

THE MANUSCRIPTS OF THOMAS ERPENIUS

By J. C. T. Oates

My subject is a collection of manuscripts written in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Syriac, Hebrew, Coptic, Javanese, and Malay; and I bring to it a mind quite unclouded by any knowledge of any of those tongues. I make this confession not because I have any objection to being thought more learned than I am, but because some of you certainly understand some of those languages, and would quickly perceive that I do not; and if I were discovered affecting to understand those things which I do not understand, you might perhaps go on to infer that I also do not understand those things which I think I do understand. And so my last state would be worse than my first.

These manuscripts were collected by Thomas van Erpe, commonly called Thomas Erpenius, professor of oriental languages at the university of Leyden, who died of the plague on 13 November 1624, a few weeks after his fortieth birthday. He possessed, as well as manuscripts, a library of printed books and a press which he had equipped at his own expense for the production of oriental texts.

I shall begin by stating in outline what happened to Erpenius's manuscripts after his death. I shall then cite a number of learned authorities in support of my statement of these facts, and to show that it is inconceivable that they should ever have been ignored, forgotten, or misunderstood. I shall then cite other authorities, equally learned, to show that they have nevertheless been misunderstood, forgotten and ignored. And I shall end by trying to reconstruct the facts in greater detail. My method will necessarily entail some repetition, and this I hope you will forgive.

Erpenius, then, died on 13 November 1624. Two days later Gerardus Johannes Vossius delivered in the theological lecture-hall of Leyden University a funeral oration in honour of his dead colleague, describing in moving words his life and his life's work, and the projects of his printing-press left uncompleted by his untimely death. This oration, *Oratio in obitum clarissimi ac praestantissimi viri Thomae Erpenii*, was published *ex officina Erpeniana* in 1625, and to it were added a number of funerary verses and a catalogue of Erpenius's books, both manuscript and printed. This collection of verses, *Petri Scriverii Manes Erpeniani*. *Quibus accedunt Epicedia variorum*, has its own title-page and collation, A-F^r, the catalogue of Erpenius's library beginning on El recto beneath its own drop-title and occupying sheets E and F; but the title-page of the *Oratio* makes it clear that the *Oratio* and the *Manes* form one publication, though in two parts: *Accedunt Funebria amicorum Carmina*. *Item Catalogus librorum orientalium, quod vel manuscripti, vel editi, in bibliotheca Erpeniana exstant*. Ambiguities in the

lay-out of the *Catalogus* and in the description of some items . make exact enumeration impossible, but the number of manuscript volumes listed is not less than ninety-three, and the number of printed books is about 150.

Leyden University, which already owned the orientalia bequeathed to it in 1609 by J. J. Scaliger, was of course anxious to add Erpenius's books to its library. Negotiations for their purchase were begun in May 1625 and continued until the following November, when they suddenly ceased, at a moment when it seemed likely that agreement was about to be reached: and they ceased because the Duke of Buckingham, who was staying at The Hague in November and December 1625, unexpectedly intervened and bought the manuscripts. On June 1st of the following year (1625) Buckingham was elected Chancellor of Cambridge University, which now looked to him for some spectacular benefaction. There was talk of his intention of building a new university library and of bestowing Erpenius's manuscripts upon it; but he had done nothing by 23 August 1628, the date of his assassination by John Felton at Portsmouth. Erpenius's manuscripts thus passed to his widowed duchess, who eventually presented them to the university in June 1632. They were shelved, as the university accounts show, in a press made specially for them, on which was placed a commemorative inscription:

Item paid to Edwarde Woodruffe for a presse for the Arabicke bookes £6-0-0; Item to the Smith for Lockes, barres and plates for the presse in the Library for the Dukes bookes £1-4-0; Item for wrighting the Dukes inscription upon his deske of bookes in the Library 0-10-0.

When about 1650 an industrious under-library-keeper named Jonathan Pindar compiled the volume known as the Donors' Book he listed the Duke's books on his first three pages, preceded only by the copy of his own works which King James I gave in 1620. They number eighty-seven volumes. Five of them are not identifiable in the Vossius-Scriverius *Catalogus* of 1625; and five of the items printed in that *Catalogus* are not identifiable in the Donors' Book; but of the eighty-seven volumes listed in the Donors' Book all save one are identifiable in the Library today, the missing item being the eighty-sixth, which Pindar found of such novel, though incomprehensible, interest that he described it at length, thus: "Some characters upon reeds bound in with two sticks and strings or rather of the Leaves of a Toddy tree writt in the Industan Character consisting of 123 leaves eight and twentie loose leaves in folio and paper." Of the eighty-six identifiable volumes, some contain Erpenius's autograph, or descriptive titles in latin and other notes in his hand; others contain descriptive titles and notes in the hand of Abraham Whelock, a scholar in Arabic (and in Anglo-Saxon) who was University Librarian from 1629 to 1653. These descriptive titles are sometimes abbreviated from the Vossius-

Scrivener's *Catalogus*; and further abbreviated they are always the source of Jonathan Pindar's entries in the Donors' Book.

The special bookcase which the Library made and its inscription were destroyed more than two centuries ago: yet if the Library had contrived to lose, not one of Erpenius's manuscripts, but all of them, along with the relevant archives and documents, there would still be ample evidence that Buckingham bought them and that the Library once possessed them. In 1627 Vossius published his *De historicis latinis libri tres*, dedicating it to Buckingham, of whose encouragement of learning he writes thus: "There was a danger that the manuscripts which my dear colleague the late Thomas Erpenius had collected over the years at great risks and expense from the East and from Africa and elsewhere might be unhappily scattered, to the detriment of the republic of letters. As soon as you became aware of this, at your Highness's bidding and as a result of your great bounty, this noble library was ransomed from the underworld, as it were, for the public good and especially for that of the University of Cambridge."¹ Similarly in 1642 John Selden writes in the preface to his edition of Euty chius that, whereas there is no manuscript of this author in the rich oriental collections at Leyden, or in the Ambrosiana at Milan, or in the Escorial, or in the Bodleian, or in the library of the Earl of Arundel, there is nevertheless one in the University Library of Cambridge, among the books which formerly belonged to Erpenius and were given to it by the Duke of Buckingham;² and although Selden himself did not use the Cambridge manuscript, Pococke took some readings from it for his own edition of 1625, in which he reprinted much of Selden's preface, including the passage I have just quoted. Meanwhile in 1642 Sir Henry Wotton had given in his *Short View of the Life and Death of George Villiers* (which was four times reprinted before 1685 in the *Reliquiae Wottonianae*) a circumstantial account, to which I shall return, of the Duke's purchase of the manuscripts and of their presentation to Cambridge by the dowager duchess. Nor is there lack of other testimonies. Brian Walton, in the *Prolegomena* to his Polyglott Bible of 1657-60 describes a volume of the Hebrew bible dated 1347 at Cambridge - "It is", he says, "one of the books belonging to Erpenius which the Duke of Buckingham gave to the University."³ J. H. Hottinger, in his *Bibliothecarius quadripartitus*, published at Zürich in 1664, writes, in his paragraph on the libraries of Cambridge: "*Bibliotheca publica, quam Buckinghamiae Dux, occasione Bibliothecae Erpenianae distractae, auxit, multos Codices possidet Arabicos.*"⁴ This I give in latin because I cannot be sure what Hottinger meant by the word *distractae*. Did he mean simply *divided*, in the sense that Erpenius's manuscripts were separated after his death from his printed books? Or did he mean, in accordance with a common usage of the word in classical latin, *sold off in parcels*? The questions are not rhetorical, and at the end of this paper I shall try to answer them.

I do not doubt that it would be possible to cull many other references similar to these from the works of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century orientalist scholars, and I shall not labour

the point much further; but if any doubts yet linger some confirmatory hints may be found in Bernard's *Catalogi* of 1697, where his list of manuscripts in the University Library, itself reprinted from James's *Ecloga* of 1600, is extended by an *Auctarium* of sixty-three volumes *e bibliotheca viri clarissimi Thomae Erpenii*; in Le Long's *Bibliotheca sacra*, first published at Leipzig in 1709;⁵ in the *Bibliotheca bibliothecarum* of Montfaucon (Paris, 1739), being abbreviated selections from Bernard; and in the travel diaries, posthumously published in 1753-4, of the informative but unlikeable Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach, who in 1710 visited the University Library and saw Erpenius's manuscripts (though his guide Thomas Baker could not tell him whether all of them had come to Cambridge), and moreover copied down the commemorative inscription written on vellum and hanging in a frame at the end of the bookcase.⁶

II

By the middle of the eighteenth century therefore the presence of Erpenius's manuscripts at Cambridge had been documented and publicised beyond any apparent possibility of misunderstanding or doubt; and the facts have of course been stated and restated since then, briefly by Henry Bradshaw in his historical sketch "The University Library" (first printed in the *Cambridge University Gazette* in February and March 1869 and reprinted both in 1881 as his *Memorandum No. 6* and in 1889 in his *Collected Papers*) and in greater detail by E. G. Browne in an article which he printed in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1894 ("Description of an Old Persian Commentary on the Ku'ran") and in 1896 in the introduction to his *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Cambridge*. Some initial bewilderment among the citizens of Leyden was of course inevitable, since the Duke made his purchase unexpectedly, quickly, and secretly at the very moment when their own negotiations seemed to be about to be successfully concluded: and we may suppose that the usual well-informed sources did not keep silent. One of them was Erpenius's friend Andreas Rivetus, who in a letter written from Leyden on 29 January 1626 told Johannes Meursius that Buckingham had bought the books and presented them to Oxford.⁷ This apart, I do not find any positive misinformation in print until the nineteenth century. It is, however, curious that when in 1658 J. H. Hottinger printed in the appendix to his *Promptuarium sive bibliotheca orientalis* the catalogues of four oriental collections, he chose not to state the location of the *Bibliotheca Erpeniana* (the contents of which he reprinted, abbreviating many entries and omitting three altogether, either from the Vossius-Scriverius *Catalogus* or from some other source very similar to it), though he refers in his text (p. 72) to Erpenius's manuscript of Eutychius, 'which I saw in England at Cambridge', and, as we have seen, made no bones about stating in 1664 that Cambridge possessed the whole collection. It is certainly possible that later generations were misled by the *sermo academicus* delivered on 29 October 1674 by Friedrich

Spanheim before the University of Leyden and printed in the catalogue of its library which was published that year.⁸ This address is written in the kind of hot-house latin which causes the reader's spectacles to steam over while simultaneously reducing his brain to the consistency of boiled cabbage; but it is still possible to discern that in one passage Spanheim attributes the riches of the oriental collections at Leyden to the successive agencies of Scaliger, Erpenius, and Golius (*paratio primam Scaligero, tum Erpenio . . . ac tandem Jacobo Golio*⁹). Scaliger bequeathed books to the University, and Golius travelled to the east in order to buy them with the University's money; Erpenius doubtless encouraged the University's acquisition of oriental books whenever he could. But whether Spanheim believed that Erpenius did more than this is something which only Spanheim could tell us. There is certainly no mention of Erpenius in the *Specimen catalogi codicum MSS. orientalium Bibliothecae Academiae Lugduno-Batavae* put out by H. A. Hamaker in 1820, where the pre-eminence of the oriental collections at Leyden is unambiguously ascribed to the judgment and generosity of Golius, Scaliger, and Levinus Warner (*Nec illud profecto aliter fieri potuit. Quippe clarissima seculi decimi septimi ingenia, Golius, Scaliger et Warnerus, magno judicio in eligendis, summa liberalitate in coëmendis MSS. versati sunt: see the beginning of the Praefatio*).

The first Dutch writer to attempt an account of the events concerning Erpenius's library after his death was Matthijs Siegenbeek in the second volume, published in 1832, of his history of Leiden University.¹⁰ Erpenius, he says, had arranged for his whole collection of oriental books, both manuscript and printed, to be offered to the University, "and," he continues, "although they decided to buy them and fixed a generous price of 5,000 guilders, no further progress was made in the matter: for what reason, I cannot say."¹¹

Siegenbeek, then, knew nothing about the Duke of Buckingham's part in the affair; no more did the author of the first two volumes of the catalogue of oriental manuscripts at Leiden which commenced publication in 1851. This distinguished scholar - according to his title-page he was a Master of Theoretical Philosophy, a Doctor of Humane Letters, a corresponding member of the Royal Dutch Academy and of the Academy of History of Madrid, an Honorary Fellow of the Asiatic Society of Paris, and in the University of Leyden Professor of History and Assistant Expositor of the Warner Bequest - this distinguished scholar, whose anticlimactic name was Dozy, introduced the first volume of his catalogue with an account of the collection's history and growth. Of Erpenius's library he writes thus: Erpenius had left a number of books, both printed and manuscript . . . Golius (who had been elected to succeed him as Professor of Oriental Languages) was anxious to keep them for the University. He told the Curators that both the printed books and the manuscripts were essential for the performance of his duties as a teacher, and that one of Erpenius's last instructions to his wife had been that she was to give the University the preference above all other potential pur-

chasers. He added that foreign dealers had made known their wish to buy the library for the Papal Nuncio, but that the widow preferred to sell to the Curators and was asking 4,000 florins, which was Erpenius's own valuation; she wanted 1,000 florins paid down, and the remainder in three annual instalments of the same amount. The Curators were very willing to buy, but lacked the money. Finally the Council of the States of Holland and West Friesland made it possible for the Curators to buy by making them an immediate grant of 1,000 florins from public funds, the 3,000 florins outstanding to be paid off half from public funds and half by the university.¹² "One might suppose therefore," Dozy concludes, "that all Erpenius's manuscripts are in our library, mixed up with Golius's: but a comparison with the catalogue appended to Vossius's speech shows that the opposite is the case. We do not possess, for example, the two copies of the dictionary of al-Jawhari, one written in Baghdad A.H.673, the other in four volumes in quarto, lacking the second volume; we do not possess, either, the seven volumes of the Universal History of Mirchond, or the Turkish translation of Tabari - in a word, all the manuscripts which were of some value. Some of Erpenius's manuscripts, if not all of them, have made their way to the Cambridge University Library, I know not how"; and he then cites Erpenius's celebrated manuscript of Euty chius and his manuscript of Imra'u'l-Qays, which Reiske in 1742 had stated to be at Cambridge.¹³

In the first of the *Addenda et emendanda* published in the fifth volume of this catalogue in 1873 Dozy offered a partial correction of this narrative, quoting Siegenbeek's statement that for reasons unknown the University failed to buy the manuscripts. It is some illustration of the dangers of over-specialization in scholarship that fifteen years earlier J. A. Van der Aa had published the reasons quite clearly in the article on Erpenius in the fourth volume of his dictionary of Dutch national biography, though he makes the mistake of supposing that Buckingham bought, not the manuscripts only, but the whole library.¹⁴

Dozy's narrative was first amplified in 1888 by Martin Theodor Houtsma, who published from a manuscript at Leyden selected letters written by Erpenius, Golius, and Warner.¹⁵ In his very brief account of the negotiations between the University and the widow he refers to a document, published in 1696, from which it appears that the University wished to acquire not the manuscripts only but the whole library and also the oriental press, which the widow was required to guarantee would remain in Leyden; and from this he deduced that the University's primary object was to secure the press, and that when its safety was assured by its purchase by the Elzevirs, negotiations for the library were abandoned as of only minor importance.¹⁶ Erpenius's manuscripts, he continues, were sold and dispersed (*verkocht en verstrooid geraakt*), and some of them were later acquired by the Bodleian (here he points to a Koran which Casaubon gave to Erpenius, and was eventually bequeathed to the Bodleian by Archbishop

Marsh, who bought it at Golius's sale) and others by Cambridge (here he points to Hottinger's reference in his *Promptuarium* to the manuscript of Euty chius, and to Erpenius's manuscript of the psalms in Syriac, "which was also at Cambridge when the London Polyglott was printed."¹⁷)

The next move in this game of historical snakes and ladders was made in 1905 by P. C. Molhuysen, who in his history of the Leyden University Library asserted that that library had bought the whole of Erpenius's library in 1625.¹⁸ Since Molhuysen was Keeper of Manuscripts at Leyden this egregious untruth doubtless carried conviction to some; but we must give him credit for realising his mistake and for acknowledging it in 1916 in the second volume of his excellent edition of the Leyden University archives: Erpenius's library, he there writes, was not bought by Leyden; it was bought by the Duke of Buckingham, who gave it to Oxford, according to a letter which Rivetus wrote to Meursius on 29 January 1626. And so the first misinformed rumour was revived nearly three centuries after its first propagation.

By this time you may well have concluded that in this matter the fault of the Dutch is reading too little and writing too much, so I will add only three further examples to show that error and confusion still persist: in 1925 P. S. van Ronkel described the provenance of Erpenius's Malay manuscripts correctly in his text,²⁰ but stated in his English summary that they had been bought and given to Cambridge by the Duke of Wellington (thus eclipsing the performance of Samuel Lee, who in his polyglott Bible of 1831 attributed Buckingham's benefaction to the Duke of Somerset); the current Dutch dictionary of national biography says (1930) that Buckingham gave Cambridge Erpenius's printed books as well as his manuscripts;²¹ and a standard guide to the history of Arabic studies in Europe, published at Leipzig in 1955, follows Dozy's error of just over a century ago in asserting that the whereabouts of Erpenius's manuscripts of Mirchond and the Turkish Tabari is unknown.²²

III

Among the archival material of Leyden University published by Molhuysen are the minutes of decisions taken by the Curators of the University, and in these the course of the negotiations between the widow Erpenius and the University can clearly be followed (Molhuysen, *Bronnen*, pp. 122-4). The representatives of the two parties first met on 13 May 1625, when Professor Thysius and Hieronymus de Backere, acting for the widow, offered to sell to the University "the arabic and other oriental books left by Erpenius and about eighty-four in number" (*de Arabischen ende andere Orientaelsche boecken, by den voorn. Erpenio naegelaeeter, ende omtrent vier ende tachtich in 't getal*); the price asked was 4,000 guilders, of which one quarter was to be paid immediately and the remaining three quarters in three annual instalments. The Curators decided to seek a subvention from the prov-

ince of Holland and West Friesland, and appointed delegates to negotiate with the provincial government. Both parties then agreed to adjourn further discussions for a fortnight.

The Curators' delegates put their case before the Council of the States of Holland and West Friesland at The Hague on 16 May. Their meeting is recorded both in the minutes of the Curators and in the minutes of the Council (*Bronnen*, pp. 205-6). The Curators explained that Golius needed the books for the proper performance of his professional duties; that it had been Erpenius's own wish that his books should, if possible, remain in the University; that certain foreign dealers were seeking to buy them for the Papal Nuncio; that the widow had offered to sell them at Erpenius's own valuation of 4,000 guilders, payable in four annual instalments; and that the University now sought the Council's direction and advice since it had no money. The Curators and the Council then discussed, and rejected, the advisability of applying for a subvention to the States General also - i.e. to the central government of the Netherlands. The Council agreed that it was not desirable to allow the books to fall into strange hands or to leave the province, and therefore authorised the Curators to proceed with the purchase, the province to provide 1,000 guilders immediately and 1,500 guilders over three years provided that the University raise another 1,500 guilders over three years also.

There is no record that the Curators and the widow's representatives met on 27 May, as they had agreed to do: but if any meeting between them took place on that day they certainly found themselves at cross purposes, for the Curators discovered, as is shown in their minutes of 12 August, that they had completely misunderstood what it was that the widow was offering to sell. According to their own record of their meeting of 13 May they were negotiating for "the arabic and other oriental books left by Erpenius and about eighty-four in number." This, they now explained, they had understood to mean both the manuscripts and the printed books, though how they can have supposed that the entire library consisted of about eighty-four volumes when the Vossius-Scriverius *Catalogus* shows that it contained three times as many passes comprehension. At any rate the widow's representatives made it clear that what they had offered to sell for 4,000 guilders was the collection of manuscripts only. On 12 August therefore the Curators referred their difficulty to Rochus van der Honert, who had been one of their delegates to the Council of the States of Holland and West Friesland on 16 May: if he had understood that the original offer embraced only the manuscripts, then their purchase was to be proceeded with on the terms already arranged, on condition that Erpenius's press remained in Leyden; if he had understood that the offer had included the printed books as well, then Golius was to be asked to examine them and to put a valuation on such as he thought would be useful to the University, so that a reasonable additional payment might be authorised.

The last meeting between the two parties took place on 14 November. Thysius and Golius declared on behalf of the widow that they were willing to allow the Curators to select and retain such printed books as they thought useful for an additional payment of 150 guilders. At this the Curators made an entirely new proposal: they would pay the widow 5,200 guilders - 1,000 guilders down and the remainder in six annual instalments of 700 guilders each - provided she caused Erpenius's press to remain at Leyden, in return for the oriental books, both manuscript and printed, together with all such books, whatever their language, as might serve to illustrate oriental languages and likewise all those books which were cleared out on Erpenius's death and deposited with his widow, it being understood that she would retain the price of such oriental printed books as she had sold since her husband's death. Thysius and Golius agreed to consult the widow; but negotiations were never resumed. They had been bedevilled by an initial misunderstanding, and they had been too protracted; and the University had tried to drive too hard a bargain - these, in fact, are precisely the reasons given by Rivetus in his letter to Meursius for the University's failure to buy the books: "*Bibliotheca Erpeniana, quam & existimaveramus Academiae Bibliothecae accessuram, prout decretum fuerat, nimia iniecta mora, & durioribus conditionibus viduae propositis, cessit Academiae Oxoniensi . . .*" Also, the widow had received a better offer.

Buckingham arrived in The Hague on 9 November and stayed there until the third week of December. The purposes of his mission, in which he failed, were to persuade the Danish ambassador that the English exchequer could no longer afford to give the King of Denmark the promised monthly subsidy of £30,000 in money or men, to bring about a grand alliance against Spain and the Empire, and, if necessary, to pawn the crown jewels. It is not to be supposed that a statesman - even of Buckingham's calibre - should turn spontaneously to the buying of oriental manuscripts when engaged in such high matters as these. The impulse came, not from Ussher, as Bradshaw plausibly suggested, but from a member of Sir Henry Wotton's household, John Dinley,²³ who afterwards became Secretary to the Queen of Bohemia; and it lies in a letter, exasperatingly dated "this Saturday morning, 1625," in the Public Record Office (S. P. 84/122). The credit for discovering it must be given to W. N. Sainsbury, who published it in 1859 in his *Original unpublished Papers illustrative of the Life of Rubens*²⁴ and to Sainsbury also must be given the discredit of as complacently incurious an editorial annotation as I have ever seen: "We are unable to say whether [the suggestion that the Duke purchase the manuscripts] was carried into effect"; and the credit for noticing the relevance of this letter to the history of the University Library must be given to Charles Sayle, who found it too late for incorporation in his *Annals of Cambridge University Library* (1916). It is addressed to Sir Dudley Carleton from Leyden, and reads thus:

Right Hon^{ble}:

Erpennius, who perhaps was knowne to Y^r L^P by sight; to mee onely by fame, left a famous Librarie of Manuscripts in the Easterne Languages, to be offered (by his owne order) first unto the States. They, upon his death, referred it to the Curators of this Universitie; who all this while have kept the widow in suspence & now pretend their stock is exhausted & have left her to her best Chapman. Yesterday they gave her libertie; and then I was brought to have a sight of them. I was told that the Jesuites of Antwerpe, of Spaine & Rome too, have underhand employed some Merchants to buy them in a poke; and surely they have no good end to hunt after such Originalls. I know not what they are, my judgment goeth not beyond my eies, w^{ch} can onely tell Y^r L^P that they are fairely written, in rare paper & wth exquisite diligence; & so much they deserved in the owners estimation, that besides the great chardge & inquisition over the world to purchase them, he raised of his owne purse, a howse, & a matrix of letters for their impression. The rate of them is 4,000 guilders or 400 pounds; upon his death-bed he reckoned that they cost him nere 5,000 gild^{rs} & told his wife that the Bish. of Winchester [Lancelot Andrewes] would give her the monie for them. They seeme to be a treasure of the Orientall tongs & are not likely to lie long on the boord. Whereupon I thought it my dutie to Yo^r Lo^P & to our Universities to give you instant notice therof, that if you shall finde it fittinge, you would then please acquaint the Duke his Grace wth the occasion & perswade him that he cannot lay out so small a summe, more for his owne honour. Y^r L^P wilbee a Benefactour too, if you can helpe them into England. I have sent annexed a Catalogue of them, & of the printed too, that Y^r L might see all, but the last are of small moment. I shall humbly attend Y^r L^{ps} order, w^{ch} I beseech may bee hastened wth Y^r L^{ps} convenience, that wee be not prevented. . . .

The widow, I suggest, was no mean saleswoman. And now the story is taken up by Sir Henry Wotton:

Here, it were iniurious to overslip a Noble Act in the Duke during this employment, which I must for my part celebrate above all his expenses; there was a Collection of certain rare Manuscripts, exquisitly written in Arabique and sought in the most remote parts by the diligence of Erpinus, the most Excellent Linguist, these had beene left to the Widdow of the said Erpinus, and were upon saile to the Jesuits at Antwerpe; Licourish Chapmen of such Ware. Whereof the Duke getting knowledge, by his worthy and learned Secretary Doctor Mason, Interverted the bargaine, and gave the poore widdow for them five hundred pounds, a summe above their weight in silver, and a mixed act both of bounty and charity, the more laud-

able being much out of his naturall Element. These were they, which after his death were as Nobly presented, as they had been bought, to the University of Cambridge, by the Dutchesse Dowager, as soone as she understood by the aforesaid Doctor Mason, her husbands intention. . . .²⁵

And so towards the end of 1625 Buckingham helped Erpenius's manuscripts into England, as Dinley had suggested. Six months later, on 1 June 1626, at the King's wish and after the members of the Senate had been subjected to great pressures (in which Mason was an active agent for the Duke), Buckingham was elected Chancellor of the University by 108 votes to 102. He immediately declared himself anxious to serve the University: "And since I am so far ingag'd unto yow," he wrote, "I will presume upon a further courtesie, which is; that yow would be pleased to supply me with your advice, and suggest a waye unto me (as my selfe likewise shall not fayle to think upon some meanes) how wee may make posteritye remember, yow had a thankfull Chancellor, and one that really both loved yow & your Universitye."²⁶

The University replied, in snivelling latin composed by George Herbert, that to answer such a question from so exalted a questioner was entirely beyond the capacity of their own humble intelligences. Nevertheless there was common talk of the Duke's intention of building a new library and of bestowing Erpenius's manuscripts upon it. Dr. John Preston, the Master of Emmanuel, removed from Cambridge to Lincoln's Inn, because, according to his biographer Thomas Ball, "the Duke was Chancellor, and would endeavour to ingratiate himself, and be a Benefactor; and had brought [*sic*] Erpenius Manuscripts, and did verily intend to found a Library; and so it would be easie, and in his power, to out him, of the College and University."²⁷ Ussher himself was active in prodding the Duke onward, as may be seen from two letters which he wrote in June 1626 to Samuel Ward, the Master of Sidney Sussex: "I have dealt with your chancellor very effectually for the erecting of your library, to which he is of himself exceeding forward: I have procured him to send unto Leyden for all the printed Hebrew books of Erpenius his library; which together with his manuscripts, which he hath already, he purposeth to bestow upon your university. I have also persuaded him to send thither for the matrices of the Syriac, Arabic, AETHiopic, and Samaritan letters, and to bestow them likewise upon you" (16 June); but on 23 June Ussher reported to Ward that news had reached him from Leyden that all Erpenius's printed books were already sold, and that the oriental matrices had been bought by the Elzevirs, "so that now you must content yourselves with his manuscripts only, which are a very rare treasure indeed, and for which your university shall rest much beholden to your chancellor."²⁸

None of these hopeful intentions had been translated into action before the Duke's assassination on 23 August 1628. Erpenius's manuscripts now passed into the possession of the

duchess, and a new stage in their history began. Early in 1629 we find Ussher suggesting to an unnamed correspondent that if the King might be persuaded to buy the Barocci manuscripts, "now brought into England by Mr. Fetherstone the stationer," and to add the Erpenius collection to them, "it would make that of his Majesty a royal library indeed" (*Whole Works*, XV, 421). Whether Charles ever considered this suggestion I do not know; but if he did so, then the Earl of Pembroke, who bought the Barocci manuscripts for the Bodleian, deserves the thanks of Cambridge as well as of Oxford.

Abraham Whelock was elected University Librarian at Cambridge in the late summer of 1629, and early in 1632 he became the first holder of the Readership in Arabic founded by his patron Sir Thomas Adams. As yet, however, the University Library possessed but one Arabic manuscript (a Koran, presented by William Bedwell in 1631) and perhaps two printed books (Erpenius's editions of the Pentateuch and New Testament), so that, the acquisition of additional texts being now of urgent importance, the Library's friends turned their minds once more to the manuscripts of Erpenius and to the arts of persuasion. Their chief agent was Richard Holdsworth, a future Master of Emmanuel and benefactor of the Library, at this time rector of the London parish of St. Peter-le-Poer and Professor of Divinity at Gresham College; and it is in his letters to Whelock (preserved in Sancroft's transcripts in the Bodleian) and in Sir Thomas Adams's letters to Whelock (in the Cambridge University Library) that the course of these final negotiations may be traced, though imperfectly, since Whelock's own part in the correspondence has not (so far as I can discover) survived.

The earliest reference is in a letter written by Adams to Whelock on 16 March 1631/2: "Your letter I received with the inclosed to Mr. Howlesworth, who is gone this afternoone about the busines you mentioned & is minded to let you heare from him next wicke."²⁹ On the 23rd Adams reported that Holdsworth "tould me the last wicke he was going about the bookes you mentioned but as I remember the vallew of them was not tould me above the one half of the summe you mentioned. Howsoever it is very well they are obtained for your Universitie, & I conceive the present fruition [*sic*] of them will be most commodious for your self & much conducing to the furtherance of the worke intended" (Dd. 3. 12, IV, No.6). This letter is admittedly obscure, and Adams seems to be counting chickens as yet unhatched. His next letter (*ibid.*, No.22), of 30 March 1632, is however clear enough:

Whatsoever the feare at Cambridge be least these Orientall bookes will be diverted, yet I hope your Universitie is in better likelihood to have them in regard of some late endeavours than in truth it was formerly. Howsoever suppose otherwaies, the certainty is this, Mr Houlsworth uppon the receipt of your letter 3 wickes agoe (as I take it) went immediately to the house of the dutches & spake to Mr Bowles her Chaplain who promised his furtherance &

to moove the dutches about them within a few daies, & Mr Houlesworth replying that my L: of Lincolne [Bishop John Williams, a benefactor of the library of St. John's, Cambridge] had already made way to the dutches about them, Mr Bowles answered, I wish he had spake with her, but he did not, onely he acknowledged he spake unto him about them, the second time Mr Holsworth repayingr thither rec^d this ansvere from Mr Bowles that the dutches replied that shee would consider of it, then did Mr Holsworth understand privately that there was great meanes used to gaine the bookes for Oxford, the 3^d time Mr Holsworth went to Mr Bowles for the dutches resolution w^{ch} was that shee would speake to the King about them, thereuppon Mr Holsworth acquainted the Earle of Dover [Henry Carey] being his parissioner wth the busines & prepared him wth severall arguments to the dutches but not meeting wth her he went to my Lord of Holland [Henry Rich, Earl of Holland, Chancellor of the University] by whom meanes was used to his maiestie, & thus it is hoped that the iewells will be reserved for Cambridge & to morrow this nobleman afore-named will stir againe about it & we hope we shall understand the danger is prevented thus you will still say Praised be the Lord daily even the God that helpeth us & poureth his benifites uppon us. . ."

Who is doing what, or saying what to whom, is perhaps not always crystal clear. However, Adams continued to keep Whelock fully informed of what was being done: on 6 April, "I spoke this day to Mr Holsworth touching the bookes, & he assured me that he hath bine 3 times this wicke about them & that my Lord of Holland is sollicitid & promiseth his best endeavour, & he hopeth they will be shortly obtained, he doth defer to write unto you untill he hath certeine newes" (ibid., No.7); and on 14 April, "This day I spoke to Mr Holsworth & he acquainted me wth the severall passages the last wick occurring touching the bookes & doth assure me that they will be had for your Universitie & that there is no cause to feare the disposall of them elsewhere onely touching the manner to obtain them wth expedition he will write the next wicke to the Vice Chancellor if this succeeding wicke do not open the way in a cleare course . . . Mr Houlesworth is no lesse sollicitous then your self for the safe & speedie procuring of them . . ." (ibid., No.8).

Soon after this the University addressed a petition to the Duchess in English, begging her to grant it "a favour once intended, as we have often heard, by your Gr: noble Husband deceased"; "there wanteth now," the petition continues, since private generosity has found the stipend for an Arabic professor, "but matter and store of Bookes to encourage and cherish this new studdy amongst us."³⁰ This approach proved to be not entirely tactful or opportune, and the Duchess's reply carries some air of rebuke: ". . . the Manuscripts you desire, are not as yett in my power, yett I will endeavour to gett them, and prevent your sending againe unto mee

in this particular. In the meantime my conscience beares mee witness, that I have been in all things hitherto zealous to further the execution of whatsoever I have understood to bee my Deare Lords Intentions. And in due time I hope, there will be reason to have my faithfulness in that poynte (soe farre as I am able) approved even by Cambridge itselfe."³¹ Holdsworth, too, thought the University's petition untimely, writing on 11 May to Whelock: "I could have wisht the University had stayed their letter, till we had gott the King to have moved Y^e Dutchess: but now that they have broken the ice, they must needs helpe to close it & strengthen it againe, by another letter to the Chancellor, that he would move the King to give his royall assent for there it only staies: This good in the meane time hath come by the paines which hath been taken, that the books are saved. Otherwise there is some cause to feare they had been transferred to Oxford but that it was prevented by timely interpositions."³² Finally, all came to a happy outcome on 8 June, when Holdsworth wrote again to Whelock "with all thanks for your great love, & all well wishes of comfort in your place, & all ioy for the Arabick books which are this day sent down to Cambridge"; the University, he added, should not omit to send a letter of thanks to the Duchess, and the Vice-Chancellor should write to Mr Bowles, "who hath bene a great advancer of this business." Adams confirmed the news to Whelock in a letter of the same date (ULC, MS. Dd. 3.12. IV, No.10). On 13 June the University sent to the Duchess an unexceptionable expression of its gratitude in a latin letter full of abstruse words and convoluted constructions composed by the Public Orator Robert Creighton; and Creighton delivered before the University in the presence of Robert Mason, once the Duke's secretary and now the Duchess's representative, a speech announcing with many superfluous rhetorical questions the Duchess's gift, recalling how the Duke had outbid the Jesuits of Antwerp - *illi quidem pretio a Duce superati et victi recesserunt* - and how (a new detail) after the manuscripts had been brought to England they had been sought by the University of Paris, as well as by envious competitors at home, and paying tribute to those who had supported the University's cause, naming, however, among them - and you will remember that Wotton named him also - only Mason himself.

There is still, however, one question which remains unanswered. In Uffenbach's copy of the inscription which was placed on the Duke's bookcase at Cambridge the manuscripts were described as *ad hastam locatos*, which is the classical latin for "put up for auction": and so the question must be briefly considered - was there a public auction of Erpenius's manuscripts? I think not, for it is a very fortunate and very bold bidder who at a sale of manuscripts, "about eighty-four in number", secures eighty-seven of them for the curiously round figure of £500. Nevertheless, Hottinger described Erpenius's library in 1664 as *distracta*, which might mean 'sold off in lots'; and Dinley enclosed in his letter to Carleton a catalogue of the manuscripts, '& of the printed too': but this might have been a written list, or more probably the

printed catalogue of the library which occupied the last two sheets of Vossius's *Oratio*. I think it possible that Erpenius's widow had some extra copies of these two sheets struck off - after all, she owned the press that printed them - for the benefit of such licourish chapmen as might make an offer: and it may be one of these extra copies that found its way into the library of Petrus Francius, whose auction-catalogue lists as lot 1270 among the quartos a volume or bundle of catalogues described as *T. Erpenii: J. Rutgersii: D. Heinsii: G.I. Vossii: A. Riveti: P. Scriverii*;³³ but I do not believe that any formal auction was held; and if an auction was held, or contemplated, I cannot find any auction-catalogue surviving to prove it.

There the story ends. On the lowest level of practicality it demonstrates the folly of keeping a widow waiting too long. For researchers in the humanities it shows how much time a grown man can waste in assembling material which he will eventually reduce to a mere footnote. It demonstrates beyond a doubt that much of what we find stated as plausible and authentic matters of fact is likely to be untrue and that once a falsehood has got into print it is likely to be accepted and repeated by respectable scholars until it becomes almost impossible to eradicate it.

NOTES

¹*Periculum erat, ne, Reip. literariae damno, miserè dispergerentur linguarū Orientalium codices; quos summus vir, & amicissimus collega mea, Thomas Erpenius ὁ παναοῦτος, ex Oriente, Africa, terris aliis, tot annis, maximis periculis & impensis, congressisset, Vix illud cognōras, cū ecce, Celsitudinis tuae jussu, ac liberalitate summā, nobilis bibliotheca, publico, ac imprimis Cantabrigiensis Academiae bono, quasi ab Orco redimitur.*

²*Sed verò in Bibliotheca Cantabrigiensis publica, Exemplar Annalium ejus reperitur inter libros Bibliothecae Orientalis Thomae Erpenii, quibus illa pridem donata est a Georgio Duce Buckinghamiae, ejusdem Academiae Cancellario.*

³*"Extant etiam in Bibliotheca Cantabrig. inter Erpenii MSS. quos Academiae donavit Dux Buckinghamius, Biblia Hebraea . . ."* Section XII, *De Lingua Chaldaica et Targumim*, p. 85.

⁴Cap. II, *De variis bibliothecis in genere*, p. 16.

⁵See pp. 74-5: "*Biblia Hebraea . . . Extat cum ceteris MSS. Erpenianis ex dono Ducis Buckinghamii in Bibl. publica Cantabrigiensis*," with references to Bernard and Walton; and p. 231: "*Facili Arabicè caractere Syro . . . Hic codex una cum reliquis Erpenianis Bibl. Cantabrigiensis publicae illatus est*," with a reference to Bernard.

⁶*Merkwürdige Reisen*, III, 22, 38-9; *Cambridge under Queen Anne*, ed. J. E. B. Mayor (Cambridge, 1911), pp. 142, 157-8.

⁷Meursius, *Opera*, ed. G. Lami, 12 vols. (Florentiae, 1741-63), XI, 447-8.

⁸*Catalogus Bibliothecae Publicae Lugduno-Batavae noviter recognitus. Accessit incomparabilis thesaurus librorum orientalium, praecipue MSS.*

⁹Spanheim, sig. **2 verso.

¹⁰*Geschiedenis der Leidsche Hoogeschool*, II, 13.

¹¹Doch, hoewel tot dien koop besloten, en daartoe eene som van ruim f5000 bepaald werd, had dezelve nogtans (om welke reden is mij niet gebleken) geen voortgang.

¹²*Catalogus codicum orientalium Bibliothecae Academiae Lugduno Batavae*, I, vii-ix.

¹³*Tharaphae Moallakah cum scholiis Nahas*, ed. J. J. Reiske (Lugd. Bat., 1742), p.xxvi.

¹⁴"De uitmuntende verzameling boeken, waarin vele zeldzame werken gevonden worden, is door den Hertog van Buckingham, ten dienste van de Academie van Cambridge, aangekocht." *Biographisch Woordenboek der Nederlanden*, V, 212.

¹⁵"Uit de oostersche Correspondentie van Th. Erpenius, Jac. Golius en Lev. Warner," in *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen*, Afd. Letterkunde, 17de deel.

¹⁶cf. M. J. de Goeje and M.Th. Houtsma, *Catalogus codicum Arabicorum Bibliothecae Academiae Lugduno-Batavae*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, 1888), I, iv-v, n.: ". . . e quibus patet non tantum actum fuisse de Erpenii Codicibus, sed imprimis de typographia Erpeniana quam postea Elsevieri emerunt. Quum autem constaret hanc supellectilem in urbe Leidae mansuram esse, nulla amplius erat quare ex aerario publico vel academico magni illi sumptus essent faciendi."

¹⁷Ook de Syrische Propheten-codex . . . bevond zich reeds aldaar toen de Londensche Polyglot gedrukt werd.

¹⁸*Geschiedenis der Universiteits-Bibliotheek te Leiden*, p. 24: De verzameling Oostersche handschriften werd in 1625 uitgebreid door den aankoop der bibliotheek van Th. Erpenius . . . na eenig loven en bieden, daar Curatoren ook zijn gedrukte boeken wilden koopen, ging zijn geheele Oostersche bibliotheek voor f.5200 aan de Universiteit over.

¹⁹*Bronnen tot de Geschiedenis der Leidsche Universiteit*, II, 124, n.3.

²⁰*Mededeelingen der k. Akad. van Wet.*, Afd. letterkunde 59, Serie A, no. 8.

²¹*Nieuw Nederlandsch biographisch Woordenboek*, VIII, 496: Zijn groote verzameling boeken en handschriften is gekocht door den hertog van Buckingham en geschonken aan de academie te Cambridge.

²²Johann Fück, *Die arabischen Studien in Europa*, &c., p. 71, n.188: Von beiden Werken besaz E[rpenius] Handschriften, über deren Verbleib nichts bekannt ist, s. Dozy im Vorwort zum Katalog der arabischen Handschriften der Leydener Bibliothek.

²³Cf. C. S. P. Dom., 1628-9, p. 448.

²⁴pp. 358-60.

²⁵*Short View of the Life and Death of George Villiers* (London, 1642), p.16.

²⁶See C. H. Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1842-1908), III, 185ff.

²⁷See Samuel Clarke, "The Lives of Thirty-two English Divines", p.108, appended to his *General Martyrologie*, 3rd ed., (London, 1677).

²⁸Ussher, *The Whole Works*, ed. C. R. Elrington (Dublin, 1847-64), XV, 339-42.

²⁹ULC, MS. Dd. 3.12, IV, No.1; printed by Sir H. Ellis, *Original Letters of eminent literary Men*, Camden Soc., 1843, No. LII, and with other extracts from the Adams-Whelock correspondence by P. M. Holt, *Studies in the history of the Near East* (1973), pp. 37-42.

³⁰ULC, Baker's transcript, MS. Mm.1.44, p. 214.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 215.

³²Bodleian, MS. Rawlinson D.1104, fol.16.

³³*Catalogus librorum Petri Francii . . . Horum omnium fiet Auctio a d. XIV. Aprilis CIO IO CCV. & seqq.* Amstelaedami, ex officina Wetsteniana, 1704 and 1705, p. 202.

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J. C. T. Oates

PIETER NUYTS AND HIS "ALBUM AMICORUM"

John Fletcher



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