



EXHIBITION REVIEW

The Art of the Islamic Book from the Leiden University Collections

Eastern Beauty in Reproductions

Last year Leiden University (of the Netherlands) celebrated the 400th anniversary of the study of Oriental languages and cultures. It was in the year 1613 that the chair of Arabic was founded, which makes it one of the oldest in Europe. The reasons for studying Arabic were manifold, from an academic interest in the Arabic language and civilisation and the need for religious dialogue (and dispute) to the fostering of commercial and diplomatic ties.

This tradition continues in a dynamic department of Middle Eastern Studies with an international scholarly standing. A range of BA and MA programmes address a wide variety of topics, both from historical angles and in view of modern developments. Last year the university and the city of Leiden celebrated the history and future of the study of Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies in Leiden with a full programme of activities: museum exhibitions, poetry readings, concerts, scholarly meetings, and tours.

This longstanding tradition in Oriental Studies is, of course, also reflected in the wealth of the library collections at Leiden University. At present, Leiden University holds approximately 4,000 Arabic manuscripts, in addition to 2,000 manuscripts in Persian and Ottoman Turkish. Diplomatic relations of the former Dutch Republic with Morocco (from 1610) and the Ottoman Empire (from 1612) enabled Dutch scholars to travel to the Middle East in search of source materials. Levinus Warner (c. 1618–1665), for example, who was a student of Oriental languages and later became a diplomat, built up an impressive collection of about 1,000 Middle Eastern manuscripts with

the help of local Muslim contacts and friends when he resided in Istanbul from 1645 onwards. Many of these manuscripts originally came from the Mamluk Empire. Warner left his entire collection to Leiden University upon his death in 1665.

The Leiden University Oriental Collections contain many precious items, such as the *Kitab al-Hasha'ish*, an Arabic translation of the *Materia Medica* of the Hellenistic scholar Dioscorides. This manuscript, dated 475 AH/1083 AD, is the oldest extant illustrated Arabic manuscript on a scientific subject.

The exhibition in Ramallah

The beauty of Islamic manuscripts is to a large extent defined by the art of calligraphy, miniatures, and illumination. These three key elements also enrich the Islamic manuscripts of the Special Collections of Leiden University. They give evidence of the unity and diversity of decorative patterns in the Islamic world. In order to enjoy the richness of the decorative arts displayed in these manuscripts without having to travel to Leiden, a selection of reproductions of the most beautiful calligraphy, illustrations, and illumination will be exhibited in Ramallah at Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre from December 4, 2014 till December 20, 2014. These aesthetic highlights in reproductions now temporarily return to the cultural context in which they originated. The selection is divided into five themes: calligraphy, depictions of Mecca and Medina, miniatures from scientific works, and poetry. The fifth theme focuses on floral and geometric designs; ornamental highlights from manuscripts are juxtaposed to comparable ornaments from Islamic architecture, thus showing the strong interrelation between the arts.

EXHIBITION

The art of the Islamic book

معرض كتاب الفن الإسلامي

4 to 20 Dec 2014

Eastern Beauty in Reproductions

Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre
Ramallah

from the Leiden University Collections

FREE ENTRANCE

Universiteit Leiden
Kingdom of the Netherlands