One of the lesser-known gems amongst the private libraries in Europe is the Arcadian Library based in London. This library focusses exclusively on the shared cultural heritage of Europe and the Arab World and holds one of the finest collections of rare books and documents reflecting this interest in the Arab and Islamic worlds. Among its circa 10,000 volumes are many copies with important provenances and fine bindings. *The Arcadian Library: Bindings and Provenance* is a companion to number 8 in the *Studies in the Arcadian Library* that dealt with the theme of the *Western Appreciation of Arab and Islamic Civilization*, written by Alastair Hamilton and published in 2011. Other volumes in the series also focussed on several aspects related to the content of the books, but with this new volume attention has turned to the physical aspects of the books: provenance, annotations and bindings.

For the last two decades this kind of ‘Book Archaeology’ has become fashionable amongst book historians and the field is gaining much ground in book and library historical research. One of the pioneers in this field is David Pearson, who published the academic manual *Provenance Research in Book History* in 1994. Several ongoing projects are focussing on the reconstruction of libraries of private and institutional owners and the recording of earlier provenances of the books that were once part of these collections. We are confronted with layer upon layer of ownership of books through time, which justifies the term *archaeology* in book history. A good example of this kind of research is the Sloane project at the British Library (www.bl.uk/catalogues/sloane).
After the year 2000 the genre was also popularized for a more general audience by works such as *Books as History. The Importance of Books Beyond Their Texts* (2008), again by Pearson. The field of research has recently been extended to book binding *techniques* by Karin Scheper, who earned her PhD at Leiden University by defending a thesis on *The Islamic Bookbinding Tradition* (2014).

In this new volume of the *Studies in the Arcadian Library*, a majestic book of almost three kilograms, six authorities examine the collection of the Arcadian Library on the history of book-collecting, the ownership and use of books, the history of bookbinding and other material evidence.

The two opening essays by Giles Mandelbrote and Alastair Hamilton survey, respectively, notable British and European provenances. These provenances include many royal, princely, aristocratic and learned owners and celebrated later collectors. The copious number of illustrations in these chapters supports the wealth of information accumulated by Mandelbrote and Hamilton and provides the reader with a large amount of interesting biographical details. At the same time the images are a welcome ‘database’ for further research in identifying provenances in collections outside the Arcadian Library.

Both chapters are overloaded with interesting and intriguing details on former ownership and the use of books, and more than once the accumulation of information dazzles the reader. Basically, both chapters provide an overview of the collection of the Arcadian Library, highlighting the most interesting, but presumably not all, examples of provenances amongst the 10,000 books. We may assume that a number of provenances could not be traced (perhaps because some inscriptions were simply unreadable) to more obscure former owners. Nor is the reader provided with a complete list of books related to a former owner or owners. Possibly this was not the purpose of either author and there was certainly not enough room for that in a book like this. One may hope that at a certain point the information on the provenances will be inserted into a database or online catalogue, such as the CERL Thesaurus. The information in these chapters provides historians with a better understanding of the history of the relationship between Europe and the Middle East. Both chapters definitely call for further investigation into, but also beyond, the collections of the Arcadian Library.

We can confirm the conclusion of both authors that ‘marginal annotations give the copies an added interest and value’. Special attention is therefore given to remarkable annotated copies and copies associated with their authors. The absolute highlight is the fascinating presentation copy of the *Kitab al-amthāl, seu Poverbium arabicorum centuriae duae* (Leidae, In Officina Raphelengiana 1614). This collection of Arabic proverbs was edited by Thomas Erpenius (1584–1624), the first professor of Arabic at Leiden University, and was