

Levinus Warner and his reading of Islamic Scriptures

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Since November 2020, I have been a PhD fellow at the Biblical Studies Section, Faculty of Theology. Within the Faculty of Theology and the ERC Synergy project ‘The European Qur’an (EuQu)’, I am now writing my PhD dissertation under the supervision of Professor Dr. Jan Loop.

Born in Japan and educated at the University of Tokyo, I have been interested in the intellectual history of early modern Europe. My initial interest in the Bible exegesis in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic led me to a broader landscape of oriental scholarship in early modern Europe. What I found striking at first is that early modern scholars of the Bible were also keen to use the knowledge of Arabic for better understanding the Bible. But as I read existing scholarship and works of orientalist scholars in the early modern period, I was fascinated with the fact that their interest in Arabic was not limited to biblical scholarship. For instance, seventeenth-century orientalist scholars in the Dutch Republic such as Thomas Erpenius (1584-1624) and Jacob Golius (1596-1667) not only engaged with Arabic as an auxiliary to understand the Hebrew Bible (not only through comparison between Hebrew and Arabic,

but also by examining Arabic version of the Bible). They also engaged with the Qur’ān, astronomy, mathematics, geography, history of the Middle Eastern region, Arabic *belles lettres*, specifically Arabic poetry. How did the early modern orientalist scholars in the Dutch Republic pursue these wide variety of topics? What sort of manuscript sources did they use? These questions bring me to my current interest in one of the students of Golius, Levinus Warner (c. 1618-1665). In what follows, I would like to focus on research questions, sources, methods, provisional hypotheses, and implication.

Levinus Warner and his legacy

My PhD project, tentatively titled ‘A man between two worlds: Levinus Warner and his reading of Islamic scriptures’ aims at revealing how Warner read and used ‘Islamic Scriptures’. Under this analytical term ‘Islamic Scriptures’, which has yet to be elaborated, I understand the Qur’ān in the first place, but also commentaries on the Qur’ān (*tafsīr*), the Hadith collections (deed and saying of the Prophet Muḥammad), and the commentary on the Hadith collections.

Levinus Warner, a German-born orientalist scholar and diplomat of the Dutch

Republic to the Ottoman Empire, has been best remembered for his outstanding collection of manuscripts in Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish. Born around 1618 in Lippe, Warner attended the *Athenaeum Illustre* in Bremen from 1636. In 1638, he matriculated at Leiden University. Having studied oriental languages under Jacob Golius and Constantijn L'Empereur (1591-1648), Warner left for Istanbul in the winter 1644. In the Ottoman capital he undertook a diplomatic mission for the Dutch Republic. And there, he collected more than one thousand manuscripts, read them, took notes, and wrote treatises (on Warner's early life, see Arnold Vrolijk, Jan Schmidt, and Karen Scheper, eds., *Turcksche boucken*, 19-37).

Existing literature on the history of oriental scholarship in the early modern Dutch Republic has illustrated Warner's profile as an avid manuscript collector. Two essays by G. W. J. Drewes and P. Sj. van Koningsveld in *Levinus Warner and his Legacy* gave a glimpse into what sort of manuscripts Warner possessed. A more recent exhibition of Warner's collection, *Turcksche boucken* illustrated Warner's activity as the Dutch resident in the Ottoman Empire and manuscript collector in greater detail.

Still, Warner as the orientalist scholar who read and used the sources that were nearly inaccessible to his contemporaries forms a scholarly desideratum. As van Koningsveld once implied, how and for what purpose did he use his own manuscript collection (van Koningsveld, 'Warner's Legacy in the Main Printed Catalogues', in *Levinus Warner and his Legacy*, 43-4)? How should Warner's

scholarship be contextualised in the history of oriental scholarship in early modern Europe and possibly in the Islamicate scholarly tradition? Departing from these research questions in general, my PhD dissertation attempts to approach not only his profile as a diplomat who negotiated with Ottoman officials for the interest of the Dutch Republic or as a manuscript collector, but primarily as an orientalist scholar.

To approach Warner's scholarship, I will first have a look at what Warner left or Warner's *Nachlass*. In fact, together with his collection of more than one thousand manuscripts, his handwritten notebooks were also bequeathed to Leiden University. Warner's *Nachlass* turns out to be a significant source to appreciate his scholarship. Closer inspection of Warner's notebooks tells us of his wide interests. The topics Warner addressed range from Bible exegesis, controversies between Orthodox Judaism and Karaite Judaism, geography, sayings and proverbs in Ottoman Turkish, Arabic poetry, rituals of the Greek Orthodox Church, various customs of the pre-Islamic Arabs and so on.

As has been indicated in existing literature (Vrolijk et al, *Turcksche boucken*, 92), some of Warner's notebooks have been mentioned and edited by eighteenth-century scholars. When Johann Gerardus Lette (1724-1760), one of the students of Albert Schultens (1686-1750), published the edition of *al-Mu'allaqāt* by Imru' al-Qays (d. 554) and its Latin translation in 1747, he extensively made use of Warner's notes. Warner paraphrased *Ġihānnumā* by Kâtib Çelebi (1609-1657), the famous Ottoman polymath,

into Latin, which in turn was referred to by Nicolaas Witsen (1641-1717) in his *Noord en Oost Tartarye* (1st ed., 1692).

Warner and his reading of 'Islamic Scriptures'

And yet, there remain many notebooks that have yet to be explored. Specifically, Warner's interest in Islam and the history of the pre-Islamic Arabs have never been studied closely, although this topic seems to have been of particular interest to him. Within the EuQu project, I would like to focus on his engagement with the pre-Islamic Arabs, one that aims at explaining the historical and cultural contexts in which Islam and the Qur'ān emerged.

The abovementioned research questions in general can be specified as follows: Did Warner's approach to 'Islamic Scriptures' including the Qur'ān and *tafsīr* change after he moved to the Ottoman Empire? How and for what purpose did he read 'Islamic Scriptures'? To what extent could his reading and usage of 'Islamic Scriptures' be distinguished from those of other orientalist European scholars in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? Why was Warner interested in pre-Islamic Arabs and what did he want to demonstrate by looking into their customs?

I address these research questions by examining manuscript notebooks and treatise pertinent to various customs among the pre-Islamic Arabs. Currently, I deal primarily with three manuscript notebooks at Leiden, Universitaire Biblioteken [hereafter: LUB]: Or. 392, Or. 1131, and Or. 1139. So far, I transcribed these manuscripts and identified Warner's sources. Also, by comparing Warn-

er's attempt to that of his contemporaries, I have been trying to situate him in intellectual and historical contexts.

What do Warner's notebooks convey? Two manuscripts at LUB, Or. 392 and Or. 1139 testify to how extensively Warner used the Qur'ān and *tafsīr* of al-Baġawī (d. 1122), *Ma'ālim al-tanzīl*. Warner made excerpts from al-Baġawī's commentary in Arabic (Or. 1139) and translated them into Latin (Or. 392). Although these two notebooks are not well organised, they shed light on which Qur'ānic places Warner chose and how he read these passages.

Another relevant manuscript to my dissertation is Or. 1131, which is entitled *De Rudioribus Saeculis Arabum, Tractatus quo mores illorum ante tempora Muhammedis, describuntur*. In it, Warner discusses various customs and manners of the Arabs in the pre-Islamic period. The topics include, among numerous subjects, inheritance, marriage, religious worships and beliefs, the importance of camel and horses, various forms of idolatry, quarrels among the Arabic tribes and so on.

Or. 1131 also suggests how widely Warner read Arabic manuscript sources: besides the Qur'ān, he frequently refers to Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamaḥṣārī's (d. 1144) *Al-fā'iq fī ġarīb al-ḥadīth*, the lexicographical commentary on the Hadith collection. Other lexicographical works such as Ibn Durayd (d. 933)'s *Ġamhara' l-luġa'* and *Kitāb al-ištiqāq* helped Warner decipher the meaning of Arabic words. Throughout Or. 1131, Warner turned to Arabic poets such as Labīd (d. c. 661), Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī (d. 1057), and al-Mutanabbī (d. 965). I will further try

to reconstruct Warner at work by studying manuscripts of these Arabic works that are now kept at LUB, with an eye on whether Warner left marginal notes.

It is interesting to note that while Warner extensively used the Qur'ān and *Ma'ālim al-tanzīl* in Or. 392 and Or. 1139, in Or. 1131 he relied on other Arabic sources more frequently. This might depend on which topics Warner wanted to address. Some customs might be described more closely in the Qur'ān, while others might be found in Hadith.

In my dissertation, I will examine the following two hypotheses that are derived from my research on the abovementioned manuscripts: 1) Warner read and used the Qur'ān as 'a historical archive' (the notion that Jan Loop has suggested in his articles). By reading the Qur'ān with commentaries, Warner attempted to describe the historical condition in which Islam emerged. At the same time, he does not seem to regard the Qur'ān as the sole source for his historical inquiry. He was

aware of the significance of the Hadith collection and Arabic poetry as the windows onto the historiography of the pre-Islamic Arabs. In short, 2) he relativised the significance of the Qur'ān as 'a historical archive' by paying as much attention to other sources.

I hope that my PhD project will illustrate how Warner acquired numerous manuscripts, tapped into them, took reading notes, and composed treatises. Also, I hope that this project contributes to the appreciation of the long and complicated history of the Qur'ān reception in Europe. Recent scholarship on the Qur'ān reception in early modern Europe has underscored that reading the Qur'ān in this period did not necessarily mean that its readers always attempted to combat with Islam. How Warner's reading of the Qur'ān can be situated in the broader intellectual, theological, and historical contexts of the Qur'ān reception in early modern Europe will be the leitmotiv of my PhD dissertation.

Seminar med Prof. Dr. Ueli Zahnd, Universitetet i Geneve

***A Disregarded Past
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