

Golius and Tychsen and Their Quest for Manuscripts. Three Arabic Letters*

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Abstract

Letters exchanged between early modern Orientalist scholars and their correspondents from the Islamic world are a major source for our knowledge of the networks that facilitated the acquisition of Oriental manuscripts. They are equally important for the study of Arabic epistolography in the period. This contribution adds to the growing corpus with the edition and analysis of three such letters concerning the acquisition of manuscripts. The first two were written by Jacobus Golius (1596–1667) in 1624 and probably 1644, while the third was addressed by Ahmad ‘Azmī, the Ottoman ambassador to Prussia, to Oluf Gerhard Tychsen (1734–1815) in 1791.

Keywords

Jacobus Golius – Oluf Gerhard Tychsen – Orientalism – Arabic letters – manuscript collecting – *Muriğ al-Dahab* – Ahmad ‘Azmī Efendī – Christian Ravius – Niqūlāwus al-Halabī – Apollonius of Perga

Introduction

The purpose of this short contribution is twofold. First, it is to expand the growing corpus of edited letters exchanged between early modern Orientalists and their Arabic-speaking or -writing correspondents.¹ Even 130 years after its

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1 Hilary Kilpatrick, “Arabic Private Correspondence from Seventeenth-Century Syria: The Let-

appearance, the most voluminous edition of such letters remains M.Th. Houtsma's volume *Uit de Oostersche Correspondentie* with selected editions from Leiden Cod. Or. 1228.² In general, letters exchanged between early Orientalist scholars and their correspondents in the East constitute, to date, the single largest body of edited Arabic letters from the Ottoman period at our disposal.

Second, all letters edited and translated below elucidate the far-flung efforts by early modern Orientalists to procure the manuscripts so necessary for their work. Studies that trace these deeply intertwined problems and the routes that manuscripts travelled to scholars or scholars to manuscripts have only recently commenced.³ Yet, the history of early Oriental studies can hardly be under-

ters to Edward Pococke", *The Bodleian Library Record* 23 (2010), pp. 20–40; Hilary Kilpatrick and Gerald J. Toomer, "Niqūlāwus al-Halabī (c. 1611–c. 1661): A Greek Orthodox Syrian Copyist and his Letters to Pococke and Golius", *LIAS. Journal of Early Modern Intellectual Culture and its Sources* 43 (2016), pp. 1–159.

- 2 M.Th. Houtsma, *Uit de Oostersche Correspondentie van Th. Erpenius, Jac. Golius en Lev. Warner*, Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1887. Since this partial publication, a second volume of letters has been found in Manchester (Ms. Persian 913) and its content analyzed by Jan Schmidt, "An Ostrich Egg for Golius. The Heyman Papers Preserved in the Leiden and Manchester University Libraries and Early-Modern Contacts Between the Netherlands and the Middle East", in id., *The Joys of Philology. Studies in Ottoman Literature, History and Orientalism*, vol. 11: *Orientalists, Travellers and Merchants in the Ottoman Empire, Political Relations Between Europe and the Porte*, Istanbul: ISIS, 2002, pp. 9–74.
- 3 John-Paul Ghobrial has recently called, quite rightfully, for a "social history of oriental manuscript collections" that "promises to transform our understanding of orientalism" ("The Archive of Orientalism and its Keepers. Re-imagining the Histories of Arabic Manuscripts in Early Modern Europe", *Past and Present*, Supplement 11 [2016], pp. 90–111, here p. 92); yet, he is unaware of previous scholarship in German. The prefaces of manuscript catalogues have, in general, been the places where information on the history of specific collections can be found. Some substantial earlier contributions are: Jan Just Witkam, *Jacobus Golius en zijn Handschriften*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980; Robert Jones, "Piracy, War, and the Acquisition of Arabic Manuscripts in Renaissance Europe", *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 2 (1987), pp. 96–110; Jan Loop, *Johann Heinrich Hottinger. Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Seventeenth Century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Images of several letters between Orientalist scholars and their correspondents have now been placed online as part of the research project 'Encounters with the Orient in Early Modern European Scholarship (EOS)' of the Warburg Institute, London, showing the exhibition 'Arabs in the West', held at the Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam, June 23–20 September 2016: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/ewto/projects/arabsinthewest/exhibition.html>. For an in-depth study of the nexus of manuscripts, cataloguing and scholarship that covers one collection over several centuries, see the case of Leipzig in Boris Liebrenz, *Arabische, persische und türkische Handschriften in Leipzig. Geschichte ihrer Sammlung und Erschließung von den Anfängen bis zu Karl Vollers*, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitäts-Verlag, 2008.

stood without acknowledging the real obstacles and efforts to procure sources. Aside from the traces of their acquisition found in the manuscript themselves, archival sources and letters in particular are among the most forthcoming in terms of information and have attracted a degree of attention. Requests for books have always played a role in these exchanges. The three documents presented here are a small addition to this corpus. All are Arabic letters, two written by and one addressed to an eminent Arabist in northern Europe.

Two Letters by Jacob Golius

The following letters can be found in a manuscript volume that contains a partial copy, in a European hand, of the universal chronicle *al-Mağmū‘ al-mubārak* by the Coptic author Ğirğis Ibn al-Makīn (602/1206–after 679/1280),⁴ now preserved in Leipzig University Library as ms Vollers 643. They were probably written, according to our analysis, two decades apart.

1 *Letter to a Moroccan Friend (1033/1624)*

The letter found at the end of the book shall be treated here first due to its earlier date. It can also be contextualized with more ease. This letter is dated 16 Rağab 1033/4 May 1624 and was written by Jacob Gool, or Jacobus Golius (1596–1667), when he was a member of a Dutch delegation in Morocco. Golius was part of an embassy sent to Moulay Zaydān (r. 1608–1627), who established his precarious rule of parts of Morocco from his capital Marrakech. He is famous for, not least, being deprived of his precious library, which was transferred to and subsequently partially burnt in the Escorial. This Dutch embassy arrived on the Moroccan coast in December 1622 and left again in June 1624.⁵ For much of that time, Golius and his colleagues were stationed in Safī on the coast, and this is apparently also where this letter was written, the name of the place being rendered here as اسف. The Dutch not only came with some books of their own,⁶ they were also eager to acquire them. The following letter is a testimony to this.

Although a clean copy, this letter was apparently either a draft or never sent at all, as it remained with Golius and returned to Europe with him, and also because it did not receive an address. The letter is directed to one Ibrāhim Ibn al-Ğāli‘ or al-Qāli‘. The paper was folded before being bound into the

4 The date of death given in some Arabic sources as 672/1273 is rejected in modern scholarship.

5 For an account of the embassy see Houtsma, *Uit de Oostersche Correspondentie*, pp. 26–27.

6 Ahmed-Chouqui Binebine, *Histoire des Bibliothèques au Maroc*, Rabat 1992, p. 71.

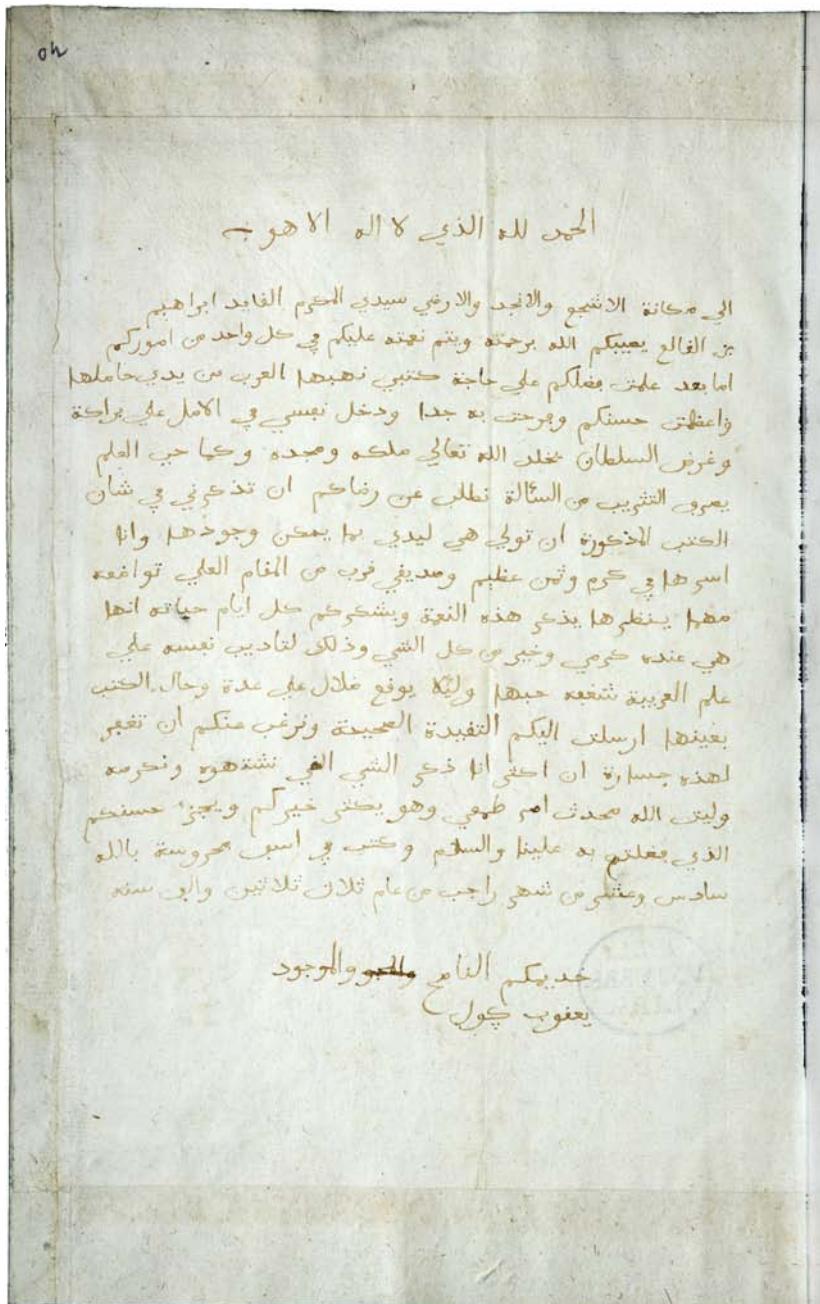


FIGURE 1 University of Leipzig, MS Vollers 643, unfoliated appended leaf: Letter by Jacobus Golius to a friend in Morocco, dated 16 Rajab 1033/4 May 1624 in Safi.

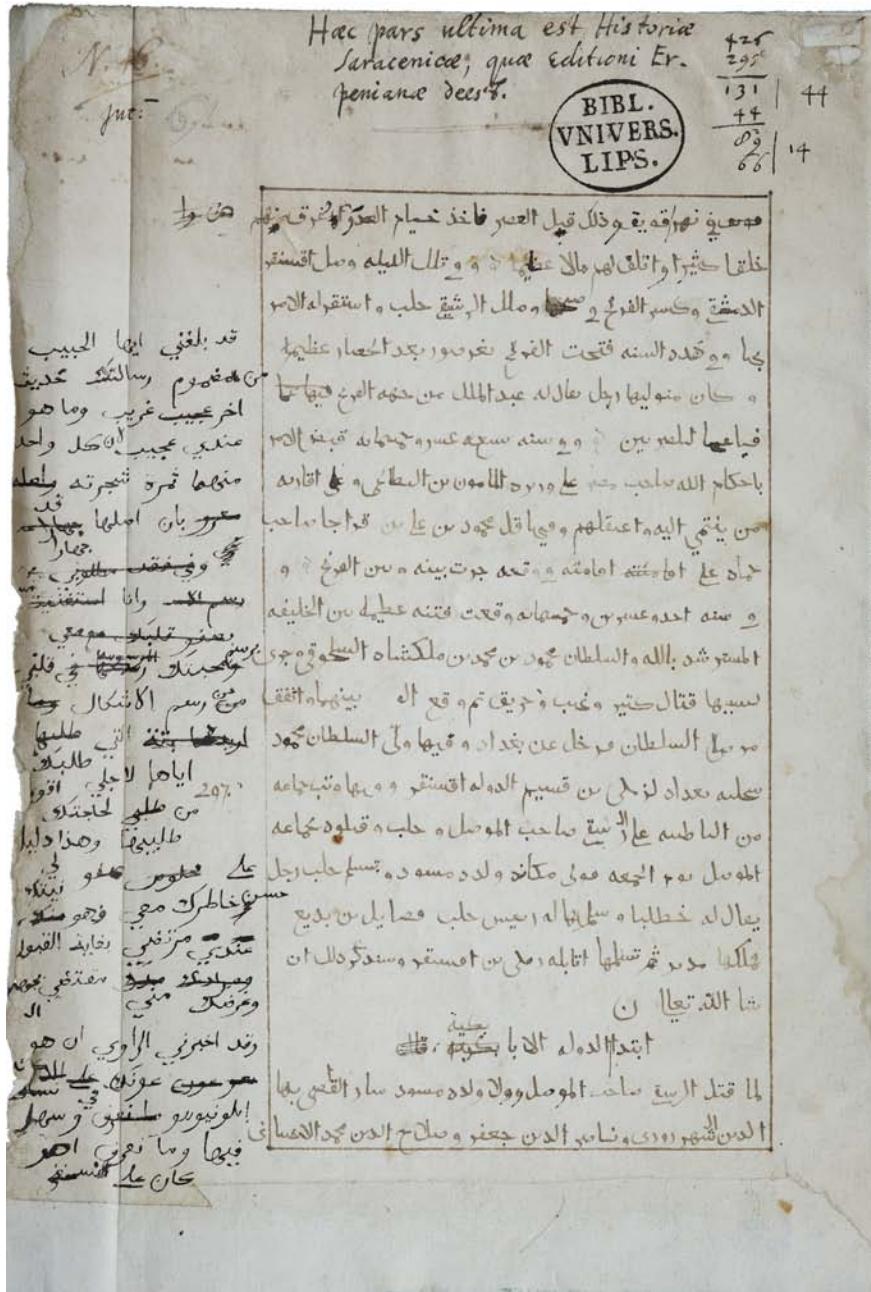


FIGURE 2 University of Leipzig, ms Völler 643, fol. 1r: The margins show the beginning of a draft letter, presumably by Golius to Niqūlāwus al-Ḥalabī, undated, c. 1644.

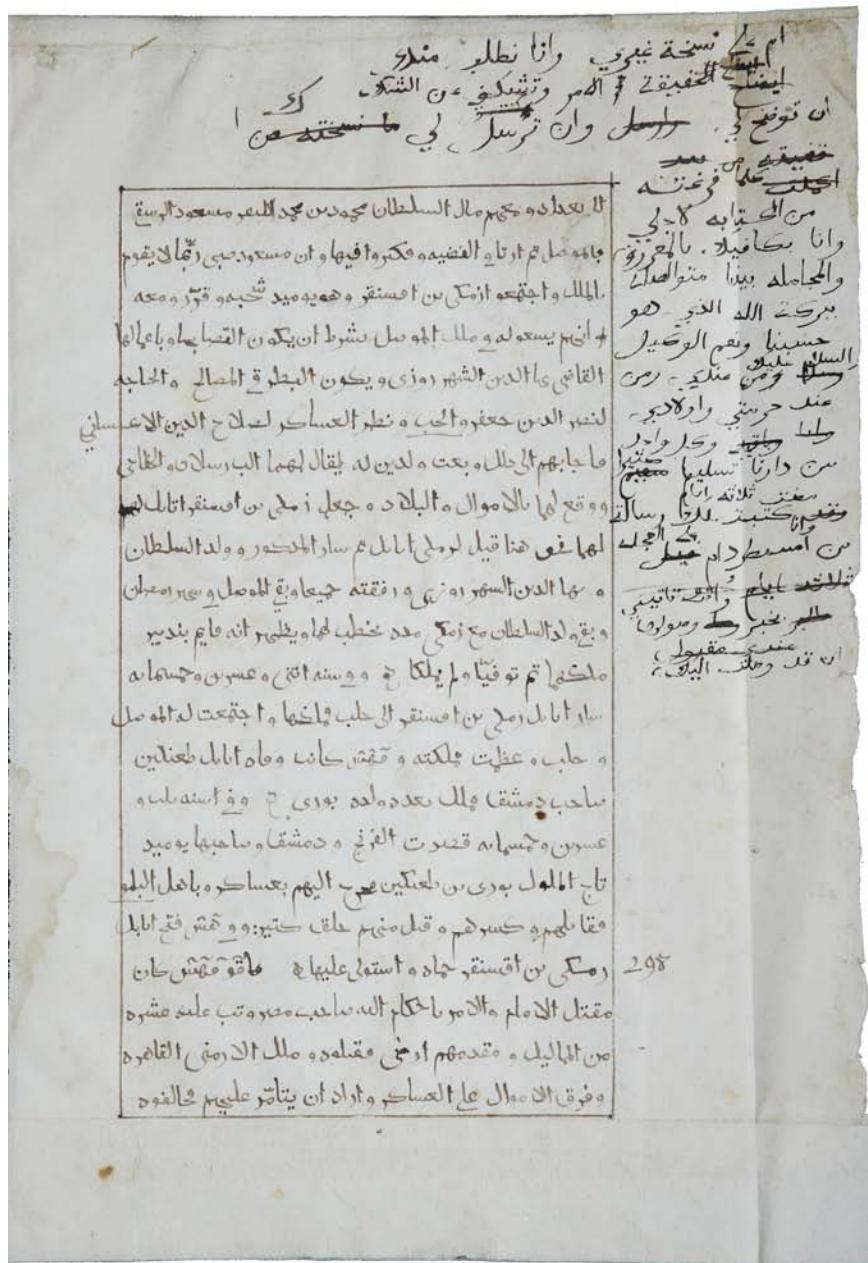


FIGURE 3 University of Leipzig, Ms Vollers 643, fol. 1r: Continuation in the margin of a draft letter, presumably by Golius to Niqūlāwus al-Halabī, undated, c. 1644.

Ibn al-Makīn volume and bears a watermark different from that in the rest of the volume.⁷

Arabic text, Leipzig University Library, ms Vollers 643, unfoliated appendix:

الحمد لله الذي لا اله الا هو
الي مكانة الاشجع والانجب والارضي سيدى المكرم القايد ابراهيم
بن العالم⁸ يصيكم الله برحمته ويتم نعمته عليكم في كل واحد من اموركم
اما بعد علمت فضلكم علي حاجة كتبى نبهها العرب من يدي حاملها
واعظمت حسنكم وفرحت به جدا ودخل نفسي في الامل علي براكة
وغرض السلطان يخلد الله تعالى ملكه ومجده وكما حب العلم
يصرف التثريب من السؤلة نطلب عن رضاكم ان تذكرني في شان
الكتب المذكورة ان تولي هي ليدي بما يمكن وجودها وانا
اسرهافي كرم وثمن عظيم وصديقي قرب من المقام العلي تواضعه
مهما ينظرها يذكر هذه النعمة ويشكركم كل ايام حياته انها
هي عنده كمي وخير من كل الشيء وذلك لتأديب نفسه علي
علم العربية شغفه بها ولثلا يوقع ضلال علي عدة وحال الكتب
بعينها ارسلت اليكم التقيدة الصحيحة ونرحب عنكم ان تغفر
لهذه جسارة ان اكثرانا ذكر الشيء الذي نشتته ونكرمه
وليت الله محدث امر طمعي وهو يكثر خيركم ويجزء حسنكم
الذي فضلتم به علينا والسلام وكتب في اسف محروسة بالله
سادس وعشرين من شهر راجب من عام ثلاثين وalf سنة

خديكم الناصح والمحجو والموجود
يعقوب كبول

⁷ An image of the letter can be accessed here: https://www.islamic-manuscripts.net/rsc/viewer/IslamHSBook_derivate_00002084/vollers_643_111.jpg?x=-2023.1837455830387&y=0&scale=0.161345496009122&rotation=0&layout=singlePageLayout (accessed 10 February 2017).

⁸ Or القالع?

Translation:

Praise be to God, there is no God but He!

To the bravest, the noblest, the most agreeable authority, my Honoured Sir, the leader (*al-qā'id*) Ibrāhīm b. al-Ġāli^c / al-Qāli^c, may God bestow his mercy on you and complete his benevolence towards you in all your affairs! Next, I informed you about the issue of my books that the Arabs/Bedouin robbed from the hands of their carrier. I praised your goodness and rejoiced greatly from it and my soul started to feel hope for the blessing and intention of the Sultan—may God the exalted prolong his reign and glory. And as the love of knowledge diverts the blame for such a question, we ask from your good will that you think of me in the affair of the aforementioned books, that you pass them on to me if they can be found. I hold them in high esteem and value them at a high price. My friend is close to the exalted place (i.e. the Sultan) [...] wherever he sees them he remembers / mentions this benevolence and thanks you every day of his life, for they [the books] are for him nobler and better than anything. This is because of his inclination to the study of Arabic and his passion is the love of it [Arabic]. And so that no error occurs concerning the number and state of the books, I send you the correct register. We wish from you that you can excuse this boldness, that I speak so much of the thing we crave and esteem. Would that God gives what I desire and that he multiplies your virtue and rewards your goodness that you gave us in abundance. Peace! Written in Sfi [= Safi],⁹ protected by God, on the 16th of the month of Raġab in the year 1033.

Your sincere and ever-present servant
Jacob Gool.

Two other letters, addressed to Golius by Aḥmad b. Qāsim al-Andalusī (c. 1570–after 1640), help us understand the context of the present piece. From them, we learn that among the stolen books in question was al-Mas'ūdī's *Muruğ al-dahab*. A first letter, sent from Marrakech to Safi and dated 12 Rabi' II 1033/2 February 1624, mentions the *Muruğ al-dahab* as the possible source for some information.¹⁰ The second letter was sent one month later, on 10 Ġumādā

⁹ As Jan Just Witkam points out, the *alif* merely indicates that there is a cluster of two consonants at the beginning of the word.

¹⁰ Manchester, John Rylands Library, Ms. Persian 913, fol. 169 (no. 57); see for edition and

I 1033/29 February 1624, and mentions the loss of the *Muruğ*.¹¹ It has been suggested that a volume of the work among Golius' manuscripts (Leiden Or. 127) can be identified with the one lamented here and that his quest to retrieve it from the "Arabs" was, thus, successful. This has since been disproved.¹² Our letter was penned by Golius yet another month later, on 16 Rağab (here: راجب) 1033/4 June 1624. It reveals several new aspects in this incident. First, the stolen shipment actually consisted of many books and, in order to identify them, Golius sent a register containing their "number and state" (*idda wa-hāl*). Furthermore, not all of the books seem to have been destined for Golius; they were equally anticipated by an unknown "friend" (*ṣadīqī*) close to the *maqām al-‘alī*, probably the Sultan, but also quite possibly a person of high standing back in the Netherlands. In any case, this person is described as an enthusiastic student of the Arabic language and therefore probably also a European. And although the above translation provides a different interpretation, the syntactic ambiguity of the letter makes it even possible to reason that the passage on the love of Arabic could refer to Golius himself. Finally, we learn that the Dutchman cast his net of indigenous contacts wider than previously known in order to retrieve his precious books. But who was the addressee Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Ğāli'/Qāli'? Could he be the enigmatic physician (*al-ṭabīb*) mentioned by Ahmād b. Qāsim as owner of the *Kitāb al-Musta‘īnī* and possibly also the *Muruğ al-dahab*? His appellation with the title of a "leader" (*qā’id*) would make a military or administrative position more likely.

As already mentioned, this letter was later bound as an appendix into a partial copy of Ibn al-Makīn's chronicle. Golius would clearly have an interest in this text since his teacher, Thomas Erpenius (1584–1624), prepared an edition of the work that was to be completed posthumously in 1625 by Golius himself. Can we, thus, connect Vollers 643 to this edition of al-Makīn?¹³ And did it have anything to do with Golius' stay in Morocco, as the letter suggests? Did

translation Jan Just Witkam, "The Leiden Manuscript of the *Kitāb al-Musta‘īnī*", in *Ibn Baklarish's Book of Simples. Medical Remedies Between Three Faiths in Twelfth-Century Spain*, ed. Charles Burnett, London: The Arcadian Library in association with Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 75–94, here p. 78.

¹¹ Houtsma, *Uit de Oostersche Correspondentie*, no. v, p. 24; Witkam, "The Leiden Manuscript", pp. 79–80.

¹² Cf. Witkam, "The Leiden Manuscript", pp. 78–79, note 11.

¹³ *Tārīḥ al-muslimīn min ṣāḥib ṣarī‘at al-islām Abī l-Qāsim Muḥammad ilā l-dawla al-ata'bīkīya idest, Historia Saracenica, qua res gestae Muslimorum, inde a Muhammedo primo Imperij & Religionis Muslimicae auctore, usque ad initium Imperij Atabacei*, Leiden: Ex Typographia Erpeniana, 1625.

Vollers 643 once form part of his library or was the letter only attached to it at a later stage? Karl Vollers, who produced the catalogue of Oriental manuscripts preserved at Leipzig University Library, clearly thought so when he speculated that the copyist was “probably J.H.H. Hottinger.”¹⁴ But the Arabic text of the chronicle is written by different hands and the scribe appears to change after folio 12, corresponding with a lacuna in the text. While it is likely that Vollers 643 was produced only after the edition of 1625, of which it is not a part, the grammatical and orthographic mistakes suggest that it is the work of a novice. Overall, the text is clumsily written and full of misreadings. Maybe Golius did not have the chance to have it included in the edition of 1625 and retained it for the second edition he was planning to publish?

2 *Letter to Niqūlāwus al-Ḥalabī*

A possible clue rests in the margins of the first folio. Unrecognized by subsequent cataloguers, the recto and verso sides of that first leaf together contain the draft of yet another Arabic letter with many corrections. While it is anonymous, the writer can be identified as someone who struggles to find the right Arabic phrasing, who was based in the Netherlands, as is evident from the phrase “three days have passed since I wrote a letter to you from Amsterdam in haste” (مضت ثلاثة أيام وانا كتبت لك رسالة من امستردام على العجل), and who was with his wife and children (*hurmatī wa-awlādī*), whom the correspondent also knew. Could this be Golius? The script is very different from the one exhibited in the Moroccan letter, more round and left-leaning. Then again, this is not only a hastily written marginal note, it might also show a development progressing from the hand of a young inexperienced man to that of a frequent writer of Arabic.

The letter answers a previous one received from the addressee, but the allusions to its content are nebulous, probably referring to “strange” facts (*hadīt āhir ḡarīb*) of two persons that are described as “chips off the same block” (*kull wāhid minhumā tamrat šaġarathī*), which makes the news about them less unexpected on the writer’s part. While much of the text is concerned with greetings and thanks, one passage seems to indicate that the two correspondents were involved in an exchange about scientific manuscripts that the addressee is producing for the writer. The latter mentions confusion about what had been written in his own or another manuscript (*mā na’rif aḥad kāna*

¹⁴ Karl Vollers, *Katalog der islamischen, christlich-orientalischen, jüdischen und samaritanischen Handschriften der Universitäts-Bibliothek zu Leipzig*, Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1906, p. 202: “wahrscheinlich von J.H.H. Hottinger”.

‘alā nushatī am ‘alā nushat ḡairī). He also asks about the “drawing of figures” (*rasm al-aškāl*) and wishes his correspondent to send him what he has already finished transcribing (*wa-an tursila lī kullamā faraḡtahu min al-kitāba*). One name, Abulūnīyūs (ابلونيوس), is mentioned here, so the work in question would be by the Greek mathematician Apollonius of Perga. One of the few surviving manuscripts of this author’s *Conics* (*al-Maḥrūṭāt*) was acquired by Golius in Aleppo and later held at the Bodleian Library in Oxford (MS Marsh 607). He also had a working copy made from this precious manuscript by an Aleppan scribe, al-Darwīš Aḥmad.¹⁵ But this was only one of several translations of this text into Arabic and a different version of the *Conics* was preserved in a manuscript in the possession of Christianus Ravius (Christian Rau, 1613–1677; the copy now preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms.Thurston 3), who visited the Netherlands on several occasions. Golius did indeed correspond and later worked closely with one Arabic copyist in the service of Ravius, Niqūlāwus al-Ḥalabī, who frequently mentions Apollonius’ *Conics* in his correspondence with Edward Pococke as well as with Golius, and who eventually copied the work (now preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Marsh 207 and 208).¹⁶ This allows us to identify a person that could misleadingly be translated as “the narrator” (*al-rāwī*), mentioned in this letter as the one who informed the sender about the Apollonius manuscript (*wa-qad aḥbaranī al-Rāwī*), none other than Christianus Ravius. And since the sender seems to possess a manuscript of Apollonius’ work (*nushatī*) and only one copy in Italy seems to have been present in Europe at the time, besides those possessed by Golius and Ravius, the circle of possible candidates is extremely small. This makes a very strong case for Golius as the writer of this letter and possessor of the Leipzig manuscript in which it is preserved. The letter is undated, but greetings from the writer’s wife and children suggest that the addressee was familiar with them. Niqūlāwus lived with Golius in Leiden in 1643–1644 before returning to Ravius, and the familiarity expressed in these greetings suggests a later date. Indeed, the copying of Apollonius’ work was mostly done after Niqūlāwus’ return to Ravius in Utrecht in 1644.¹⁷

¹⁵ Cf. the meticulous description of the manuscript, now Leiden Or. 14(1), in Jan Just Witkam, *Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts of the Library of the University of Leiden*, vol. 1: *Manuscripts Or. 1—Or. 1000*, Leiden: Ter Lugt Press, 2007, pp. 19–21.

¹⁶ Kilpatrick / Toomer, *A Greek Orthodox Syrian Copyist*, pp. 23–24, 52.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 82–83.

Arabic text, Leipzig University Library, MS Vollers 643,¹⁸ fol. 1^{r-v}:

قد بلغني ايه الحبيب / من مضموم رسالتك حديث / اخر عجيب غريب وما هو / عندي عجيب
لان كل واحد / منها ثمرة شجرته واما / معروبان اصلها جهارا قد [محى] وفي فقد
مطلوبين من / رسم الامر وانا استغنىت منه / بصفوفك مع معي / (رسم) ومحبتك الموسوية ...
في قلبي / من (عن) رسم الاشكال وما / اريده سائبة التي طلبها / ايها لا جلي اقوى / من طلبي
لحاجتك / طلبها وهذا دليل / على خلوص صفو نيتك لي / حسن خاطرك معي و هو متلك
/ عندي مرتضى بغایة القبول / ومرادك وغرضك [مدك] مبني مقتضى بجهد / وقد اخبرني
الراوي ان هو / يعرفون عنك على الدك[...].ن / ابلونيوس ما نعرف (في) وسهل (نسا.[...]) /
فيها وما نعرف احد / كان على نسختي [اظ] ام على نسخة غيري وانا نطلب منك / ليضاح
ليضاح الىحقيقة الامر وتشكك كشف عن الشك / ان توضح لي وارسل وان ترسل لي ما
نسخته من / قضيته من / اعملت كلما فرغته / من الكتابة لا جلي / وانا بكافيك بالمعروف /
والجاملة بینا متواصله
ببركة الله الذي هو / حسبنا ونعم الوکيل / وسلام وسلام عليك ومن عندي ومن / عند
حزمي او لادي / ولنا وباقيه وكل واحد / من دارنا تسليما (سعيم) كثيرا / مضت ثلاثة ايام
/ وقد وانا كتب لك رسالة / من امسطردام قبل على العجل / ثلاثة ايام واتت وتأتيني / الجم
بنخبر وصله وصولها / عندي مقبول / ان قد وصلت اليك

Later, the manuscript with the text by Ibn al-Makīn was seen by Johannes Andreas Michael Nagel (1710–1788), professor of Oriental languages in Altdorf, who put his impressions of it into a German letter to the book's unnamed owner.¹⁹ Not using Latin in the 18th century could very well show that the volume's owner at this point was German-speaking.

¹⁸ Vollers, *Katalog*, p. 202. The manuscript is also available in the online catalogue of Oriental manuscripts from Leipzig University Library: https://www.islamic-manuscripts.net/receive/IslamHSBook_islamhs_00003064.

¹⁹ A letter appended to the manuscript with a needle, and which is now absent from the digitized presentation, mentions the letter by Golius: "Venerande Dom. Senior, [...] Es ist aber das Buch auch am Ende nicht gantz. Auf letzter Seite stehet ein Concepto, od[er] eine Abschrift, eines Arabischen Briefes, den d. berühmte Professor, Jacob Golius, auf seiner Reise, in Mauritanien, geschrieben hat. Er schreibt darinnen an etliche gute Freunde, deren aber [unreadable, B.L.] ist, und bedankt sich bei ihnen, daß sie sich wegen des Buches so ihm gestohlen worden sey, hätten Mühe geben wollen, und bittet sie, sie

A Letter from Ahmed 'Azmī Efendi to Oluf Gerhard Tychsen (1205/1791)

Though little has been written about Oluf Gerhard Tychsen (1734–1815), the professor of Oriental languages, first in Bützow then at the University of Rostock, was a central figure in late-18th century Oriental studies and beyond, with a wide-ranging correspondence.²⁰ In his time, Tychsen's expertise was sought all over Europe whenever Arabic inscriptions on coins,²¹ manuscripts²² or Islamic textiles²³ were concerned. But contrary to the letters of Golius, those

möchten ferner daran seyn, daß er es wieder bekäme. Den gedruckten Elmacin, bitte ich mir ergebenst auf einige Tage zu lassen, weil ich solches zu meiner Inaugural Disputation, woran ich schreibe, nothwendig brauche. Vale. | Venerandi Nom. Tvi | Studiosiss. Observantiss.q. | Ioh. Andr. Mich. Nagel | L.L.O.O. Prof. in Univers. Altorfi[ana]"

- ²⁰ A major source remains Anton Theodor Hartmann, *Oluf Gerhard Tychsen oder Wanderungen durch die mannigfaltigsten Gebiete der biblisch-asiatischen Literatur*, 111 vols. Bremen: Heyse, 1818–1820. A conference recently held in Rostock promises to shed more light on Tychsen's scholarship: *Der Rostocker Gelehrte Oluf Gerhard Tychsen (1734–1815) und seine internationalen Netzwerke*, 25–27 November 2015, University of Rostock. The proceedings of this conference are in an advanced state of preparation (personal communication from Prof. Arianna D'Ottone Rambach to Jan Just Witkam, 15 February 2017).
- ²¹ Modern scholarship has devoted most of its sparse attention to Tychsen's pioneering work in the field of Islamic numismatics, cf. Niklot Klüsendorf, "Rostock als Standort der orientalischen Numismatik" in *Islamische Numismatik in Deutschland. Eine Bestandsaufnahme*, ed. Stefan Heidemann, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000, pp. 27–45, especially pp. 28–31.
- ²² Despite all his scholarship, Tychsen was easily duped by the Maltese counterfeiter and hoaxter Father Giuseppe Vella (1749–1814), see Jan Just Witkam, "The Oriental Manuscripts in the Juynboll Family Library in Leiden", *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 3 (2012), pp. 20–102, here pp. 68–75; id., *Dolcezze Siciliane. Les fraudes utiles de l'abbé Giuseppe Vella*, 2013 <http://www.islamicmanuscripts.info/files/Vella-falsifications-longue-version-avec-resume.pdf> (accessed February 15, 2017); Thomas Freller, *Magier, Fälscher, Abenteurer: Cagliostro, Vella, Saint-Germain*, Düsseldorf: Artemis & Winkler, 2006, pp. 240–242, 247–248.
- ²³ Tychsen assisted in deciphering the Arabic script on the imperial insignia in Nuremberg, cf. C.F. von Murr, "Erläuterung der arabischen Umschrift, welche in goldenen karmatischen Schriftzügen auf den untern Saum des kaiserlichen Mantels gestickt ist, der in Nürnberg unter den Reichsinsignien aufbewahret wird; nebst Herrn Hofraths Tychsen neuer Dechiffrirung derselben", *Journal zur Kunstgeschichte und zur allgemeinen Litteratur*, 10. Theil (1781), pp. 318–374; Tychsen was also approached from as far away as Palermo when the burial chamber of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (d. 1251) was opened in 1781 to identify the Arabic inscription on the burial shroud, cf. Francesco Daniele, *I regali sepolti del duomo di Palermo riconosciuti e illustrati*, Naples: Stampa del Re, 1784, pp. 103–104.

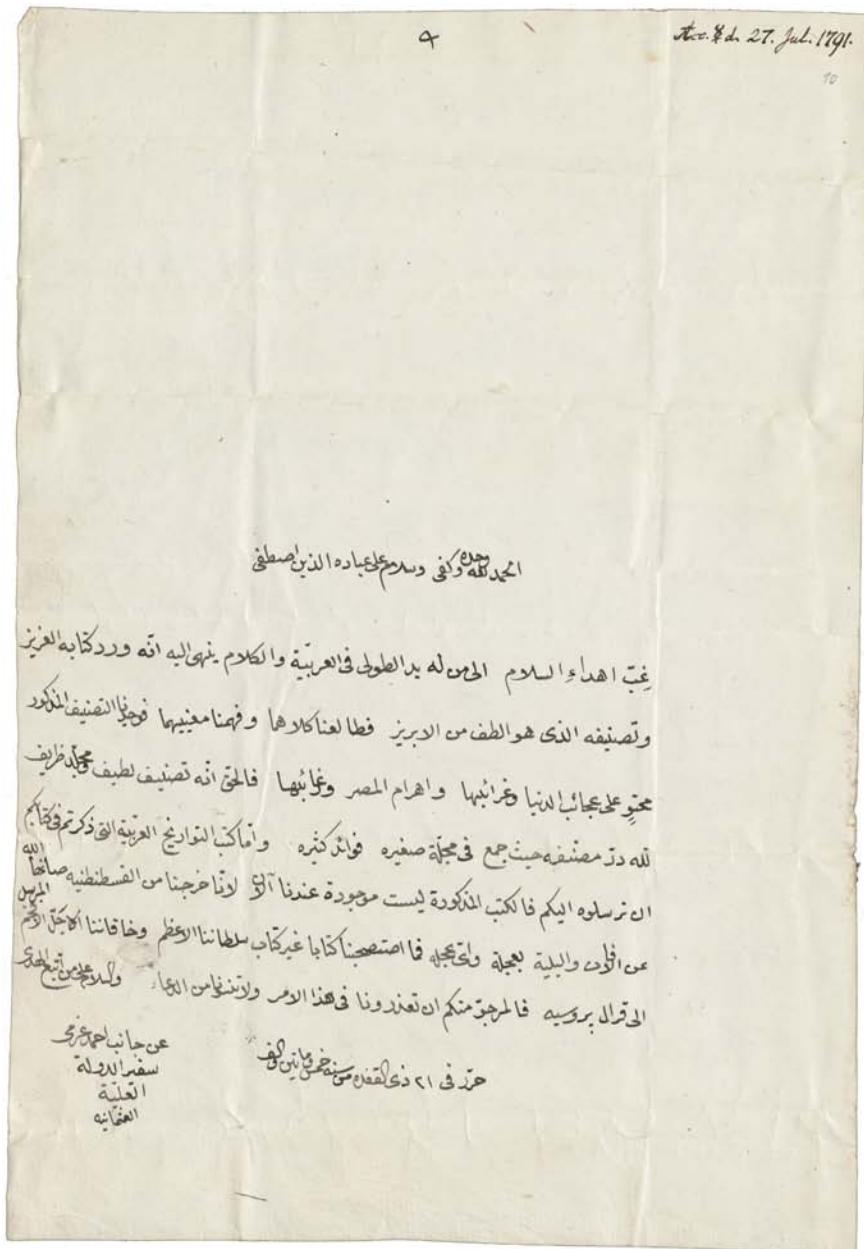


FIGURE 4 Rostock University Library, MSS. orient. 211(2), fol. 10r: Letter by Ahmad Azmī Efendi, Ottoman ambassador to Prussia, to Oluf Gerhard Tychsen, dated 21 Dū al-Qa'da 1205/22 July 1791.

FIGURE 5 *Rostock University Library, MSS. orient. 211(2), fol. 10v, detail: Address of the letter by Ahmad ʻAzmī Efendi, Ottoman ambassador to Prussia, to Oluf Gerhard Tychsen, dated 21 Dū al-Qaʼda 1205/22 July 1791.*

of Tychsen have received little attention to date. A recent project to catalogue and digitize his estate is poised to change that²⁴ and brought to light the following letter, preserved in Rostock University Library.

The letter was sent by Ahmād ‘Azmī (d. 1821), who acted as Ottoman ambassador to Berlin in 1790–1792, after his departure from Constantinople on 21 Dūl-Qa‘da 1205/22 July 1791 and received in Rostock a mere six days later, on 27 July 1791.²⁵ Since the embassy had departed already in November 1790 to arrive in Berlin in February 1791, where it would stay until January 1792, the letter was probably sent from the Prussian capital. Tychsen is addressed as *mu'allim*, the university is called *madrasa*, and the address features what could be the first rendering of the names Mecklenburg (روستوق) and Rostock (ميقلنبرغ) into Arabic.

²⁴ http://www.ub.uni-rostock.de/ub/xDLib/tychsen_xde.shtml (accessed February 10, 2017). I thank Prof. Kristina Richardson (New York) for alerting me to this important initiative.

²⁵ Aksan, Virginia H., "Ahmed Azmi Efendi", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 3, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson, online edition http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_SIM_oo89 (accessed 11 February 2017).

From this text, it becomes apparent that Tychsen had written to the ambassador before and that this communication had been accompanied by one of Tychsen's own publications (*taṣnīfuhu*), which Ahmād ‘Azmī praises in the highest terms. It is also apparent that he had requested “Arabic history-books” (*kutub al-tawārīḥ al-‘arabiyya*). But his previous letter had not reached Ahmād ‘Azmī in time and the ambassador therefore did not find the titles in question as he had already left Constantinople in a hurry. This would suggest that the letter was addressed to Constantinople. As the dating suggests, the ambassador had already been in Prussia at this point for some time, so Tychsen's previous letter would have been unusually retarded. Whether Tychsen followed up on this correspondence later and obtained the books he wished for is not known. But it is interesting to note that this was not the first time this scholar tried to reach out to an Ottoman ambassador. Already sometime before 1766, he addressed one ambassador “Achmed Efendi” in a Turkish letter to Berlin (later published by him in German translation),²⁶ albeit without receiving a response. Embassies from Constantinople might thus have been a routine target of Tychsen's inquiries.

Arabic text, Rostock University Library, MSS. orient. 211(2), fol. 10r-v:

بعد وصوله الى بلد ميقلنبورغ يصل
الى يد اولوف كيرهارد طيكسن معلم
مدرسة روسطوق مرسله

Acc. [.] d. 27. Jul. 1791

الحمد لله وحده وكفى وسلام على عباده الذين اصطفى²⁷

غَبّ اهداه السلام الى من له يد الطولي في العربية والكلام ينْهى اليه انّه ورد كاتبه العزيز

²⁶ Oluf Gerhard Tychsen, “Uebersetzung eines Briefes an den Türkischen Abgesandten Achmed Efendi”, *Bützowische Nebenstunden, verschiedenen zur morgenländischen Gelehrsamkeit gehörigen mehrentheils ungedruckten Sachen gewidmet*, Erster Theil, Bützow / Rostock, 1766, pp. 37–40. I thank Małgorzata Maksymiak (Berlin) for alerting me to this reference and also providing me with a scan.

²⁷ Qur’ān 27:59.

وتصنيفه الذي هو الطف من الا بريز فطالعنا كلامها وفهمنا معنיהםا فوجدنا التصنيف
المذكور

محتوي على عجائب الدنيا وغرائبها واهرام مصر وراغبها فالحق انه تصنيف لطيف ومجلد
ظرفيف

الله در مصنفه حيث جمع في مجلدة صغيرة فوائد كثيرة وأما كتب التواريخ العربية التي ذكرتم
في كتابكم

ان رسلاوه اليكم فالكتب المذكورة ليست موجودة عندنا الان لأننا خرجنا من القسطنطينية
صانها الله

عن الافتات والليلة بعجلة واي عجله فما استصحبنا كتابا غير كتاب سلطانا الاعظم وخاقانا
الاجل الانفخ المرسل

إلى قرال پروسية فالمرجو منكم ان تعذرؤنا في هذا الامر ولا تنسونا من الدعاء والسلام على
من اتبع المهدى²⁸

حرر في ٢١ ذي القعده من سنة خمس و مائتين و الف

عن جانب احمد عزمي
سفير الدولة
العلية
العثمانية

Translation:

After its arrival in the land of Mecklenburg it shall be delivered
to the hand of Oluf Gerhard Tychsen, professor
at the University of Rostock, without delay.

Acc. [.] d. 27. Jul. 1791

²⁸ Qur'an 20:47; from the earliest surviving examples of Arabic letters on papyrus, this phrase was used by Muslim officials when conferring with non-Muslim correspondents.

Praise be to God, the one and sufficient, and peace upon His servants whom He has chosen!

After conferring peace to him who has a sure footing in the Arabic language and rhetoric, let it be known to him that his esteemed letter arrived as well as his work that is more delicate than pure gold. We read them both and understood both their content. We found the aforementioned work full of the wonders and marvels of the world, the pyramids of Egypt and what is desired in them. It truly is a precious work and an elegant volume. By God, how excellent is its author as he collects in a small volume so much useful information. As for the Arabic history books that you mentioned in your letter to send them to you, these books aren't found with us now because we departed from Constantinople—may God protect her from misfortunes and calamity—in a hurry—and quite a hurry!—and did not bring any writing other than the letter of our most mighty Sultan, our most revered and most magnificent Emperor that was sent to the King of Prussia. We hope that you forgive us in this case and do not forget us in your prayers! Peace upon those who follow the guidance!

Given 21 Dū al-Qa‘da in the year 1205.

From Ahmād ‘Azmī, Ambassador of the exalted Ottoman state.

Conclusion

The three letters presented here underline the potential that the correspondence of early modern Orientalists holds for the study of their work. They also show contacts and exchanges of an intellectual nature between European and Middle Eastern intellectuals and dignitaries rarely acknowledged by either side. The first letter shows the vagaries of the earliest attempts to build systematic collections of Oriental manuscript sources, when precious acquisitions could be lost to robbers, pirates or other disasters on the precarious journey home. The second letter shows a scholar's attempts to consult a text in a world without electronic means of reproduction and where many precious items were not in public institutions but in private hands. It also shows the prime importance of editing these letters, as this fragment could not have been satisfactorily identified if not for the previous works of Houtsma, Kilpatrick and Toomer. And the third letter allows us to see the networking strategies of

a scholar in a backwater province on the Baltic sea seeking to get his hands on manuscripts from the Ottoman realm. Great efforts still need to be exerted to make full use of the vast archive of Orientalist correspondence. This archive hints at a large body of work that often did not result in neat publications, but rather exists in manuscripts, drafts and letters. Frequently, as our letters show, these efforts were cut short by the inability to attain the desired manuscripts.

Addendum

Subsequent to the completion of this article and the pre-print process, a conference devoted to Oluf Gerhard Tychsen, held in Rostock,²⁹ brought to light some interesting new discoveries that add significantly to the context and understanding of the letter edited here. I had been unable to identify the work ‘Azmī Efendī mentioned having received from Tychsen. This work raised the question of which language it would have been written in for the ambassador to understand it and praise its language. I was not aware of Tychsen having authored a work in Arabic or Ottoman prior to 1791, the date of the ambassador’s response. During the Rostock conference, Sabine Mangold (Cologne) directed me towards an Arabic dialogue Tychsen had composed by himself for a combined Arabic grammar and chrestomathy, the *Elementale Arabicum*.³⁰ Published in 1792, I had not considered it to be one of the works sent to ‘Azmī Efendī. Yet, upon reviewing the work, I found contained in the preface both Tychsen’s initial letter and the ambassador’s response (spelled here ‘Asmir Ahmed Efendi’, p. v).³¹

I had previously thought of the Egyptian pyramids (*ahrām al-Miṣr*) evoked by ‘Azmī as mere rhetorical devices, a continuation of the curiosities (*‘aḡā’ib*) that started the praise—and clearly they are. But they also refer to the subject of the text Tychsen had sent and that is now confirmed to be part of the *Elementale Arabicum*; namely, a discussion between a professor at the University

²⁹ Korrespondenzen und Nachlässe um 1800—Erschließung, digitale Edition und wissenschaftliche Auswertung, 22–23 May 2017, University of Rostock.

³⁰ *Elementale Arabicvm sistens L.A. Elementa, Catalecta maximam partem Anecdota, et Glossarium*, Rostock: Ex Officina Libraria Koppiiana, 1792. The story of this peculiar publication and of the exchange with the Ottoman ambassador is given in Anton Theodor Hartmann, *Oluf Gerhard Tychsen oder Wanderungen durch die mannigfaltigsten Gebiete der biblisch-asiatischen Literatur*, vol. II, part 1, Bremen: Johann Georg Heyse, 1818, pp. 354–358.

³¹ Tychsen, *Elementale Arabicum*, pp. vi–ix.

of Rostock (named only with the letter ط, for طیکسن) and a guest from the East ('aduenam ex oriente', named with the letter ن, for the traveller Carsten Niebuhr) about Rostock, its university and, most importantly, the nature of the Egyptian pyramids and the ruins of Persepolis.

A colleague of Tychsen's at the University of Bützow had declared the ruins of Persepolis, the cuneiform script found there and publicized by Carsten Niebuhr, and the pyramids of Egypt, natural phenomena,³² a position that Tychsen starkly opposed and which resulted in a lively exchange of letters with Carsten Niebuhr. He would later express his opinion in a Latin work,³³ but his initial public stance seems to have been this Arabic dialogue.

Besides its content, this dialogue is curious for its use of several elements of colloquial Arabic. In light of this, the ambassador's assertion regarding the high quality of Tychsen's language and style seem to be more courtesy than conviction. Yet, it was to play a surprising role after the ambassador's return. Tychsen included 'Azmī's letter, with or without his knowledge, in the preface of the final publication, using the Ottoman statesman as an expert witness to his own assumed—yet dubitable—competence as an Arabist.

Other previously open questions can also be answered through this text. The date of Tychsen's first letter is 13 Dū l-Qa'da 1205, thus eight days before the date of the response, and it was sent to Berlin. The answer, too, was sent from the Prussian capital. The ambassador was urged by Tychsen to use the postal system ('alā yaday al-barīd al-ladī yağī min Rūstūq ilā Barlin);³⁴ yet, the letters were sent by a personal courier, one Oberconsistorialrath Silberschlag, while the Arabic work was handed to the ambassador by the former Prussian ambassador to Constantinople, Heinrich Friedrich von Diez (1751–1817).³⁵ And the peculiar spellings of the names of people and places are not 'Azmī Efendi's renderings of what he heard or read, but are taken from Tychsen's original letter and the dialogue.

32 Samuel Simon Witte, *Ueber den Ursprung der Pyramiden in Egypten und der Ruinen von Persepolis*, Leipzig: Müller, 1789.

33 *De cuneatis inscriptionibus Persepolitanis Lucubratio*, Rostock: Officina Libraria Stilleriana, 1798.

34 Tychsen, *Elementale Arabicum*, p. vi.

35 Hartmann, *Olfur Gerhard Tychsen*, vol. II, part 1, pp. 354–355.

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