In 1705 Adriaan Reland published his *De religione mohammedica*. The work, a second Latin edition of which appeared in 1717, was translated into Dutch, French, English, German and Spanish and was placed on the Roman Index in 1722. Its publication has been regarded as a turning point in western attitudes to Islam. With an objectivity remarkable for the time, Reland presented a Muslim confession of faith, in the Arabic original and in an annotated Latin translation, and then systematically contraverted the various western misconceptions of Islam and the Prophet.\(^1\) His text is preceded by an epistle dedicatory and a preface. In the epistle he emphasizes the extent of the Muslim area: this alone is a reason for taking Islam as a serious object of study. The flourishing civilisation of the Arabs in the Middle Ages is an added proof that their religion was not simply the result of human folly, but should be examined in the light of reason. In his preface Reland admits that religions have always attacked each other. They have each created, and been the victims of, vicious campaigns of propaganda. He does not, he stresses, wish to defend Islam, but if it is ever to be attacked effectively this must be done with a true knowledge and understanding of its principles. It is a remarkably rational faith, and thus—he here quotes Ludovico Marracci—all the more attractive to idolators converting to monotheism. Only rarely does Reland express a negative opinion of Islam. Like his predecessors, particularly Edward Pococke to whom he was so indebted, he deplores the Prophet’s attitude

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to polygamy. On the whole, however, he avoids the insulting epithets common among his contemporaries and treats Islam with respect.

In this, and in his systematic confutation of Christian prejudice, Reland is reminiscent of Henry Stubbe whose *Rise and Progress of Mahometanism* was written in the 1670s and remained in manuscript. But there could hardly have been a greater difference between the two men. Stubbe (who was no Arabist) had been known for his radical views and verged steadily closer to Deism.² Reland had been brought up in the strictest Reformed orthodoxy, at a time when Dutch universities were crossing one of the most conservative periods of their history. His father was a preacher. He himself had studied at the university of Utrecht. He had been taught Hebrew by Johan Leusden, a loyal follower of Gisbertus Voetius and an opponent of Cartesianism and Arminianism; theology by the equally orthodox Melchior Leydekker and the only slightly more moderate Herman Witsius; and philosophy by the staunchly anti-Cartesian Gerard de Vries. He had then proceeded to Leiden. In 1700, at the age of twenty-four, after a brief appointment at Harderwijk, he was nominated professor of oriental languages at Utrecht on the recommendation of the King and the Earl of Portland. And in Utrecht, that bastion of orthodoxy, Reland remained from the time he took up his chair in 1701 to his death from smallpox in 1718. He rejected posts offered him in Franeker and Leiden.

Reland was one of the most versatile scholars of his day. He was praised for his Latin poetry and admired for his cartographical studies of Palestine, Persia, Japan and Java. He produced work of enduring value on Biblical archeology. He was revered as an expert on Persian and Arabic and for his skill as a Hebraist, and he was esteemed for his linguistic theories on Malay, Urdu, Hindi, Chinese, Japanese and the languages of the American Indians. Yet he never budged from his university. He was described by Edward Gibbon as “a judicious student” who “had travelled over the East in his closet at Utrecht”.

Reland had already revealed an original approach to Islam in some of his very earliest works, the theses he had presented in Utrecht in 1696. In his *Exercitatio philologico-theologica de symbolo Mohammedico (Non est Deus nisi Unus) adversus quod SS Trinitas defenditur* (defended under Witsius) he tackled a standard issue in Christian anti-Muslim