Eriksen Torm, who has not left any scholarly traces, but who was the son-in-law of the famous physician and

45 DKB Ms. OrArch. 2-1.

46 DKB, Ms. e don. var. 38 4°, see Babinski, *World Literature*, p. 271.

47 Iversen, 'Peträus'.

48 DKB, Ms. Cod. Arab. 19.

49 DKB, Ms. Cod. Arab. 29.

50 A third Qur'an manuscript in King Frederik III's library, today's DKB, Ms. Cod. Arab. 2, might also have been gifted by Peträus. See Erik Petersen, 'Wulfstans Kodex og Schumachers Liste. Om den ældste fortegnelse over håndskrifter i det Kongelige Bibliotek', *Fund og Forskning* 48 (2009), pp. 7–56. The list can be found here: <https://permalink.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/761/> I would like to thank my colleague Lars Cyril Nørgaard for pointing this article out to me.

antiquarian Ole Worm.⁵¹ The following year, Peträus was offered a professorship in oriental languages in Königsberg. While he accepted the offer, he, for unclear reasons, never took up the position.⁵²

This was an institutional context that supported and facilitated – to a certain degree, at least – bold orientalist ventures in the framework of theological studies. Pioneering figures like Peträus, sometimes with, sometimes without financial support, often ventured beyond the beaten track, trying to print and publish in new languages, for which often no printer and no types and certainly no buyers could yet be found and for which there was often, despite some initial support, no continuous institutional funding available.

This is confirmed, at the end of century still, by the professional trajectory of Matthias Anchersen (1682–1741), the future bishop of Ribe. Anchersen is another understudied figure in the history of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Denmark. His scholarship and interest in oriental languages was initially nurtured at Copenhagen's University, where, as we have seen, public support and royal patronage led to a rudimentary institutionalisation of oriental studies within the strict Lutheran-Protestant syllabus.

At the time of Anchersen's studies, the chair of oriental philology was held by Hans Steenbuch (1664–1740), who himself had studied oriental languages during a seven-year *peregrinatio academica* in the Netherlands (Leiden) England (Oxford), France, Italy, Switzerland and Germany (Leipzig and Giessen). During a stay in Giessen in 1690 he befriended the Danish amateur orientalist Frederik Rostgaard (1671–1745), who also played a role in Anchersen's life. Rostgaard was a wealthy man with broad scholarly interests. During an extended nine-year study tour between 1690 and 1699, he developed a pan-European network, and a great collection of books and manuscripts. This allowed him to connect scholars and books across confessional and cultural boundaries. During his stay in Paris in 1696, Rostgaard met with Antoine Galland (1646–1715), Barthelemy d'Herbelot (1625–1695) and Louis Picques (1637–1699),⁵³ as well as with the Syrian scholar Salomon Negri (1665–1729). A number of manuscripts at the Royal library testify to the collaboration between Negri and Rostgaard, among them notebooks with an alphabetical Latin – Arabic vocabulary, written by Salomon Negri for Rostgaard private use⁵⁴ and a collection of Arabic

51 Iversen, 'Petræus', p. 102.

52 Ibid.

53 Stig. T. Rasmussen, 'Frederik Rostgaards Museum Orientale', in *Umisteligt. Festskrift til Erland Kolding Nielsen*, ed John T. Lauridsen, Olaf Olsen (Copenhagen, 2007), pp. 183–192; 184.

54 DKB, Ms. Rostg. 42, 8^o Vocabularium Latino-Arabicum à Jacobo Salomone Damasceno in usum Frid. Rostgaard (see *Bibliotheca Rostgardiana, in duas partes divisa; quarum*

proverbs, written by Salomon Negri, with their Latin translations by Rostgaard.⁵⁵ According to an entry in Rostgaard's diary, Negri also copied for him the *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, (*The Instruction of the Student*) by Burhān al-Dīn al-Zarnūjī (d. 1223), based on a manuscript in the Bibliothèque du Roi in Paris.⁵⁶ This copy – 'à Jacobo Salmone manu elegantissima exaratus' – is listed in Rostgaard's manuscript collection and is now also held at the Herzog August library in Wolfenbüttel.⁵⁷ During his stay in Rome the following year, Rostgaard produced a Latin translation of the text with the help of Josephus Banesius (Joseph Banese), a learned Maronite from Syria, who published, in 1677 in Rome, a *Life of Saint Brigitte* in Italian and Arabic and was involved in the Maronite edition of the Gospels in Syriac and Karshuni, including the Peshitta text.⁵⁸ Based on Negri's copy, the great Dutch oriental scholar Adriaan Reland (1676–1718), who had been introduced to Rostgaard by Steenbuch,⁵⁹ had an edition of the *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* printed in Utrecht, together with Rostgaard's translation

prior, impressos libros, altera manuscriptos exhibet. (Copenhagen, 1726), p. 447, n. 34) and DKB, Ms. OrArch. 4-1 (possibly *Bibliotheca Rostgardiana in duas partes*, p. 447, n. 35), Ms. OrArch. 1-11.

55 DKB, Ms. OrArch. 4-3, 'Arabum philosophia popularis sive Proverbia Arabica, quae in sermonibus familiaribus, vel ab ipsa plebe adhiberi solent. Ex quibus non tantum Orientalium mores et ingenia egregiè dignoscuntur, sed et verus Arabismi genius aequè facile ac jucunde acquiri potest. Arabica ex ore Jacobi Salomonis Damasceni, Praeceptoris sui in Arabica lingua fidelissimi, descripsit, ad ejusque mentem genuinum proverbiorum sensum explicuit et latinam versionem concinnavit Fridericus Rostgaard.' The Latin and Arabic proverbs are written on individual paper strips, numbered and then glued into the manuscript, following alphabetic order. One of Rostgaard's successors, Johan Christian Kall (1714–1775), professor of oriental languages at Copenhagen university from 1738 to his death in 1775, edited this Arabic-Latin collection of proverbs in 1764. BL, MS Sloane 3035 is another copy of Negri's collection of proverbs. It has the Latin title page in Negri's hand, *Proverbia Arabica maxime trivialia & familiari sermone quotidie usurpata quae nunquam hactenus typis excussa in usum clarissimi viri ac linguarum amantissimi Friderici Rostgaard exaravit; eidemque in amicitia pignus obtulit Jacobus Salomon Damascenus*, Paris, 1696. Negri renders the Arabic title as the 'Kitāb al-amthāl al-sā'irah bayn al-nās', the author of which he identifies as 'Ibrahim Qara al-Sayyid'. See Ghobrial, 'The Life and Hard Times of Salomon Negri', in Loop, Burnett, Hamilton (eds.), *The Learning and Teaching of Arabic*, p. 318, n. 30.

56 DKB, Ms. NKS 393d oktav, see entry under '1697'.

57 *Bibliotheca Rostgardiana*, p. 446, n. 26. HAB, Cod. Guelf. 157 Blank.

58 *Sacrosancta Jesu Christi Evangelia jussu Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide ad usum ecclesiae nationis Maronitarum edita*, ed. Faustus Naironus Banensis and Josephus Banesius (Rome, 1703).

59 See Reland's letter to Rostgaard from 7 January 1708, DKB, Ms. Langebek 184m. See also Bruun *Frederik Rostgaards liv og levnet* (København, 1870), p. 143.

and a variant translation by another Maronite scholar, Abraham Ecchellensis (1605–1664).⁶⁰

Anchersen pursued his studies in this scholarly milieu in Copenhagen.⁶¹ He learned Hebrew from Steenbuch's public and private instruction, receiving a grounding in Syriac and Rabbinical Hebrew. He continued his studies of Jewish Antiquities and Rabbinics with the Rabbi in Federicia, where Anchersen became rector of the *Schola Trivialis* in 1701.⁶² In 1704, Anchersen published a *Specilegium defectus lexicorum rabbinicorum variorum potissimum Buxtorfiani utrisque* (Copenhagen, 1704), in which, following the work of his mentor Steenbuch, he elucidates the meanings of several words found in rabbinical literature that were missing from the dictionaries published up to that point.⁶³ On 25 February 1705 Anchersen became Professor of Philosophy at the University of Copenhagen. Rostgaard received Anchersen in his library and showed him his collection of oriental manuscripts and prints.⁶⁴ Later, when Rostgaard had to sell his library because of financial difficulties, Anchersen bought 6 manuscripts.⁶⁵

In 1706 Anchersen too received a royal travel stipend to study abroad.⁶⁶ After shorter stays in Hamburg, Bremen, Groningen and Franeker he arrived in Utrecht in October of that year and stayed there for 10 months. From Utrecht he travelled to Amsterdam and Leiden and in March 1708 he arrived in England and spent some months at Cambridge, before he returned to Copenhagen in the spring of 1709.⁶⁷

This study trip brought Anchersen in contact with some of the most remarkable orientalist scholars of the time. In Cambridge he worked closely with the German Arabist Heinrich Siecke, or Henry Sike (1668–1712), and in the

60 *Enchiridion studiosi, Arabice conscriptum a Borhaneddino Alzernouchi, cum duplici versione Latina, altera a Friderico Rostgaard sub auspiciis Josephi Banese, Maronitae Syri, Roma elaborata, altera Abrahami Echhellensis. Ex museo Rostgardiano edidit Hadrianus Relandus* (Utrecht, 1709). Discussed in *Le journal des sçavans* 1710, 377–82.

61 Bruun, *Rostgaards levnet*, p. 112, and see Anchersen's dedication to Rostgård in his edition of the *Carmen Tograi* from 1707 below.

62 Holger Frederik Rørdam, 'Matthias Anchersen. Biskop i Ribe Stift (d. 1741)', *Kirkehistoriske Samlinger*, 4th r. 1 bd. (1889–91), p. 423.

63 Bjørn Komerup, 'Mathias Anchersen' *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon* på lex.dk. Hentet 14. juli 2024 fra https://biografiskleksikon.lex.dk/Mathias_Anchersen.

64 Anchersen, *Poema Tograi*, A3r. The auction catalogue of Rostgård's library in 1726 gives 57 oriental manuscripts, *Bibliotheca Rostgardiana*, pp. 443–450, see Stig. T. Rasmussen, *De Orientaliske Samlinger. En guide / The Oriental Collection. A Guide* (Copenhagen, 2015), pp. 22–23.

65 According to Rasmussen, *Samlinger*, p. 85. I haven't yet identified these manuscripts.

66 *Album studiosorum Academiae Lugduno Batavae 1575–1875*, cl. 783.

67 For more details see Rørdam, 'Matthias Anchersen'.

Netherlands he was under the tutelage of Sike's friend, Adriaan Reland, who was also in correspondence with Steenbuch and Rostgaard.⁶⁸ The orientalist expertise which Anchersen acquired during his studies has so far only been attested by a re-edition of the famous Arabic poem *Lāmiyyat al-'ajam* by the Persian-born poet al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī al-Ṭughrā'i. The Arabic text of this poem had been edited before in 1629 by the young Jacobus Golius as a study text, without translation. Anchersen now added Golius' translation, and a number of learned notes which Reland had put at his disposal.⁶⁹ Golius' copy of his 1629 edition, with interleaved translation and annotations, is one of the many documents the EuQu team discovered with the help of Eva-Maria Jansson at the Royal Library in Copenhagen.⁷⁰ Further discoveries, among them Arabic-Latin word lists,⁷¹ collection of Arabic grammatical and linguistic concepts,⁷² excerpts from a number of different Arabic-Islamic texts,⁷³ a transcription, with annotations, of al-Būṣīrī's famous poem *Qaṣīdat al-Burda* from manuscripts in Emmanuel College,⁷⁴ and unpublished drafts⁷⁵ suggest that Anchersen was more deeply engaged with Arabic language and literature than had previously been assumed. However, his actual expertise as an Arabist remains somewhat elusive, as it is often difficult to discern from these sources what Anchersen himself contributed and what he simply adopted from Sike and Reland. This is particularly true for a partial Latin translation of the Qur'an (*Suras* 1 and 2, and 50 to 114) written in Anchersen's hand, which Paul Babinski and I found a couple of years ago at the Royal Library. Every Sura is followed by a commentary that shows deep familiarity with the *Tafsīr al-Jalalayn*.⁷⁶ The Royal Library also preserves a transcription and translation of a commentary on a collection of 40 *ḥadīth*, the *Sharḥ arba'īn ḥadīth*, by Muḥammad ibn 'Alī Ibn Wad'ān

68 See Bruun, *Rostgaards Levnet*, 143.

69 *Poema Tograi, cum Versione Latina, Jacobi Golii, hactenus inedita. Quam ex MSto Goliano praeafatione, & notis quibusdam auctam*, ed. Matthias Anchersen (Utrecht, 1707). See Loop, 'Arabic Poetry', p. 234, n. 19.

70 DKB, Ms. OrArch. 1-8 ('Carmen Tograi cum versione et notis mis. Jacobi Golii').

71 See for example his list of Arabic roots taken from the Qur'an, with Latin translations, in Ms. OrArch. 1-9 'Collectio Radicum arabicum ex Alcorano'.

72 DKB, Ms. OrArch. 1-10 'Clavis Commentariorum Arabicorum, sive Collectio Terminorum Grammaticorum, Philosophicorum, Technicorum, Artiumque qui in Lexicis, Commentariisque Arabicis Mss occurrere solent ...'

73 See e.g. DKB, Ms. OrArch. 1-10 'Miscellanea ex diversis Mss codicibus Arabicis hic congesta. Ex Al-Bocharii parte prima inter codices Laudianos in Bibliothec. Oxoniensis.'

74 DKB, Cod. Arab. 274.

75 See for example his notes and comments on *Lāmiyyat al-'ajam* in Ms. OrArch. 1-4, 'Notae in Camen Togra'i.'

76 DKB, Ms. OrArch. 1-14.

(d. 1100 or 1101).⁷⁷ The original from which Anchersen copied this text was in possession of Sike and is now still at Cambridge.⁷⁸ While Christian European scholars had long been aware of the theological, legal and cultural significance of *ḥadīth* collections, only occasional scholarly effort went into their analysis in the 17th century. Inspired by Reland and by Henry Sike, whose own notebooks testify to his wide reading of *ḥadīth* literature and other (early) Islamic historical sources,⁷⁹ Anchersen copied and studied this important manuscript of commentaries to a *ḥadīth* collection. Anchersen's copy contains the Arabic text, with a Latin translation and dense annotations, comments and references throughout the text.

In keeping with this interest in *sunna* und *ḥadīth* is a draft of a *Vita Muhammedis* (Life of Muhammad) among Anchersen's papers, 'briefly excerpted from what the celebrated Henry Sike has abundantly collected in his notes.'⁸⁰ The biographical sketch of the Prophet is preserved in two booklets under different shelfmarks and seems to be based on notes and excerpts made by Sike from, among others, *Ta'riḫ-i Guzīdah* by Ḥamd Allāh Mustawfī Qazvīnī and the *Ta'riḫ* by Muṣṭafā ibn Ḥasan Jannābī's (1533 or 4–1590 or 1).⁸¹ As Alastair Hamilton has shown, both sources have been extensively excerpted by Sike in his notebooks (Bodl. Ms. Or. 377 and Ms. Or. 380). A number of quotations in the notebooks re-appear in the *Vita Muhammedis*, where Sike's preparatory work has been brought into a coherent narrative, most probably by Anchersen.

Although it is difficult to assess Anchersen's individual contributions, the numerous documents related to his oriental studies at the Royal Library in Copenhagen position his work at a pivotal moment in the history of European

77 DKB, Ms. OrArch. 3-2.

78 CUL, Dd. 6.24.

79 See Alastair Hamilton, 'Henry Sike (1668–1712), a German Orientalist in Holland and England', *Journal of the Courtauld and Warburg Institutes* 84 (2021), 207–241.

80 *Vita Muhammedis hic compendiose excerpta ex iis [quae] ubertim in schedulis suas coniecit Celebr. Henricus Sike*. DKB, Ms. NKS 343.

81 The first one (DKB, Ms. OrArch. 1-6) includes chapters 1 to 6 plus a chapter on *Muhammad's wives* ('Caput de uxoribus Muhammedis') and one on *Muhammad's miracles* ('Caput de Miraculis Mohammedis'). It has the title *Paralipomena at Historiae Saracenicae*, i.e. 'Supplement to the *Historia Saracenica*, containing things that were most learnedly collected by Henry Sike, Professor of Cambridge, from the [unpublished papers] of Hamdalla Al-Kazwini, the Persian, and Al-Zjamali, and others; briefly compiled by Matthias Anchersen.' The second booklet, under the shelfmark NKS 343 folio 1, contains Chapters 7 to 26 and has the title *Vita Muhammedis hic compendiose excerpta ex iis, [qui] ubertim in schedulis suas coniecit Celebr. Henricus Sike.*, i.e. 'Life of Muhammad, here briefly excerpted from that which the renowned Henricus Sike abundantly collected in his notes'.

Islamic studies. It indicates a new awareness, clearly inspired by Sike and Reland, that Islam could not just be reduced to the Qur'an as had traditionally been the case in Christian Europe. Sike, Reland and Anchersen recognized the significance that prophetic traditions had for Islamic theology, law and society, as much as they also understood the value of commentary literature for our understanding not only of the Qur'an, but of all genres of scholarship and classical literature.

Anchersen's academic prospects in Copenhagen were limited. There was, also in his case, no academic position suitable to his orientalist interests. In 1709 he was appointed professor of geometry, 'which he is not known to have particularly engaged in.'⁸² A lack of academic positions, but also, it seems, disagreements with the king prevented him from further pursuing and passing on this new approach although he continued to offer private lectures in oriental philology.⁸³ In 1731 he was appointed bishop of Ribe, after which he produced no further oriental scholarship we are aware of.

Anchersen's orientalist work was also hampered by another problem – the lack of an Arabic printing press in Copenhagen. In fact, Anchersen was involved in an effort to address this problem. In 1712, Frederik Rostgaard had the opportunity to acquire a set of Arabic typefaces in Amsterdam, via Reland and through the mediation of Anchersen. It is unclear why the types were not immediately put to use in Denmark, as they remained in Rostgaard's house for years before he eventually bequeathed them to the University of Copenhagen in 1726, hoping that this would encourage the study oriental languages. Shortly after, in 1728, they were lost in the great fire. However, Rostgaard replaced them with a new set, which he apparently had ordered again from the Netherlands.⁸⁴ It seems that the new types could not be used, as they didn't come in sufficient numbers, and were also of unequal size.⁸⁵

5 Orientalist Scholarship and the Niebuhr Expedition

It took another 30 years until the first book with Arabic letters was printed in Copenhagen. The professor of Hebrew and Old Testament studies, Johan

82 Rørdam, 'Matthias Anchersen', p. 424.

83 Bjørn Kornerup, 'Mathias Anchersen' *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, https://biografiskleksikon.lex.dk/Mathias_Anchersen.

84 Rasmussen, 'Rostgaards Museum', p. 185 and Bruun, pp. 395 and 458.

85 According to Johan Christian Kall, see the preface to his *Fundamenta linguae Arabicae in usum auditoria Hafniensis* (Copenhagen, 1760), sig.)(2^v.

Christian Kall (1714–1775) prompted the university printers to procure types with which it would finally be possible to print Arabic texts, for example his Arabic grammar, the *Fundamenta linguæ Arabicæ*, which he used for his teaching. In 1760 this was the first book ever to be printed in Copenhagen with moveable Arabic types. The publication was followed by Kall's edition of Rostgaard's and Negris' Arabic-Latin collection of proverbs, which he published in 1764.⁸⁶ Later in the century, the German Danish orientalist Jacob Georg Christian Adler (1756–1834) had Johann Jacob Reiske's *Abulfedæ Annales Muslemici* printed with the same types. Jens Lassen Rasmussen still used the rather inelegant types from the mid-18th century for the printing of his works, for example the edition of Hamza al-Isfahani's historical treatise *Ta'rikh sinī mulūk al-arq wa 'l-anbiyā'* in 1817.⁸⁷

We don't know much about Johan Christian Kall's scholarship, but manuscripts in the Royal library shed some light on his scholarly interests and his teaching. Four handwritten copies of his Ethiopic grammars, produced by students, as well as the copy of an Ethiopic grammar of Johann Heinrich Michaelis, show that his scholarship and his teaching went beyond Hebrew and Arabic and also included Ge'ez.⁸⁸ One of the most interesting sources in his archive is an annotated copy of Golius' *Lexicon* containing numerous references to the Qur'an and other edited Arabic texts which Kall had read, such as the Schultens' edition of the Arabic Job,⁸⁹ Pococke's edition of al-Ṭuḡhrā'ī's *Lāmiyyat al-'ajam*,⁹⁰ the *Specimen historiae Arabum*, and Golius' edition and translation of al-Farghānī's *Elementa Astronomica*.⁹¹ In the preface to his grammar, Kall writes that the Qur'an was also the main textbook that he used for teaching Arabic.⁹² The central aim of these Arabic studies was to provide students with 'a more solid understanding of the Hebrew language and the

86 Frederik Rostgaard and Salomon Negri, *Arabum philosophia popularis, sive sylloge nova proverbiorum*, ed. Johann Christian Kall (Copenhagen, 1764).

87 *Historiae praecipuorum Arabum Regnorum rerumque ab iis gestarum ante Islamismum* (Copenhagen, 1817).

88 DKB, Mss. Kall 308 kvart, NKS 155 f kvart, NKS 1110 oktav, and Thott 1019 kvart, all identified by Paul Babinski.

89 Albert Schultens, *Liber Jobi cum nova versione ad Hebraeum fontem et commentario perpetuo ... 2 vols.* (Leiden, 1737).

90 *Lamiato'l'Ajam, carmen Tograi* (Oxford, 1661).

91 *Muhammedis fil. Ketiri Ferganensis, qui vulgo Alfraganus dicitur, Elementa astronomica, arabicè & latinè* (Leiden, 1669).

92 'Votis eorum non defui, sed iteratis ac plerumque annuis vicibus tum praecepta grammatica illis interpretatus sum, tum deinde in meliorum auctorum lectionem eos deduxi, potissimum *Corani*; qui liber, uti religionis Mohammedanae fontes ipsos aperit, eiusdemque fundamenta & dogmata exponit, ita simul elegantissimi stili specimen, Arabum

interpretation of the sacred text.⁹³ This classical exegetical use of Arabic is also reflected in a number of Hebrew synonyms to Arabic root words that he noted in his copy of Golius's dictionary.⁹⁴

Kall was also involved in the preparation of the famous Danish Arabian Expedition (1761–1767), as well as in evaluating its outcomes. In July 1760, he wrote an assessment of the first draft of Johann David Michaelis's (1717–1791) instructions for the travellers, and he also produced the first description of the manuscripts collected by Frederik von Haven and brought back by Niebuhr in 1766.⁹⁵ Kall's suggestions, after reading Michaelis' first draft shortly before the expedition's departure, reveal judicious pragmatism and realism. He correctly noted that the estimated duration of two years was far too short and recommended to add at least one more year to allow the members of the expedition to acclimate to the Arab world and acquire the necessary linguistic and cultural skills. He also urged the organisers to consider the significant dangers of travelling in Arabia and proposed various security measures, including recruiting an armed escort. Additionally, he suggested increasing the funds for the acquisition of manuscripts significantly, arguing that 500 Reichsthaler would never be sufficient 'to be able to give the Royal Library [...] a noticeable new luster' ('um der Königl. Bibliothek [...] einen merklichen neuen Glanz geben zu können'.)⁹⁶ In the end, von Haven had 2000 Reichsthaler at his disposal. Kall also advised against spending money on Qur'an manuscripts or Qur'an commentaries but rather to focus on *Sunna* and *Hadith* collections – 'those would be rarities that deserve a place in the Royal Library' ('das wären Seltenheiten, die in der Königlichen Bibliothek einen Platz verdienten').⁹⁷ And he insisted, that not only all the manuscripts, but also all the information and answers to the question should first be sent to Copenhagen as the funder of the entire endeavour.

The Royal decree incorporated these suggestions and instructed the travellers that they

ipsorum iudicio, exhibere censetur. Quo fiebat, ut (quod proverbio dicitur) una fidelia duos parietes dealbare liceret.' Kall, *Fundamenta*, sig.)(2r.

93 '... ad solidiorum hebraeae linguae cognitionem sacrique codicis intellectum sibi me duce, via per linguae Arabicae studium panderetur.' Kall, *Fundamenta*, sig.)(2r.

94 '... ad solidiorum hebraeae linguae cognitionem sacrique codicis intellectum sibi me duce, via per linguae Arabicae studium panderetur.' Kall, *Fundamenta*, sig.)(2r.

95 Apparently in the 'universitetsprogram' of 1766. I haven't seen this document.

96 See Johann David Michaelis, *Literarischer Briefwechsel*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1794), 1: 447–461; p. 451.

97 *Ibid.*, p. 453.

are not to consider the beauty and value of the manuscripts, but the usability of their content, and lastly – their age. According to the instruction they are not requested to purchase transcripts of the Koran, which one can find much cheaper in Europe after the Turkish war. Moreover, were they to purchase them or touch them, they might sometimes incur threats from the Moslems. Nor should they bring along ascetic books or prayer books, and preferably no Arabic poetry, although the purchase of such manuscripts is not forbidden, if there is good reason to do so. The objective is, however, mainly to acquire manuscripts dealing with natural history, geography and history, and also the old codices from the Hebrew and Greek Bible, at a pinch also old transcripts of Arabic Bible translations. Among Hebrew manuscripts they should prefer those, whose age – and particularly the obsolete and those that deviate from the form of present letters – make them valuable, or those that deviate from present Masoretic texts in such a way as could be of interest to the critics.

Most of the Arabs' medical manuscripts are only of limited usability, but as those, which contain something about smallpox, may deserve some attention, you should particularly bear them in mind when contemplating the purchase of medical manuscripts. If written lexica are offered for sale, then those should be preferred that are not yet used by Golius and Giggeius.⁹⁸

Eventually, 118 manuscripts, most of them collected by the philologist Frederik von Haven in Istanbul and Cairo, entered the Royal library in Copenhagen.⁹⁹ This was the first group of oriental manuscripts at the Royal library that had been systematically acquired. 'One may, therefore, consider the acquisition from The Arabian Journey as the catalyst that started the process that caused The Royal Library's oriental manuscript collection to develop from a collection of curiosities into a scholarly library'.¹⁰⁰

Frederik Christian von Haven, whose main responsibility was to select and purchase manuscripts during the exhibition, was born in 1727 in Odense and died in Mokka (Mukhā, the red seaport in Yemen) in 1763, of Malaria. Von Haven was without doubt the most accomplished Arabist that Denmark had produced by that time. His expertise was cultivated, once again, through a travel grant from the Danish crown, which enabled him to study oriental languages in Göttingen, where Johann David Michaelis had just begun his

98 Quoted in Rasmussen, *Samlinger*, pp. 89–90.

99 Rasmussen, *Samlinger*, pp. 103–4.

100 Rasmussen, *Samlinger*, p. 104.

academic career as a Professor of Philosophy and an expert of comparative oriental studies. Notebooks of that time, written in Danish and Arabic, give us insight into quality and nature of the instructions von Haven received in Göttingen.¹⁰¹ They are an interesting window into von Haven's studies with Michaelis and show him working through Erpenius' grammar, describing and practicing the paradigms of the different Verb conjugations, and, particularly, going through the Qur'an and analysing its semantics and grammatical structures. Michaelis, like Kall and many other early modern European Arabists, considered the Qur'an to be the key text to teach Arabic, for linguistic as well as for theological reasons.¹⁰²

Michaelis offered von Haven the opportunity to join the expedition to Arabia as early as 1756. Both agreed, however, that it would be important for the philologist to also learn some spoken Arabic. In 1758 von Haven travelled to Rome where he hoped to find a teacher among the local Maronite monks who could instruct him in *al-ʿammiyya* – spoken Arabic. We have no information about the kind of instructions von Haven received in Rome, but we can assume that he learned some basic spoken Lebanese dialect that would have allowed him to make inquiries and to select and purchase relevant manuscripts. Von Haven continued to actively improve his language skills during the journey. In Cairo he received instructions from two dragomans, who had once been in French services: a certain 'Herr Baruth' from Aleppo and his student, Monsieur Le Grand, both of whom also appear in other contemporary sources.¹⁰³ Le Grand apparently had a great collection of more than 300 manuscripts, among which was one piece that interested von Haven particularly. 'Han havde en

101 DKB, Ms. Thott, 321, 8°.

102 Kall's justification for his reading of the Qur'an in the Arabic class is paradigmatic. The Qur'an, he writes 'opens the very sources of the Mohammedan religion and expounds its foundations and doctrines, [and] is also considered to present an example of the most elegant style, in the judgment of the Arabs themselves. Hence it happened that (as the proverb says) one brush could whitewash two walls.' Kall, *Fundamenta*, sig.)(2r. ('Votis eorum non defui, sed iteratis ac plerumque annuis vicibus tum præcepta grammatica illis interpretatus sum, tum deinde in meliorum auctorum lectionem eos deduxi, potissimum Corani; qui liber, uti religionis Mohammedanæ fontes ipsos aperit, eiusdemque fundamenta & dogmata exponit, ita simul elegantissimi stili specimen, Arabum ipsorum iudicio, exhibere censetur. Quo fiebat, ut (quod proverbio dicitur) una fidelia duos parietes dealbare liceret.'). Similarly, Michaelis in the *Vorrede* to his edition of Erpenius' Arabic grammar, argues with theological and practical reasons why the Qur'an was the best textbook for students of Arabic. See *Erpenii Arabische Grammatik, abgekürzt, vollständiger und leichter gemacht von Johann David Michaelis nebst den Anfang einer Arabischen Chrestomathie aus Schultens Anhang zur Erpenischen Grammatik* (Göttingen, 1771), pp. x–xv.

103 See Babinski, *World Literature*, pp. 204 and 215.

anden større Raritet [...] Det var nogle balde in folio af en Koran skreven med Kufiske bogstaver, og med Chalifen Omars egen haand. Han havde bestukket tyrkerne i en Mosgee i Cairo, for at rive disse Blade af.¹⁰⁴ ('He had another great rarity [...] Some folio pages of a Quran written in Kufic script, and in Caliph Omar's own hand. He had bribed the Turks in a mosque in Cairo to tear out these pages.')¹⁰⁵

Today, the leaves are preserved at the National Museum in Copenhagen.¹⁰⁶ It is not entirely clear, which mosque Le Grand had these leaves from. Carsten Niebuhr claims in his travel account that the manuscript was taken from al-Azhar Mosque, but it probably came originally from the same deposit at the 'Amr Mosque in al-Fusṭāṭ, from where the other Kufic manuscripts in the Royal collection were taken in the first half of the 17th century.¹⁰⁷

6 Unique Manuscript Collections in Copenhagen

The first to clearly identify this deposit was the German traveller Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767–1811), who presented a description of a small chamber on the north side of the 'Amr Mosque.

'Es war ein fusshoher Stoss von Pergament, welcher grösstentheils noch gebunden war, und vielleicht den ältesten und seltensten Koran enthält, der den Islamiten erhalten ist. Jedes Pergamentblatt hat etwa die Grösse eines Landkartenbogens, und ist mit grossen schönen kufischen Charakteren beschrieben, welche manche einen Zoll lang waren.'¹⁰⁸

Until the end of the 18th century Copenhagen had one of the largest, if not the largest collection of Kufic manuscripts in Christian Europe. This unique collection attracted the interest of scholars from all over Europe. In the 1730s, the French ambassador to Denmark, Louis Robert Hippolyte de Bréhan, comte de Plélo, sent some four folios of two Kufic manuscripts held at the Royal

104 *Frederik Christian von Havens Rejsejournal fra Den Arabiske Rejse 1760–1763*, ed. Anne Haslund Hansen and Stig T. Rasmussen (Copenhagen, 2005), p. 198.

105 See on this also Babinski, Loop 'Looting and Learning: War and the Qur'an in European Oriental Studies', *Erudition and the Republic of Letters* 9, 3 (2024), 239–280, 277.

106 Nationalmuseet i København, Ms. Fa. 1.

107 Carsten Niebuhr, *Beschreibung von Arabien* (Kopenhagen, 1772), p. 96. See Déroche, *La transmission écrite du Coran*, 10, n. 17.

108 Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, *Reisen durch Syrien, Palästina, Phönicien, die Transjordan-Länder, Arabia Petraea und Unter-Aegypten*, ed. Fr. Kruse, 4 vols., (Hildesheim et al., 2004), 3: 389f.

library in Copenhagen to the professor of Arabic at the Collège Royal, Étienne Fourmont (1683–1745).¹⁰⁹ Plélo was possibly instigated by Hans Gram, then head librarian of the Royal Danish library, who presumably was looking for an expert evaluation of the manuscripts. Fourmont, upon receiving the precious four folios, wrote a *Mémoire ... sûr les 4 feuilles de Ms de Copenhague* and produced two sets of facsimile copies of them all of which are now preserved at the BNF, Ms Arabe 580.¹¹⁰ His *Mémoire* testifies to Fourmont's unfamiliarity with this form of Arabic script. In Paris there was not a single Kufic manuscript, and he had so far only encountered this script in ornamental titles and identified it as 'une espèce de Majuscule' used to highlight or to ornate certain passages.¹¹¹ He did not realise that the Copenhagen manuscripts were fragments of the Qur'an.

In 1780, the Copenhagen collection of Kufic manuscripts was studied and described by Jacob Georg Christian Adler in his essay *Descriptio codicum quorundam cuficorum partes Corani exhibentium in Bibliotheca Regia Hafniensis et ex iisdem de scriptura Cufica Arabum observationes novae*.¹¹² This was by far the best informed and most comprehensive account of the 'art of writing among the Arabs' to date, with a particular focus on Kufic script and based on a number of Arab authors.' Adler, in his *Descriptio* published an alphabet of Kufic letters as well as a facsimile copy of a leaf of one of the Copenhagen manuscripts, which 'exhibits vowel points and diacritica perfectly'.¹¹³ The copper plate engraving was based on a facsimile copy that is now in Rostock

109 Fourmont received DKB, Mss. Cod. Arab. 42, fols. 1–2 (r and v) and Cod. Arab. 41, fols. 34r–v and 27r–v.

110 See François Déroche, 'De Fourmont à Reinaud, les péripéties de l'identification des plus anciens manuscrits du Coran', *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 143, 2 (1999), 563–76.

111 'De la rareté des Ms. Kioufiques on compte qu'il y en a peu dans le monde – Dans la Bibliothèque du Roi de France, il n'y a pas de Ms. uniquement Kioufiques de tems en tems, trois ou quatre quelque fois, dans tout un Ms in folio, d'où l'on peut conjecturer, qu'à presque le caractère Kioufique a été hors d'usage, et est devenue une espèce de Majuscule, dont par emphase et pour parade de Science on se servoit dans les titres seulement.' BNF, Ms Arabe 580.

112 *Descriptio codicum quorundam cuficorum partes Corani exhibentium in Bibliotheca Regia Hafniensis et ex iisdem de scriptura cufica arabum observationes novae praemittitur disquisitio generalis de arte scribendi apud arabes ex ipsis auctoribus arabicis iisque adhuc ineditas sumta* (Hamburg, 1780).

113 'Huius codicis, qui puncta vocalia et diacritica optime exhibet, paginam unam, accurate descriptam huic libello annexui.' Adler, *Descriptio*, p. 21. The manuscript is DKB, Ms. Cod. Arab. 37, fol. 30r.

together with several other copies.¹¹⁴ In the catalogue of the Rostock library, these facsimile copies are attributed to Samuel Negri, but this is unlikely. They were most probably made by Adler when he was studying the manuscripts in Copenhagen in 1780.¹¹⁵ All of them are labelled and numbered as ‘Tables I–III’ and were probably intended as additional illustrations for his publication.

A few years later, Adler made use of another manuscript from Copenhagen. Between 1789 and 1794, he edited Johann Jacob Reiske’s (1716–1774) transcription and Latin translation of Abū l-Fidā’s entire world history in five volumes,¹¹⁶ which includes many of Reiske’s philological annotations. The enormous project was initiated and funded by the Danish historian and collector Peter Frederik Suhm (1728–1798), who also owed the manuscript. Ten years earlier, Suhm had bought Reiske’s entire scholarly *Nachlass* from his widow, Ernestine Christine Reiske (1735–1798).¹¹⁷ In 1796 he passed it on the Royal Library, where it is today. The purchase and later donation to the library was celebrated by contemporary scholars as a move of greatest prudence and as an outstanding service to scholarship and learning. Reiske’s *Nachlass* consists of numerous copies of classical texts across different genres of Arabic (as well as Greek and Byzantine) literature and scholarship, which he had produced mainly during his time in Leiden (1738–1746). To many of these texts, Reiske left Latin or German translations, annotations, indices, and cross-references.

With the acquisition of this archive the Royal library gained a treasure trove of orientalist scholarship of the highest level. It provided scholars in and around Copenhagen not only with access to classical Arabic texts – historical, geographical, poetic, and scholarly – but also with a model of rigorous philological practice.¹¹⁸ In the years that followed, scholars of Arabic and Greek worked with Reiske’s *Nachlass* in Copenhagen, producing several editions based on this carefully prepared material.

114 Rostock University Library, Ms. orient. 161.1, (*Calligraphiae arabicae specimina*). They are copies of DKB, Mss. Cod. Arab. 41, fol. 28r–29r (Tab. I a–c); Cod. Arab. 37, fol. 30r (Tab. IIa–b) and Cod. Arab. 38, fol. (Tab IIIa–b).

115 The transliterations of the Kufic into *naskh* on each page is most probably Adler’s hand, and the comparison with Hinckelmann on Tab. III.a is congruent with the comparison of Suras from the Copenhagen manuscripts with Hinckelmann in the *Descriptio*.

116 *Abulfedae Annales Muslemici, Arabice et Latine. Opera et studiis Jo. Jac. Reiskii, sumtibus P.F. Suhmii, nunc primum edidit J.G.C. Adler* (Copenhagen, 1798–1795).

117 For details see Chr. Bruun, *Peter Frederik Suhm 18. Oktober 1728–7 September 1798. En Leventsbeskrivelse* (København, 1798), pp. 372–374.

118 There are also a number of Greek codices in Reiske’s collection at the Royal Library, which I have not studied in detail.

However, this was not the only acquisition that was made in those years by the Royal Danish library. Under the directorship of the German-born orientalist Daniel Gotthilf Moldenhawer (1753–1823), who acted as head librarian of the Royal Library between 1788 and 1823, the library acquired 60,000 books and all the manuscripts from the collection of the Danish statesman and book collector Otto Thott (1703–1785), among them also 76 Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Hebrew and other oriental manuscripts.¹¹⁹ In 1822, the collection of Nicolai Christopher Kall (1749–1823), the son of Johann Christian, entered the Royal Library and in 1824, shortly after his death, Moldenhawer's own collection was bequeathed to the library by his heirs.¹²⁰

Thanks to a prudent acquisition policy, the efforts of individual collectors, scholars, and travellers, as well as political decisions, institutional developments, and global diplomatic networks, the Royal Library in Copenhagen had, by the end of the 18th century, amassed a significant collection of around 600 Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, and Turkish manuscripts. Scholars like Jens Lassen Rasmussen were able to base their orientalist work on this extensive collection.

The key text of Rasmussens essay on Medieval Arab-Scandinavian connections, *Yāqūt Shihāb al-Dīn's Dictionary of Countries*, in which Rasmussen found Ibn Faḍlān's report, was one of 36 manuscripts that Frederik von Haven had acquired in Constantinople in 1761.¹²¹ Later in his career, Rasmussen also made direct use of the Reiske collection.

He printed parts of Hamza al-Isfahani's chronology of pre-Islamic dynasties, the already mentioned *Ta'rikh sinī mulūk al-arḍ wa 'l-anbiyā'*, which Reiske had copied from a fragment of this text in the collection of Levinus Warner in Leiden.¹²² Reiske had also translated parts of this text, in a dissertation on the earliest history of the Arabs, which Rasmussen, again, used in this edition. In 1821 Rasmussen published Reiske's transcriptions and translations of Ibn Nubāta's *Sarḥ al-'uyūn* (Pasturing at the Wellsprings of Knowledge),¹²³ as *Addimenta ad historiam Arabum ante Islamismum*.¹²⁴

119 Rasmussen, *Samlinger*, p. 101.

120 Rasmussen, *Samlinger*, p. 103. On Moldenhawer's collection see Ada Adler, *D.G. Moldenhawer og hans Haandskriftensamling* (København, 1917).

121 It is today DKB, Mss Cod. Arab. 99 and Cod. Arab. 100. See Perho, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts*, 1: 369–374.

122 *Historiae praecipuorum Arabum Regnorum rerumque ab iis gestarum ante Islamismum* (Copenhagen, 1817).

123 DKB, Ms. Cod. Arab. 230, based on Leiden UL, Ms. Or. 705. On the European reception of the *Sarḥ al-'uyūn* see Peter Webb's informative note: <https://mouse.digitalscholarship.nl/lessons/warner>.

124 *Addimenta ad historiam Arabum ante Islamismum excerpta ex Ibn Nabatah, Nuveirio atque Ibn Koteibah* (Copenhagen 1821).

7 Conclusion

While not comparable to the Northern European powerhouses of orientalist scholarship that developed in Leiden or Oxford, Copenhagen emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries as a significant centre of Lutheran oriental studies. This development was shaped by institutional progress, individual dedication, royal travel grants, and extensive global networks.

Institutional frameworks, including the establishment of academic chairs and, particularly, a system of royal stipends and academic sponsorship, provided Danish scholars with opportunities to study abroad, to travel in the Near East, to collect and copy manuscripts, and to collaborate with other scholars, including native speakers.

Key figures, such as Theodor Peträus, Frederik Rostgaard, Matthias Anchersen, Christian von Haven and Jens Lassen Rasmussen played crucial roles in advancing the discipline. Their contributions ranged from manuscript acquisition and translation to innovative philological and historical analysis, reflecting both intellectual curiosity and an ability to navigate the interplay between local institutional limitations and global scholarly currents.

Danish Oriental studies were not confined to academia but were deeply embedded in networks of diplomacy, trade, and cultural exchange. Manuscripts, often acquired through intricate channels involving native speakers, diplomatic envoys, and traders, became vital resources for advancing scholarship. Danish scholars and collectors assembled libraries that are today among our most important witnesses to the history and practices of early modern oriental studies, such as for example the rich *Nachlass* of Johann Jacob Reiske.

Rooted in the study of Hebrew texts and Old Testament biblical scholarship, Danish orientalism from the beginning also addressed secular concerns, transcending theological boundaries while remaining deeply influenced by them. The essay demonstrates that a clear separation of the sacred from the secular, and the local from the global, is ultimately impossible. The two realms are deeply interwoven, not only in the motivations of scholars, where theological and historical concerns often overlapped, but also in their methods, which were shaped by the transregional movement of people, texts, and ideas. In this sense, Danish oriental studies exemplify how early modern knowledge was produced at the intersection of confessional learning and cosmopolitan exchange.

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