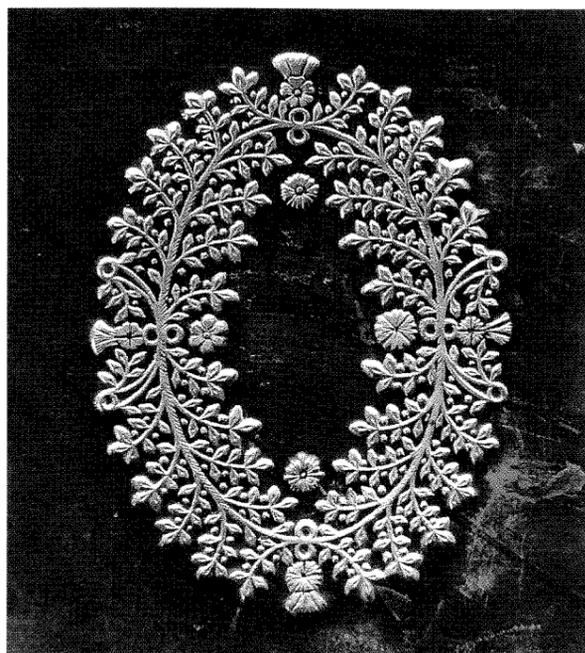


books is on the whole very sober. Most of the books that he acquired in the bookshops of Leiden were bound by his bookbinder Wolter de Haes in plain vellum bindings, the larger formats adorned with a central, blind tooled ornament. On the spine Thysius usually wrote a short title of the work in question. Only his more expensive folio books, acquired new or second-hand, he had (re-)bound in more expensive calf bindings, with gilt lines on the boards and his monogram on the spine. Occasionally, as in the case of his copy of the Delft Bible of 1477, these calf bindings were adorned with a beautiful gilt tooled central ornament, which seems to have been exclusively reserved for Thysius's books. (see illustration below)



Death is life unto me

Finally, a remarkable feature of many of Thysius's books is the occurrence of a small red wax seal inside the covers, depicting a bird. (see illustration to the right) No reference has been found to the meaning of this animal, which can also be found in books acquired shortly after Thysius's death, but it may well be a phoenix, the more so since on the top of one of the bookcases in the library a contemporary life-size wooden phoenix is placed. Modelled after a well-known emblem by Joachim Camerarius, which has as its motto 'Mors mihi vita est' (Death is life unto me), this bird surely stands symbol for the everlasting cycle of knowledge that takes place in the Bibliotheca Thysiana, and for that matter in every other library. It is perhaps the most poignant example of the symbolic meaning Johannes Thysius attached to his books.



'Credentialis int Arabis'

Scaliger's Arabic translation for an early voyage to the Indies (1600)

Arnoud Vrolijk (Curator of Oriental Manuscripts and Rare Books)

Although the first commercial relations between the Netherlands and Southeast Asia were established by private companies, they enjoyed the unreserved protection and encouragement of the Dutch Republic and its most prominent official, prince Maurice of Orange. Before the foundation of the Dutch colonial empire, merchants were highly dependent on the goodwill of the local rulers. To secure this goodwill they brought 'patents', credentials issued by the Dutch authorities, which served as an introduction and gave a more or less official status to their bearers. But how were they to communicate with foreign dignitaries? In the Dutch Republic there was no one with any knowledge of the languages of the region. Since it was anticipated, however, that the recipients of these letters were Muslims, it was assumed that they would understand Arabic. Fortunately, there were scholars at the University of Leiden who could serve as translators. The first of these 'patents' was translated into Arabic and printed by Franciscus Raphelengius, professor of Hebrew at Leiden. It supposedly left the Netherlands on the first voyage to the Indies in 1595. The sole remaining copy is preserved in the Museum Plantin-Moretus in Antwerp.

Doubtful Arabic

Another such letter is held in the Oriental collections of Leiden University Library, UBL MS Or. 1365 (3). The parchment bears a title on the verso side: 'Credentialis int Arabis van Prins Maurits voor Jacob van Neck, Admiraal na Oost Indien.' It accompanied the said admiral on his second expedition to the East Indies, which sailed on 28 June 1600. The Arabic is at times doubtful, but not nearly as bad as one would expect from a generation of Orientalists who never set foot outside Europe. All possible care was lavished on the letter to make it look official. Partly written in gold ink, it carries Prince Maurice's lacquer seal, which was duly attached by a professor of Law.

Did the letter actually serve its purpose? Van Neck's own journal relates that it was presented to the queen of Patani (present-day Pattani, southern Thailand), on 10 November 1601:

'Ende ons patent wert den grootsten vant lant in Arabische sprake voor geleesen. Ende door hunlieden bisschop promptelijc vertaalt, die heur altesamen wel geviel.'

'And our "patent" was read out in the Arabic tongue before the grandees of the country and simultaneously translated by their bishop [sic, apparently a high-ranking member of the Muslim clergy, A.V.], to their general satisfaction.'

Needless to say, the relations between the Dutch and the queen were cordial.

The very existence of this letter in the Leiden collections demonstrates that Van Neck brought it back to the Netherlands. It was presumably kept in a file with sundry translated correspondence at the Leiden University Library, only to be registered in the early 1830s. Ever since R.P.A. Dozy first catalogued the document in 1851, several generations of Leiden curators have been completely mystified by it. Although the letter clearly mentions Van Neck's name and the 'islands and regions of the East Indies' as its destination, the Leiden manuscript catalogues and inventories invariably refer to it as being addressed 'ad diversos Dynastas Mauritaniae' or 'to several Moroccan rulers'. The letter was first edited and translated into Dutch by J. van Oordt in 1899, but its actual destination was rediscovered only in 1980 by H.A. van Foreest and A. de Booy.

A Miracle by a Masterly Author

The identity of the Arabic translator was equally forgotten. In 1989, however, Herman de Leeuw mentioned Josephus Justus Scaliger as the person who had 'written' it,



Parade of the queen of Patani (seated on an elephant) in honour of admiral Jacob van Neck and his crew. R. Roelofs, 'Kort ende waerachtigh verhael van de tweede schipvaerd [...]', in I. Commelin, *Begin ende voortgangh van de Vereenighde Nederlantsche Geocroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie* ([Amsterdam], 1646), 1/7, facing p. 18. [UBL 348 C 9-10].



Credentials issued to admiral Jacob van Neck (c. 1564-1638) by Maurice, prince of Orange, on 1 June 1600. [UBL MS Or. 1365 (3)]

but at the same time denied that Scaliger 'would ever have ventured translating into Arabic'. There can be no doubt that the document is indeed in Scaliger's hand, many specimens of which are preserved in the Leiden collections. However, he must also be considered as the translator. This conclusion can be reached by a process of elimination, for in June 1600 there was no one besides Scaliger who knew Arabic. Secondly, De Leeuw is probably right in assuming that the earlier translation of 1595 by Raphelengius served as a model for Scaliger; but there are so many discrepancies that it can only be regarded as his own work. Even the draft of the letter has been preserved, which shows Scaliger's struggle with a language he was never able to learn as well as, for instance, Hebrew. This draft was added to the fair copy in 1992. Finally, there is the date of the letter to guide us: Raphelengius's letter only mentions the Christian date, but Scaliger managed to calculate the correct date according to the Muslim calendar. Who else could have performed this little miracle, except the masterly author of *De Emendatione Temporum*?

Thus, establishing the provenance of this document is not only a matter of concern for bibliographers; it also helps us to learn more about Scaliger's proficiency in Arabic and the practical application of his chronological studies. In honour of Scaliger, the 'patent' was carefully restored in the library's atelier and shown to the public on the 400th anniversary of his death in 2009.