

Faith & Fable

ISLAMIC MANUSCRIPTS FROM CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY



FOREWORD

The first Islamic manuscript to enter the Library was a copy of the Qur'an donated in 1631 by the Arabic scholar William Bedwell. Since that time the Library's Islamic manuscripts collection has grown in size and diversity to over 5,000 items. They shed a light on many aspects of the culture of the Islamic world, its beliefs and learning.

Such a collection was amassed over subsequent centuries either from scholarly collectors or purchased by skilled librarians to add more depth to the already impressive range of treasures. But this extraordinary collection has remained relatively unknown outside the Library.

Today, the aim is to change this with a number of different approaches. We are creating a fully searchable online catalogue of the manuscripts and digitising a selection of the most beautiful and interesting texts to make them available to the international scholarly community anywhere in the world via the internet. At the same time, the practical care of the original items, carried out by our own skilled conservators, will ensure their long-term survival for future generations.

The Islamic manuscripts collection is supported within the Library by a team of specialists whose knowledge and skills, whether academic, practical or technical, aim to bring them to the attention of researchers. But only with a sustained programme of scholarly co-operation with experts outside the Library can the full content and significance of these texts be realised and their place in the wider context of Islamic scholarship become established.

Anne Jarvis, University Librarian



Detail from the opening of the Qur'an from the Palmer collection.
(Add.1138)

INTRODUCTION

Cambridge University Library's collection of Islamic manuscripts dates from the very origins of the establishment of teaching and scholarship in Arabic in the early 17th century. The acquisition of the library of the famous Leiden scholar, Thomas Erpenius, coincided with the foundation of the Professorship in Arabic by the benefaction of Sir Thomas Adams, in 1632. Since then, as befits the status of the University as a leading centre of Middle Eastern studies, the collection has grown into a rich resource and indeed a treasure-trove of wonderful examples of the art of the book in the Islamic world.

The collection has been greatly enhanced by the legacy of many subsequent professors and students: the colourful and adventurous E.H. Palmer, murdered in the Sinai desert; the redoubtable twin daughters of Mr Smith of Ayrshire; another great Arabian traveller, John Lewis Burckhardt; and the exuberant larger than life figure of E.G. Browne, the University's first lecturer in Persian. Browne was himself a great cataloguer, and his own substantial collection was then described in detail by his successor, R.A. Nicholson. The most recent hand list, already 50 years old, was the work of A.J. Arberry, a prolific translator of literary works in Arabic and Persian, including many poetic texts and also a fine rendering of the Qur'an.

The manuscripts held in Cambridge come from far and wide across the Arab world, as well as Iran, Central Asia and North India; and in subject matter, they cover the whole range of scholarly and literary creativity nurtured by Islam. Not surprisingly, copies of the Qur'an form a substantial part of the collection, along with works on grammar, medicine, history and literature, notably many illustrated copies of Persian poetry.

One feature of the manuscripts is the variety and quality of the calligraphy, including some of the earliest examples of the Qur'an in kufic script. The decorative qualities of the Arabic alphabet are on display in many precious volumes, not to mention the superb panels of illumination that grace many copies, whether in the opening 'shamsah', ornate headings, or marginal decorations.

These manuscripts are as much a feast for the eyes as for the mind. This brief introduction can hope to do no more than whet the appetite.

Charles Melville, Professor of Persian History

For ease of understanding and consistency throughout, European/CE, not Islamic dates have been used.

Thomas Erpenius.

TO ADORN & ENRICH

Thomas van Erpe (1584–1624)

The story of the Library's acquisition of the Erpenius manuscript collection, its first collection from the lands of the Middle East, is a colourful tale of intrigue involving brilliant scholars, political assassinations and grieving – or grasping – widows.

Thomas Van Erpe, or Erpenius, as he is commonly called, was born in 1584 in Gorinchem, Holland. Originally a theologian, his interests turned to oriental languages and he became Professor of Oriental Languages at the University of Leiden. He developed a distinguished reputation throughout Europe for his learning, but despite many enticing offers he refused to leave his native country on a permanent basis. However, during his travels he amassed a valuable selection of books and manuscripts. When he died prematurely of the plague in 1624, he left a collection of around 90 manuscripts, 150 printed books and a printing press with an Arabic font, a most unusual item in Europe at that time. It was his wish that the collection should go the University of Leiden, but the tortuous negotiations between the University and the widow of Erpenius met with problems and eventually foundered in misunderstanding.



Opening page of an Arabic work on metrical composition: the scribe is one of the secretaries of the Ottoman Court, dated 1592. (Dd.10.7)



George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham, 1598–1632.

Enter the newly elected Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham (1592–1628), a favourite of James 1st. Buckingham was a man of both politics and culture, with an interest in painting, fine books and manuscripts. In 1625 he happened to be in

The Hague on political business for the King. Knowing of Cambridge's interest in the Erpenius collection he intervened in the negotiations and offered Erpenius's widow a cash payment of £500 for the manuscript collection only. Tired of the long bargaining procedures with the University of Leiden, she accepted, and the manuscripts were swiftly and secretly shipped to England. Unfortunately, when the Duke's increasingly fraught political career was abruptly terminated in 1628 by his assassination, the manuscripts became the property of his widow, Katherine, Duchess of Buckingham, who did not appear to be in any hurry to part with them.

Shortly afterwards, in 1632, Sir Thomas Adams founded the first chair in Arabic at Cambridge and Abraham Whelock (1593–1653) was appointed to the position. Whelock also held the post of University Librarian (from 1629 until his death) and was keen to develop a collection of manuscripts and books in Arabic and other Middle Eastern languages, both for his own particular interests and to enhance the Library's collections. He knew of Erpenius's valuable collection and very much wanted it for the Library.

A persuasive letter from the University was written to Buckingham's widow. 'We have often heard that his Grace had bought in the Low Countreyes the Librarie of Mr. Erpenius, Professor of the Orientall Tongues, in the Universitie of Leyden, with the intention to bestow the said Libraire upon the University of Cambridge. . . . that your grace would be pleased, out of your noble disposition, to adorn and enrich our universities with this Treasure; this is our boldness to petition to your Grace at this



Page of notes by Erpenius himself in a copy of the text of Ibn Malik's *Alfiyya*. (Mm.6.23)



Opening page of a volume of Mirkhwand's great universal history the *Rawḍat al-Ṣafā*, dated 1572. From the Erpenius collection. (Gg.4.22)

time. . . ' The Duchess, not wishing to be involved in any further controversy, relented and the manuscripts were transferred to Cambridge in 1632.

Important individual manuscripts include the oldest Persian manuscript in the Library, two volumes of an ancient commentary on the Qur'an. The most celebrated item is perhaps the 13th century history of Sa'īd Ibn Batrīq, as well as a manuscript of the Gospels translated into Arabic and written by the same scribe. The Library's collection of rare printed books also contains 27 publications by Erpenius, including a copy of his *Grammatica Arabica* printed in 1613 and two copies of his *Elementa linguae Arabicae* printed in 1730.

The value of the Erpenius collection was soon realized. It not only laid the foundation for the Library's unique Middle Eastern manuscript collection but subsequently – and partly because of this – attracted others. Today, individual items are shelved amongst those from other collections from similar subject areas. However the Erpenius manuscripts are identifiable to the knowledgeable eye because most still retain the distinctive, if rather faded and worn, leather bindings chosen long ago by the collector himself.

بجمع على هذا نظر الاله

انواعه قال الشاعر وابعج

وانضال جزمته بافضل

جوز انضال المدح بالجار

المدح ودهس بالجار

المدح مع المدح فيكون

بجناه وتعلم من اجل ورد

استلذان لان دعاء قائل

من الامم ليس ياتي عن عكس

وبان المدح مع القليل بالجار

كلما سبق فلا يكون متوليا منه

دور المدح الحمد والمدح

وهو اشياء والناس الجليل

من نعمه وغيره فاما

مترادفان والتلفظ في

مترادفان وقيل هما

علي احد يضربا علي هؤلاء ومن ادبايمهم وخطبايمهم ومترسليهم وشعرايمهم

وله يخل من انفسار دولة العرب عصرا من الاعصار من ملك

فاصل جوار يرتب فيهم ويضطيهم ويكفلمهم ويكفيمهم وتغصبت

لصاعتم ويجوز علي تنبيي بضاعتم والذي اصطفاه الله في زماننا

لنصرت لادب وقدف في قلبه الرغبة في كلام العرب الامير الاجل

الاسف سالار بها الدين علاء الدولة ابوالمظفر اسيز بن خوارزم

شاه ادام الله علاء ونصر لواه فعاية لذته في مجالسة الافاضل

وقصاري له في منادمة الاماثل ولا يزال ظل كرمه الواسع

عليهم ممدودا وجنايمهم بانعامه الفايض لديهم محمودا وصلاته

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علي احد يضربا علي هؤلاء ومن ادبايمهم وخطبايمهم ومترسليهم وشعرايمهم

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A THOUSAND YEARS OF ARABIC GRAMMARS

Cultures of the Middle East have a long tradition of grammatical study (called *naḥw* or *taṣrīf*), with early works being written both to counteract mistakes people made in expressing themselves, and to correct errors made in recitations of the Qur'an. Scholars discoursed learnedly and endlessly on whether the methodology of Arabic grammatical study developed as a result of the influence of Greek logic from Aristotle onwards, or whether it was a development from Islamic law (*fiqh*). Whatever the truth of the matter, the science of Arabic grammar grew in importance in early medieval times and the great intellectual centres of Basra and Kūfa developed in Southern Iraq.

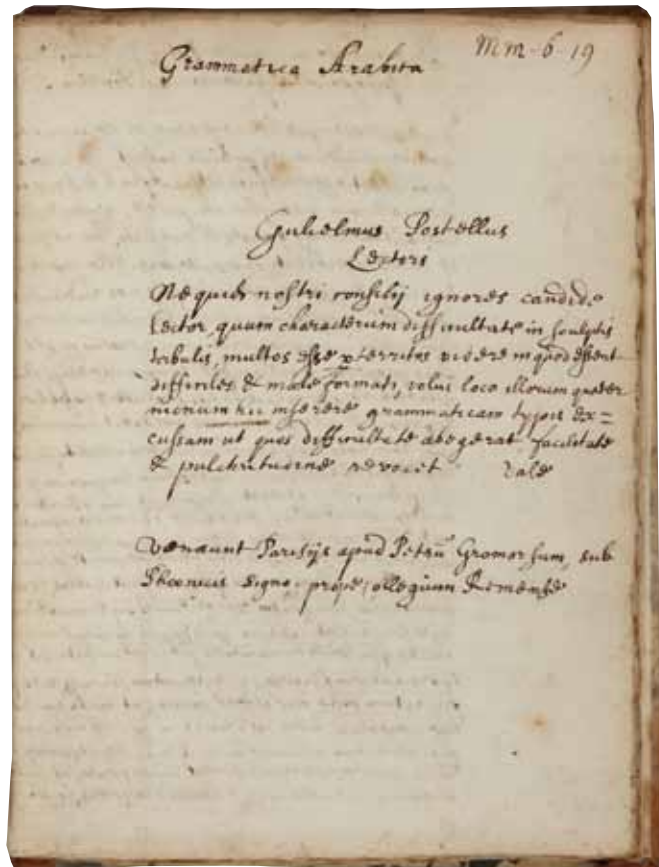
At the end of the 8th century two very important works by Sibawayhi (d. 793) and al-Farrā' (d. 822) codified all the grammatical material originating from pre-Islamic poetry and from the Qur'an. These texts were used to teach in Baghdad, which in the 9th century became the centre of grammatical studies under the eminent teacher and grammarian al-Mubarrad (d. 898).

Following the ground rules laid down by Sibawayhi, authors of grammatical works divided their content into a large number of chapters grouped into two major divisions; one section dealt with the changes in word endings and the other section with changes in the forms of the words themselves. This division is still to be found in all Arabic grammatical works, even though the order within the two major divisions may vary slightly.

Developments in the second half of the 10th century resulted in a golden age of grammatical studies in Baghdad, where important advances took place resulting in the development of three 'schools' of grammarians pursuing different concepts and terminology.

In the 11th century, one of the first studies of Arabic syntax, by the Persian grammarian Jurjānī (d. 1078), became known in Europe when Erpenius translated it into Latin in 1617. The 12th and 13th centuries saw further developments taken forward by the Persian scholar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144) whose major work *Kitāb al-Mufaṣṣal* was commented on by later scholars such as Ibn al-Ḥājjib (d. 1249) and al-Astarābādī (d. 1289). Finally, in the 14th century

Left An Arabic grammar with comments in and around the text in Persian and Turkish, completed in 1389. From the collection donated by King George I in 1715. (Dd.10.6)



The beginning of an Arabic grammar in Latin written by Guillaume Postel. (Mm.6.19)

the Egyptian grammarian Ibn Hishām (d. 1360) wrote the *Kitāb Mughnī al-labīb*; this became and still remains the standard for teaching Arabic grammar in Arab countries today.

The Library has manuscript copies of works by many of these scholars, including al-Mubarrad's *Kāmil*, Jurjānī's *Kitāb al-Awāmil* and Ibn al-Ḥājjib's famous *al-Kāfiyya*.

A keen interest in Arabic language structure also developed among members of the European scholarly community. Some of the earliest works in this area were produced by Guillaume Postel (1510–81), a French linguist whose controversial religious opinions frequently made him unpopular. Postel had interests in many other scholarly fields and was adept in several languages, including Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac.

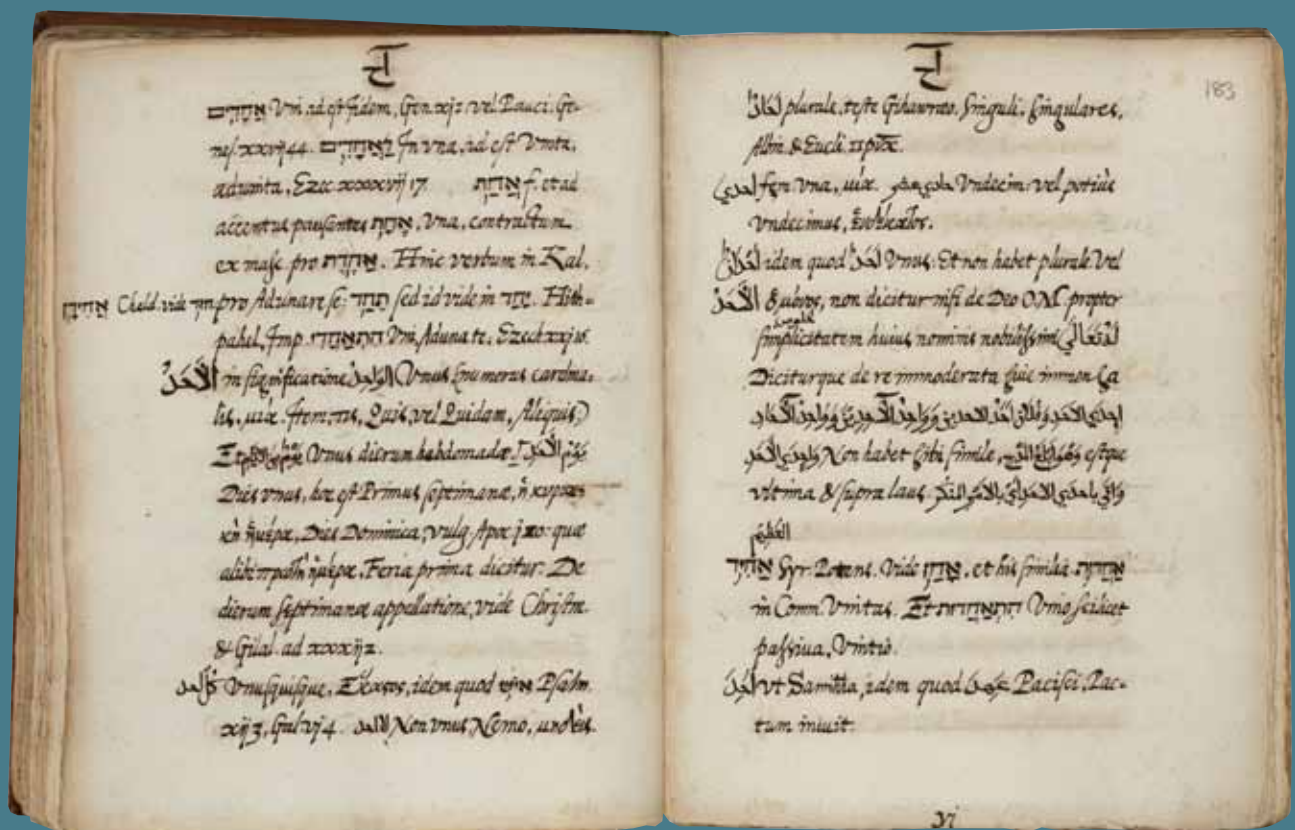


DEFINING DICTIONARIES

The concept of a dictionary is not covered by any one term but in Arabic is often referred to as *qāmūs* or *mudjam*; in Persian the term is *farhang*. Because of the language structure, dictionaries in medieval Arabic were not arranged in the same way as those of European languages; some were arranged by the root of the word and its variants listed in alphabetical order based on phonetic principles; others were listed by rhyme order with roots of the word listed by the final sound; and yet others were arranged on a European pattern with all words ordered by the initial letter listed together.

Many important dictionaries were written during medieval times: the *Lisān al-Arab* of Ibn Manzūr was and still is the best-known large-scale dictionary. Grammarians Zamakhsharī and Firūzābādī (d. 1415) also produced dictionaries, while from later times Murtada al-Zabīdī's *Tāj al-arūs* is well known and continues to be widely used today.

Left Page from the celebrated Persian dictionary *Burhān-i qāṭi'* compiled by Ibn Khalaf Tabrizī, dated 1700. From the Lewis collection. (Add.188)



Page from Bedwell's Arabic-Latin lexicon, presented to the Library by the author in 1631. (Hh.6.1)

EUROPEAN LEXICOGRAPHERS

European scholars, intent on making Arabic and other Middle Eastern languages more accessible in the West, also produced dictionaries; the first, by Jacob Golius (1596–1667), was printed in 1653. Golius was a Dutch mathematician who studied Arabic and was the most distinguished pupil of Erpenius. He held the professorships of both mathematics and Arabic at Leiden. His *Lexicon Arabico-Latinum*, printed in 1653, remained the most famous Arabic-Latin dictionary for around two centuries.

According to some sources, it was not Erpenius but William Bedwell (1561–1632), a priest and scholar who had interests in the field of Arabic, other 'oriental' languages and in mathematics, who was the first to revive the study of Arabic in Europe. Bedwell compiled a dictionary of Arabic based on his own readings of texts. After completing seven volumes of this work he came across a copy of the *Qāmūs* of Firūzābādī and added yet more definitions in the light of this. His completed work extended to nine volumes with extra slips inserted, and four further bundles of sheets.

Following his death, Bedwell's manuscripts (and a type font for printing in Arabic) came to the Library, where they were consulted by Edmund Castell (1606–85) during the creation of his monumental *Lexicon Heptaglotton*. This multi-language dictionary, which included Arabic and other Middle Eastern languages, took Castell many years to complete, even though he was helped by many assistants whom he financed from his own funds. It was eventually printed in 1669. Castell became Professor of Arabic at Cambridge and he too bequeathed his manuscripts collection to the Library.

In the 19th century another important English scholar was George Percy Badger (1815–88), an Anglican missionary who travelled widely in his early years in Malta, the Middle East and India. He wrote a large number of books relating to Arabic history, literature and his own travels, and in 1881 completed his *English-Arabic lexicon*. The original manuscript copy of the dictionary together with Badger's notes on its compilation, is now preserved in the Library.

Top right The first part (letter *alif* only) of a Persian-Latin lexicon begun by the missionary and scholar George Lewis but left unfinished. (Add.253)

Below right Decorative frontispiece from a copy of the celebrated Arabic dictionary, the *Qāmūs* of Firūzābādī. Written in Isfahan in 1670. (Add.847)



WANDERINGS IN THE DESERT

Edward Henry Palmer (1840–82)

'I am writing from the place itself where the murder was committed. It is a wild romantic spot, with precipices shelving down into the Sudr Wady... When we first came... we could find nothing, but some men who went up the wady several miles in front of us came down the gully and found a bone, and then the others were found. Some of the party at least were killed or wounded before being thrown down the precipice, as there is much blood on the rocks above.'

(Letter from C. Warren)

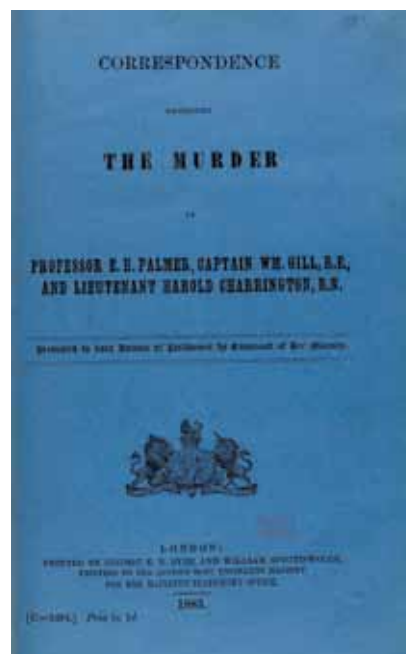
It was an assignment that was to prove fatal. In June 1882, Gladstone's government decided that an invasion of Egypt was the only way to destroy the threat to British interests represented by the Arab nationalist movement. A Cambridge man was asked to take part in a secret mission to find out the attitude of the Arab tribes in Sinai to such an attack and to attempt to detach them from their allegiance to 'Urābī Pasha, the nationalist leader. He was also to use his considerable influence with the Bedouin, backed by money, to secure the immunity of the Suez Canal from Arab attack. Who was he and how had he achieved such knowledge and influence?

Born in 1840, E. H. Palmer was a native of Cambridge. In 1860 his considerable language skills gained him a place at St John's College, where a teacher of Hindustani inspired him to study oriental languages. He made rapid progress, especially in Urdu, Persian and Arabic, and still found time as a student to use his language skills to catalogue the Persian, Arabic and Turkish manuscripts in the University Library and also those in King's and Trinity Colleges.

A fellowship at St John's enabled him to pursue his studies further and to travel. In 1867 he joined an expedition to survey the region of Sinai for the Palestine Exploration Society. Palmer's primary task was investigating the historical evidence for the Exodus story and attempting to trace the route by which the ancient Israelites had crossed the Sinai Peninsula. On a later expedition he spent eleven months walking the 600 miles from Sinai to Jerusalem, searching for inscriptions. *The desert of the Exodus* (1871) chronicled his wanderings and 'endeavored to record the impressions which a sojourn among the scenes of the Exodus has left upon my own mind and thus... promote a more intelligent study of this most interesting portion of the sacred narrative.'



Portrait of Palmer from *The life and achievements of Edward Henry Palmer, late Lord Almoner's Professor of Arabic in the University of Cambridge and fellow of Saint John's College* by his friend Walter Besant, published in 1883. (Cam.d.883.3)



Cover of the official government report relating the circumstances of the deaths of Palmer and his companions. Published in London, 1883. (Cam.a.500.4)



Page from an ancient Qur'an written in hijazi script from Palmer's collection; from a four-page fragment made from a single large folded sheet of parchment. (Add.1146)

Returning to Cambridge, Palmer was eventually appointed to the Lord Almoner's Chair in Arabic. 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. However even Cambridge College life can pall and Palmer abandoned his academic work to move to London to write on wider topics. It was then he was charged with Gladstone's mission. Setting out with two army officers to meet Bedouin leaders and to arrange terms of allegiance, he was led into an ambush by the guide and taken prisoner. He was shot the next day. A search party found his remains, and those of his companions, and they were brought home for burial. The mission and its grisly end later attracted widespread sympathy – and controversy – both in Britain and Egypt. Though not among the greatest of scholars in the field, Palmer was certainly one of the most romantic figures to be found among British oriental scholars.

Palmer's manuscript collection was bought from Palmer's companion and executor, C. F. Tyrwhitt-Drake in 1878. They are all fragments of the Qur'an, usually incomplete, and often only a few pages in length, but they demonstrate a coherence of style and are among the earliest examples of Qur'an texts in the Library's manuscript collections.



Leaf of an early Qur'an written in kufic script. The manuscript is made up of 60 small leaves of parchment bound between thick wooden boards. (Add.1115)

وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ^٣ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْذِبُونَ وَإِذْ قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي
الْأَرْضِ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُونَ ^٤ إِلَّا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ الْمُفْسِدُونَ وَلَكِن لَّا
يَشْعُرُونَ ^٥ وَإِذْ قِيلَ لَهُمُ امْنُوا كَمَا آمَنَ النَّاسُ قَالُوا أَنُؤْمِنُ كَمَا آمَنَ السُّفَهَاءُ
إِلَّا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ السُّفَهَاءُ وَلَكِن لَّا يَعْلَمُونَ ^٦ وَإِذْ الْفُؤَادُ لَنُؤْمِنُوا قَالُوا
إِنَّا وَإِذْ خَلَوْنَا إِلَىٰ شَيْطَانِئِهِمْ قَالُوا إِنَّا مَعَكُمْ إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُسْتَهْزِؤْنَ ^٧ اللَّهُ
يَسْتَهْزِئُ بِهِمْ وَيَمُدُّهُمْ فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ ^٨ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا
الضَّلَالَهَ بِالْهُدَىٰ فَمَا رِحْتِ بِتِجَارَتِهِمْ وَمَا كَانُوا مُهْتَدِينَ ^٩ مِثْلَهُمْ كَمِثْلُ
الَّذِي اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّا أَضَاءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُ ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي
ظُلُمَاتٍ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ ^{١٠} صُمُّ بَكْرٍ عَمِي فَمَهْمٌ لَا يُرْجَعُونَ ^{١١} أَوْ كَصَيْبٍ
مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فِيهِ ظُلُمٌ ^{١٢} وَرَعْدٌ ^{١٣} وَبُرُوجٌ ^{١٤} يَجْعَلُونَ أَصَابِعَهُمْ فِي آذَانِهِمْ
مِّنَ الصَّوَاعِقِ حُدُورَ الْمَوْتِ ^{١٥} وَاللَّهُ مُحِيطٌ ^{١٦} بِالْكَافِرِينَ ^{١٧} يَكَادُ الْبَرُّ يُخْطِفُ
أَبْصَارَهُمْ كُلَّمَا أَضَاءَ لَهُمْ مِّشْوَاهٌ ^{١٨} وَإِذَا أَظْلَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُوا ^{١٩} وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ



A WEALTH OF RELIGIOUS TEXTS

The very first Arabic manuscript ever to enter the Library's collections was a copy of the Qur'an. It was the personal copy of William Bedwell, the Cambridge Arabist and lexicographer. He donated his own Qur'an at the urging of Abraham Whelock, the University Librarian, even before the Erpenius collection came to the Library, such was Whelock's enthusiasm to develop collections in Arabic and Middle Eastern languages.

Words and writing have always had immense importance within Islamic civilization and the most significant words are the holy text of the Qur'an. Although it is an unchanging text written always in Arabic and intended for reading aloud, there are many differing styles in terms of format, historical development and cultural diversity. A very rich heritage of manuscript copies of the Qur'an survives, along with commentaries written by a long tradition of religious thinkers. Examples of prayer books and talismans have also survived. A small selection from the impressive collection in the Library demonstrates how the Qur'an, in terms of the style of calligraphy and decoration, evolved throughout the centuries and in different geographical regions and cultures.

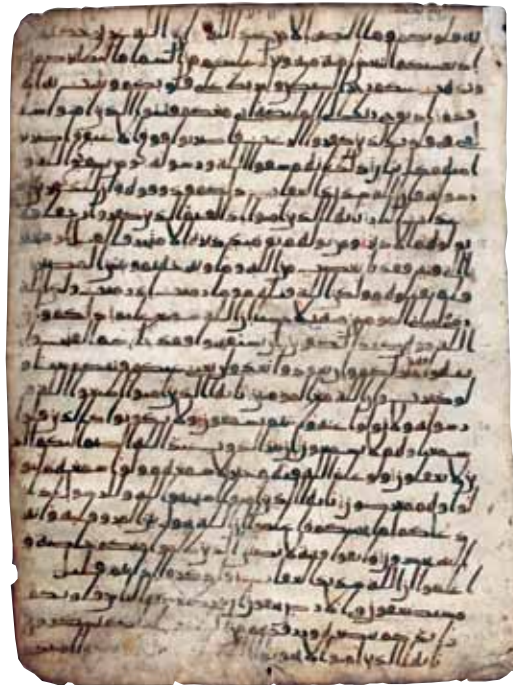
HIJAZI SCRIPT

The earliest Qur'an manuscripts were written in the 7th and 8th centuries. One very early Qur'an text written on a single large sheet of parchment and folded in half, illustrates a primitive form of the script known as *hijāzī* script that originated in the Arabian Peninsula around Mecca and Medina. It is characterized by very tall sloping letters that denote the consonants in the text only; there are few of the dots and other markings indicating pronunciation, or pauses in the reading, and little use of colours.

KUFIC SCRIPT

The kufic Qur'ans, named because the distinctive text style is thought to have originated around Kūfa in southern Iraq, date from the 9th and 10th centuries. They are written on parchment and distinguished by lettering with very short vertical and elongated horizontal strokes and a system of vowel markings that differentiate among the groups of letters otherwise identical in the script. Vowels are indicated by red or green dots and gold roundels mark the ends of the verses. The page is usually greater in width than in length.

Left One of the finest examples in the collection is this Qur'an in Indo-Persian court style presented to the Library in 1806 by the Directors of the East India Company; it was from the library of Tipu Sultan. The volume has several magnificent opening pages that are lavishly decorated. It dates from the 16th or early 17th century. (Nn.3.75)



Leaf of an early copy of the Qur'an written in *hijāzī* script on parchment. (Add.1125)



This Qur'an manuscript consists of a number of leaves on parchment with large and very beautiful kufic script. The text is decorated with a number of golden circles marking the ends of chapters. Written in 870, this is the oldest dated Qur'an manuscript in the UK. (Add.1116)



Qur'an leaf written in eastern kufic style script from Palmer's collection. (Add.1127)

EASTERN KUFIC

A variant of the kufic style can be found in Qur'ans produced slightly later (around the 10th century), and from further east in Iran. These have a script with taller upright strokes and smaller strokes sloping to the left, and the page itself is longer.

NASKHI SCRIPT

From around the 10th century the art of papermaking filtered into the Middle East from Central Asia, and Qur'ans started to be written not on parchment but on paper. These early texts were penned in a very dense, cursive script called *naskhi*, a very legible style of script that became very widely used in Arabic manuscripts.

MAGRIBI SCRIPT

In North Africa and Islamic Spain the Qur'an text was copied on parchment until later centuries and a local script, called *maghribi*, developed. The lettering has deeper and more rounded curves, and is decorated with a wider range of colours including blues and greens. The colours appear both in the body of the text as well as in the vowels.



The example shows the distinctive characteristic of a North African manuscript. Written on a rather rough paper in the maghribi style, the colouring in the illuminated headings is typical of manuscripts from this region. (Dd.2.54)

MAMLUK QUR'ANS

From the 14th century onwards, during the rule of the Mamluks and later dynasties, there was a growth in highly ornate Qur'ans with more developed calligraphy and richly illuminated pages. In particular, the 'carpet pages', the double-page spread at the beginning of the volume, are filled with beautiful geometric patterns and lettering in gold and other colours within a rectangular framework.

ILLUMINATED QUR'ANS

From around the 11th century there was a move towards more elaborate decoration of the script when richly decorated Qur'an texts were produced for noble or royal patrons who wished to endow a mosque with a fine copy. Many such Qur'ans contain exquisite examples of calligraphy, illumination and binding. The art of richly illuminated Qur'an texts spread throughout the Islamic world and there are many impressive Ottoman examples. Another finely illuminated example from the collection is a smaller, but very decorative, Qur'an from the 16th century with seals of four Mughal emperors, the earliest one dated 1703.

MINIATURE QUR'ANS

With a distinctive style and decoration – not to mention their tiny size – miniature Qur'ans are too small to be easily read but are meant to be used as talismans or good-luck charms, sometimes kept in specially made boxes. These Qur'ans come in many shapes and the text is a miniature form of *naskhī* script called *ghubār* or 'dust', as the calligraphy is so fine.

AFRICAN QUR'ANS

An interesting local variant in Qur'an style, from West Africa or Africa south of the Sahara, is that produced in loose-leaf format on paper in black ink with red and yellow ornamentation. The pages were stored between covers of rough hide and then stored in a saddlebag or satchel to take on journeys.



An example of an unbound prayer book, with script in black, red and yellow, and its carrying satchel. This style originates from the region of Saharan Africa. (Or.2251)



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



Finely decorated opening pages of a Qur'an manuscript showing many characteristics of the Mamluk style but with a commentary in Persian. (Add.838)

LAYERS ON LAYERS

The twin daughters of an Ayrshire solicitor, Dr Agnes Smith Lewis and Dr Margaret Dunlop Gibson, had a taste for adventure and an intellectual curiosity that endured throughout their lives. When their father died they received a considerable legacy and in 1866, at the age of just 23, the two Victorian ladies visited Greece and Egypt. They then devoted themselves to the study of Greek, Syriac, Arabic and Hebrew, and became accomplished scholars.

Years later, in 1890, widowhood set the sisters off on their travels again, this time to St Catherine's Monastery at Mt Sinai, where their abilities in reading the manuscripts impressed the librarian. They also made an outstanding discovery of a version of the Old Syriac Gospels dated to the 5th century. More expeditions to the Middle East followed, and even greater discoveries were made. In 1896, they showed some leaves of a Hebrew manuscript that they had purchased in the Middle East to Dr Solomon Schechter, Reader in Talmudic and Rabbinic Literature at Cambridge. His efforts to find the source of these precious manuscripts led him to Old Cairo, to the synagogue of Ben Ezra, and the discovery of the renowned Genizah collection.

Although Agnes Smith Lewis is renowned as being instrumental in the discovery of the Library's famous collection of Genizah fragments, less well known is her foresight in purchasing other unique manuscripts. One such purchase, in 1895, was of a palimpsest written on parchment that contained some leaves of an ancient Qur'an text. The leaves of parchment, containing several layers of texts on the same page, had in the past been scraped clean of text with a pumice stone and reused. As parchment was such a scarce resource, some pages have up to five texts.

The text on the top level, which can easily be read, is a set of homilies written in Arabic by early Christian fathers and is believed to date from the end of the 9th century or the beginning of the 10th century. The parchment had passed to Christian monks and the preceding text overwritten, the leaves folded double and then clipped to a smaller size to fit the more recent text in the 9th century. Some of the texts underneath are in Syriac, and some are leaves of the Septuagint version of the Bible in Greek.



Single leaf of the palimpsest showing the top layer of text in Arabic.

Among the Syriac quires, there are 44 leaves of early Arabic script lying crossways to the upper script, not quite either kufic or *nashkī* in style, but which Agnes Lewis realized were from the Qur'an. She showed the palimpsest to her colleague Rev. Alphonse Mingana, a refugee scholar from Iraq best known for his connection with the manuscript collections at the University of Birmingham, who studied them.

These texts were identified as an early Qur'an text containing variant words that dated from a time before the rules of Arabic grammar were properly established.

Once the Qur'an text became fixed in its accepted form, any earlier texts were destroyed. One of the texts, dating possibly from the 8th century, contains three different styles of writing and not all are from the same original manuscript. The results of the findings by Mingana and Lewis were published in their *Leaves from three ancient Qur'ans* in 1914.

In 1902 Margaret Gibson had placed the manuscript with expert binders attached to the British Museum who conserved the fragile pages by setting the parchment leaves within strong paper frames and covering some of the damaged pages in a fine white gauze. Soon afterwards the manuscript was loaned for display at an international exhibition in Leipzig but it disappeared without trace at the outbreak of the First World War.

The text itself continued to be studied and deciphered by scholars in order to unlock more of its secrets, using Mingana's transcription as a starting point as the original manuscript remained missing. More recent researchers have questioned the findings made in the early days, especially those of Mingana. His transcription was found to be inaccurate in many ways, partly due to Mingana's own difficulties with the language, and partly because the manuscript is unreadable at critical points and the text could not be properly deciphered with the equipment available at the time.

The whereabouts of the palimpsest was a mystery for many years but its whereabouts was eventually traced by two Cambridge scholars. Agnes Lewis died in 1926 but in accordance with the wishes set out in her will, in April 1936 it was finally returned by them, to the Library.



Part of a single leaf of parchment magnified to show the layers of text.



The twin sisters. Agnes Lewis is on the left and Margaret Gibson on the right.

A COLLECTION OF MANY PARTS

Rev. George Lewis (d. 1729)

The imposing dark wooden cabinet decorated with brass handles and plaques and inscribed 'Biblioteca Orientalis' was specially designed by the Rev. George Lewis for his idiosyncratic collection. The whole library has been preserved intact, along with the assortment of curiosities Lewis collected in India. The 76 valuable Arabic and Persian manuscripts, including rare volumes such as that of lyrics by Raha'i, the Persian poet, are still shelved in their original order. Now the soft leather bindings of the manuscripts may be dusted with time, but their contents remain luminously beautiful. The coins, weights, inscriptions on copper-plate and two sets of exquisite miniature playing cards, intricately painted on fragile wafers of wood and tortoiseshell, all have their own special place in the cabinet. There is even a long narrow drawer for Lewis's embroidered slippers, a poignant reminder of the man who was both a scholar and a collector.

The cabinet and its precious contents, sent to the Library in 1727, was a gift from the Rev. George Lewis, once a student at Queens' College, then later Chaplain to the East India Company settlement at Fort St George (now Madras) between 1692 and 1714. His time in India coincided with a growing interest in England for copies of original texts from Middle Eastern and Indian countries, both religious and secular. Lewis collected mainly Persian items but there are also some Arabic and other examples of Indian languages. He selected the manuscripts for the diversity of their subject matter – an intriguing assortment of Qur'ans, dictionaries, epics, some Christian texts and texts of local interest, as well as copies of the *Timūrnāmah* of Hātifi and a copy of Jāmī's *Yūsuf and Zulaykhā*. There are also histories, such as a volume written in 1690 containing the biography of Shāh Ismā'il 1st, King of Persia in Safavid times. A contemporary catalogue of the collection, probably by Lewis himself, gives a list of the manuscripts with short descriptions.

This was the most extensive Islamic collection to enter the Library since the Erpenius collection almost a century earlier. Literary texts such as those of Ḥāfiẓ and Jāmī had not previously been available to Cambridge scholars, as the earlier manuscript collections had consisted mainly of religious or grammatical works, or travels.



Leaf from *Timūrnāmah* (A history of Timūr's Conquests) of Hātifi dated 1573. (Add.205)



Illustrated leaf from Nizāmī's celebrated romantic poem *Khusraw and Shirin*. (Add.207)

The collection also contains a large volume known as the 'Lewis scrap-book' with fascinating examples of letters, fragments of manuscripts, and specimens of different types of calligraphy. The greater part consists of letters addressed to Lewis by various correspondents in Persian, Arabic and Turkish representing almost all styles of calligraphy used in the Islamic world at the time. Some of these are signed and dated and many are highly decorative.

The unusual nature of the collection reflects the character of the man who amassed it. Lewis was a gifted linguist, proficient in Persian, and was appointed to his post in India with special responsibility for the Protestant Portuguese-speaking native population. During the time he spent in Fort St George, Lewis took a keen interest in the education of the local population and was closely involved in the beginnings of the missionary press set up with the intention of printing an edition of the Old Testament in Portuguese. The man – like his collection – had 'many parts'.



From a magnificent copy of a Persian translation of Qazwīnī's *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt* (Wonders of creation). This precious manuscript, one of the Library's treasures, has beautiful illuminated pages including birds, animals, human figures and angels. It was given to the Library separately by Archdeacon Lewis's son, and is dated 1566. (Nn.3.74)



From Lewis's copy of the *Divān* of Ḥāfīz. (Add.208)

THE ART AND CRAFT OF MANUSCRIPT PRODUCTION

For centuries the Persians have been renowned for their skills in calligraphy, illumination and miniature painting techniques; in the Islamic world, they were the acknowledged masters of the art and craft of manuscript production. The creation of an illuminated manuscript involved numerous artisans, not necessarily working in the same workshop or at the same time, and considerable planning was therefore required. The artists, though often not known by name, were highly regarded and their skills were prized quite separately from the merits of the texts on which they were working. Such artists could command the very best in the tools of their trade: the paper and paints. Many Persian manuscripts are recognized for the extremely high quality of their paper. At the end of the production method, such paper was finished with size (a type of glue) and burnished by polishing with stones to produce a fine, non-absorbent surface to take the ink and paint.

The paints were produced from materials such as cochineal (pink), verdigris (green), lapis lazuli or indigo (blue), ochre (yellow) and cinnabar (red). Gold leaf was applied liberally to pictures and borders and gold was also used to decorate incised patterns on both the front and back covers. The inside covers of the binding (doublures) were frequently decorated. Fine leathers were used in the bindings.

A VISUAL FEAST

Paintings in manuscript volumes are described as 'miniatures', and this became an art form in itself, demanding great skill and artistic creativity. It first became significant in the 13th century, developing during the Mongol and Timurid periods of Persian history, and reached its zenith in the 15th and 16th centuries.

The texts of such manuscripts were so full of mythological and historical stories that they lent themselves to visual interpretation: unlike Qur'an texts, the poetry texts allowed the depiction of the human form and when this and mythical beings, buildings, clothing and jewellery were added to illustrations of plants, animals and landscapes, the outcome was a visual feast. The beginning of the text may be prefaced by a decorative heading or *'unwān*, or with initial pages bearing a decorated circular motif or *shamsah*.



Decorative *shamsah* from the opening pages of a volume of Sa'di's poetry, presented by the East India Company in 1806. (Add.270)



Decorative *'unwān* from the start of a copy of the *Bustan* of Sa'di. From the Browne collection. (V.16)

A miniature painting may share a page with some text, but more often occupies a whole page. Like the text, the paintings are constrained within a ruled border but sometimes elements of the picture break through the border, making an effective and dramatic impact. The illustrations relate to some particular happening within the text, but they are always limited by particular accepted conventions and include a complex symbolism peculiar to this tradition.

The style of the text used is called *tal'iq* or *nastal'iq*; sometimes it is spaced by the use of *chalipa*, diagonal script in square sections, in order to make a section or chapter of script fit the page, or when reaching the point in the text where a picture is inserted.

Miniatures were never intended as public art: only the owners and their circle would see these manuscripts. For this reason they have often survived intact and in good condition, with the ancient colours still close to their original vibrant state.

Right Page showing *chalipa*, decorative spacing of the text. (Add.3139)



Left Two illuminated pages from a fine copy of the *Shāhnāmah* of Firdawsi. The first shows Guruy executing Siyavush; the second Rustam rescuing Bizhan from the pit. This copy was presented to the Library in 1806 by the East India Company and contains numerous beautiful miniature paintings. Copied in the 16th or early 17th century. (Add.269)

PERSIAN POETS DOWN THE CENTURIES

*What miraculous worlds roll within the vast,
the all-embracing ocean of the mind!*

Rūmī: tr. R. A. Nicholson

The Persians have always been passionate about poetry: they are proud of their poets, and justly so. A love and aptitude for poetry writing throughout the centuries is so ingrained that verse is encountered in almost every classical work, whether from literature, science or philosophy. In the past, developing the ability to write in verse form was a pre-requisite for any would-be scholar. At first poets were supported by court patronage and this gave rise to the epic style of verse written in a metrical pattern known as the *qaṣīda*.

Perhaps the best-known exponent of the epic – and indeed among the most famous of the many illustrious Persian poets – is Firdawsī, born in Tus in 935.

It took 33 years for Firdawsī to write the epic *Shāhnāmah* (The book of kings). Probably the longest poem ever written, it was intended to be recited in front of an audience. The *Shāhnāmah* is a work on an heroic scale. Beginning with an account of the creation of the universe, it tells the story of Iran's pre-Islamic past, encompassing legendary and historical ages as it describes the royal rulers over the centuries, finishing with the last king of the Sassanid dynasty at the time of the Arab conquest of Iran in the mid 7th century. Into this grand narrative, Firdawsī interweaves a host of stories and legends. Some of these have migrated into European literature, such as the exploits of the great folk hero Rostam and his horse Rakhsh, as well as the exploits of other heroes like Sūhrāb, Bizhan and Farīdūn. The background theme which runs throughout is the history of the Iranian people, embroidered with the subsidiary themes of the continual conflict between good and evil, and the significance of the loyalty of the common man to the sovereign.

Firdawsī began writing the *Shāhnāmah* in 977 and completed it around 1010. It is said that the completed poem was not well received by his patron who refused to pay him the agreed reward for his labours. Firdawsī was forced to flee to his native Tus where he later died. Legend has it that recognition and riches came only as he was being buried, but he set a model of the epic tradition that was to be followed by a host of other poets.



A fine copy of Rūmī's *Maṣnavī*, probably copied in the 15th century. There are many notes added in the margins in the early part of the manuscript. (Oo.6.32)

Later centuries marked the rise of mystical poetry in the Sufi tradition, in which some among the Islamic believers sought divine love and knowledge through the search for direct personal experience of God, rather than through an outward show of beliefs and practices. Without doubt the most eminent Sufi poet was Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207–73); his *Maṣnavī* or 'Spiritual Couplets' ranks among the great poems of all time. The prelude to the *Maṣnavī* – often known as *The song of the reed* – was translated by E. H. Palmer; the flute made of reed is the instrument used to accompany the whirling of the Sufi dervishes, performed to achieve religious ecstasy. (The name of the Mevlevi order of dervishes in Turkey derives from Rūmī's common title; and he is buried in their spiritual centre in Konya.) The *Maṣnavī* could almost be described as a compendium of Sufism and includes discussions of the problems of existence, cleverly illustrated through familiar stories and legends. The renowned Cambridge Professor of Arabic R. A. Nicholson (1868–1945) spent a significant part of his working life studying and translating this work, and his critical edition of the *Maṣnavī* did much to make the poem more accessible and foster a greater understanding of the poet and his work.

*That remains for thee; to know
Things above, as things below,
How the planets roll;
How the sun his light displays,
How the moon darts forth her rays;
How the nights succeed the days,
What the secret cause betrays,
And who directs the Whole!*

Shāhnāmah: tr. James Atkinson, 1832

The poet Sa'di (1184–1283) was a native of Shiraz but lived an eventful life and was widely travelled. His best-known works are *Būstān* (The orchard) completed in 1257, and *Gulistān* (The rose garden) in 1258. Sa'di wrote in a form of verse called the *ghazal*, a metrical form that has rhyming couplets and a refrain, and he explores, with the use of metaphor, the experience of love as inward emotion. His language is graceful and simple and his verses are also in the Sufi tradition. Sa'di explores and describes with a deep awareness of some of the contradictions of human life and discusses the vagaries of fate experienced by those embroiled in the swiftly changing world of political life. This is contrasted with the delight of the individual freedoms experienced by the Sufis.

If there is a book of poetry to be found in a Persian home it is most likely to be the poems of Ḥāfiẓ (1315–90). Ḥāfiẓ is perhaps the most popular of Persian poets and the most famous writer of *ghazals*; in his poems the experience of earthly and heavenly love is intertwined. He was also born in Shiraz and his poetry received

early recognition; he later fell out of favour with his patron, although he did eventually regain his position at court. His poetry is well known to this day and modern Iranians recite his verses and use his sayings in everyday life.

His works were translated so many times, and spread so widely, that he became familiar to European writers on whom he has had an important influence. Translated into German in the early nineteenth century his influence is clearly seen in Goethe's "West-östlicher Divan" and in the lieder of Schubert.

The Library has over 200 examples of Persian poetry manuscripts. Some are complete works, others only fragments, but together they illustrate the historical progression of literary style and include writings of all the major poets from the classical period.

*Hafiz, the secret of God's dread task
No man knoweth, in youth or prime
Or in wisest age; of whom would'st thou ask:
What has befallen the wheels of Time?*

tr. Gertrude Bell, 1897



Page of text with a central miniature from a fine copy of Sa'di's *Kulliyāt*. (Add.270)

THE GREATEST ROMANTIC

Nizāmī Ganjavī (1140–1202) is considered by many to be the greatest romantic epic poet in Persian literature; he introduced a colloquial and realistic style to poetry. Although he enjoyed the patronage of rulers and princes, he is thought to have lived rather a secluded life. Nizāmī's best-known work is his *Khamsah*, (Quintet), a collection of five long narrative poems. He was not a court poet, though he wrote for royal patrons, as he was wary of the artistic restrictions such a position would impose on his artistic freedom.

Nizāmī was a master of the romantic epic; his emphasis is on the human rather than the superhuman or heroic aspects of his characters, and his poems are also filled with details of the lives of common people, including artisans, and imagery taken from the natural world. The plots of the *Khamsah* stories are relatively simple and derived from familiar legends except for



Full-page painting from *Makhzan al-asrār* in a copy of Nizāmī's *Khamsah* presented to the Library in 1894. (Add.3139)



Page from a fine copy of the *Khamsah* of Nizāmī. (Oo.6.11)

the first poem, *Makhzan al-asrār* (Treasury of secrets), which is a mystical poem dealing with esoteric subjects which became a model for many later imitations. The second story, *Khusraw and Shirin* recounts, with many twists and turns, the story of the courtship of the resourceful Princess Shirin by King Khusraw 2nd, and the vanquishing of his love-rival, Farhād. The third poem is a well-known romantic tale of Arabic origin: *Laylā and Majnūn*. Based on a popular legend from the Arab world, it tells of ill-starred lovers who endure separation and suffering in circumstances beyond their control, and when later reunited, find they are unable to re-kindle their love. The fourth and most intricate poem, *Haft Paykar* (The seven beauties), relates how Bahram Gur, the Sassanian king, falls in love with seven beautiful princesses whom he invites to his palace and who entertain him with stories, these representing seven aspects of human destiny. The final and longest poem is the *Iskandarnāmah* (Story of Alexander), based on the Islamic version of the life of Alexander the Great, who rose to the status of a national hero



*Sad inmate of the desert wild,
His form and face with dust defiled;
Exhausted with his grief's excess,
He sat down in weariness.
'Estranged from friends,' he weeping cried,
'My homeward course is dark to me;
But, Laili, were I at thy side,
How blessed would thy poor lover be!'*

Laylā and Majnūn: tr. James Atkinson, 1894

in Persia. It narrates the three stages in Alexander's life: first as the conqueror of the world; then as a liberator of the oppressed and seeker after knowledge; and finally as a prophet, journeying once again across the world, from west to east, and south to north, to proclaim his beliefs and to collect volumes to create a great library.

These stories are all well known – several had been mentioned by Firdawsī in the *Shāhnāmah* – but Niẓāmī is known for his own skill at the dramatic plot, the drawing of complex characters and his masterly use of language.

The Cambridge scholar and professor of Arabic, A.J. Arberry, wrote of the *Khamsah* poems. "Besides being excellent reading in themselves, they shared with the *Shāhnāmah* the honour of supplying Persia's miniature painters with rich material for the exercise of their craft: the conjunction of glittering verse with brilliant art gave birth to some of the world's most splendid books".

The Library's holds several manuscripts of the complete text of Niẓāmī's *Khamsah* and other copies of sections of it.

Illustration of Majnūn in the desert from the margin of a copy of the *Khamsah* of Niẓāmī. (Oo.6.11)

This particular manuscript has the text written in pages of four columns in *tal'iq* script; each story is prefaced by a page with an illuminated '*unwān*'. Two stories contain the date 1584. There are 15 miniature paintings spread throughout the text and a double-page miniature painting on the first and last pages. There are also, unusually, four examples of paintings down the outside margins of the text pages. Despite their age, the paintings have retained their original vibrant colours and bring a vivid imagery to the text.

MEADOWS OF GOLD AND MINES OF GEMS

To delve into the Library's fascinating manuscript collections of historical writings on the Middle East, is to encounter a rich seam of hard fact, semi-fiction and – on occasion – pure fantasy.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE HISTORIES

The growth of early historical writing in the Middle East was closely associated with, and to some degree grew out of, the tradition of the recording of the Prophet's life and sayings. The verification of such events and developing an accepted chronology for early Islam led to the growth of an historical methodology from around the 7th century; the recording of chronological history in the Islamic world was fully developed by the 10th century.

However, many Middle Eastern writings scorn the rigid boundaries of the strictly 'historical' in the European sense. While manuscript texts clearly relate particular events such as battles and the

complicated chronologies and intrigues of ruling dynasties, they also encompass extensive biographical and genealogical details, and may venture into the realms of cosmography and even astrology. Some include descriptions of times before recorded events, and these can be fanciful or mythological in character. An interesting example of an historical work detailing such early origins is a manuscript by al-Mawṣilī with a title which translates as 'Knowledge of beginnings; a compendium of interesting and curious information'. This copy is from the Burckhardt collection and dated 1663, though copied from a much earlier version of the same text.

EMINENT HISTORIANS

Writing descriptions of past events, people and situations has always been important in the cultures of the Middle East and this tradition created many eminent historians. The scope of their work is vast – indeed, on occasions nothing less than the history of their world.

Ya'qūbī, who died around 897, wrote both historical and geographical works and travelled widely in the Middle East, India and North Africa. The collection contains a copy of his history in which he gives an account of pre-Islamic and non-Islamic peoples, followed in the second part by an account of Islamic history up to 872.

One of the earliest and most prominent Persian historians was al-Ṭabarī (839–923) who wrote history, theology and commentaries on the Qur'an. His most famous work is the *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī* (History of the prophets and kings). Originally written in Arabic, and later translated into other languages such as Persian and Turkish, it is a universal history from the time of creation to 915, and renowned for its detail and accuracy on Middle Eastern history.

Al-Masūdi (896–956), the eminent Arab historian and geographer, was also known as the 'Herodotus of the Arabs'. His world history – *Muruj al-dhahab wa-mā'adin al-jawhar* (The meadows of gold and mines of gems) – is said to have filled 30 volumes in its original form. It contains descriptive observations regarding the origins of the world and information of a historical nature on non-Islamic peoples. Later volumes include a history of Islam beginning with the Prophet and another of the Caliphs down to al-Masūdi's own time.

Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406), an eminent polymath born in North Africa, was considered a forerunner in many disciplines but he was famous for his historical writings and for the development



Opening page of the *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī* by Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Ya'qūbī, dated 1684. (Qq.10)

of historical method. His *Muqaddima* (Prolegomena) is an introduction to a planned history of the world. His own life was itself highly eventful and ironically he completed his great work during a period when he was out of political favour.

A renowned Persian historian is Mirkhwand (1433–98) who from an early age devoted himself to historical and literary studies. His most famous work is the *Rawḍat al-Ṣafā* (Great universal history) in seven large volumes plus a geographical appendix. The first three volumes cover the period from the creation of the world to the end of the Abbasid Dynasty, while the fourth and fifth volumes of the work cover the historical period up to 1360; volumes six and seven cover later periods of history and geographical information.

The Library's collection contains a number of copies of the various volumes of this work.

PEOPLE, PLACES AND EVENTS

In contrast to such all-encompassing writings, some works document the story of one particular region, city, person or event. For instance, Ibn Khaldūn's contemporary, the Egyptian historian al-Maqrīzī (1364–1442) wrote many works on history, biography and topography, although perhaps his most famous work is his history of Egypt. A lengthy manuscript attributed to al-Maqrīzī contains a history of Egypt and an account of the topography of Cairo. Many years later, in 1849 Abdullah ibn Hijāzī al-Sarqawī completed his own account of the rulers of Egypt from earliest times down to the time of Selim 3rd (1801) which is also in the collection.

Other manuscripts describe historical events familiar in European history but recounted from the Arabic viewpoint. One, dated from the early 14th century, contains a full account of the Crusades; another manuscript by an unknown author, dated 1810, describes the Egyptian campaign of Napoleon Bonaparte (1798–1801).

One intriguing manuscript, from the Erpenius collection, contains the well-known general history of Sa'īd ibn Batriq, better known by his Latin name Eutychius, Patriarch of Alexandria. This fills most of the volume, but the so-called *Unique chronicle of Sicily* is also bound with it. This unique text is of unknown authorship, but describes the history of Sicily from the time of the first Islamic invasion in 827 to 965.

The Library is privileged to hold copies or parts of many of the most significant historical manuscripts thanks to the gifts of the collections of Erpenius, Burckhardt, Browne and Lewis.



Opening page of an historical treatise on the history of Egypt by al-Maqrīzī, dated 1744. (Add.746)



A history of Persia composed in 1330 by Ḥamd Allāh of Qazwīn and transcribed in 1453. From the Browne collection. (G.4)



First volume of the Turkish translation and abridged version of al-Ṭabarī's 'History', dated 1413. From the Erpenius collection. (Mm.4.16)

A MASTER OF DISGUISES

John Lewis Burckhardt (1784–1817)

'I have passed among Bedouins some of the happiest days of my life; but I have likewise passed among them some of the most irksome and tedious, when I impatiently watched the sun's disk piercing through the tent from its rising to its setting; for I knew that in the evening some songs and a dance would relieve me from my draught-playing companions.'

The merchant 'Sheikh Ibrahim Ibn 'Abd Allah' was a convenient pseudonym that the scholar and explorer J. L. Burckhardt used to disguise his European origins when he travelled in the Near East, Egypt and Arabia during the years 1809 to 1817. He was born in Basel into a wealthy Swiss family, but a professional career held few attractions for a man of such restless spirits. A meeting in London with Sir Joseph Banks, the President of the Africa Association, led to a commission to cross the African continent from Cairo to the Niger, with the aim of discovering the river's source. The adventure appealed.

Burckhardt was sent to Cambridge to learn Arabic as a preparation for his later explorations and then, in 1809, he travelled to Aleppo. He stayed there for three years perfecting his Arabic and 'going native', adopting local dress and customs, before departing on his mission to Egypt. Passing himself off as a merchant to avoid suspicion, Burckhardt travelled alone or with groups of native travellers. On his way south he took the opportunity to re-discover the long-forgotten ruins of Petra: he was the first European since the 13th century to see the 'rose red city, half as old as time', as one poet described it. Arriving in Egypt he decided to explore Upper Egypt, a 'short' detour which lasted three years, and during which he studied the caravan routes and also visited the unique Abu Simbel temples.

At this time most Europeans knew little about life in Arab countries. Burckhardt was a keen observer of local populations, gleaned information from the Islamic pilgrims and merchants whom he met on his journeys. The Bedouins held a particular fascination for him: his *Notes on the Bedouins and Wahabys* was published in 1830. He eventually converted to Islam and was one of the first Europeans to make the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. His descriptions of these holy places and the religious ceremonies greatly helped to make Islam better understood in Europe.



Portrait of Burckhardt from his *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land*. (S514.b.82.1)



Opening page from a work on letter-writing by Ahmad ibn 'Ali-Qalqashandi. From the Burckhardt collection. (Qq.36)

Burckhardt returned to Cairo, where, with the help of Henry Salt, the British Consul, he arranged to commission the Italian, Giovanni Belzoni, to remove the enormous stone head of Ramses II from Thebes and to transport it to the British Museum in London.

'Sheikh Ibrahim Ibn 'Abd Allah' never did carry out his original plan to cross the desert from the Nile to the Niger, as he fell ill with food poisoning and died in October 1817. He was buried in Cairo. However, the Africa Association published the texts of his notes and diaries to much acclaim. *Travels in Nubia* (1819), *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land* (1822) and *Travels in Arabia* (1829) astonish the reader with their clarity, reliability and detail. In his fieldwork, Burckhardt was entirely dependent on his own resources and on his natural talent for observation and judgement. On his travels he followed his own interests and his researches on native peoples, and his works could be regarded as the first ethnographic studies of the Arab nomad tribes.

'We crossed the plain at sunrise; and the fresh air of the morning was extremely agreeable. There is nothing which so much compensates for the miseries of travelling in the Arabian deserts, as the pleasure of enjoying every morning the sublime spectacle of the break of day and of the rising of the sun, which is always accompanied, even in the hottest season, with a refreshing breeze.'

Burckhardt was an avid but selective manuscript collector. During his explorations, he acquired original source material, often concerning the history, topography and geography, of Upper Egypt, Nubia and Sudan. He bequeathed his collection of more than 300 Arabic manuscripts, along with some of his own documents and letters, to the Library in recognition of his days in Cambridge as a student of Arabic.

The Burckhardt collection contains many of the earliest Arabic manuscripts, both dated and undated, with important historical, literary and philological texts. Few are illuminated but there are examples of beautiful and elegant script. The manuscripts include some of the finest works of Arabic literature such as the famous epic of the poet Antarah ibn Shaddād and an early anthology of Arabic poetry. Ironically – since the explorer died relatively young – it also contains the ancient *Kitāb al-Mu'ammariin* (Book of the long-lived) of Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, dated 1036.



Copy of the *Diwān al-Ḥamasa*, collection of old Arabian poetry, dated 1200. (Qq.213)



Colophon from a copy of the *Maqāmāt* (Stories in rhymed prose) of al-Hamadhānī, dated 1596. (Qq.118)

المرض هو حال حادثة في البدن يضره لا يضره غيره واسطه كاصرار ودم الحلق النفس والاراد وادونهم على اجناس متشابهة وهي الامراض الحادثة في مزاج الاعضاء المتشابهة كالامراض
 واسمها ماخوذ من محلها **ع** والته وهي الامراض الحادثة في الاعضاء الآلية وهي الالات المركبة من الاعضاء المتشابهة واسمها ماخوذ من اسم محلها وانفصال الاتصال هو المرض الحادثة
 في اجز البدن المتصلة بعضها ببعض فتعرف ما اتصل منها وهو عام لاعضاء البدن المتشابهة والالية واسمها ماخوذ من العرض الحادث في محلها وهذه قسمه صحيحة لان البدن
 اذا خرج عن اعتداله اما ان يكون في تركب اعضائه التي يشبه الالات فكلها تكون المرض المتشابهة واما ان يكون في تركب اعضائه المتشابهة فتحدث المرض المتشابهة

ما يشبهه من رحي الروح وهي العرفه بحجى ايقم

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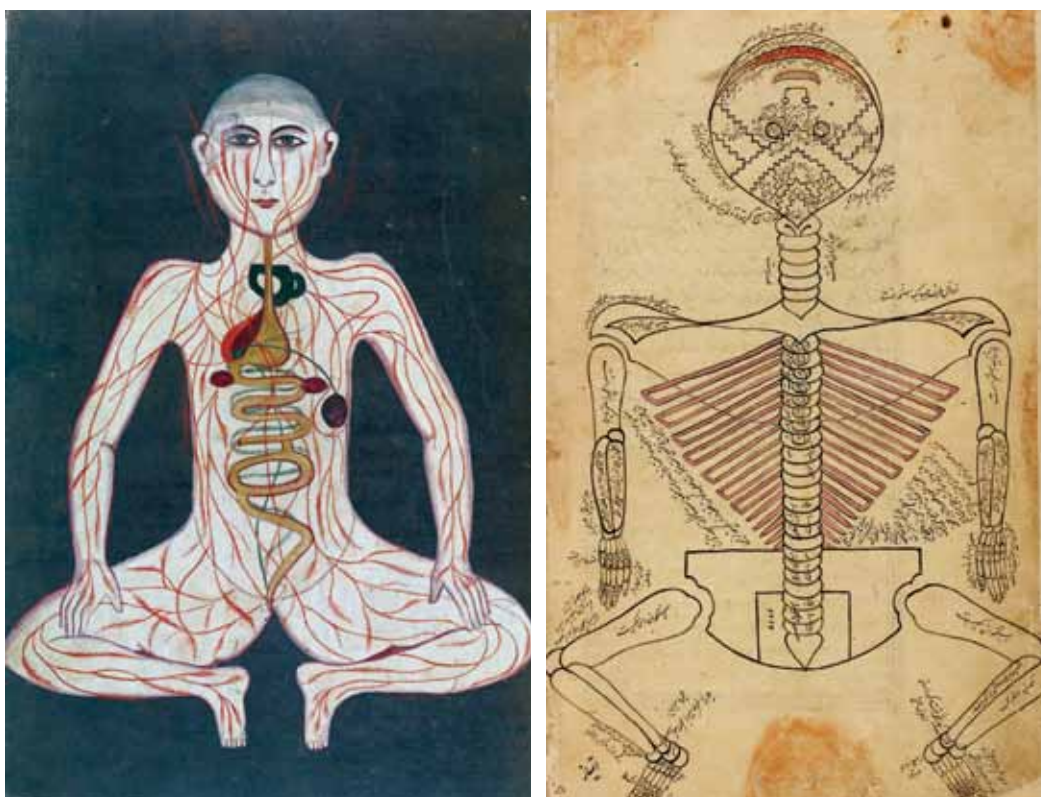
اما في تركب جمل البدن من الاعضاء الالات بانفصال ما اتصل منها فتكون يعرف الاتصال واما الامراض المتشابهة هي اما مركبة او مركبة والغذاء اما حارة او باردة او رطبة او يابسة والمركبات اما
 حارة رطبة او حارة يابسة او باردة رطبة او باردة يابسة والمعرفة اما ان يكون من كيفية طارية على الاعضاء من غير فضلة تنصب معها او مع فضلة تنصب معها والامراض الالات اما في
 هيئة الاعضاء او في مقدارها او في عددها او في وضعها فالذي في الهيئة اما في شكله او في جوهره او في مجرى العنقوبان يتبع او يتقسط او في خشونة ما هو المس بطبعه او في ملاسمة ما هو
 خشن والذي في المقدار على ضربين اما ان ينظم العنقوبان المقدار الطبيعي او يصغر عن مقداره الطبيعي والذي في العدد اما ان يواو بالوجه الطبيعية او غير طبيعية واما نقصانها كليا او جزيا

THE FATHERS OF MODERN MEDICINE

In Islamic tradition, the origins of medical thought can be traced back to the time of the Prophet: many sayings about health and medical matters are attributed to him, and authors of early Islamic medical texts were usually both clerics and physicians. During the Abbasid period (750–1258) translations were made of important Greek and Sanskrit medical texts into Arabic by specialists in the subject. Consequently Galen and Hippocrates were revered as pre-eminent authorities on medical matters, as well as some early Indian physicians. Islamic medical practitioners then incorporated some of the ideas from these traditions into their own body of knowledge to make advances both in the theory and practice of medicine, particularly in the fields of anatomy, ophthalmology, physiology, psychology, surgery and the pharmaceutical sciences. Many of the ensuing Arabic medical texts were in turn translated

into Latin and other European languages, and had a significant influence on medical thinking in Europe. Examples of early influential texts in the collection include medical works in Arabic including texts and notes on the works of Galen and Hippocrates and an Arabic translation of Galen's *Anatomy* dated 1660.

Islamic doctors were innovators: they set up *bimaristans*, establishments where the sick were cared for by qualified staff, and subsequent developments included the first public and psychiatric hospitals, and universities granting degrees in medical practice. Against a background of a high standard of medical ethics, hospitals in the Islamic world initiated the introduction of proper medical standards for doctors and regulations for drug purity. Other advances were made in surgical instruments and procedures, experimentation, clinical trials, dissections, autopsies, drug testing, and isolation wards for people with contagious diseases.



Two illustrations showing the bones and the veins of the human body from the manuscript of the *Tashrih-i Manṣūrī*. From the Browne collection. (P.21)

Left A leaf from two Arabic medical works; the colophon is dated 1547. (P.8)



Opening page of a very beautiful 13th century manuscript of a portion of *Dhakhira-i Khwārazmshāhi*. This chapter deals with the uses, abuses and effects of wine. (P.18)

BOOKS OF HEALING

Over the centuries, Islamic scholars made many outstanding written contributions to medical ideas, theories and practices and the manuscripts collection contains a rich variety of such works. These include the earliest encyclopedic work on medicine in Arabic, the *Firdaws al-Ḥikma* (Paradise of wisdom) written around 860 by 'Alī Ibn Sahl Rabbān al-Ṭabarī (838–70) who emphasized the strong ties which exist between psychology and medicine, and the need for psychological understanding in the treatment of patients.

Also typical of the large encyclopedic works produced by Islamic medical specialists is a copy of *Dhakhira-i Khwārazmshāhi* (Khwarazm Treasury) compiled by 'Ismā'īl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Jurjānī (1042–1136), copied in the 15th century; it contains a complete collection of medical information and a supplement about the use of drugs. The collection contains five other copies of various part of this compendious work. There are also examples of types of medical dictionary with lists of diseases with symptoms and

treatments, such as two medical treatises in Persian. Other works describe drugs and their preparation, for instance the *Materia medica* by Ḥajjī Zayn al-Attār who lived in Shiraz in the second half of the 12th century.

The 10th century in particular saw an exceptional flowering of Islamic medical knowledge. Great scholars and physicians included Abū Bakr Muhammad Ibn Zakarīyā al-Rāzī, (865–925), also known by his Latin name of Rhazes, who introduced the use of the controlled experiment and clinical observation methods into the field of medicine, and rejected theories from Galen that were unverified by experimentation. He wrote the *Kitāb al-Ḥawī fi al-Ṭibb* (The comprehensive book of medicine), in which he recorded clinical cases of his own experience and provided very useful descriptions of various illnesses and contagious diseases. This work was subsequently very influential in Europe.

One rare and interesting manuscript is a comprehensive work on medicine, of which the great part is a text by al-Rāzī that includes a number of treatises by him and one by Ibn Sīnā, copied in the 13th or 14th century. The first part of the manuscript deals with diseases of the chest and lungs and the latter part with food and diet. Another example of a rare text by al-Rāzī contains a chapter on smallpox and measles and an account of fevers.

Ibn Sīnā (981–1039), also known by his Latin name as Avicenna, was a very influential figure in the areas of both philosophy and medicine. He is frequently regarded as the father of modern medicine and one of the greatest medical scholars in history. He introduced systematic experimentation to study physiology, discovered the contagious nature of infectious diseases, and made progress in the use of anaesthetics. His medical encyclopedia, *Al-Qānūn fi al-Ṭibb* (The canon of medicine), written around 1020, was translated into Latin and remained a standard textbook in Europe for centuries; his *Kitāb al-Shifā'* (The book of healing), a more general encyclopedia of science and philosophy, was equally well respected.

Abū al-Qāsim al-Zahrāwī (936–1013), known as Abulcasis, is often regarded as the father of modern surgery. He made a significant contribution to the discipline of surgery with his *Kitāb al-Taṣrif* (Method of medicine); this was written in 1000 and later translated into Latin and used in European medical schools for centuries. The 30-volume medical encyclopedia includes the description of over 200 surgical instruments, many of which had never been used before.

Ophthalmology was a topic in which medieval Islamic medical specialists made considerable advances. Early in the 9th century, both Ibn Māsawayh and his student Ḥunayn Ibn Iṣḥāq wrote



important works on the subject. A near contemporary was 'Ammār al-Mawṣilī, who was originally from Iraq but later lived in Egypt. His only work, a treatise on eye diseases, contains interesting clinical cases and a claim to have designed a hollow needle for the removal of cataracts from the eye by suction. A text by the notable physician 'Alī Ibn 'Īsā (a celebrated oculist who flourished in Baghdad around 961) entitled the 'Oculists' reminder' can be found in the collection.

Some two centuries later Ibn al-Nafīs (1210–88) wrote *Al-Shāmil fī al-tibb* (The comprehensive book on medicine), a voluminous medical encyclopedia that was originally planned to comprise 300 volumes. Incomplete at the time of his death, the book is still one of the most all-inclusive medical encyclopedias in history. Ibn al-Nafīs is now best-known for being the first to describe the pulmonary circulation of the blood long before this was understood in Europe, and as an early proponent for many aspects of experimental medicine including autopsies and dissection from which much was learned. He is highly regarded as one of the greatest medical thinkers, some referring to him as 'the second Ibn Sīnā', and others considering him even greater.

Many of the valuable and intriguing medical texts in the Library were collected by E. G. Browne, himself a qualified doctor, who gave up his medical career to study Persian, and who appreciated and acknowledged the great advances made by the Islamic medical scholars.

Above right A manuscript titled *Ma'dan al-Shifā-i Sikandarshāhi* (Thesaurus of therapeutics), a treatise on Indian medicine compiled from various Sanskrit works. It is divided into three sections: one on the general scope of medicine, another on anatomy and physiology, and a third on pathology and treatment. (Gg.2.12)

Above left Browne's collection contains a very fine old manuscript of part of the third book of the *Qānūn* of Ibn Sīnā that deals with the diseases of the eyes, ears, mouth and tongue. (P.5)

A REMARKABLE LEGACY

Edward Granville Browne (1862–1926)



A year amongst the Persians, published in 1893, is a book in which an English author reveals the spirit of Persia and its people with great insight and vivacity.

In his introduction to the book he writes – ‘Believing that the observations, impressions, and experiences of my twelve months’ sojourn in Persia during

the years 1887–8 may be of interest to others besides myself, I have at length determined to publish them’.

E. G. Browne, as he is usually known, originally intended to follow a career in science and medicine and came to Cambridge to read Natural Sciences. However he had become interested and sympathetic to the Turks in their struggle against Russia in the Russo–Turkish war of 1877–8. He soon turned to learning Arabic and Persian and from then on his dedication to the study of Middle Eastern languages and cultures never faltered.

Browne visited Constantinople briefly in 1882, but it took another three years of medical work before he found the opportunity to travel to Persia, the country that had captured his imagination and his heart. His journey across Persia (in 1887–8) is narrated in his book. It evokes vivid descriptions of how he made direct contact with the native people and observations on their everyday life. Browne’s medical knowledge proved very useful in relation to his researches and he had a special interest and expertise in Arabic medical theory and techniques. Browne often offered medical advice and help, and in exchange the Persians shared information about their local customs and culture. During his travels the scholar also collected many precious manuscripts, clearly appreciating their importance – many texts from the Middle East existed only in manuscript form until a much later date than in the West.

On his return to Cambridge Browne became a lecturer in Persian and later Professor of Arabic. He never visited Persia again, yet his work centred on the study of the life, thought and literature of the Middle East. He had a remarkable facility for mastering Middle Eastern languages and could read and write equally well in Arabic, Persian or Turkish. Tellingly, though, the greater part of Browne’s literary output is concerned with Persia and its religion, literature, history, politics and journalism.



Opening page of a *Qarābādin*, or *Materia Medica* in Turkish, compiled in the reign of Sultan Ahmad III (1703–30). Many of the prescriptions are ascribed to Galen or Rhazes. (P.14)

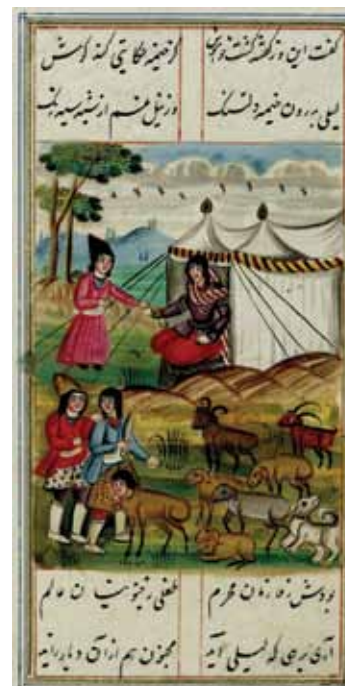


Illustration from Maktabi’s version of the romance of *Laylā and Majnūn*, one of the first manuscripts that Browne bought on his visit to Constantinople in 1882. (V.44)



Page from a portfolio containing letters received by E. G. Browne from leading Babis and Baha'is from 1889–1913. (F.66)

From a religious point of view, Browne's interest in the Islamic faith focused not on the mainstream orthodoxies but centred rather on the Babis, a religious movement that emerged in Iran in the mid 19th century and eventually split into three groups. With his knowledge of their beliefs, Browne was able to help mediate between the groups during this split. He wrote articles dealing with the sect and published two translations of histories of the Babi movement. His collection of personal papers contains numerous letters to and from religious leaders and important and unique materials on the development of the faith.

Politically, Browne followed the fortunes of the Persian National movement during the Constitutional Period of 1905–1909 with intense sympathy, taking an active part in shaping British opinion. During this period he took steps to influence Britain's international politics in favour of the Iranian cause. He corresponded directly with Iranian state officials whom he invited to his house in Cambridge, and collected much first-hand evidence in the form of newspapers, photographs, maps and letters describing the situation in Iran. For over six years (1908–14) Browne conducted a tireless campaign in the press and in meetings in support of the Persian constitutionalists and against foreign policies relating to Persia, especially the Anglo–Russian agreement of 1907.

When the constitutionalists were defeated, Browne withdrew from the political arena and spent the rest of his life in scholarly pursuits. He devoted two significant volumes to writing its history:

A history of the Persian Revolution 1905–1910 (1910) and *The press and poetry of modern Persia* (1914). However, his most significant work was his *Literary history of Persia*, published in four volumes between 1906 and 1924. He states in the preface 'For many years I have cherished a desire to write a history of the intellectual and literary achievements of the Persians...' The range and depth of this study has not yet been superseded in a standard work.

Browne was also responsible for compiling the first truly comprehensive catalogue of the Arabic, Persian and Ottoman manuscripts in the Library. Creating his catalogue took eight years in all; it was a painstaking labour of love: 'I have not only numbered with my own hand the pages of most of the manuscripts but have carried almost every one of them at least once from the Library to my rooms [in Pembroke College] and back! His catalogue is still in regular use.

Browne's own manuscript collection started modestly enough with two volumes of Persian poetry, one of which was purchased on his first visit to Constantinople. It eventually grew to almost 500 volumes. The real nucleus of the collection, though, was formed in 1888 during his year of travel in Persia and the time immediately following this and reflects his own personal interests both in medicine and in the religious Babi movement. He bequeathed all his manuscripts and personal papers to the Library.

Browne left a remarkable legacy as a teacher and scholar, as a writer and as a collector and cataloguer of manuscripts. The Persian people themselves held him in greatest regard and affection and a street in Tehran remains named after him to this day.



Opening page of a fine old anthology of Persian poetry transcribed in 1424, and containing around 80 poems by many authors including 'Aṭṭār. (V.65)



COMPLEX CHALLENGES: SPECIALIZED SOLUTIONS

Many of the Islamic manuscripts in the collections are from very early times (over 80 texts date from before 1500) or have been in the Library for a considerable period. The long-term survival of these texts in a good state of repair requires a team of conservators with a thorough knowledge of the traditional materials and original methods used in their construction, and an understanding of the mechanics of their structure. This enables them to devise specific treatments that, as far as possible, preserve the objects' original character.

Islamic manuscripts are constructed using materials and techniques significantly different from their Western counterparts and therefore require unique conservation approaches. One such challenge is the deterioration of the copper-based green pigment used in the past to draw the borders set around the text on the individual pages. As this pigment ages it becomes corrosive and eats through the paper causing the text panels to break away from the page; meticulous repairs are needed to recreate the pages in their original state. Characteristically the paper itself is burnished and care must be taken to find repair materials that blend successfully with the highly polished character of the original. Another concern is that Islamic manuscripts often have a v-shaped flap, known as a *lisān*, folding over the fore-edge of the volume, and this may become detached from the rest of the binding. The spine of the volume and the edges of the bindings are also prone to deterioration.



As part of the conservation process, silk gauze, added in an earlier repair process, is removed from a manuscript (Or. 1287). Tweezers are used and additional assistance is provided by a video enlarger.



Parchment pages of an early Qur'an manuscript showing water damage to several leaves. (Or.2267)

The day-to-day activities of the specialist staff in the Library's Conservation Department include controlling the environmental conditions of the storage and exhibition areas, providing book supports for items when they are in use, and even creating made-to-measure storage boxes of archival quality for Islamic manuscripts that are especially vulnerable to damage.

More complex procedures are carried out on items in danger of deterioration. When planning and prioritising conservation work, and deciding on the level of treatment required, it is essential to take into consideration a complicated array of factors including the existing state of the manuscript, the potential academic interest, projected usage, and time and funding constraints. Increasingly, such decisions are now made in conjunction with the need for the digitization of manuscripts, as and when funding permits. This new technology enables access to digital images of the Islamic texts to be made easily available to a larger audience, and reduces the amount of handling – and the potential wear and tear – of the original manuscripts. However, ensuring the safety of historical materials during the imaging process poses fresh challenges to the conservator although the goal remains the same: ensuring that the collections are protected for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

Left Leaves of an early Qur'an manuscript before conservation. (Or.770)

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Extracts

p. 8. *Correspondence respecting the Murder of Professor E. H. Palmer...*
(London: H.M.S.O., 1883), p. 54.

p. 20. *The Shah nameh of the Persian poet Firdausi*,
by James Atkinson
(London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1832), p. 171.

p. 21. *Poems from the Divan of Hafiz*, translated by Gertrude Lowthian Bell (London: William Heinemann, 1897), p. 118.

p. 23. *The Loves of Laili and Majnun; a Poem from the original Persian of Nizami*, edited by the Rev. J. A. Atkinson
(London: David Nutt, 1894), p. 19.

p. 26. Burckhardt, J. L. *Notes on the Bedouins and Wahabys*
(London: 1830), p. 202.

p. 32. Browne, E. G. *A year amongst the Persians*
(London: A. and C. Black, 1893), p. 1.

Front cover **Miniature painting from Nizami's "Khusraw and Shirin"**
(Add.207 (Lewis collection) f. 76)



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