

# Globalization of Knowledge in the Post-Antique Mediterranean, 700–1500



Edited by  
Sonja Brentjes and Jürgen Renn

GLOBALIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE POST-ANTIQUE  
MEDITERRANEAN, 700-1500

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*Edited by*

SONJA BRENTJES and JÜRGEN RENN

*Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Germany*



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# List of Abbreviations

ACA	Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó
ACB	Archivo de la Catedral de Barcelona
Add.	Additamenta
AHN	Archivo Histórico Nacional
a/Arab.	Arabic/us
BN	Biblioteca Nacional
BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France
Cod.	codex
CR	Cartes Reials
CRAI	Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
EP <sup>2</sup>	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam</i> , new edition, 11 Vol., and supplement. Leiden: Brill, 1960–2004
GAS	Fuat Sezgin, <i>Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums</i> , 15 Vol. to date, Leiden: Brill, 1967–1996; starting with vol. X: Frankfurt am Main: Institut für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften an der Goethe-Universität, 2000
lat.	Latin/us
MS	manuscript
o/Or.	oriental/is
R	register

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## Notes on Contributors

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(2000; with Gerrit Bos), and Abu Ma'shar on *Historical Astrology, The Book of Religions and Dynasties (On the Great Conjunctions)* (2000; with Keiji Yamamoto).

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# Introduction

Jürgen Renn and Sonja Brentjes

In the period immediately following the disintegration of the Western Roman Empire, the wider Mediterranean world remained highly connected, with distant territories eventually becoming strongly related to it, such as the Arabian Peninsula, the Indian subcontinent, and central Asia, mainly in the sequel of the expansion of the early Islamic caliphates. In the centuries often characterized as “post-antiquity,” people, material objects, ideas, and knowledge continued to migrate across vast geographical spaces. Knowledge exchange took place in an increasingly heterogeneous political, economic, and cultural landscape, implying immense losses but also striking innovations. This volume collects a number of studies investigating such knowledge exchange processes and their consequences from various perspectives.

The volume is based on a conference held in October 2012 at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin. It was organized by Matteo Valleriani and Helge Wendt as part of the institute’s ongoing research project on the globalization of knowledge in history. The founding conference of this project also took place in Berlin, in 2007.<sup>1</sup> A follow-up conference was held in Sofia in 2008, resulting in the volume *Melammu. The Ancient World in an Age of Globalization*.<sup>2</sup> The current volume may also be considered as a first outcome of another, related research project supported by the Max Planck Society, the “Convivencia Project,” dedicated to studying the processes leading from Iberian to global dynamics in the period between 500 and 1750. This project is a collaboration of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence (Max Planck Institute), the Max Planck Institute for European Legal History, the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, and the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology with their international partners, in particular the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas in Madrid and Chicago University. In the course of its preparation in the past years, several scholarly meetings were held, bringing together many of the scholars who have contributed to this volume.

The first chapter by J. Niehoff-Panagiotidis serves as an introductory survey of the formation of historiography within and across different communities

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<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Renn (ed.), *The Globalization of Knowledge in History* (Max Planck Research Library for the History and Development of Knowledge, Studies 1; Berlin: Edition Open Access, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Markham J. Geller (ed.), *Melammu. The Ancient World in an Age of Globalization* (Max Planck Research Library for the History and Development of Knowledge, Proceedings, 7; Berlin: Edition Open Access, 2014).

around the Mediterranean from Hellenistic times to the early Abbasid caliphate, approximately. B. Gruendler's contribution analyzes the formation of a new professional group together with the formation of book-based forms of knowledge production and distribution in third/ninth-century Abbasid Baghdad. The chapters by Brentjes, Renn, and Burnett treat issues of scientific texts and their contexts in Baghdad, al-Andalus, Antioch, and Genoa. Fancy argues for a re-interpretation of the exchange of soldiers across religious and territorial boundaries in Christian-ruled regions of the Iberian Peninsula and Muslim-ruled territories in North Africa. He situates this exchange in the larger perspective of a shared Mediterranean and West Asian concept of the just ruler and his military clients or servants. Ansari and Schmidtke go beyond the immediate Mediterranean cultural space. They focus on the movements of knowledge and its concomitant institutions between two smaller Muslim communities south of the Caspian Sea and on the southern Arabian Peninsula. Like Niehoff-Panagiotidis at the beginning, Akasoy at the end draws an extensive arc of cultural transformations and territorial extensions. But while Niehoff-Panagiotidis introduces the reader to the self-narration of different peoples in the Mediterranean world, Akasoy travels with those interested in her stories from Macedonia to Northeast Asia, from a living war-hero to admired religious icons or even worshipped divine beings. Going beyond Niehoff-Panagiotidis, Akasoy uses her grand narrative about Alexander of Macedonia for a debate of methodologies mainly in the domain of religious studies, but with some glances over the fence into the work done at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin for more than two decades on issues of models of knowledge and their movements across cultures and territories.

These models tackle the basic question as to what exactly knowledge is. The intense debates ongoing since the 1980s, have shown that there are historically and culturally very diverse notions of it. For analytical purposes, the research group at the Max Planck Institute has conceived of it as a human capacity to address challenges and, by relying on prior experiences, to mentally anticipate actions corresponding to these challenges. By thus defining knowledge as codified experience and as a problem-solving potential, they intentionally left its precise nature in its specific appearances wide open. Knowledge in fact varies as widely as the challenges met by humans in different historical and cultural circumstances. Nevertheless, different forms of knowledge still share some remarkably common features.

As codified experience, knowledge has a cognitive or mental dimension that has traditionally been a focus of the history of ideas. But it also has material and social dimensions that have received increasing attention in recent studies. Knowledge can be distributed and socially shared or historically accumulated due to its external, material representations such as spoken languages, texts, books, images, or technological artifacts. Knowledge also has a reflexive quality: knowledge about things is inseparable from knowledge about knowledge. Knowledge about knowledge is typically a reflection on the external representations of knowledge, thus giving rise to a chain of abstractions, which

at each point depends on the contingent external representations that are historically available. Knowledge also has a systemic quality. Different elements of knowledge often relate to and depend on each other.

Forms of knowledge vary along three basic dimensions: distributivity, systematicity, and reflexivity. Knowledge is distributive, because it can be shared to different degrees between individuals and groups. Its systemic properties start at the lowest level with isolated chunks of knowledge, leading via heterogeneous packages of knowledge to more or less coherent systems of knowledge. The reflexivity of knowledge is measured with regard to how far it is removed from primary interactions with material objects or concrete persons along the chain of reflective abstractions just described. Of particular relevance is knowledge about knowledge. This is second-order knowledge, which serves as a framework for legitimizing or restricting other forms of knowledge.

All of these dimensions are relevant to the understanding of globalization processes of knowledge. Knowledge has a self-organizing quality that comes with its systematicity and reflexivity. It is therefore often possible to reconstruct a knowledge system from just a few fragments. The reconstruction may, however, look quite different from the original. This is a typical feature of knowledge transmission processes, which at the same time tend to be knowledge transformation processes. This is due to the fact that transmission processes amount to a recontextualization of knowledge within a new knowledge economy. Every society includes mechanisms for the production, circulation, and transmission of the knowledge constituting its knowledge economy. Some of these features are discussed in greater detail in the chapter by Brentjes and Renn.

Second-order knowledge forms an essential part of this knowledge economy, being itself reproduced by it. A specific body of knowledge entering such a knowledge economy will necessarily be transformed by it, as this specific knowledge may become associated with new ideas about the meaning and legitimacy of knowledge. Vice versa, every new piece of knowledge will in turn also change an existing knowledge economy, possibly questioning or challenging some of its fundamental principles. These fundamental principles will, of course, typically not all be articulated explicitly but instead are often tacitly embodied in its institutional structures. Gruendler's contribution in this volume on the *Arabic Book Revolution* impressively illustrates the social, material, and intellectual dimensions of a knowledge economy in transition.

The analysis of some of the structures and processes discussed in this book will, or at least so we hope, yield specific insights into the evolution of knowledge in the era of post-antiquity—with implications that concern even the much more recent history of knowledge. One of the book's unifying questions concerns the manner in which we should conceptualize the relation between science, technology, and religion in the post-antique world. Is religion always to be understood as a method of legitimization and reassurance, of dealing with the unavoidable and inescapable, appealing to an ultimate authority as has been

suggested by social scientists?<sup>3</sup> And is science somehow intrinsically related to the rational, and technology to the doable? In such a case, we would have to face a dualism that may surface historically in differently conceived notions of the religious and the secular, but that is ultimately grounded in an anthropological universal. If this were so, it would indeed hardly make sense to compare the transformation of Greek science in third/ninth-century Baghdad with that of the Alexander legend in the Qurʾān. Yet, there are striking similarities in the way that traditional knowledge is reinterpreted even in these two cases. Tensions inherent in the ancient sources are now made explicit and highlight the relation between the practical, the cosmological, and the theological aspects of the relevant knowledge.

The approach to knowledge outlined above may provide a way to avoid the dilemma, as such reinterpretations are precisely what is to be expected when an earlier tradition becomes part of a new knowledge economy. But we must ask more deeply: in which sense can we speak meaningfully of religious knowledge, without immediately confining it to its mundane by-products and preconditions, such as institution building, scripturalization, and exegesis, or the production of religious artworks? This question is particularly pertinent to the period in question, as is also reflected by the contributions to this volume. The knowledge exchanged in post-antiquity is indeed predominantly religious knowledge in some broad sense: stories of prophets and heroes, theological writings, religious identities, or normative philosophical traditions.

What all of these knowledge traditions have in common, even where they border on the secular, is that they offer knowledge in a search for identity. Such “identity knowledge” does not have to be religious in a strict sense. It may also be part of literary, philosophical, historiographical, or political traditions. But it evidently counted among the most precious forms of knowledge in a time of rapid political turnovers, of shifting boundaries and alliances, of identities shaped by far-reaching networks, and of the powerful resilience of an ancient heritage which as a totality, however, was irrecoverably lost to the past, turning the future into an orphan lacking definition.

Some historical actors attempted to construct a distance from the ancient world while at the same time relying strongly on its cultural heritage. This dialectical reference to the ancient heritage may be characterized as a process of re-centering. Such re-centering took place in the successor states of the Roman Empire, including the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic world. Augustinus’s *civitas dei* and the *umma* of the Qurʾān answer questions of collective identity, transposing notions of political community and experiences with their fragility to a realm of internalized beliefs and norms that retain political implications. Religious communities do in fact share many features with political communities, among them a knowledge economy. But they are capable

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<sup>3</sup> Volkhard Krech, “Dynamics in the History of Religions. Preliminary Considerations on Aspects of a Research Programme,” in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe. Encounters, Notions, and Comparative Perspectives*, eds Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 23–4.

of relying more on social and epistemic networks than on territorial cohesion, as the centuries' long connectivity between the two Zaydī communities, one in northern Iran, the other in western Yemen, illustrates (Ansari and Schmidtke).

But again, in what sense can we speak of knowledge here? In which sense, for instance, can references in the Islamic tradition to Alexander's visiting places where the sun rises and sets be seen as knowledge? Not, of course, in the sense of precise geographical knowledge. But it may very well have served as second-order knowledge that allowed Muslims from all over the world to find their place and their identity within an imaginary communal geography of Islamic history (Akasoy). References to "transcendent" experiences that cannot be articulated in terms of everyday experiences are by no means the exclusive privilege of religious knowledge. Abstractions resulting from reflections on practical knowledge, for instance concepts expressing the positional qualities of a weight, are equally remote from the intuitions of the proverbial man on the street.

What differentiates such "scientific" concepts from those of theological and literary contexts are their concrete positions within larger systems of knowledge and within long-ranging historical traditions, involving extended chains of successive reflective abstractions, which at each step have been shaped profoundly by specific local constellations and contexts. The apparent abyss between scientific and religious forms of knowledge is therefore merely the product of this contingent global history. If there is a salient feature of religious knowledge, it is its inherently self-reflexive or second-order character, relating all other forms of knowledge to questions of one's own existence, one's identity and belonging to a larger community. But other forms of knowledge also acquire a comparable normative or reflexive dimension, for instance, when a substantive body of new knowledge becomes available through cumulative transfer and translation activities or due to the increased productivity of the knowledge economy. Such new knowledge may then serve as a normative example, as a new paradigm challenging the existing second-order frameworks and eventually transforming them.

From this vantage point, the history of knowledge is, by its very nature, an epistemic *histoire croisée* in which the encounter of different forms of knowledge can be understood not so much as an ultimately cumulative process, as has been traditionally assumed in the history of science, but more importantly as an interference of mutually exclusive perspectives. Only in this way can we understand the richness and complexity in which the globalization of knowledge has unfolded in history. The specific globalization of knowledge in the wider Mediterranean of post-antiquity, considered in this volume, has left us with a rich laboratory to probe such notions.

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Chapter 1

From One Universal Historiography  
to the Other: The Reorientation of  
Ancient Historiography in Byzantium  
and its Reception in Arabic—The Islamic  
Organization of Written Memory<sup>1</sup>

*To Hans Joachim Gehrke, for his birthday*

Johannes Niehoff-Panagiotidis

Ancient historical writing followed a fairly fixed pattern from the days of the Roman Republic until the end of late antiquity and even beyond. Hellenistic universal history was adapted to the needs of the Roman Empire and Polybios is a good and early example of this process. In the vast territory comprising so many groups, traditions, and languages, the globalized peoples had to reformulate their chronologically organized memories according to the linguistic and narrative patterns of the Greek-speaking world. The Jews were only one of many.

This changed dramatically with the advent of Christianity, and even more when this religion became the creed of the Roman Empire. Astonishingly enough, it was mainly one writer, Eusebios of Caesarea (died 339/40), whose work rose to many of the challenges, among which the role of biblical historiography (the chronicle) was but one. During the Byzantinization of the Roman Empire, the formerly conquered peoples started from biblical translations to create their own written versions of Christian history—and this in their reformulated mother tongues (like the Armenians). Nevertheless, they clung to Hellenistic models.

After the Muslim conquest, Christians felt it necessary to reformulate their history by re-establishing their traditions in the language of the new all-embracing Empire, Arabic. Examining examples like Theophilos of Edessa (695–785), which is located just 45 km from Ḥarran, the hometown of Thābit ibn Qurra (d. 288/901), this chapter will show how this process evolved at a time when Muslim historiography became established. It is in this framework that an attempt is made to put the *sīra* into a late antique setting.

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<sup>1</sup> I thank R. Jiang for his help in preparing this contribution.

## PAGAN HISTORIOGRAPHY IN A CHRISTIAN EMPIRE AND ITS BIBLICAL ALTERNATIVE

It was in the year 513, during the reign of Severus and in the reign of Abgar the king, son of Ma'nu the king, in the month of Tishrin the second, the spring that goes out from the palace swelled ... <sup>2</sup>

This famous text is the earliest surviving piece of Christian Oriental historiography. Like other annalistic entries, it begins with the dating (here: November 201 CE) according to the Roman ruler (here: Septimius Severus [ruled 193–211]). He is called “king” (*malkā*, the rendition of the Greek term for the Roman emperor, βασιλεύς), like his Byzantine successors much later (officially only starting with Heraklios [ruled 610–641]).<sup>36</sup> The era is the Seleucid, a dating system used after the official ascension of Seleukos Nikator (ruled 312–281 BCE) on the first of Nisan 312 throughout the Hellenized Near East (also by the Jews, who continued using it until the late Middle Ages).

But another ruler is mentioned as well (in fact, the hero of the short piece): King (with the same title as his Roman counterpart) Abgar VIII “the Great” (ruled 176/77–211/212).<sup>4</sup> The name of the month is the Mesopotamian one (similar to that in the later Jewish calendar), which is partly in use in the Near East (Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Iraq) even today. The language is Syriac, the local form of Aramaic used along with Greek in the Seleucid military colony of Edessa/Orhay. This dialect is previously documented only in pagan inscriptions, the earliest being one from Birecik (the old Birthā) in 6 CE. This inscription uses the same dating formula, albeit without the Roman parallel.<sup>5</sup> When Edessa became a Roman *colonia*, part of this double dating was retained. The famous deed of sales of 243 CE, found in Dura Europos but written by the royal notaries (preserved is the purchaser’s copy), dates according to three eras: the regnal years of the Roman emperor, the “former” reckoning (i.e. the Seleucid year), and the years of “liberty,” that is when the city had become a Roman *colonia*.<sup>6</sup>

The report on the “Great Flood” in Edessa is preserved in a much later historical work, the *Chronicle of Edessa*, originating from about the second third of the sixth century, that is, from Justinian’s reign (ruled 527–565). In terms of its structure, the piece discussed above breaks the order of this typical city

<sup>2</sup> Ignazio Guidi (ed.), *Chronica Minora*, pars prior, (CSCO, Scriptores Syri III.4) (Paris: E Typographico Reipublicae, 1903).

<sup>3</sup> *malkā* is the designation from which today’s “Melkites” take their name, i.e. the group of the emperor’s faith.

<sup>4</sup> See Millar on the complex structure of his reign after the Roman conquest of the region by the very same Septimius Severus and before its transformation into a Roman *colonia* (212/213). Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.-A.D. 337* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 195 and chapter 12.5.

<sup>5</sup> Han J.W. Drijvers and John F. Healey (eds), *The Old Syriac Inscriptions of Edessa and Osroene: Texts, Translations and Commentary*, Handbuch der Orientalistik 1/42 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), (with commentary).

<sup>6</sup> Drijvers, and Healey 1998, p.1.

chronicle, similar to the nearly contemporary one by pseudo-Joshua the Stylite, or to the Greek chronicle written by John Malalas (a Syriac *mallālā* “preacher”).<sup>7</sup> First, it is by far the longest piece; second, it disrupts the chronological order, since the next entry for the year 183 (of the same era) points to an event from about the middle of the second century BCE: “In the year 180, kings begin to reign in Edessa.”<sup>8</sup> This appears to be the real beginning of the chronicle in the strict sense of the term. Our piece gives the impression of being of a different origin and of a deeply different character, patched at the top of the sober chronicle. And indeed, we learn from it how memory was organized in this city between Rome and the dwindling Parthian Empire, soon to be incorporated into the empire as metropolis by Caracalla (who, being of Arabic extraction, was killed near Edessa). We learn of two *sāfre d’Orhāy* (scribes of Edessa), also called by their pagan names.<sup>9</sup> They belonged to the group of *sharrīre*, appointees of the king, members of the local elite.<sup>10</sup> They headed the *arxion d’Orhāy*, the royal archive.<sup>11</sup>

From the same archive, at the end of the first book of his *Church History*, Eusebios tells us that the documents comprising the alleged correspondence between Jesus and another King Abgar, called the Black, were translated.<sup>12</sup> The metropolitan of Palaestina I claims they had been taken from the “language of the Syroi.” Thus, we encounter here the fairly uncommon case of a translation from Syriac into Greek.<sup>13</sup> Later, we find a complete historical novel, the famous *Doctrina Addai* on the origins of Syriac Christianity in Osroene.<sup>14</sup> Millar called it “a wonderful Christian historical novel.”<sup>15</sup> It is well balanced between facts and fiction, telling the story of Tobias, son of Tobias, the Jew in whose house Addai/Thaddaios lodges. Tobias is a merchant from Palestine, one of many shuttling between Rome and Parthia. He introduces the apostle to the king. Since the Syriac translation of Eusebios’s “history” is preserved in one of the oldest surviving Syriac manuscripts from about 500, a comparison between the Greek

<sup>7</sup> W. Wright (ed.), *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite*, composed in Syriac A.D. 507, with a Translation into English and Notes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1882).

<sup>8</sup> Guidi 1903, part 2, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Guidi 1903, part 1, pp. 12ff.

<sup>10</sup> Segal identifies them with the *strategoi* of Hellenistic times. J.B. Segal, *Edessa, “The Blessed City”* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 20ff.

<sup>11</sup> Guidi 1903, part 3, pp. 4–5.

<sup>12</sup> Eduard Schwartz (ed.), *Eusebius Werke*. Band 2. *Die Kirchengeschichte*. Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller 9/1–3 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1903–1909), I, 13, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, “Greek into Syriac and Syriac into Greek,” in Sebastian P. Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London: Ashgate, 1984), Variorum Reprints: Collected Studies 199, Nr. II. On the author, crucial for this contribution, see the article in Alexander P. Kazhdan (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), vol. 2, pp. 751–2.

<sup>14</sup> Alain Desreumaux, *Histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus: Présentation et traduction du texte syriaque intégral de La Doctrine d’Addai*. Apocryphes 1 (Brussels: Brepols, 1993). Osroene is the landscape around Edessa, corresponding to the *xōra* of a Greek city. Later, it became part of the name of the province.

<sup>15</sup> Millar 1993, p. 463.

and Syriac versions is of great interest.<sup>16</sup> It seems probable that the ingenious tale was based on Josephus Flavius's report on Queen Helena's life.<sup>17</sup> According to him, her son Izates II (which is Iranian for God) was granted Ḥarrān as his fief, close to Edessa. Her burial, in the suburbs of Ailia (Jerusalem), is also mentioned by Eusebios.<sup>18</sup> However, it should not be forgotten that another female member of the royal house named Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, moved to Palestine just like Protonike, the female hero of the novel.

These—alas very brief—examples indicate the great extent to which Christian Oriental historiography is linked to imperial history, normally written in Greek. The example taken from the archives of Edessa, in which the king installs a special officer to watch over the flood from October to April, can also be found in Prokopios (fl. 490–562), who used archival material, and his successor Agathias of Myrina (fl. 530–582/594). The oldest account of the origins of Syriac Christianity appears in Greek before it does in Syriac, and is attested by the highly prestigious genre of Byzantine Church history, especially in its first representative Eusebios. The many short *Chronicles* (*tesh'iyatha*) published in volume IV of the third series of the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* look almost like Byzantine (world) chronicles, even though many of them were written in Islamic times.

#### THE TRANSFORMATION OF IMPERIAL HISTORIOGRAPHY (AND BIOGRAPHY): THE LIFE OF THE HOLY—THOUGH NOT BAPTIZED—EMPEROR

To understand the system of late antique historiography one has to take but a brief glimpse at the Greek writing of history during late antiquity, because the traditions of writing memory in a continuous narration transcend linguistic borders. The transformation of these traditions is closely connected with religious transformations.

A very important achievement of Roman civilization was the incorporation of Greek historiography into the Roman and, later, imperial idea. The Romans expressed the history of their own empire, their mission, in terms of Greek historiography. The stages of this process are marked by the historical writings of Roman senators narrating *historía* in Greek (like Fabius Pictor [second half of the 3rd century BCE]) and by Greek captives describing and analyzing the political system of the rising power (like Polybios [fl. 200–118 BCE], who criticized his predecessors). The leading society of the (Eastern) Roman Empire

<sup>16</sup> Adam H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom. The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Millar 1993, p. 463; Segal 1970, pp. 17ff and passim (see index). The comparison has been undertaken by Sebastian P. Brock, "Eusebios and Syriac Christianity," in Harold W. Attridge, and Hata Gohei (eds), *Eusebios, Christianity, and Judaism*, *Studia Post-Biblica* 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 212–34.

<sup>17</sup> Josephus Flavius, *Antiquitates Judaicae*, in *Flavii Iosephi opera*, ed. B. Niese. 4 Vols. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1887–1892), vol. 4 (1892), Book XX,2,1ff.

<sup>18</sup> Schwartz 1903, II,12.

continued this narration up to the last historian of the Byzantine Empire (who was also the first of the Ottoman Empire), Kritovoulos of Imvros (fl. 1410–1470), in the middle of the fifteenth century.<sup>19</sup> This Greek historiography is the one most scholars are used to calling “Byzantine.” It expressed the ideas of the Greco-Roman *oikoumene* in lofty ancient Greek and had difficulties combining Christianity with this glorious past transmitted by and since the times of Herodotos (fifth century BCE) and Thukydides (second half of the fifth century BCE). In fact, the tension between the Christian and the traditional set of narration techniques is inherent in Byzantine historiography, as can be seen clearly in the work of Eusebios of Caesarea, an author who symbolizes in exemplary fashion the transition between Roman and Byzantine, pagan and Christian historiography. His biographical presentation of Constantine as the ideal ruler in the tradition of Moses and the *Caesares* gave Christianity the image of an ideal ruler, and Byzantium the paradigm of “New Constantines” to come.<sup>20</sup> Prokopios of Caesarea (the see of Eusebios) represents a similar case, from the very city in Greece founded by Herodes the Great (ruled 37–4 BCE).<sup>21</sup>

#### THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK: CHRISTIAN ORIENTAL HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE FRAMEWORK OF HELLENISM AND BEYOND

The non-Greek subjects of the Hellenistic and later the Roman Near East adopted the presuppositions and narrative techniques of this writing of history, largely abandoning their own. When we see them taking up the pen again (at different places, in different languages, and in various places), we find a Hellenistic historiography in the service of these *éthnē*. This is the first condition for the rise of Christian Oriental historiography.

Before turning to the second condition, it is essential to look at the reception and development of this impressive bulk of writing history with regard to the longest lasting indigenous tradition of writing history, the Jewish tradition. The Old Testament is to a major extent a historical narration but, in stark contrast to the Greek and Roman approach, the story of the Jews is hung between the two poles of a narration history, between Genesis and the coming of the Messiah. All of these attempts by Jewish historians from Alexandria like Artapanos (late third or early second century BCE), Eupolemos (middle

<sup>19</sup> Kazhdan 1991, vol. 2, p. 1159.

<sup>20</sup> Ivar A. Heikel (ed.), *Eusebius Werke*. Erster Band. (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller 7) (Leipzig: C.J. Hinrichs, 1902); Averil M. Cameron, and Stuart G. Hall, *Eusebius' Life of Constantine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Paul Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries*. Papers from the Twenty-Sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St. Andrews, March 1992 (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> Averil M. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1985); Averil Meredith Cameron (ed.), *History as Text. The Writing of Ancient History* (London: Duckworth, 1989); Anthony Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Kazhdan 1991, vol. 3, p. 1732.

of the second century), and others—almost all of which have been lost—apply Hellenistic models to the story of their own people, and do so using Greek, in order to write a *historía*.<sup>22</sup> They are documented by Eusebios in his *praeparatio evangelica* and by Clement of Alexandria in his *stromateis*. The major exception to this loss—*unus sed leo*—is the work of Josephus Flavius, who became a major source for Christian Oriental historiography. Flavius adopted two major genres common in Hellenistic historiography, as had his predecessor Nikolaos of Damaskos (second half of the first century BCE to first half of the first century CE).<sup>23</sup> Nikolaos wrote for King Herodes, but almost all of his work is lost. The first genre is the historical monograph dealing with a single event, for instance a war (masterpiece: Thukydides). The second is the *archaiologia*, an exhaustive account of a period from times immemorial up to the author's present. This is what Titus Livius (died circa 17 CE) did in his Roman history. He was writing in Latin as a contemporary of Dionysios of Halikarnassos (first century BCE), who wrote in Greek. *Ab urbe condita* and *Romaike archaiologia* belong to the same Roman-Hellenistic genre. Flavius's corresponding works are his "Jewish war" and his "Jewish archaeology," clearly the transposition of Dionysios's oeuvre to the people of the Jews but in a Jewish context this meant re-narrating the Jewish Bible. Important for our context is that this work was almost entirely lost within Jewish communities, while eagerly read, translated, and interpreted by Christians.<sup>24</sup> Christian Oriental writers often resorted to his writings. One of the oldest Syriac manuscripts (dated 462) is the translation of his work called *'eqlesiastiqē* on fol. 114v of the Petropolitanus. Armenian historiography also used him extensively, in particular Movsēs Xorenac'i (fifth century?).

Jewish historiography came to an end with the destruction of the Second Temple and the Jews had to rely on other means for the linguistic codification of memory.<sup>25</sup> These means were no longer Hellenistic ones, at least until the Byzantine Middle Ages.

And the Christians? As is well known, there is no early Christian historiography after the Gospels. The adherents of the Jewish sect were living in the immediate expectation of the Second Coming. Why then write down the events of an empire they felt estranged from? Given the aforementioned link between the Roman Empire and Roman imperial historiography, it is no surprise that with Eusebios's work a new era began, as he gave the Church a "history." His basis was Jewish historiography in Hellenistic garb, as previously noted, but he

<sup>22</sup> Erich S. Gruen, *Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Tessa Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society*. Second edition (London: Duckworth, 2002); Heinz Schreckenberg, *Die Flavius-Josephus-Tradition in Antike und Mittelalter* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, Eusebios of Caesarea in the first three of his 10 books on *Church History*. The notable exception is the translation of the fourth-century Latin reworking of Josephus's work *De excidio urbis Hierosolymitanae* into Judaeo-Arabic and Hebrew, see Saskia Dönnitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption des Sefer Yosippon* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle and London: The University of Washington Press, 1982).

also chose to work with another genre. Earlier Christian writers had taken the structure of the (late) books of the Jewish Bible, called in Hebrew *dibʾre yamin* (“events of the days”), and created the only kind of Christian historical writing known before Eusebios: the Greek (*Septuagint*) translation *xroniká* was taken as a model for Sextus Julius Africanus’s (late second, early third centuries) work *xronographiai*.<sup>26</sup> Here we find a structure encountered before: brief entries using simple year dating. However, the aim was not primitive listing (as it looks in many later chronicles, including the Edessenean one cited above), since the author tried to follow the Hellenistic practice of synchronizing the different eras and empires: the Medes, the Persians, and the Romans. Christian history was thus integrated into a salvation framework of secular events, starting from Chapters 2 and 7 of the *Book of Daniel* (on which Sextus’s contemporary Hippolytos (died circa 236) wrote a commentary), thus precluding any all-too-easy apocalyptic speculations. The author, originating from Flavia Neapolis in Palestine (modern day Nablus), gives a vivid account of his visit to the court of King Abgar where he met another author of early Syriac literature, Bardaišān (154–222).<sup>27</sup> They went out hunting, a typical Persian sport.

Eusebios took over the genre and expanded it, thus becoming the founder of chronography as a historical genre and, although the original Greek work is lost but for a few fragments, it survives in the translations into Latin (by St. Jerome), Armenian, and Syriac. Near the beginning of his account the author of the anonymous *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (close to Amida), writing about 775, states: “The material up to Constantine the Pious was taken over by me from Eusebios (*meneh nsib (h)u lan*).”<sup>28</sup> This example helps to understand how the transition between late antique (Greek), Christian Oriental, and Islamic historiography was shaped.

Therefore one can say that Eusebios was the most influential author for Christian historiography in the Middle East (where he came from) as far as chronography and Church history (conceived by him, as it seems, as a substitute for pagan *historía*) are concerned, and this not only in Greek, but also, via various routes, for the Oriental Christians. Moreover, he maintained this exemplary

<sup>26</sup> Julius Africanus, *Chronographiae. The Extant Fragments*, ed. Martin Wallraff, with Umberto Roberto and, for the Oriental sources, Karl Pingéra, translated by William Adler (Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller, Neue Folge 15), (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> J.-R. Vieillefond, *Les Cestes de Julius Africanus*, Publications de l’Institut français de Florence, Collections d’histoire, de critique et de philologie (Florence-Paris: L’Institut français de Florence, 1970), I, 20.

<sup>28</sup> J.-B. Chabot (ed. and transl.), *Chronique de Denys de Tell-Mahré*, Bibliothèque de l’École des hautes études: Sciences historiques et philologiques 112 (Paris: Bibliothèque de l’École des hautes études, 1927–1933), 1, 6; The chronicle was formerly erroneously ascribed to Dionysios of Tell Mahré. Kazhdan 1991, vol. 1, pp. 628–9. Howard-Johnston analyzed the complicated tradition surrounding the highly important *Chronicle of Zuqnin*. He rightly rejects the authorship of the bishop of Edessa, Dionysios of Tell Mahré, still common in older reference works (like the edition of Chabot). John Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis. Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: Routledge, 2010), pp. 194ff. Only one manuscript has survived.



position even after the advent of Islam, directly and indirectly (by excerpts or translations).

Apart from the *Church History* and the *Chronicle*, Eusebios wrote another equally original historical work, the four books on the life of Constantine. Although his predecessors are quite clear—imperial historiography like Suetons's (circa 71–circa 135) *Vitae* or Plutarch's (circa 45–circa 125) biographies—there is a crucial distinction from them. As the account of the battle at Milvian Bridge shows, he interpreted the pagan Roman emperor as the ideal ruler over New Israel, with Moses as his predecessor.<sup>29</sup> Constantine becomes an imitator of Christ, a political as well as a religious figure, who leads his flock to salvation. Constantine is depicted as what he actually became for the Oriental Church: a saint.<sup>30</sup> From the standpoint of historiography (and the lives of the saints are a kind of historiography) this is remarkable because there were no accounts of saints' lives at this time. Only about 30 years later did St. Athanasios (died 373) write his famous *Life of Antony*. For Byzantium, the empire, Constantine became the ideal for all "New Constantines," and his image the ideal Byzantine biography of an "emperor and priest," even though its author was condemned in 787.<sup>31</sup> If one takes the Islamic empire and its secular and spiritual ruler as an imitation of the Byzantine government, it is tempting to see the *sīra* as the *Life of Constantine* rewritten by Arab Muslims. Although we have no traces of direct translation into, say, Syriac, the last three books of Eusebios's *Church History* also deal with the first Byzantine emperor as their hero—and this work was translated into Syriac.

Before proceeding it is time to define further our subject: what do all of these peoples, languages, and literatures have in common that earns the designation of "Christian Orient," a subject that was rapidly expanding its focus toward the Northern Caucasus and Nubia while its representatives were being physically annihilated?<sup>32</sup> One can look at the useful and comprehensive overviews by

<sup>29</sup> Heikel 1902, I, 37–8. Heikel 1902, I, 12 already compares in its title Constantine to Moses. An annotated translation is Averil M. Cameron, and Stuart Hall, *Eusebios' Life of Constantine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). The relationship between Constantine and his historiographer is discussed in Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>30</sup> Heikel 1902, I, 21, 5.

<sup>31</sup> See Magdalino 1994; Gilbert Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre, étude sur le Césaropapisme Byzantin*, Bibliothèque des histoires (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> Old Eastern Caucasian (Albanian) was known, almost exclusively, by the multilingual glossary, in fact a compendium of the Christian Orient, published by Ilya V. Abuladze in 1937, until Z. Aleksidzé discovered an old lectionary of early Byzantine times, on Mount Sinai at St. Catherine's in the 1990s, see Z. Aleksidzé and J.-P. Mahé, *Le nouveau manuscrit Géorgien Sinaïtique* N Sin 50, (Louvain: Peeters, 2001) (CSCO 586, Subsidia 108). The alphabet is Georgian, though, invented by Mesrop according to Moses Khorenatsi'i. Moses Khorenatsi'i, *History of the Armenians*, ed. Robert W. Thomson (Ann Arbor: Caravan Books, 2006), pp. 321–4. See also, Ilya V. Abuladze, "About the discovery of the alphabet of the Caucasian Albanians," *Bulletin of the Institute of Language, History and Material Culture (ENIMK)*, Tbilisi, 4.1 (1938). Old Nubian was written in the Greek alphabet, with some Coptic letters. See Gerald M. Browne, *Introduction to Old Nubian*. Meroitica 11 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989).

Mueller and Hage, but a definition of their essence is difficult, since we are dealing with a period of about 2,000 years and an area stretching from Ethiopia to the Caucasus (or Mongolia).<sup>33</sup> As far as historiography is concerned, two points seem decisively shared, such that it is justified to speak of “Christian Oriental historiography.” First, the languages have nothing in common originally, since they are not cognate. On the other hand, their linguistic cognates are seldom labeled “Christian Oriental.” The closest relative to Syriac is probably Babylonian Aramaic, written for the eastern Talmud and detected in some Targumim. On the sarcophagus alleged to belong to Queen Helena of Adiabene both languages are written side by side, apparently without any danger of mutual incomprehensibility.<sup>34</sup> But they all have one substantial fact in common: even if the most important of the languages possessed a tradition older than Alexander, the shape they took—beginning with Syriac and Coptic—was greatly influenced by the fact that they coexisted for centuries with Greek. The time, circumstances, and sociolinguistic basis of each of them is different, but the individuals able to write (see above on the *sāfre*) were bilingual, as examples like the contract of 243 found in Dura Europos and the archive published by Teixidor, Feissel, and Gascou clearly show.<sup>35</sup> Even the name of the city—*Antonina Edessa*, after the emperor who incorporated it—is given in Greek with Syriac letters, and 17 Greek documents were found together with the Syriac ones.<sup>36</sup> All of these languages betray the imprint of Hellenism, from vocabulary to textual strategies, since the groups that put them in writing were structurally bilingual (even Michael the Syrian knew Greek in the late twelfth century). They are thus clearly examples of an empire “writing back,” by its own means,<sup>37</sup> in this case, the pre-Hellenistic languages. The reawakening of the languages of the oriental regions of Alexander’s empire, accompanied by the spread of Christianity, finds its closest parallel in the process of writing down the *Mishna* under Yehuda ha-Nasi (about 220 CE).<sup>38</sup> The translation of the Bible into Coptic, Syriac, and other languages, the field of activity most commonly investigated, shows different layers of Hellenization in the case of Syriac, and is of great interest for textual

<sup>33</sup> C.D.G. Müller, *Geschichte der orientalischen Nationalkirchen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1981); Wolfgang Hage, *Das orientalische Christentum* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. and ed. by G. Vermes, F. Millar, and M. Goodman (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), vol. 3.1, p. 164, no. 66 gives both the inscriptions, and remarks that one of them resembles the *estrangelā* script (see above on Birecik).

<sup>35</sup> Drijvers, and Healey 1998, P1. The archive was edited as P2 and P3 in Drijvers and Healey 1998, who give the emendations by Sebastian P. Brock, “Some New Syriac Documents from the Third Century AD,” *ARAM Periodical* 3 (1991): 259–67; Denis Feissel, and Jean Gascou, “Documents d’archives inédits du Moyen Euphrate (troisième siècle après J.-C.),” *CRAI* (1989): 535–61; J. Teixidor, “Deux documents syriaques du IIIe siècle après J.-C., provenant du Moyen Euphrate,” *CRAI* (1990): 144–66.

<sup>36</sup> They stem from Apadana, close to Batnai. The name is Persian.

<sup>37</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. (London: Routledge, 1989), citing the title of a famous article by S. Rushdie.

<sup>38</sup> J. Neusner, *The Mishnah* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988).

criticism of the Bible. But historiography is another fruitful field for detecting this change, and, as the example from Edessa/Orhay above has shown, a very old one. In fact, one wonders what was the language chanted in the “Church of the Christians” (*‘edtā dKhrestīāne*) in Edessa (the first reference incidentally to a Church building<sup>39</sup>).

The second common denominator is political; juridically, the territories where these languages were developed as written languages were dependent on the Roman/Byzantine Empire or pursued a politics of balancing between Rome and Iran, not always successfully. In terms of ancient history, they were client kingdoms, later incorporated into the empire like the one of Deiotarus “Philorhomaioi” in Asia Minor (in whose honor a speech by Cicero has survived) or the most famous one of King Herod.<sup>40</sup> As a result, in Armenia, Georgia, and Edessa the writing of history emerged from a complex process of negotiation between the older role of Greek, Christianization, and faithfulness to local tradition. This loyalty was incarnated in the person of the ruler, the king, and his dynasty—like Abgar. But, as the example of distant Ethiopia shows, the *kabrā nāgāšt* (“glory of the kings”) finds its closest parallel in *K’art’lis c’hovreba* (“life of Georgia”), including their final redaction much later than the first millennium, namely in the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>41</sup> In both cases we are dealing with a synthesis between dynastic history and *origo gentium*. These works have many authors and were transmitted over centuries, if not millennia. The hero is normally a dynasty that represents the people. The Negus had to intervene on Justinian’s behalf against the ally of the Sassanians in South Arabia.<sup>42</sup> The conquest of Mecca by his former general, Abraha, is the topic of Sura 105 (called “The Elephant” after Abraha’s war animal).

This fundament of these languages’ historical identity was also the reason they were restricted. No local dynasty achieved the impact of the Roman Empire. Its language was Greek (the “language of the Romans,” as Greek is called in modern Greek), also the original medium of preaching the Gospel. It is at this point that the lines intertwine: Aramaic, in the garb of Syriac, became the most common language apart from Greek. The high percentage of texts translated into this language from Greek (where they are often lost), from the fifth century, and the wide diffusion of its speakers (to the Red Sea, China, and India) made it the sole medium of equal—or almost equal—international importance. The fact that Syriac was the second most important language from which translations

<sup>39</sup> Guidi 1903, vol. 2.1, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Deiotarus was also the head of a tetrarchy, like Herod. One legion kept his name, the *legio XXII Deiotariana*, even in later times.

<sup>41</sup> R. Beylot, *La gloire des Rois ou l’histoire de Salomon et de la reine de Saba* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008); Gérard Colin, *La gloire des rois (Kabrā Nāgāšt). Épopée nationale de l’Éthiopie* (Genève: Patrick Cramer, 2002) for the *kabrā nāgāšt*. Excellent for Georgian is Steve Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography: Early Texts and Eurasian Contexts*. CSCO 601, Subsidia 113 (Louvain: Peeters, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> Iwona Gajda, *Le royaume de Himyar à l’époque monothéiste: l’histoire de l’Arabie du Sud ancienne de la fin du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle de l’ère chrétienne jusqu’à l’avènement de l’Islam* (Paris: De Boccard, 2009), especially pp. 102ff.

were made (also into Armenian and Georgian) and that Ethiopian includes words borrowed from that language (*haymanot* = faith) are clear indications of the importance of this second language of the Seleucid Empire. Moreover, there are many words in the language of the Qurʾān borrowed from Syriac (and/or Christian Palestinian Aramaic). But its speakers' connection to the Miaphysite International, leading to their suppression in Byzantium and Persia, and the lack of dynastic support—except from Ethiopia—ceded the role of the chief Oriental language to Arabic in the long term. Thus, late antiquity up to the seventh century was a period of sociolinguistic disintegration, hindered neither by the use of the universal language of Greek for Christianity nor by the unifying forces of the Byzantine Empire.

This process is also mirrored in historiography. Although most of these histories depend, directly or indirectly, on Eusebios it is in their own languages that they tell history—or better different histories—of the Near East. Hence, Oriental Christian historiography became a matter of only limited interest, since it was subjected to an ongoing provincialization of late antique/Byzantine historiography, being of interest today mostly to specialists in the languages and literature(s) of these peoples.

From the seventh century another process was under way, this time a very swift one: the reintegration of the divided Near East, as a large part of the Byzantine Empire and all of Sassanian Iran were incorporated into the Arabic Islamic caliphate. Within 10 years of the death of the Prophet, Damascus, Antioch, and Alexandria were definitively in the hands of the new world power. How this conquest was reflected in Byzantine and Near Eastern historiography is the topic of the excellent work by J. Howard-Johnston, to whose thoughtful and original *Quellenkritik* the following lines are indebted.<sup>43</sup>

If one applies the traditional division of “history” between *res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum*, the most striking point for the following pages of this chapter is this: we have no contemporary account of early Islamic history written by Muslims. Islamic historiography emerged at the earliest in the eighth century. Its main representative is the universal history by al-Ṭabarī (from Tabaristan on the Caspian Sea) who died in 310/923. Significantly entitled *taʾrīkh al-rusūl wa-l-mulūk* (“History of the apostles/prophets and kings”), his work is based mainly on older sources, namely the Middle Persian “Book of the Kings.” Hence it must be the heir of older Arabic records (including the *sīra*).

The rise of Muslim historiography is clearly a highly intricate problem, which was not far from contemporary politics. The so-called revisionist school of early Islam cast doubt on almost all Muslim traditions about its own beginnings.<sup>44</sup> The result is that all contemporary and near-contemporary information about early Islam can only be gained from Christian (and some very

<sup>43</sup> Howard-Johnston 2010.

<sup>44</sup> Patricia Crone, and Michael Cook, *Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977).

scanty, enigmatic Jewish) evidence, enumerated by Howard-Johnston.<sup>45</sup> Since the Byzantine sources, that is, those historians who wrote in Greek (such as Georgios Pisidis, the court poet of Heraklios, and the *Chronicon paschale*) abruptly break off at about 630 or offer only a few allusions (like the homily by the eyewitness to the conquest of Jerusalem, Sophronius), the only available sources for the period up to the end of the seventh century are the Christian Oriental chronicles of the type described above.<sup>46</sup> Very often their later avatars like the *Chronicle* of Theophilos of Edessa (died 785) are preserved only in later medieval compilations.<sup>47</sup> Theophilos was trilingual. He wrote in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic and might be the kernel of the medieval legend of Theophilos the sorcerer. As one example, the anonymous Syriac *Maronite Chronicle* tells us, after a lengthy lacuna in the only surviving manuscript, the following:

[lacuna] Mu‘āwiya, Ḥuḍayfa, son of his sister. And on Mu‘āwiya’s command, he was killed.

Again, ‘Alī was threatening to march again against Mu‘āwiya. They beat him up when he was praying, in the city of Ḥērṭā, and they killed him. And Mu‘āwiya went down to the city of Ḥērṭā. All the Arabic (ṭayyāye) troops there gave him their hands, and he went back to Damascus ...

In the year 971, the eighteenth of Constans, many Arabs gathered in Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup> They made Mu‘āwiya their king/emperor (*malkā*). He went up to Golgotha, sat there and prayed, went to Gethsemane and went down to the grave of St. Mary, and he prayed there. The same day, when the Arabs assembled there, there was a heavy earthquake. On that occasion, by a big deal, Jericho fell. And the Church of Lord (*mār*) St. John, of the baptism of our Savior, at the Jordan, was destroyed in its fundaments, with all the monastery; and the monastery of our father Evthymios with many dwelling places of the monks and anchorites, many places broke down by this.

The same year, the month of *tammūz*, many emirs (*amirē*) of the Arabs assembled and gave their hand to Mu‘āwiya. And an edict was issued in all the lands and cities of his empire that he should be proclaimed king/emperor of his realm, and they made proclamations and voices. He also coined gold and silver which was not accepted, because the Cross (*ṣliḥā*) was missing. Again,

<sup>45</sup> Strictly contemporary are four sources, none of them Muslim. Howard-Johnston 2010, pp. 135–6.

<sup>46</sup> On Pisidis and Heraklios, see the magisterial analysis by Howard-Johnston 2010, pp. 16ff. and pp. 36ff. Sophronius was patriarch there (from 634 onwards) and a compatriot of St. John of Damascus. See Howard-Johnston 2010, pp. 171ff.

<sup>47</sup> Howard-Johnston 2010, 194ff. He was the court astrologer of Caliph al-Mahdī (ruled 158–169/775–785).

<sup>48</sup> According to the Seleucid era, like the chronicle cited above.

Muʿāwiya was not girded with a crown like all the kings before him. He put his throne to Damascus, he did not want to go to the seat of *Mḥmmṭ*.<sup>49</sup>

Through this unknown, probably Maronite, Syriac author, who wrote about 680, we encounter a contemporary report about the first Muslim civil war, the first *fitna*, the struggle between ʿAlī, cousin and son-in-law of the prophet, and Muʿāwiya, the future first caliph of the dynasty of the Umayyads.<sup>50</sup> This report refers to the transfer of the capital from Medina to Damascus.<sup>51</sup> The prophet and his home are mentioned in this passage, in a popular Arabic form, by name (this is probably one of the first times at all that he is called by name.) The fourth caliph's assassination (Najaf) is correctly situated close to the old capital of the Lakhmids, al-Ḥīra.<sup>52</sup> It is there that Symeon dBēth Arshām learned about the persecutions of the Christians in South Arabia.<sup>53</sup> Thus, this is a report, separated from the events by only about 30 years, about the origin of the conflict among Muslims, which over time split the community (*umma*, a loan word from Jewish Aramaic). Although neutral in this strife, our unknown author was very well informed: He knows about the rebellion of Muḥammad ibn Abī Hudhayfa in Egypt, probably because he and his adherents had fled to Palestine, and their execution by Muʿāwiya (Dhū l-Qaʿda-Dhū l-Ḥijja 139/Mai-June 657).<sup>54</sup> He adds precious information about the attempts of the Umayyads to introduce their money. One has only to look at the cover illustrations of Howard-Johnston's book to see how correct he was: the coins that Justinian II (685–95 [first reign]) struck are in fact gold coins with a cross...

Yet the content and form of his report (and the whole *Chronicle*) are Byzantine and Christian Oriental. The form is annalistic, taken directly or indirectly from Eusebios. The author begins, correctly, with Alexander the Great and goes on to his lifetime—as Byzantine chroniclers do. He often combines his short entries with local events: earthquakes, the local grape. In 71, 24, just after mentioning the prophet, he tells us that on the 13th of Nisan, that is in the spring, frost

<sup>49</sup> Ernest Walter Brooks, Jean-Baptiste Chabot, and Ignazio Guidi (eds), *Chronica minora, Pars tertia*, (CSCO Scriptores Syrii III.4) (Paris: E Typographeo Reipublicae, 1905), pp. 69–71 (Syriac)/pp. 54ff. (Latin). On this important text see Howard-Johnston 2010, pp. 175ff. The translation is by this author. See also A. Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 1993). The manuscript is London, British Library, Add. 17216.

<sup>50</sup> Howard-Johnston 2010, 176 tries to determine an exact date.

<sup>51</sup> Louis Gardet, "fitna," in *IE²*, eds B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat, and J. Schacht; assisted by J. Burton-Page, C. Dumont, and V.L. Ménage (Leiden: Brill, 1965), vol. 2, pp. 930–1. On Muʿāwiya see R. Stephen Humphreys, *Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān. From Arabia to Empire* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

<sup>52</sup> On this Sassanian client kingdom that was so important for the development of classical Arabic literature, see Isabel Toral-Niehoff, *al-Ḥīra. Eine arabische Kulturmetropole im spätantiken Kontext* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

<sup>53</sup> See Ignazio Guidi, *La lettera di Simeone vescovo di Bēth Aršām sopra i martiri omeriti*, Memorie della Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche 3, no. 7 (Rome: Salviucci, 1881). The Syriac author is otherwise unknown. His account, close to the events, is one of the best pieces of Christian Oriental historiography.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Pellat, "Muḥammad b. Abī Hudhayfa," in *IE²*, eds C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, and C. Pellat (Leiden: Brill, 1993), vol. 7, pp. 394–5.

(*glīdā*) ruined the white vine. And, most enlightening, he still uses the double dating, first according to the Seleucid era, including the old Aramaic month names (see above), and then according to the Roman emperor, who at this time was the son of Heraklios, Constans II, soon to be murdered in Syracuse on Sicily (died 668). This combination of eras was then to be readopted by the Byzantines who wrote Greek, like Theophanes the Confessor (died 817/18), who ordered the entries of his chronicle according to the imperial reigns, the kingship of the Sassanians, the caliphs, the patriarchs of Antioch, Constantinople, and Rome.<sup>55</sup> He had acquired most of his education in the Greek Orthodox monasteries of Palestine, where he spent a great deal of time.

The most striking episode is the piece on the supposedly Byzantine ceremony in Jerusalem during the visit of the first Umayyad caliph in Jerusalem. Several elements emphasize this Byzantine reading of the Umayyad ceremony. The caliph is called *malkā*, thus receiving the same designation as King Abgar (and all the rulers of Edessa) and the Roman emperor (see above). He is hailed like the Christian Roman rulers (actually, our author used two Greek words, common for the acclamations, typical for the ceremonies of a coronation).<sup>56</sup> The post-Byzantine narrator is astonished about the lack of a crown (*klilā*), although he knows about the ritual of giving hands (the Islamic *bayʿa*). But, above all, we find the *amir of the faithful* honoring the main Christian places of the *topographia sacra* in the Holy Land, as the nun Egeria had done almost three centuries before.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps he followed the precedent set by Heraklios's triumph/pilgrimage after his victory over Khusrōy II in March—or September?—630.<sup>58</sup> Thus, not only did the Roman emperor act as a New David, as celebrated by Georgios Pisidis, but the Muslim ruler is presented in the garb of the Messiah king.<sup>59</sup> This is, moreover, the literary-historical background for the construction of the Dome of the Rock and the Golden Gate on what is called today the *ḥaram al-sharīf*.

#### TRANSLATING INTO THE NEW EMPIRE: CHRISTIAN ARABIC HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE ATTEMPT TO REACH A BROADER PUBLIC

With the advent of the New World order introduced after the Muslim conquest of the Near East, over time Arabic gradually became the language of day-to-day communication as well as (later) a literary medium among Christians. This shift occurred gradually, in different sectors of the caliphate's society at different times, on different levels, and in different types of texts. Liturgy, as often, proved conservative. Even today Christian services are performed in Greek, Coptic, Syriac, and Armenian. Communities differ in the extent to which

<sup>55</sup> Howard-Johnston 2010, pp. 268ff.

<sup>56</sup> Namely *klēseis* and *phōnes* (*qlsys* and *pwms* in Syriac, Guidi 1903, 71, p. 18). One could also consider *keleusis*, equally of Greek origin.

<sup>57</sup> On her, see Kazhdan 1991, vol. 1, p. 679.

<sup>58</sup> Howard-Johnston 2010, pp. 22ff., 246 and *passim*.

<sup>59</sup> Howard-Johnston 2010, p. 32 (with references).

Arabic is used. This is also the case for bishoprics. The extant material displays each community's own tempo, its own niche for the new language. One very illuminating example is the bilingual fragment of the *Psalms*, preserved in the depository of the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus, evidently from the time when this building, in part the Church of St. John the Baptist (whose head—according to an old tradition—was preserved there), was used by Muslims and Christians side by side.<sup>60</sup>

The writers of history moved in a milieu, which was in part trilingual: Greek, the language distinctive of their community (Syriac, Coptic, Armenian), and Arabic. Since they were mostly conservative writers, one has to be aware that their sources could come from all three sides (including Muslim). Since intercommunication had become easier (you could now communicate over a huge distance using Arabic instead of a range of languages), a Copt could use a Miaphysite writer from Syria, if his work was translated into Arabic. Evtychios of Alexandria (Saʿīd ibn al- Biṭrīq, d. 328/940), a Melkite from Fuṣṭāt, used, for instance, a historical account of the early seventh century from Syria, but in Arabic translation. It was in this language that he read the *Romance of Alexander* and the *Cave of Treasures*.<sup>61</sup> He probably knew no Greek, even though he was at the summit of the hierarchy.

The most important point, though, is that the Muslims did not translate Christian Oriental historiography into Arabic. They used Christian Arabic re-elaborations, continuations, and translations for their own works on history (*taʾriḫ*) instead. As far as I know, there is no Muslim who ordered the translation of a Syriac chronicle or translated such a work by himself, not even as a convert from Christianity. This is remarkable, since this is exactly what happened to official Sassanian historiography. The “Book of the Kings,” the famous *Khvadāynāmag*, was translated perhaps before 139–140/756–757, since this translation is ascribed to the famous convert from Zoroastrianism to Islam, ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Muqaffaʿ.<sup>62</sup> The form, content, and orientation of this work resemble so strongly what has been said above about local historiography in late antiquity that it would be a fruitful research to compare Ethiopian, Georgian, and Sassanian historiography.<sup>63</sup>

ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, whose original name is known (*Rōzveh* “Light is the best”), was executed in an intrigue at the early Abbasid court at about

<sup>60</sup> The Arabic part uses the Greek script for what was evidently then the local dialect of the Empire's capital. It was published back in 1901 by Violet. B. Violet, “Ein zweisprachiges Psalmenfragment aus Damaskus,” *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 4 (1901): 384–404, 425–42, 475–89.

<sup>61</sup> Howard-Johnston 2010, 335ff. and Françoise Micheau, “Saʿīd b. al-Biṭrīq,” in *Et*, eds C.E. Bosworth, E.J. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, and G. Lecomte (Leiden: Brill, 1995), vol. 8, pp. 853–6.

<sup>62</sup> “Book of the Lord”. In modern Persian both words have a different meaning: *Khvadāy* means God, *nāmāh* letter.

<sup>63</sup> A direct influence on Kʿartʿlis cʰhovreba from Persia is highly probable. Georgian dignitaries served at the court of the Shāhānshāh and bear Iranian titles.



139–140/756–757, by order of the caliph.<sup>64</sup> He also translated *Kalilag u Damnag* into Arabic, even today read to children as one of the first masterpieces of Arabic prose. With the translation of the official historiography of the Sassanians, he offered invaluable material for the rising Muslim historiography. Although the whole of his translation is lost, the list of writers who relied on it (including al-Ṭabarī and Evtychios), beginning in the third/ninth and going up to the fifth/eleventh century, reads like a who's who of historians of classical Islam.<sup>65</sup> Ibn al-Muqaffa's translation was not the only book on Sassanian history that Muslim historians used, however. We know that there were more of them in circulation, allegedly 10. When this royal historiography became known to Muslims in the second/eighth century, some of them responded enthusiastically, making it part of the stream of Islamic historiography and undertaking great efforts to develop their own forms and traditions of historiography.

For the development of Muslim historiography it was not so important whether a work of Christian Oriental historiography was translated into or (re)written in Arabic. If we explore Christian communities in Islamicate societies, however, conditions and perspectives change. The *Chronicle of Seert*, for instance, is mostly a translation into Arabic of two historiographical works written originally in Syriac, by two authors belonging to the Apostolic Church of the East, following the patterns established in late antiquity.<sup>66</sup> Sometimes the transmission history is quite complicated. An exceptional, but typical example is the history of John of Nikiu (died after 696) to whom we owe one report on Hypatia's death. Written at the end of the first/seventh century in Coptic (or Coptic-Greek?) by the Egyptian bishop, later deposed, it was translated into Arabic and then, in early modern times, into Ethiopian. This is the language in which it is preserved and edited.<sup>67</sup>

With this opening of Oriental Christians to the language of the new masters, their writings also became accessible to a Muslim public. It was in Arabic (not in his Iranian mother tongue) that Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (224–310/839–923) used the Persian official dynastic history and the *Chronicle of Seert*, not in Pahlavi nor in Eastern Syriac.

On the other hand, Christians began to adopt Muslim patterns of narration for writing down their histories. Evtychios, a contemporary of al-Ṭabarī, used the *Khvadāynāmag* in the same manner as his Iranian Muslim colleague living in Baghdad. The Melkite patriarch, trained as a physician—he was thus a layman—received not only a thorough Arabic education but was also taught by

<sup>64</sup> Francesco Gabrieli, "Ibn al-Muqaffa," in *IEP*, eds B. Lewis, V.L. Ménage, Ch. Pellat, and J. Schacht (Leiden: Brill, 1971), vol. 3, pp. 883–5.

<sup>65</sup> Howard-Johnston 2010, pp. 341ff.

<sup>66</sup> Formerly but incorrectly called the Nestorians. Howard-Johnston 2010, pp. 324ff. The *Chronicle of Seert* was edited by Addai Scher, *Histoire nestorienne (Chronique de Séert)*, *Patrologia orientalis* IV3, V2, VII2, XIII 4 (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1908–1919).

<sup>67</sup> R.H. Charles (transl.), *The Chronicle of John of Nikiu* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1916); Howard-Johnston 2010, pp. 181ff. Zotenberg's analysis is a masterpiece. Hermann Zotenberg, "Mémoire sur la chronique byzantine de Jean évêque de Nikiou," *Journal asiatique* (Série 7), 10 (1877): 451–517; 12 (1878): 245–347; 13 (1879): 291–386. The Ethiopians are also Miaphysites.

prominent Muslim authorities. One of them, Yahyā, was the son of the leading representative of Muslim historical memory (“traditionalist”) in Egypt, ‘Uthmān ibn Ṣāliḥ (died 217/834). This man deciphered an inscription on the smaller church in Manfa, the old Memphis. This means that he knew Coptic.<sup>68</sup>

## FEATURES OF EARLY ARABIC ISLAMIC HISTORIOGRAPHY

Since quite a lot of work has been done on the origins of Arabic Islamic historiography in the last decades, this contribution can be quite brief in this aspect.<sup>69</sup> There is a deep-rooted problem concerning the reliability of the rich, though very late (second/eighth century) Muslim tradition concerning the origin of the Islamic community, the *umma*. Of its three main sources, the Qur’ān, the *ḥadīth*, and the authoritative “Life of the Prophet” (*sīra*), the latter two can be classed as approximating what is called written historical memory, but these are the ones whose authenticity was so seriously questioned by Crone.<sup>70</sup> The Holy Book of the Muslims is very different from the Old and the New Testaments, since it contains hymns and is not narrative (with exceptions, like Sura 12), although it does contain allusions to historical events (Sura 85, 4 and elsewhere). As far as historiography is concerned, *ḥadīth* is a kind of written memory typical for Islam (although it might have Jewish roots).<sup>71</sup> It consists of thousands of brief stories (the word is etymologically related to the Hebrew *ḥadash*, “new”) that relate exemplary events, mostly decisions taken by the

<sup>68</sup> Ulrich Haarmann, “Manf,” in *IE²*, eds C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, B. Lewis, and C. Pellat (Leiden: Brill, 1991), vol. 6, pp. 410–14.

<sup>69</sup> Among many others, one should mention Fred Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Dūrī, *The Rise of Historical Writing among the Arabs*, translated by Lawrence I. Conrad with introduction by Fred M. Donner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); R. Stephen Humphreys, “Qur’anic Myth and Narrative Style in Early Islamic Historiography,” in *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, F.M. Clover and R. Stephen Humphreys (eds) (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 271–90; Harald Motzki (ed.), *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Harald Motzki, *Hadith: Origin and Developments, The Formation of the Classical Islamic World* 28 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims – A Textual Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Uri Rubin, “The Life of Muhammad and Islamic Self-Image: A Comparative Analysis of an Episode in the Campaigns of Badr and Hudaibiya,” in *The Biography of Muhammad: The Issue of the Sources*, ed. Harald Motzki (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 3–17; Uri Rubin, “The Life of Muhammad and the Qur’an: The Case of Muhammad’s Hijra,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 28, (2003): 40–64; Gregor Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Mohammeds* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1996); Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006). The state of the field is related in a remarkable manner by Howard-Johnston 2010, pp. 364ff.

<sup>70</sup> Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

<sup>71</sup> Apart from the preceding note see J. Robson, “ḥadīth,” in *IE²*, eds B. Lewis, V.L. Ménage, Ch. Pellat, and J. Schacht (Leiden: Brill, 1971), vol. 3, pp. 23–8.

prophet in a certain situation. They normally consist of two parts. The second part is the *matn* (pl. *mutūn*, body), the actual story that normally ends with a decision or an utterance by Muḥammad. The first part is called *isnād* (support, confirmation). It tries to trace back the second part to the prophet, and this through a continuous chain of men (*rijāl*). In fact, the trustworthiness of such a *matn* was essentially dependent on whether it was based on a “sound” (*ṣaḥīḥ*) chain of transmitters (*muḥaddithūn*). In the third/ninth century, the great traditionalist Muḥammad al-Bukhārī (died 256/870) had already published the most important collection of *ḥawāḍith* under this title, still today a basic reference work for every Islamic judge.

The aim of the enormous bulk of tradition called *ḥadīth* was predominantly juridical, not historical. But since in Islam the revelations offered through the Qurʾān and the advice provided by the *ḥadīth* (whose significance is not very far from *sunna*, “custom”) were—at least allegedly—performed in the life of Muḥammad, it is no wonder that all three sources are intertwined as *historia rerum gestarum*. The life of the prophet is exemplary (like that of the Messiah). Since it is extremely important whether a verse of a Sura was revealed earlier or later, it is of great importance for every Muslim expert in jurisprudence to know about the time when which verse was uttered during Muḥammad’s lifetime. This is why Muslims collected even the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (“occasions for revelation”). Thus it is no wonder that many historians were *muḥaddithūn*. Al-Ṭabarī, for instance, also wrote an enormous *tafsīr* (explanation, commentary) of the Holy Book. This work, like others of its kind, contains a broad range of information used to analyze the Qurʾān, verse by verse, including notices from the *sīra* (the authoritative one by Ibn Hishām [d. 212 or 218/828 or 833], as well as from other authors) and from the Jewish tradition (*isrāʾīliyyāt*). This is the reason why the structure of the Arabic Islamic material is the same in his great history. Muslim historiography preserves the dichotomy *isnād/matn*, although the proper expression for such a secular snippet of information is *khbar/akhbār* instead (“news,” the word is related to the Hebrew *ḥaber*, “friend”). The same applies to Saʿīd ibn al-Bitṭīq. He had grown up in the milieu of Muslim traditionalists, in his case in Old Cairo. Muslim interest in pre-Islamic history (as illustrated by the deciphering of the Coptic inscription mentioned above) also originated here, namely as pieces of Byzantine and Persian history were integrated into the traditions relevant for Islamic theology and jurisprudence. Hence it is no wonder that in the work of both authors the Byzantine and the Islamic variants of writing history began to merge.

In this context special attention is due to the *sīra*, the canonical narrative on the life of the prophet, fully titled *al-sīra al-nabawiyya*.<sup>72</sup> In its canonical form, it is only preserved in the early Abbasid version by Ibn Hishām. It is well known that his work is merely an excerpt from the older one by Ibn Ishāq (died circa 157/767). Howard-Johnston gives a plausibly reliable genealogy of this work.<sup>73</sup> It grew out of the older, half-written, half-oral traditions as preserved in the

<sup>72</sup> W. Raven, “al-sīrah,” in *EI*<sup>2</sup>, eds C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, and G. Lecomte (Leiden: Brill, 1997), vol. 9, pp. 660–3.

<sup>73</sup> Howard-Johnston 2010, pp. 358ff.

works by the inventors of *ḥadīth*, ‘Urwa ibn al-Zubayr (died 93–94/711–712 or 94–95/712–713) and his pupil al-Zuhrī, the father of Islamic historiography.<sup>74</sup> ‘Urwa, son of a famous companion of the prophet, spent a great part of his life in the entourage of ‘Ā’isha (died 58/678), Muḥammad’s favorite wife, and left behind a *risāla*, a letter. Both held public lessons, the younger in presence of the Umayyads, thus representing the transition between the written and the oral. But thanks to manuscripts that keep records of older versions of the prophet’s campaigns (*maghāzī*) by Yaḥyā ibn Bukayr (died 231/845) in Fās and by Salama al-Ḥarrānī (l. d. 191/807) in Damascus, we can follow more closely the development of the pieces of which the authoritative “Life” was composed.<sup>75</sup>

Even more important, Wahb ibn Munabbih (died between 106 and 119/725 and 737), a contemporary to ‘Urwa, wrote a work called *Kitāb al-mubtadi’a wa-qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* (“Book of the Beginning and of the Stories about the Prophets”). Its title is an avatar of the Old Arabic tradition of *qīṣṣa* (“oral story”) in the form of which he told the history of the world beginning with Adam. Sounding like a derivative of the Byzantine tradition of chronicle in the garb of Malalas, this work was lost until Khoury published a papyrus in Heidelberg, in which material from this record is preserved under the title *ḥadīth Dawūd* (“Hadith about David”).<sup>76</sup> If we consider then that Wahb was the son of a convert and grew up in a Judeo-Christian milieu in Yemen, close to Sanaa, and that his *Kitāb al-mubtadi’a wa-qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* was very much used by the authors of the “lives” of the prophet (including Ibn Ishāq) and later Muslim historiography, *tafsīr*, and “tradition” (in the aforementioned sense), one might dare pose the question as to whether it would be worthwhile to put the *sīra al-nabawiyya* in the context of late antique historiography as Neuwirth did so successfully with the Qur’ān some years ago.<sup>77</sup> Then, Byzantine historiography would stand, probably in its Syriac garb, truly at the cradle of Muslim *ta’rīkh*.

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<sup>74</sup> Gregor Schoeler, “‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr,” in *EF*, eds P.J. Bearman, T. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 2000), vol. 10, pp. 910–13 (excellent); M. Lecker, “al-Zuhrī,” in *EF*, eds P.J. Bearman, T. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 2002), vol. 11, pp. 565–6.

<sup>75</sup> MSS Fez, Qayruwān 202; Damascus, *Zāhiriyya* maj. 110.

<sup>76</sup> R.G. Khoury, “Wahb b. Munabbih,” in *EF*, eds P.J. Bearman, T. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 2002), vol. 11, pp. 34–6, to be read with caution.

<sup>77</sup> Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein europäischer Zugang* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010).

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## Chapter 2

# Aspects of Craft in the Arabic Book Revolution

Beatrice Gruendler

### INTRODUCTION

Arabic books abounded in the outgoing second/eighth and third/ninth century, and their subjects ranged from the sciences and the arts via craft trades to popular literature. This coincided with the formation of scholarly disciplines, some native, others appropriated from neighboring and preceding civilizations. A prominent topic within the native disciplines was the uses of writing, notably in the administration of an empire, whose geographical span from Cordoba in al-Andalus to Samarqand in Central Asia required sophisticated logistics for the payment of armies, agricultural and commercial taxation, and the administration of justice.

Books played a major role in the urban centers, which had become increasingly diverse with the rise of the Abbasid dynasty (132–656/750–1258), and in which knowledge had become a currency of social prestige. This was the case in part because the government consulted scholars and commissioned books on issues of religious law and doctrine, Arabic language, Islamic history, and foreign sciences. But the educated elite took to the book equally quickly, and in the second quarter of the third/ninth century, individuals already boasted about the size of their libraries.<sup>1</sup> The “book addict” became a social type in literature.<sup>2</sup> Several factors contributed to make this happen: a shared language able to grow in step with the developing disciplines, writing materials available in unlimited quantity, and artisans with expertise in manufacturing books.

With the declaration of Arabic as a state language at the end of the first/seventh century and the introduction of paper-making technology from Samarqand by the end of the second/eighth century, the third factor became

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<sup>1</sup> An example is one of al-Maʾmūn’s generals, whose private library even includes the latest satire of the contemporary poet ʿUmāra b. ʿAqīl. Al-Iṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, ed. Muḥammad Qumayḥa (reprinted Beirut: Dār al-thaqāfa, 23: 427–9, 1401/1981).

<sup>2</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. Riḍā Tajaddud (Tehran: Marvi Offset Printing, 1971), pp. 130, 208; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. Ayman Fuʾād al-Sayyid. 2 parts in 4 vols. (London: al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 1430/2009), vol. 1, pp. 361, 578–9, thus describes the courtier al-Faṭḥ ibn Khāqān (died 247/862), the writer al-Jāḥiẓ, and the chief judge of Baghdad Ismāʿīl ibn Ishāq ibn Ḥammād al-Azdī (died 282/895).



Figure 2.1 Recreation of historical paper manufacture, Koni Gil Miro, Samarqand (Photograph: Beatrice Gruendler)



Figure 2.2 Scooping of paper (Photograph: Beatrice Gruendler)



Figure 2.3 Finished sheet of paper (Photograph: Beatrice Gruendler)

active, the craftsmen in charge of book production.<sup>3</sup> Although their role was instrumental, and the Arabic book revolution could not have occurred without them, they remain largely undocumented. Hence, in my contribution I will focus on the stationers' emergence and rise and discuss the ways in which they participated in and contributed to the dissemination and transformation of knowledge from different cultural origins and disciplinary backgrounds. My study will illuminate how material production, social relationships and economic success contribute to processes often studied exclusively on the level of forms of knowledge and their content, their institutionalization and geographical concentration.

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<sup>3</sup> See Helen Loveday, *Islamic Paper: A Study of an Ancient Craft* (London: The Don Baker Memorial Fund, 2001); Joseph von Karabacek, *Arab Paper*, trans. D. Baker and S. Dittmar (London: Archetype Publications, 2001), pp. 87–91; and Johannes Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*, trans. G. French (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 61. The battle at the river of Talas (or Taraz), in modern Tajikistan, as the point of transfer of the paper technology from the Chinese to the Arabs may be consigned to the realm of legend, however; see Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World we Live in* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2007), p. 295.

## DEARTH OF INFORMATION ON CRAFTSMANSHIP

Reconstructing the genesis of the profession and the social group of stationers in Abbasid society is fraught with difficulties. Classical Arabic historical sources are generally of little help here, revealing their social biases. Although they are uncommonly copious on many subjects in comparison to medieval Europe, they are fairly silent with regard to the crafts and their practitioners. The stream of books about scholars, poets, and men of letters produced in Arabic from the fourth/tenth century onwards, notably the widespread genre of the biographical dictionary (which often supplies many entries on one individual, including variants of identical accounts given therein) essentially concerns the very people who wrote these reference works, and who belonged to the educated classes by birth or profession.

Merchants, artisans, and laborers were of little concern and rarely made an appearance as individuals in early biographical dictionaries, unless they straddled the above categories in some fashion. Through the bias of the sources, which present the lives of the educated, not the craftsmen, the names and vitae of members of the stationers' trade are rarely included.

On the rare occasions when they are mentioned there are few details beyond the name and occupation of a stationer deemed relevant for inclusion in a who's who of scholars. One finds brief one-liners, following the *vita* of a scholar, of the kind: "So-and-so: his stationer" or "His stationers were so-and-so" without any additional information.<sup>4</sup> This lack of detail stands in contrast to the increasing use of the professional labels of *warrāq* and *kāghadhī* in the biographical literature over the first half of the third/ninth century.<sup>5</sup>

Thus we must fall back on occasional incidents involving stationers within the scholarly milieu which are recorded in the sources and throw light on their ignored profession. Here appear such stationers who were simultaneously scholars or interacted with them. An exceptional case is Ibn al-Nadīm (died 380/990), who set himself a monument with his "Catalogue" (*Kitāb al-Fihrist*) of books and is without doubt the most famous stationer in Arabic history.<sup>6</sup> The few preserved cases of information about less exalted stationers provide some glimpses into their self-concept.

Other authors who wrote much about books, such as the essayist al-Jāhīz (died 255/868), must be read with caution as they pursued their own agendas. In al-Jāhīz's particular case, his opinions are often difficult to discern. Moreover, his famous praise of books, followed by a list of the book's disadvantages, reappears as the opening chapter of an anonymous book on "Virtues and Their

<sup>4</sup> See al-Zubaydī, *Ṭabaqāt al-naḥwiyyīn wa-l-lughawiyyīn*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm. Second edition (Cairo: Dār al-ma'ārif, 1392/1973), p. 185 and Ibn al-Nadīm 1971, p. 65 and 1430/2009, vol. 1, pp. 172–3, respectively.

<sup>5</sup> See p. 60 and no. 118.

<sup>6</sup> For a recent biography, see Devin Stewart, "Abū l-Faraj Muḥammad ibn Ishāq Ibn al-Nadīm," in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography 925–1350*, ed. Terri De Young, and Mary St. Germain (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), pp. 129–42.

Opposites,” authored in the tenth century and falsely attributed to him.<sup>7</sup> But the majority of the information is patchy and anecdotal. Scattered details have to be assembled into a more complete picture, which, however, lacks any statistical or quantitative validity. The following are select incidents of stationers’ appearances in sources compiled in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. These have certainly been reworked into literary form and cannot be taken as accurate transcripts of historical events, but they nonetheless do reflect concepts and attitudes of the society of their time.

## A STATIONER’S SELF-CONCEPT

On one occasion a stationer speaks out and gives testimony of a professional pride no less than that of the more highly regarded administrative secretaries. This reveals a general demand for this craft, a demand which made it lucrative—although not prestigious.

‘Allān ibn al-Ḥasan al-Warrāq al-Shu‘ūbī (died after 197/813) from Fars in southwest Iran was a transmitter of Arab genealogy and disputes about ranks among tribes. His major work, *The Arena on Vices of the Arabs*, served to gather arguments for questioning and impugning the lineages of the blood-based Arab aristocracy.<sup>8</sup> Demand for this kind of anti-Arab propaganda came from the growing leadership of non-Arabs, notably Iranians, who claimed cultural equality with, if not superiority to, the Arabs and who looked back on a much longer history. ‘Allān and his patrons, the Barmakid family of statesmen, both shared this attitude.<sup>9</sup> The new Abbasid rulers whom they served differed from the preceding Umayyad dynasty (40–132/661–750) in giving opportunities to Iranians and other non-Arab ethnic groups, some of whom had just recently converted to Islam. Pedigree was now matched by skill and by a new type of professional solidarity among government clerks.<sup>10</sup> ‘Allān also aired his pro-Iranian sentiment in poetry—in short, he was not silent on his convictions.

<sup>7</sup> al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn. 7 vols. (Beirut: Dār ihyā’ al-turāth al-‘arabī, 1357/1938), vol. 1, pp. 38–102; Pseudo-al-Jāhiz, *al-Maḥāṣin wa-l-aḍḍād* (Shiyāh: Maktabat al-sāhil al-janūbī, s.d.), pp. 3–9, translated in Charles Pellat, *The Life and Works of Jahiz*, transl. D.M. Hawke (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 130–32; Sebastian Günther, “Praise the Book! Al-Jāhiz and Ibn Qutayba on the Excellence of the Written Word in Medieval Islam,” in *Franz Rosenthal Memorial Volume*, ed. Yohanan Friedmann (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Press, 2006), pp. 125–43 (= *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 31: 1–19); James E. Montgomery, *Al-Jāhiz: In Praise of Books* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Charles Pellat, “Mathālib,” in *ET*, edited by C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and Ch. Pellat, assisted by F.Th. Dijkema, and S. Nurit (Leiden: Brill, 1991), vol. 6, pp. 828–9.

<sup>9</sup> The trend that asserted the cultural superiority of Iranians over non-Arabs (referred to as *shu‘ūbiyya*), nonetheless found expression in the Arabic language; Susanne Enderwitz, “Shu‘ūbiyya,” in *ET*, ed. C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, and G. Lecomte (Leiden: Brill, 1996), vol. 9, pp. 513–16.

<sup>10</sup> The early Abbasids had essentially adopted the Sassanian administrative and bureaucratic state apparatus including the function of the secretary; Dimitri Gutas, *Greek*

The leniency of his caliphal employers, who cannot have been unaware of his attitude, is surprising, because it implied disparagement of that Arabic genealogy on which the Abbasids's claim to legitimate rulership partly rested. 'Allān's outspokenness was not confined to the Iranian cause, for he was an equally proud representative of the stationers' profession. His case is one of the rare instances in which the sources record a *warrāq* speaking for himself.<sup>11</sup>

Aside from his copying work in a palace library (*bayt al-ḥikma*), 'Allān kept a shop near the Syria Gate in Baghdad, where he sold and copied books with the assistance of a local youth.<sup>12</sup> Then he received a job offer from the caliph's chief counselor Aḥmad ibn Abī Khālīd al-Aḥwal (died 211/826–7) to become his copyist.<sup>13</sup> 'Allān thus took up quarters in the counselor's palace and began his work. Once, however, he failed to rise in the counselor's presence, who commented on this as the stationer's "poor education." 'Allān responded by defending his education and his profession:

How come poor education (*adab*) is attributed to me, when the literary arts (*ādāb*, pl. of *adab*) are learnt from me, and I am their source? What did you want me to rise for? I did not come to beg for gifts, nor did I want you or seek anything from you. *It was you who wanted me to come* and write in your palace, and I came to you out of need to receive a salary, even though I deserve better from you than that.<sup>14</sup>

The incident concludes with 'Allān vowing never again to serve in any one's house as a personal copyist. 'Allān puts a face on the undocumented masses

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*Thought, Arabic Culture: The Greco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsīd Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th Centuries)* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 56.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm 1971, p. 183 and 1430/2009, vol. 1, pp. 325–7; Yāqūt, *Muḥjam al-udabā'* (= *Irshād al-arīb ilā ma'rifat al-adīb*), edited by D.S. Margoliouth. 20 vols. (Leiden and London: 1923–31, reprint Beirut: Dār ihyā' al-turāth al-'arabī, 1997), vol. 12, pp. 192–6; al-Ṣafādī, *Kitāb al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt* (= *Das biographische Lexikon des Ṣalāḥaddīn Ḥalīl ibn Aibak aṣ-Ṣafādī*), ed. Helmut Ritter, et al. 32 vols. (Bibliotheca Islamica) (Istanbul, Wiesbaden, and Leipzig: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1931–2013); vol. 19, pp. 558–9.

<sup>12</sup> The *bayt al-ḥikma* was not, as has often been claimed, an academy or a center for translation activities; Dimitri Gutas, and Kevin van Bladel, "Bayt al-Ḥikma," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Three, ed. Gudrun Krāmer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson. Brill Online, Accessed February 22, 2013. <[http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/bayt-al-hikma-COM\\_22882](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/bayt-al-hikma-COM_22882)>.

<sup>13</sup> Aḥmad ibn Abī Khālīd acted as al-Ma'mūn's vizier without carrying the title from 202/818 to his death. A onetime Barmakid protégé, he gained the good graces of the subsequent vizier al-Faḍl ibn Sahl (died 202/818), whom he succeeded; Dominique Sourdel, *Le vizirat 'abbāsīde de 749 à 936 (132 à 324 de l'Hégire)*. 2 vols. (Damas: Institut français de Damas, 1959–1960), vol. 1 (1959), pp. 219–25 and 732 and Dominique Sourdel, "Aḥmad ibn Abī Khālīd al-Aḥwal," in *EF*, Editorial Committee consisting of H.A.R. Gibb, J.H. Kramers, E. Lévi-Provençal, J. Schacht, assisted by S.M. Stern (Leiden: Brill, 1960), vol. 1, pp. 271–2.

<sup>14</sup> al-Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-Wuzarā' wa-l-kuttāb*, ed. Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ (Abu Dhabi: National Library Cultural Foundation, 1430/2009), p. 479. The event does not appear in the preserved portion of this work, but in the appendix of Ṣāliḥ's edition, based on Yāqūt 1923–31, vol. 12, pp. 192–3. See also Ḥabīb Zayyāt, *al-Wirāqa wa-ṣinā'at al-kitāba* (Beirut: Dār al-ḥamrā', 1992), pp. 33–4.

of copyists who produced the copious books we find used and discussed in the sources, and whose services were essential to circulating the information in the new written format.

## BOOK PRODUCTION

### *The Physical Book*

Regarding physical books, the terminology tends to be vague with occasional exceptions. The term for book, *kitāb*, denoted originally a piece of writing of any length including letters and could also stand for notebook, literally “sheet” (*ṣaḥīfa*).<sup>15</sup> When mentioned at all, writing materials were often unspecified. None of the words for book, leaf, sheet, or note (*kitāb*, *waraq*, *ṣaḥīfa* or *ruqʿa*) spell out precisely what material is written on. An exception is the common phrase used in the sources for someone declaring the intention to write: “He called for an inkwell and [a piece of] papyrus/parchment.”<sup>16</sup>

In one rare and more detailed description, the polymath Abū ʿUbayda (died 210/825) shares 14,000 proverbs written on slips of “leather, paper, and papyrus (*julūd*, *quṭnī*, *qirtās*).” The second term, literally “made of woven cotton,” probably did not refer to actual cotton fabric, which was not an early paper ingredient, but should be understood as “cotton-like,” since the bleached and carefully combed fibers of linen rag paper appeared as white and pliable as cotton.<sup>17</sup> The accurate technical term for the new paper, *kāghadh*, a word of Sogdian provenance, was not much in circulation. In Abū ʿUbayda’s case his prolificness made him utilize any available writing material. That authors and stationers were not purist but practical in their use of prime material is shown by early book specimens which mix gatherings of parchment and paper.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ibn al-Anbārī, *Nuzhat al-alibbāʾ*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrāʾī (Baghdad: Maṭbaʿat al-maʿārif, 1959), p. 29 and Ibn al-Anbārī, *Nuzhat al-alibbāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad A. Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār nahḍat Miṣr li-l-ṭabʿ wa-l-nashr, 1386/1967), p. 35 (both editions will be cited hereafter); on *ṣaḥīfa*, see Beatrice Gruendler “Sheets,” in *Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. J.D. McAuliffe, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2004), vol. 4, pp. 587–9.

<sup>16</sup> *Daʿā bi-dawāt wa-qirtās/jild*. In the case of a lampooning match involving the poet Diʿbil, both materials alternate. Al-Iṣbahānī 1401/1981, vol. 20, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> Al-ʿAskarī, *al-Taḥḍīl bayna balāghatay al-ʿarab wa-l-ʿajam*, ed., together with Mā yutamaththalu bihī min al-abyāt, by Ḥamd ibn Nāṣir al-Dukhayyil (Burrayda, 1418/1998), pp. 128–9/90. The fact is reported by Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, and the recipient of the proverbs is Aḥmad ibn Saʿīd ibn Salm (MS: Sahl, emended by al-Dukhayyil) ibn Qutayba al-Bāhili, al-Wāthiq’s governor of Marw who later changed his vocation to *ḥadīth* scholar and philologist. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwār Maʿrūf. 17 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-gharb al-islāmī, 1422/2001), vol. 10, pp. 105–7. The editor erroneously explains *quṭnī* as woven cotton. The term *quṭn* and variants do appear for cloth in Ibn Manẓūr’s *Lisān al-ʿarab*, *sub verbo*, but not the derivative *quṭnī*. Karabacek 2001, p. 36 discounts the use of cotton as a paper ingredient.

<sup>18</sup> See for instance the *Dīwān* of al-Quṭāmī (died 110/728), MS Berlin Petermann II 589 (Ahlwardt no. 7527) dated 364/974.



As to the binding, books could be unbound, such as Sībawayhi's (died circa 180/796) loose leaves that went flying in a wind gust, or leather bound, such as Abū l-'Atāhiya's (died 210/825) lecture notes.<sup>19</sup> Sizes varied between 10 and over 1,000 sheets for a book, and Ibn al-Nadīm in his *Fihrist* included sheet numbers, rounded to tens, among his bio-bibliographical information on those books that he personally inspected to ensure that a buyer would receive the entire work or the desired version, if several existed.<sup>20</sup>

For storage, books were placed into book chests (*qimṭār*) and those placed into larger boxes (*ṣandūq*), while the lighter notebooks (*daftar*) were kept in baskets (*safat*) or sacks (*mikhlat*).<sup>21</sup> We hear about books carried in sleeves in the form of fascicles (*juz'*) and larger amounts packaged in chests. It is usually on the occasion of a library's transport or bequest that its size and value find mention.<sup>22</sup>

As for ink, men of letters and traditionists customarily carried inkwells (*dawāt, maḥbara*).<sup>23</sup> On longer trips, such as grammarians' journeys to the desert to collect Arab poetry from Bedouins, they supplied themselves with larger ink flasks (*dastija min ḥibr, qanīnat ḥibr*), since the amount of the ink determined the amount of material they could record.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, pp. 56, 69 and 1386/1967, pp. 63, 82.

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Ibn al-Nadīm 1971, p. 82 and 1430/2009, vol. 1, pp. 231–2.

<sup>21</sup> Thus the few written notes of al-Farrā' were found upon his death; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' al-zamān*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās. 8 vols. (Beirut: 1968–72, reprinted Cairo: Dār al-thaqāfa, s.d.), vol. 6, p. 181, al-Khaṭīb 1422/2001, vol. 16, pp. 228–9. For *mikhlat* see Adam Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition: A Glossary of Technical Terms and Bibliography*. (Handbook of Oriental Studies 1/58) (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 86, 119. Thus Dī'bil stored his research notes for his book on poets; al-Ṣūlī, *Akhbār Abi Tammām*, ed. Khalīl Muḥammad 'Asākir, Muḥammad 'A. 'Azzām, and Naẓīr al-Islām al-Hindī (Beirut: al-Maktab al-tijārī li-l-ṭibā'a wa-l-tawzī' wa-l-nashr, 1356/1937), p. 200; al-Ṣūlī, *The Life and Times of Abū Tammām by Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā al-Ṣūlī preceded by al-Ṣūlī's Epistle to Abū l-Layth Muzāḥim ibn Fātik*, edited and translated by Beatrice Gruendler (New York and London: New York University Press, 2015), par. 94.1.

<sup>22</sup> Examples given are 120 mule loads or 600 boxes for al-Wāqidī's library sold by his heirs for 2,000 *dinārs*; 100 boxes and 4 large clay jars for the deceased traditionist Yaḥyā ibn Ma'īn's library; 200 *dinārs* for a library the judge Yaḥyā ibn Aktham was unable to afford; 3,000 *dinārs* for the sale of the library of the deceased philosopher Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī; and 10,000 or 14,000 *dirhams* for the library of an unnamed deceased grammarian, acquired by Ya'qūb ibn Layth; Houari Touati, *L'armoire à sagesse: bibliothèques et collections en Islam* (Paris: Aubier, 2003), pp. 47–8. The conversion rate was one *dīnār* to 20–22 *dirhams* at the beginning of the third/ninth century, rising to 25 *dirhams* by the middle of that century. During this period, a trained professional earned 15–24 *dirhams* a month, a laborer between one and a quarter and two *dinārs*; Eliyahu Ashtor, "Essai sur les prix et les salaires dans l'empire califien," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 36: 16–69, pp. 25, 48–9.

<sup>23</sup> al-Sirāfi, *Kitāb Akhbār al-naḥwīyyīn al-baṣriyyīn*, ed. Ṭāḥā Muḥammad al-Zaynī, and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Khafāji (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1374/1955), p. 73.

<sup>24</sup> Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, pp. 59, 78 and 1386/1967, pp. 69, 93.

## Specialization

The production of books was distributed between the manufacturing and the service sector, and within the latter, divided between skilled professional and public services.<sup>25</sup> In terms of professional designations in the early Islamic economy, bookmaking exhibits an impressive range and sophistication of craftsmanship. There was the broadest denomination of *warrāq*, or “stationer,” which included everything from producing the prime material, paper, to disseminating the finished product, including finding authors or buyers for potential books still to be copied, sourcing books for researching scholars, and assembling or assessing entire libraries for sale to wealthy clients.

I borrow the term “stationer” from Adrian Johns’s study of stationers in seventeenth-century London, based on the comparably broad range of functions fulfilled by both early Arab craftsmen who produced and sold books and early modern stationers. Excepting the mere technology, the majority of the social changes commonly associated with the dissemination of printed books took place *mutatis mutandis* in the Arabic manuscript book culture of the third/ninth century.<sup>26</sup>

The book trade was complex and diversified, as revealed by its degree of specialization. In terms of content, copyists of the Qur’ān (*maṣāḥifī*) and assistants who added the vowel markers (*nāqīṭ*, *naqqāṭ*, both of whom usually specialized in this) differed from copyists of other books (*nāsikh*). There were ink makers (*ḥibrī*, *ḥabārī*), paper makers (*kaghghād*, *kāghadī*) and bookbinders (*mujallid*, *sahḥāf*). The draft copy produced by a scholar was clean-copied in larger script by a *muḥarrir*, and finished copies would be proofread by a hired collator (*mu‘āriḍ musta’jar*).<sup>27</sup>

In terms of a person’s occupation bookmaking could be a full-time occupation or supplement the income of someone who pursued another career. Stationer was, it seems, a default option for any member of the educated class. Thus judges became stationers, or vice versa. From the other end of the social spectrum, a slave trader turned into a stationer.<sup>28</sup> Impoverished intellectuals frequently resorted to copying as a means of subsistence. Moreover, the self-employed trade suited non-conformist members of society, such as libertines and heretics, who are amply attested among freelance stationers. As such

<sup>25</sup> Maya Shatzmiller, *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1994), pp. 101–68.

<sup>26</sup> See Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); for Arabic book culture, Beatrice Gruendler, *Book Culture before Print: The Early History of Arabic Media* (The American University of Beirut, The Margaret Weyerhaeuser Jewett Chair of Arabic. Occasional Papers, 2011); for the social phenomena associated with print culture, see Dana Sajdi, “Print and Its Discontents: A case for pre-print journalism and other sundry print matters,” in *The Translator: Studies in Intercultural Communication*. Special Issue “Nation and Translation in the Middle East,” ed. Samah Selim, 15, no. 1 (2009): 105–38.

<sup>27</sup> Shatzmiller 1994, pp. 236–8, 279–81, Pedersen 1984, p. 47.

<sup>28</sup> An example is Maḥmūd al-Warrāq. See Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, *Ṭabaqāt al-shu‘arā’*, ed. ‘Abd al-Saṭṭār Aḥmad Farrāj (Cairo: Dār al-ma‘ārif, 1981), pp. 366–7, 422–3, 455.

the independent occupation of the stationer and its function of spreading information gave a niche for dissent and added to the pluralism of voices in early Abbasid times. Full-time stationers could also be in government service (as in ‘Allān’s case above), or work exclusively for one author or scholar, as for the lexicographer Ibn Durayd (died 321/933).<sup>29</sup> The historian al-Wāqidi (died 207/823) and the grammarian al-Mubarrad (died 285/898) each employed two stationers concurrently.<sup>30</sup>

The half-time copyist—perhaps the most frequently attested case—could be a scholar of the legal tradition, history, or language and literature, the last subgroup figuring prominently in the sources. This showed book production to be a convenient way to fulfill individuals’ financial needs, as it could be practiced according to a chosen schedule by anyone with sufficient command of Arabic orthography and language and decent handwriting.

One fact, however, still requires explanation: the Abbasid government never attempted to monopolize paper production, even though the previous writing matter, Egyptian papyrus, had been manufactured under state control (along with coinage and brocade), and the search for a more easily available writing material had been a government concern.<sup>31</sup> Did the speed of the new material’s propagation catch the authorities off guard, so that it was soon too late to instate such a rule?

## ACCESS AND DISSEMINATION

### *Scholarly Control*

The dissemination of scholarly information in particular was controlled from another quarter, however. In the opinion of al-Jāhiz, for instance, scholarship, both native and foreign, was what books were meant for in the first place. Still, he admitted other subjects as serious or beneficial, such as fine literature, religion, law, administration, crafts, agriculture, and daily life.<sup>32</sup> The fact that this attitude was not shared by all readers is shown by the vast market of popular fiction to which the *Fihrist* devotes a section towards the end.<sup>33</sup>

But in scholarship, and this is what concerns us here, the access to a book was connected to a person. The Kufan grammarian and later leader of the Kufan school, Tha‘lab (died 291/904), acquired most of his knowledge from books, but he received this through oral teaching by the students of the books’ authors. The standard teaching procedure of the time consisted of a teacher having his

<sup>29</sup> al-Zubaydī 1392/1973, p. 185; al-Qiftī, *Inbāh al-ruwāt ‘alā anbāh al-nuḥāt*, ed. Muḥammad A. Ibrāhīm. 4 vols. (reprinted Cairo: Dār al-fikr al-‘arabī, 1406/1986), vol. 1, p. 220.

<sup>30</sup> See Ibn al-Nadīm 1971, pp. 65, 111 and 1430/2009, vol. 1, pp. 172–3, 308 respectively.

<sup>31</sup> al-Jahshiyārī 1926–1928, p. 158 and 1430/2009, pp. 211–12 (both editions are cited hereafter).

<sup>32</sup> al-Jāhiz 1357/1938, vol. 1, pp. 50–52, 57–8, 71–2, 74, 77–9.

<sup>33</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm 1971, *maqāla* 8.1.

book read aloud in portions by a student, upon which he corrected the student's vocalization and commented upon aspects of the read passage. Once the author had passed away, one of his students would continue using the book in the same fashion with the next generation of students. Thus all of Tha'lab's knowledge from Abū 'Ubayda's books, for instance, was taught to him via Abū 'Ubayda's student al-Athram (died 232/846; literally "the gap-toothed").<sup>34</sup> Some of these books were in the hands of men who had produced little scholarship themselves, but who derived their status from safeguarding and conveying knowledge from one generation to the next. They did so with the aid of written texts they alone owned. Another such transmitter-scholar was Salama ibn 'Āṣim (died 240/854) for the books of the lexicographer Ibn al-A'rābī (died 231/844).<sup>35</sup> Salama likewise memorized the books of al-Farrā' (died 207/822) with the sole purpose of passing them on.<sup>36</sup> In contrast to today, the existence of a book did not mean its general availability in the modern sense of mass production. If a book was not shared through copying or instruction, it would become a dead-end.

In one case one book's trajectory can be traced through five generations of subsequent scholars. The fourth scholar takes the liberty of summarizing the content differently from its precise written wording. He defends this to a questioning student as the result of his four decades of study with his teacher, a timespan during which he doubtless witnessed many readings of the text as well as commentaries which probably differed from one instance to another.<sup>37</sup> The repeatedly received oral transmission was then deemed to impart the authority to reformulate its written transcript.

Such book-based oral teaching required an in-depth—albeit passive—familiarity with the subject matter. Unless transmitted by an expert, a book could not fulfill its purpose. Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī (died 215/830), having lost his memory in old age, but not his critical faculties, regarded himself no longer able to teach his own book *On Shrubs and Pasture*. A prospective student, al-Riyāshī (died 257/871), even brought it along with him, but this was insufficient for Abū Zayd, who excused himself by saying that he had forgotten the book. The scholar's literal formulation of his refusal, "Do not read it to me" refers to the above-mentioned bimodal teaching procedure of the time.<sup>38</sup>

This sort of scholarly transmission had its own merit. The grammarian al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (died 215/830) was called "the path to the *Book of Sibawayhi*," the foundational work of the Basran-Baghdadian school of grammar, later to become the classic of all Arabic grammar with countless commentaries, so that its status can be compared to that of Plato's dialogues in Greek philosophy.

<sup>34</sup> al-Lughawī, *Marātib al-naḥwiyyīn*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Maṭba'at nahḍat Miṣr, 1954), p. 96.

<sup>35</sup> al-Lughawī 1954, p. 96; Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, p. 117 and 1386/1967, p. 146. A similar case was Sa'dān al-Ḍarīr for Abū 'Ubayda; Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, p. 119 and 1386/1967, p. 149.

<sup>36</sup> *kāna ḥāfiẓan li-ta'diyati mā fī l-kutubī*; Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, p. 117 and 1386/1967, p. 146.

<sup>37</sup> Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, p. 181 and 1386/1967, p. 242; al-Qifṭī 1406/1986, vol. 2, p. 22. The fourth scholar is Abū Mūsā al-Ḥāmiḍ, and his teacher Tha'lab.

<sup>38</sup> *lā taqra'hu 'alayya*; al-Lughawī 1954, pp. 42–3.

(It had no title, since properly redacted and titled books were still a novelty in the outgoing second/eighth century). After the death of Sībawayhi, who had not shared his book through teaching, his student al-Akhfash held the only copy and was the only one capable of teaching it. His control of the still unknown work, both the material object and intellectual content, was complete. Younger colleagues feared he might claim it as his and asked him to study it with them as a way to establish and publicize its true author.<sup>39</sup>

The scholars, who continued to access information orally, used notebooks and books as new options without changing the dynamics of scholarship or releasing control over its circulation at first. Notebooks in particular were made for one's own needs and shared, if at all, only within the circle of one's students.<sup>40</sup> Gregor Schoeler has defined these notes as *hypomnemata* as opposed to properly redacted books (*syngammata*). Although they do not survive independently, their content was often compiled and credited in subsequent books. But the abundance of written material would soon change this and take control away from their authors and place it with book owners and users.

### *Stationer as a Default Career*

Books were thus important for men who were experts but produced no scholarship themselves, for it permitted them a derivative intellectual ownership, or rather stewardship, within scholarly circles, with the additional option for material profit. In this sense, it was a logical consequence for the above-mentioned al-Athram to become a stationer. He had studied with the eminent authorities in grammar of the generation preceding him and transmitted to those who would become the leaders of the Kufan and Basran schools—both located at this time in the Abbasid metropolis of Baghdad—even though al-Athram was no great scholar himself.<sup>41</sup>

What he had achieved was to become a conveyor of knowledge from one generation to the next. In the *vita* of Ibn al-Sikkīt (died 244/858), al-Athram is cited among his teachers, but he is not defined like others by a discipline, such

<sup>39</sup> Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, p. 108 and 1386/1967, pp. 133–4; Monique Bernards, *Changing Traditions: Al-Mubarrad's Refutation of Sībawayh and the Subsequent Reception of the Kitāb* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> See Gregor Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: From the Aural to the Read*, revised and enlarged edition in collaboration with and translated by Shawkat M. Toorawa (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 112–15. He calls this “literature of the school, for the school.” For further detail, see Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*, transl. Uwe Vagelpohl, ed. James E. Montgomery (Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures) (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 28–44.

<sup>41</sup> “School” is to be understood not as an institution but rather as a pedigree of scholars who built upon each other's work. Already in the late third/ninth century students occasionally sat in gatherings of the rival school, and when both groups relocated to Baghdad, the distinction became blurred, as many studied with teachers from either. The concept survived, however, as a convenient way to arrange biographical dictionaries and a literary model for books on grammar disputations.

as grammar or lexicon, but as a transmitter (*rāwī*), passing on the books of al-Aṣmaʿī (died 213/828) and Abū ʿUbayda to his own students.<sup>42</sup> This by itself was a common enough function, but the unusual part was that al-Athram had a poor memory. This handicap would have made the exercise of his profession impossible a generation earlier. But now technology came to his aid.

In a session by al-Athram (here called an assistant to al-Aṣmaʿī), held outside his home, he dictated the poetry of the Umayyad poet al-Rāʿī (died circa 90/709), literally “the Herder,” so nicknamed for his minutely drawn portraits of Bedouin life and desert travel in archaic vocabulary. The attending Thaʿlab (a student at the time) described how, after the gathering was over, al-Athram laid aside the book from which he had dictated. Another student, young Ibn al-Sikkīt wanted to ask al-Athram a question about the poetry. Thaʿlab inveighed that al-Athram, being only a book transmitter, might not know the answer and be embarrassed before those gathered. But Ibn al-Sikkīt insisted and recited a verse with difficult vocabulary for comment by al-Athram, who indeed had no answer to give. Ibn al-Sikkīt cited another verse for comment and al-Athram remained silent, showing his displeasure. The situation escalated to mutual insults until the teacher ended the gathering and disappeared into his house.<sup>43</sup>

Al-Athram did not store his knowledge in his mind but held it in his hand in the form of the books of al-Aṣmaʿī and Abū ʿUbayda. He had taken the opportunity to benefit from an emerging technology in order to turn a weakness into an advantage. This is not to say that there had never before been books in the Middle East, as Christian monasteries had produced Syriac codices for two centuries. A fair portion of the earliest Arabic book fragments preserved are Christian texts and the role of the monasteries in early Arabic book production remains to be studied. However, the adoption of the book for the Arabic textual tradition and its rapid paper-based circulation were new phenomena. Al-Athram further maximized its potential by copying his teachers’ books carefully, correcting, and fully vocalizing these to guarantee an accurate phonetic reading.<sup>44</sup> This was not done regularly in the Arabic script at that time. In his case, it was necessary, “for he memorized nothing.”<sup>45</sup> But more importantly, it constituted a further step in the process of making a book stand in for a person.

Al-Athram was also an entrepreneur. He took the initiative to offer copies of his books to scholars for purchase instead of waiting to be asked.<sup>46</sup> As we have seen, Thaʿlab had accessed the teachings of Abū ʿUbayda solely through al-

<sup>42</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm 1971, p. 62 and 1430/2009, vol. 1, p. 159.

<sup>43</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm 1971, p. 62 and 1430/2009, vol. 1, pp. 159–60; al-Sīrāfī 1374/1955, p. 68; Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, p. 127 and 1386/1967, p. 160; slightly shortened, al-Qifṭī 1406/1986, vol. 4, p. 320; Ibn al-Nadīm appends Ibn al-Sikkīt’s explanation of the proverb.

<sup>44</sup> *kāna ṣāhibā kutubin muṣaḥḥahatin ... wa-ḍabaṭa mā ḍammanahā*; Yāqūt 1923–31, vol. 15, p. 77; al-Ṣafadī 1931–2013, vol. 22, p. 214–15. On the lacunose writing system, see pp. 51 and 56, and for the consequences regarding its usage, see Beatrice Gruendler, “Stability and Change in Arabic Script,” in *The Shape of Script: How and Why Writing Systems Change*, ed. S. Houston (Santa Fe: Publications of the School of Advanced Research. 2012), pp. 93–111.

<sup>45</sup> Yāqūt 1923–31, vol. 15, p. 77; al-Ṣafadī 1931–2013, vol. 22, pp. 214–15.

<sup>46</sup> Yāqūt 1923–31, vol. 15, p. 77.

Athram's books. The stationer's presence in this was vital. Being both owner of, and expert on, the books he controlled their circulation. This was a new type of book scholar, limited to and specializing in a specific set of books.

In the early third/ninth century, a book was still dealt with mostly in oral ways: it was read aloud or listened to. But this nonetheless required the constant presence of the written copy. Thaʿlab, although he had memorized all his teachers' books, still deemed it important to have the texts at his fingertips.<sup>47</sup> Through the physical form of books information acquired a double life. Oral content passed from teacher to student, conveying different types of intellectual ownership, such as audition (*samāʿ*) and memorization (*ḥifẓ*), and so did the written form. (Beyond this, there are records of public readings of books, particularly on the prophetic tradition, but these did not necessarily cover entire works nor did they entitle listeners to teach and transmit.) The two forms of oral and written information would eventually lead separate lives, as the written versions passed out of one individual's control. Books as material possessions then acquired a life and dynamic of their own, which grew increasingly important for scholars. Two students of the Kufan grammarian Naṣrān al-Khurāsānī (flourished early third/ninth century), who already held different levels of oral intellectual control over the content of their teacher's books, still fought over them upon his death (*ikhtalafā fī kutubihī*), one of them being Ibn al-Sikkīt.<sup>48</sup>

### *Dissemination for Pay*

The question remains how authors and readers felt about leaving the making of books to craftsmen who had at best rudimentary knowledge of the subject matter. One explanation may be that there already existed—for the large body of orally transmitted texts since pre-Islamic times—professions solely in charge of preserving and disseminating these, as living tape recorders so to speak. These were poetry transmitters (*rāwī*) and Qurʾān reciters (*qārīʾ*) in addition to collectors of prophetic tradition (*muḥaddith*) and historical and legendary accounts (*akhbārī*).<sup>49</sup> The first two in particular were merely in charge of memorizing their material, while *muḥaddithūn* and *akhbārīyyūn* usually both transmitted and studied their subject matter. Poetry transmitters were not involved in the creative process, but received the finished poems from their master and then went (with or without him) to deliver these to the designated addressee. Their potential editing and correcting of the poetry remained

<sup>47</sup> Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, p. 174 and 1386/1967, p. 229.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, p. 181 and 1386/1967, p. 140; Ibn al-Nadīm 1971, p. 78 and 1430/2009, vol. 1, p. 218; al-Qifṭī 1406/1986, vol. 3, p. 343.

<sup>49</sup> For an oral approach to Arabic poetry, which has found only partial consensus, see Michael Zwettler, *The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry: Its Character and Implications* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978). In his review, Heinrichs points out the key function of the *rāwī*. Wolfhart Heinrichs, "Review of *The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry: Its Character and Implications*, by Michael Zwettler," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 41 (1982): 63–7, particularly pp. 65–6.

unacknowledged. They also took charge of assembling the collected works (*dīwān*) of a given poet, which then could be turned into a written book. In fact, the poetry transmitters of the late second/eighth and early third/ninth century most likely used notebooks for their own reference.<sup>50</sup>

This familiar institution of one person professionally in charge of another person's text, without thereby acquiring any claim to authorship, then merely needed to be transferred from memory to paper. The commercial aspect was also already present, although not prominent. Transmitters worked for a poet no longer merely as aspiring apprentices (as had been the case earlier), but because they secured an income, which in known cases varied between 10 and 20 percent of the total reward for a poem.<sup>51</sup> The failure of a poet to earn rewards would induce his assistant to desert him.<sup>52</sup>

### *A Forward-Looking Transmitter*

The transmitter of the poet 'Umāra ibn 'Aqīl (died circa 247/861) still practiced his profession mainly by relying on his memory. His job description was to perform in public the poems composed by his employer. Yet he also was his record keeper in charge of holding the oeuvre intact and preserving it beyond the poet's death. Famous for his archaic style, 'Umāra enjoyed popularity under Caliph al-Ma'mūn (ruled 189–218/813–33). He was among the last of the greats whose verse was accepted by philologists as linguistic evidence to formulate grammatical rules. In the meantime the transmission of poetry had become a paid service. But it was only specific individuals who could be expected to pay for verse, as they drew a tangible benefit from the poetry, namely the patrons, who utilized it as propaganda and philologists who gathered the verse of past poets from surviving *rāwīs* as raw material for their scholarship.<sup>53</sup>

In 'Umāra's case, however, a transmitter saw the new value of sharing his repertoire in writing. He turned an opportunity to his advantage, so that his employer became his customer. Under the reign of al-Mutawakkil (ruled 232–47/847–61), the aging 'Umāra, whose memory was failing him, asked his *rāwī* to compile his complete poems in writing, in order to reuse old verse for an ode to the new caliph. The transmitter boldly requested a 50 percent cut from the expected reward. This percentage exceeded the lower common rate and reflected two things: first, the *rāwī* was the sole person capable of providing it, for he held the *de facto* monopoly over 'Umāra's verse; second, the written resource that the poet demanded was durable and would make the *rāwī* superfluous. He needed to plan ahead and put a high price on his (perhaps last)

<sup>50</sup> Early *ḥadīth* transmitters likewise used notes; Schoeler 2006, pp. 28–44; Schoeler 2009, pp. 40–53.

<sup>51</sup> al-Iṣbahānī 1401/1981, vol. 18, p. 326–7 for Muslim ibn al-Walīd (died 208/823); al-Iṣbahānī 1401/1981, vol. 4, p. 377–8 for Ibn Harma (died circa 176/792).

<sup>52</sup> al-Ṣūlī 1934, pp. 3–6 on the poet Abān al-Lāḥiqī (died circa 200/815).

<sup>53</sup> al-Jumāḥī, *Tabaqāt fuḥūl al-shu'arā'*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir. 2 vols. (Cairo: Matba'at al-madani, 1952), vol. 1, pp. 47–8. The paying philologists are Abū 'Ubayda and Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Nūḥ al-Utāridī.



service. Conversely, the actual author, in order to retrieve his own work, had no choice but to accept the condition and cede half of his projected earnings.<sup>54</sup>

The transmitter was certainly not yet a real stationer, nor did he produce or sell books to a larger public. Rather he edited the *diwān* he memorized for one customer only, but one who depended on this service, and the transmitter estimated correctly the high price he could demand. The monetary value of disseminating text, already accepted for oral literature, would later become an integral factor of bookmaking, except that the book as a potentially widespread commodity vastly increased the range of options and the margin of profit. Prices are difficult to assess for the third/ninth century, but occasional mentions range from five to ten copied sheets per *dirham*, which would amount to 20–40 *dirhams* for a 200-page book.<sup>55</sup> This was far less than the 10 to 20 percent cut of the reward for a praise poem, but the latter would occur only once per poem and on few occasions in a poet's career, whereas books could be copied and sold repeatedly and as long as they were in demand.

#### FORMAT AND INTELLECTUAL OWNERSHIP

Transmitters and stationers differed in regard to the ownership of the content they reproduced. For poetry, its recitation by another than the poet did not affect his ownership, equal to authorship. The authorship of verses could be given as a gift by the poet himself, but all other verbatim takeover (*salkh*) was considered plagiarism. (This is different from the reuse and reformulation of motifs, which was unavoidable and evaluated by aesthetic standards.) In cases where a transmitter falsely claimed authorship of verse he recited and then the true author was found out, this was regarded as fraud.<sup>56</sup> The only other person who could claim some sort of ownership was the patron of a panegyric (*madīh*) he had paid for. Patrons would often have the praise that was recited to them dictated afterwards to retain a copy in their archives.<sup>57</sup>

The poet 'Umāra became the victim of theft by another poet by imprudently sharing an unpublished ode in writing. Thereafter he refused to dictate any ode before its official delivery.<sup>58</sup> Only upon a poet's death could his transmitter freely dispose of the poetic works he had memorized or jotted down, and claim

<sup>54</sup> al-Isbahānī 1401/1981, vol. 23, pp. 440–41. Another *rāwī* had a less forward-looking employer, the poet Muslim ibn al-Walīd. When he presented Muslim a notebook of his own poetry for check-reading, the poet threw it, not caring, into a river. al-Isbahānī 1401/1981, vol. 18, p. 328.

<sup>55</sup> al-Khaṭīb 1422/2001, vol. 16, p. 225; Ibn Khallikān 1968–72, vol. 6, pp. 177–8.

<sup>56</sup> al-Isbahānī 1401/1981, vol. 18, pp. 326–7.

<sup>57</sup> Even before Islam the Lakhmid king Nu'mān ibn al-Mundhir is said to have done so, though this is likely a back-projection of later practice. Al-Jumāhī 1952, vol. 1, p. 25. For the Abbasid period, see al-Ṣūlī 1356/1937, pp. 217–20 for *madīh* by Abū Tammām and Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1981, p. 414 for *madīh* by Abū l-'Aynā' which the praised patron had dictated for the records after its oral delivery.

<sup>58</sup> al-Isbahānī 1401/1981, vol. 23, pp. 433–4.

the entire gain from its dissemination for himself, irrespective of whether he did so orally or in writing.

The producers of books were in control of a physical item, separate from the oral content they had used, without necessarily possessing expertise in it. They created a second and parallel ownership in the new medium and kept 100 percent of the price for what they treated as *their* merchandise. Property of intellectual content and its written form had parted ways. Gain for the physical book belonged to the one who made and sold it, while the author was at liberty to dispose of the oral content as he chose, such as delivering a different version for free in a public lecture or dictation session.<sup>59</sup> The circulation of different versions of one book was common.<sup>60</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm accounted for this phenomenon by alerting the readers of his catalog to extant versions and (if he had inspected them) their respective numbers of sheets or chapters. The details of this side-by-side existence of oral and written practices had yet to be worked out. Occasional tensions and accusations of fraud highlight this issue as unresolved.

## SUPPLY AND DEMAND

The end product of book manufacture was thus in the hands of the commercial class of the stationers. But how did these gain access to the information contained between a book's covers? Here is where most tensions occurred. It was unproblematic if the author himself copied his work or employed a stationer. Freelance stationers, however, had to get hold of a book's content, and no standard procedure had yet emerged. The normal way to receive information in scholarship was to become a student and audit books or take them down by dictation. These orally received texts were then compared with those of fellow students or presented to the teacher for proofreading. Then they could be passed on to one's own students.

A stationer, to obtain material, had to pose as an apprentice scholar. He might or might not apprise his teacher, or the owner of a book he wanted to copy, of his ulterior motives.<sup>61</sup> He could gamble that the scholar was unaware, or that he was uninterested in profit, either because he received a salary as a tutor or held a second profession, or again because he considered it improper to take compensation for dispensing his knowledge, as was common in the subjects of Qurʾān commentary and prophetic tradition. Those fields, obviously of the greatest interest to regular Muslim believers, were also the subjects of large-scale public dictation sessions in which anyone was free to jot down the content.

<sup>59</sup> al-Khaṭīb 1422/2001, vol. 16, p. 225; Ibn Khallikān 1968–72, vol. 6, p. 177–8.

<sup>60</sup> One example is Ibn Durayd's dictionary *Jamhara*, which he dictated from memory in Fars, Basra, and Baghdad, "Therefore the copies rarely match, and you see much addition and omission." Yāqūt 1923–31, vol. 18, pp. 131–2.

<sup>61</sup> For instance, al-Baghawī al-Warrāq (died 317/929) did not; al-Khaṭīb 1422/2001, vol. 10, p. 128; Zayyāt 1992, p. 7.

(Attendance was, for instance, counted by the ink spots left by the audience's inkwells). Teachers of grammar often took a fee for their instruction, delivered either one-to-one or in a small group.<sup>62</sup>

### *A Stationer's Venture*

In a case involving the above-mentioned al-Athram, he chose not to disclose his intentions. This occurred in 188/840 when the renowned grammarian Abū 'Ubayda visited Baghdad.<sup>63</sup> Al-Athram was a skilled and thorough copyist and at the same time familiar with his scholarly subject matter. Knowing what importance rested on his copies, he executed them with minute precision.<sup>64</sup>

The immediate impulse came from a secretary in the palace, Ismā'īl ibn Ṣubayḥ al-Ḥarrānī (flourished late second/eighth and early third/ninth century), who desired to have at his disposal the complete works of Abū 'Ubayda, whose high quality had become known in Baghdad.<sup>65</sup> The secretary anticipated two potential hurdles: first, the famously reticent scholar was unlikely to relinquish control over his knowledge by passing it on in writing, and second, any profit-conscious stationer might try to capitalize on this and demand an exorbitant price. It is uncertain which exact reason compelled the secretary to act as he did, but in any case he circumvented the author and went to the person who was familiar with the books's content and able to reproduce them. He did not seek consent from al-Athram or negotiate a fee but used his administrative authority, placing the stationer under arrest. This drastic measure in order to obtain books shows that access to them could prove difficult. Having placed the stationer behind lock and key in one of his palaces, the secretary gave him the books of Abū 'Ubayda and ordered him to copy them.<sup>66</sup>

Ibn Ṣubayḥ thus had a set of the books at his disposal, as he gave them to al-Athram, but the fact that he had them copied indicates that he did not own them. Perhaps these copies were autographs brought by the visiting scholar himself (whose very book-writing had pricked the caliph's curiosity) with the intention to offer them to the caliph's library or take them back to Basra.

<sup>62</sup> But note the grammarian al-Māzinī's rejection of a tuition offer of 100 *dīnārs* by a non-Muslim who wanted to study with him Sībawayhi's book. Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, p. 141 and 1386/1967, p. 183.

<sup>63</sup> al-Khaṭīb 1422/2001, vol. 15, p. 341; Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, p. 86 and 1386/1967, p. 107. For a discussion of the event, see Gruendler 2011.

<sup>64</sup> See n. 44 above.

<sup>65</sup> Ismā'īl headed the bureaus of chancellery, secret correspondence (*sirr*), and estates under al-Rashīd's vizier al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabī' (187–93/803–9) and the bureau of *sirr* under the same vizier under al-Amīn (193–98/809–14). Sourdel 1959, vol. 1, pp. 185, no. 1, 186, 190–91. The works of Abū 'Ubayda included linguistic issues in Scripture and the Prophetic Tradition, pre-Islamic and Islamic history, poetry, proverbs, grammar and linguistic solecisms, and lexicographical monographs. For a representative survey, see Gruendler 2011, pp. 17–19.

<sup>66</sup> al-Khaṭīb 1422/2001, vol. 13, pp. 594–5; al-Qifṭī 1406/1986, vol. 2, pp. 319–20. A slightly shorter version appears in Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, pp. 126–7 and 1386/1967, p. 159–60; Yāqūt 1923–31, vol. 15, pp. 77–8; al-Ṣafadī 1931–2013, vol. 22, p. 214.

Confined to the palace and charged with more copying labor than he could handle, al-Athram appealed to his stationer colleagues and, to speed up the process, he resorted to a system of having each book copied in distributed parts.<sup>67</sup> One of the copyists involved, Abū Miṣḥal (a Bedouin who had moved to town) reports that he used to go with a group of colleagues to al-Athram, who passed them a book underneath the door, distributed its sheets among them, gave them blank sheets, and asked them to complete the copying by a certain deadline. Abū Miṣḥal also comments on the legitimacy of this procedure. He explains that al-Athram was Abū ‘Ubayd’s student, but the latter was “one of the stingiest people with his books” and, had he been aware, would have forbidden al-Athram’s activities.<sup>68</sup> Abū Miṣḥal’s comment reveals that such secret reproduction violated accepted customs and implied dishonesty on the part of the student. Profit was not involved here, neither for al-Athram nor his colleagues whose assistance he seems to have expected as a favor. The fact that they did help him may point to a burgeoning self-awareness of the stationers as a professional group.

For al-Athram, book production had followed from a combination of factors: the demand of the palace, his access to knowledge, and his failure to produce his own scholarship. Minor scholars like him, who worked mainly as transmitters, were common and figure in the biographical dictionaries within the scholarly vitae of their more prominent colleagues, unless they had their own brief entries. The author of the earliest biographical dictionary on grammarians, Abū l-Ṭayyib al-Lughawī (died 351/962) distinguishes explicitly between leading scholars (*aʿimma*, sing. *imām*) and transmitters (*ruwāt*, sing. *rāwī*). Al-Athram belonged to the latter, but unlike some who were true memory artists, his poor oral performance precluded success in the teaching circuit. His way to excel became bookmaking, and the written scholarship he offered was attractive to two groups of people: scholars, who paid for copies of books, and courtiers, such as Ibn Ṣubayḥ, who did not. The new medium gave him the relevance that he had been denied as a scholar.

Different from the book-stingy Abū ‘Ubayda, other authors might welcome their dissemination through other hands, or even organize it themselves, for it increased their renown and their pool of potential students. Some authors, like the grammarian al-Sīrāfī (died 368/979), who worked half-time as a stationer, used the book market strategically by producing two sets of books, one easy to read and another needing explication, in order to ensure a steady stream of students. He maximized his gain even further, as some contended, by increasing the prices of his books copied by his students, by falsely claiming to have proofread them.<sup>69</sup> Pricing could be used variously: al-Wāqidi’s employment of two stationers was partially designed to keep his books affordable, whereas a

<sup>67</sup> This is the only case encountered so far of distributed copying of single books, though in large and rapid copying commissions, several scribes are often mentioned as being engaged together.

<sup>68</sup> al-Qiftī 1406/1086, vol. 2, 319–20. See n. 66 above.

<sup>69</sup> Zayyāt 1992, p. 14 after Yāqūt 1923–31, vol. 8, p. 189.

century later al-Ṣūlī (died 335/946) bragged that his new edition of the poet Abū Nuwās's (died circa 198/813) *Dīwān* had caused the earlier and inferior one to drop to a fraction of its previous price.<sup>70</sup>

A lingering ambivalence toward the flood of books—coupled with adherence to the oral performance of knowledge—is discernible in scholars' diverse pronouncements on their book possession. Some prided themselves on owning and using only a minimal number, even if they dictated tens of thousands of pages from memory, which would then be turned into books by others.<sup>71</sup> The younger generation of students, however, saw the ownership and the reading of books as a proof of scholarship.<sup>72</sup> Books were still not available to anybody. The sources frequently report incidents where a scholar intercepted a rival's student carrying a book to class and inquired about the book or asked to borrow it.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the reticence of some scholars, book production was unstoppable and gradually came to be recognized as a separate and independent activity. Some authors or their descendants would explicitly “grant reproduction” to a stationer.<sup>74</sup>

### *The Market Versus Scholarship*

But stationers did more than replicate books. They intruded upon the territory of scholarship by judging a book's quality and recommending it to customers. This was the case with a Basran stationer who pronounced on a book's quality. We do not know his name, as the sources simply refer to him as “one of the *warrāqūn*.”<sup>75</sup> Neither do we know the selection of books he (and others) offered to their customers in Basra's book market. But seeing the amount of books from

<sup>70</sup> al-Ṣūlī 1356/1937, pp. 55–6 and 2015, par. 27.

<sup>71</sup> For instance al-Aṣmaʿī; see al-Lughawī 1954, pp. 49–50. Al-Farrāʾ is vaunted for dictating 3,000 sheets worth of books from memory, while possessing only two books amounting to no more than 50 sheets. Al-Khaṭīb 1422/2001, vol. 16, pp. 228–9; Ibn Khallikān 1968–72, vol. 6, p. 181.

<sup>72</sup> The poet Abū Nuwās describes the contrast between Abū ʿUbayda “as always with his tomes, reading them, while al-Aṣmaʿī is a nightingale in a cage singing tunes and ever telling varieties of entertaining tales.” Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, p. 88 and 1386/1967, p. 109. See variant in al-Qiftī 1406/1986, vol. 4, p. 201.

<sup>73</sup> Al-Aṣmaʿī, for instance, thus consults the *Majāz al-Qurʾān* of his rival Abū ʿUbayda; al-Sīrāfi 1374/1955, p. 48.

<sup>74</sup> The traditionist al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥumayd ibn al-Rabīʿ retrieved Ibn Ishāq's (died 151/768) *Maghāzī* from the Kufan traditionist Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-ʿUtāridī (died 282/885), who had audited it with its redactor Yūnus ibn Bukayr (died 199/814), and was permitted to reproduce it: “I asked him to give me [the book] and transfer its reproduction to me, and he did” (*saʿaltuhū an yadfaʿahū ilayya wa-yajʿala wirāqatahū lī fa-faʿala*); al-Khaṭīb 1422/2001, vol. 5, pp. 343–8, especially pp. 437–8; Zayyāt 1992, pp. 7–8.

<sup>75</sup> The event must have occurred prior to the death of al-Riyāshī (died circa 257/871), who appears in the account.

the first quarter of the third/ninth century that the later *Catalog* lists, there must have been a wide selection.<sup>76</sup>

The anonymous but astute member of the stationers' profession recommended to his buyers a reference work on such words that looked alike in writing but could be pronounced in different ways, which in many cases changed the meaning. This is a feature of the Arabic alphabet type, an *abgad*, which does not denote short vowels in the basic script (*rasm*).<sup>77</sup> Though these could be marked by small additional signs above and below the line, invented in the second/eighth century, they were little used in early manuscripts. The result was that many words looked alike in the script but sounded different when read out aloud. With the increased use of the written medium, these visual homonyms became a source of error, were identified as a problem, and collected as a book's subject under the title of "solecisms of the commoners" (*laḥn al-ʿamma*). This is actually to be understood as solecisms of educated people, for it was they who cared to avoid lapses in the ʿarabiyya.<sup>78</sup> This type of book served the growing number of people who owned and read books but had not received oral instruction on how to fill in the blanks left by the Arabic script (which was far easier to write than to read aloud).

The book in question happened to be penned by the above-mentioned Ibn al-Sikkīt.<sup>79</sup> He had become a respected lexicographer of the Kufan philological school, which was at this time losing ground to the upcoming Basran school, whose superior grammatical system would dominate the field.<sup>80</sup> The contentious book, entitled *The Rectification of Speech*, pointed out which pitfalls to avoid in reading and speaking and was topical on two accounts.<sup>81</sup> First, Ibn al-Sikkīt had skillfully composed it, ensuring that the information it contained was accurate and easy to locate. He was appreciated as a good writer, better for instance than

<sup>76</sup> However, as Stefan Leder, "Grenzen der Rekonstruktion alten Schrifttums nach den Angaben im *Fihrist*," in *Ibn an-Nadīm und die mittelalterliche arabische Literatur*. Beiträge zum 1. Johann Wilhelm Fück-Kolloquium Halle 1987 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), pp. 21–31 has shown, not every title cited can be assumed to stand for an actual book.

<sup>77</sup> On the definition of this term, see Peter T. Daniels "Fundamentals of Grammatology," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110 (1990): 727–30.

<sup>78</sup> On this genre, see Ramaḍān ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *Laḥn al-ʿamma wa-l-ṭaṭawwur al-lughawī* (Cairo: Dār al-maʿārif, 1967); Georgine Ayoub, "Laḥn," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, ed. Kees Versteegh. 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), vol. 2, pp. 628–34.

<sup>79</sup> On him, see GAS 1982, vol. 8, pp. 129–36 and GAS 1984, vol. 9, pp. 137–8.

<sup>80</sup> Grammarians's prestige was reflected in their employment as tutors by the elite. After al-Kisāʾī (died 189/805) and al-Farrāʾ, the Kufan Ibn al-Sikkīt still served as tutor for a caliph's sons; among the Basrans Quṭrub, Ibn al-Aʿrābī, al-Riyāshī, and Abū ʿUbayda tutored sons of high dignitaries. See Gérard Troupeau, "La grammaire à Bagdad du IX au XIIIe siècle," *Arabica* 9 (1962): 397–405; Rudolf Sellheim, "Gelehrte und Gelehrsamkeit im Reiche der Chalifen," in *Festgabe für Paul Kirm zum 70. Geburtstag dargebracht von Freunden und Schülern*, ed. E. Kaufmann (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1961), pp. 54–79, particularly pp. 59–61, 63–4.

<sup>81</sup> Ibn al-Sikkīt, *Islāḥ al-mantiq*, ed. A. M. Shākir, and ʿAbdassalām M. Hārūn (Cairo: Dār al-maʿārif, 1368/1949).

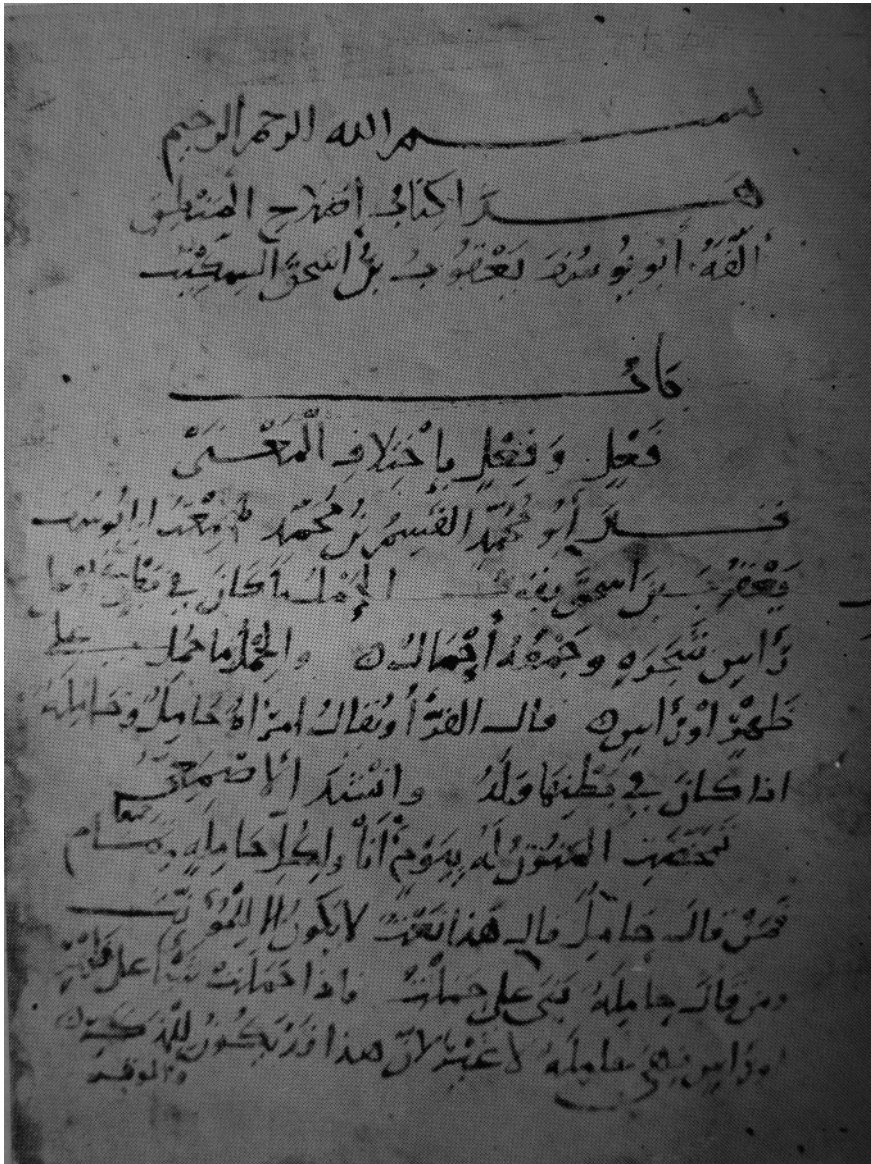


Figure 2.4 *Iṣlāḥ* MS, opening chapter on non-synonymous nouns of the morphological types *fa'l* and *fi'l*, dated 372/982–3 (Source: Ibn al-Sikkīt, *Iṣlāḥ al-manṭiq*, edited by Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, and 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, Cairo: Dār al-ma'ārif, 1368/1949, plate 2)

the school's leader Tha'lab.<sup>82</sup> The awareness was growing that the organization and visual presentation of information was a skill in itself. Second, the book was of practical benefit for educated people who wanted to speak flawless 'arabiyya. The genre was much in demand. Nearly every philologist authored a book on the subject, but Ibn al-Sikkīt's rendition is among the earliest and it did survive.

He was not the first, however. The lexicographer Quṭrub (died 206/821) had already inaugurated a book genre on a subtype, namely, words with three possible readings, or "triplets" (*muthallathāt*).<sup>83</sup> But Ibn al-Sikkīt had reservations against this pioneer. He took an entire bookcase (*qimṭār*) full of notes from him before he judged him to be unreliable and discarded his notes.<sup>84</sup> He decided to do a better job, and indeed, succeeded.

During his lifetime, Ibn al-Sikkīt promoted his own book with dictation sessions, for which he hired a professional assistant (*mustamlī*) who would continue to transmit the book upon the author's death in 244/858.<sup>85</sup> The work was well known, but soon only available for purchase and no longer through teaching. The anonymous bookseller thus favored a popular and user-friendly resource. But his advocacy caused controversy. The Basran grammarian Ibn Durayd (died 321/933) reports the following event:

I saw one of the stationers in Basra prefer the "Book of [the Rectification of] Speech" (*Kitāb [Iṣlāḥ] al-Manṭiq*) by Ya'qūb ibn al-Sikkīt and favor the Kufan [philologists]. Al-Riyāshī, who was sitting among the stationers, was told this and he said: "We were the ones who took the lexicon from none but hunters of lizards and eaters of jerboas (that is, true Bedouins) but these [Kufan lexicographers] took the lexicon from farmers, truffle collectors, and eaters of sour milk," or something along those lines.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>82</sup> *kāna aḥsana l-raḡulayni ta'rifan*; al-Lughawī 1954, p. 95. See also al-Marzubānī, *Nūr al-qabas: al-Mukhtaṣar min al-Muṭtabas fī akhbār al-nuḥāt wa-l-udabā' wa-l-shu'arā' wa-l-'ulamā'*, recension of Yūsuf ibn Aḥmad al-Yaghmurī, ed. Rudolf Sellheim (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1964), pp. 319–20; Ibn Khallikān 1968–72, vol. 6, p. 395.

<sup>83</sup> Although the work exists only in a later versification and countless commentaries, the sources unanimously credit Quṭrub with its invention; see Gruendler 2012.

<sup>84</sup> Yāqūt 1923–31, vol. 19, pp. 52–4.

<sup>85</sup> He was 'Abdallāh ibn Muḥammad ibn Rustam al-Lughawī; Zubaydī 1392/1973, p. 208; al-Khaṭīb 1422/2001, vol. 16: 398; al-Qifṭī 1406/1986, vol. 4, p. 394. He also appears in the chain of transmission in al-Tibrīzī's revision. See Ibn al-Sikkīt 1368/1949, preface, p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> al-Sirāfī 1374/1955, p. 68; Ibn al-Nadīm 1971, p. 64 and vol. 1, pp. 166–7; Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, p. 153 and 1386/1967, pp. 199–200. Note the following variants: Ibn al-Nadīm 1971, p. 64 and vol. 1, p. 166–7: "read (*yaqra'u*) the book" and "I (scilicet Ibn Durayd) told [al-Riyāshī] what he had said"; Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, p. 153 and 1386/1967, pp. 199–200: "he was told about what that man had said." A jerboa is a desert rodent belonging to the typical menu of the Bedouin. For a humorous account of a Bedouin inviting a field-working grammarian to a jerboa meal, see Gruendler, "Leaving Home: *Al-hanīn ilā l-awṭān* and its alternatives in Classical Arabic literature," in *Visions and Representations of Homeland in Modern Arabic Poetry and Prose Literature*, ed. Sebastian Günther, and Stephan Milich (Hildesheim, Zurich, and New York: Georg Olms Publishers, [forthcoming]).



Al-Riyāshī (died 257/871), the grammarian who challenged the bookseller, was in several respects a man in-between.<sup>87</sup> Belonging to the Basran school, he bridged the gap between the generation of the triumvirate of al-Aṣmaʿī, Abū ʿUbayda, and Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī and that of the towering al-Mubarrad (died 285/898).<sup>88</sup>

Al-Riyāshī was generally respected. But his contemporary Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī (died 255/869) seems to have been in two minds about him. Once he deplored that the times had nothing better to offer than al-Riyāshī, concluding that “knowledge will pass from the hands and books will vanish.”<sup>89</sup> It was understandable that a contemporary scholar thought of books as perishable. What he meant was that works not put into circulation and taught in a scholarly fashion risked getting lost, and cases of “book-stingy” scholars, who died without sharing their writings, confirm this.<sup>90</sup>

In terms of his method, al-Riyāshī emphasized direct oral access to the most authentic language, that is, that of the Bedouins. He wrote few books himself but had read either half or the whole of the *Kitāb Sībawayhi* with al-Māzinī (died 249/863), and his teacher conceded that al-Riyāshī understood the book better than he did himself.<sup>91</sup> Al-Riyāshī also borrowed the *Classes of Poets* on poetic criticism by the recently deceased al-Jumāhī (died 231/845) fascicle by fascicle as it was being edited by his nephew and transmitter.<sup>92</sup> Al-Riyāshī clearly appreciated books as a backup, if their author was no longer alive. But if possible he preferred person-to-person teaching, and he deplored, for instance, that he could not have heard al-Jumāhī in addition to reading his book.

Al-Riyāshī still memorized books. He read the books of his teacher Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī under his tutelage until he knew them by heart. With his other teacher, al-Aṣmaʿī, he simply audited his works until he memorized them—though he admitted that reading the material with Abū Zayd had sped up the process.<sup>93</sup>

Oral debate remained the means to establish status. When he discovered that a student of his also studied with another teacher, he challenged the rival to a

<sup>87</sup> On him, see GAS 1982, vol. 8, pp. 96–7.

<sup>88</sup> Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, p. 153 and 1386/1967, p. 199.

<sup>89</sup> al-Zubaydī 1392/1973, p. 97.

<sup>90</sup> Thus al-Shaybānī (died circa 205/820) allegedly did not share his dictionary: “His *Kitāb al-jīm* has no transmission, because Abū ʿAmr withheld it from people, and no one read it before him.” Al-Lughawī 1954, pp. 91–2. Werner Diem, *Das Kitāb al-Ġīm des Abū ʿAmr aṣ-Ṣāibānī: Ein Beitrag zur arabischen Lexikographie*. Doctoral thesis (Munich: Munich University, 1968), pp. 33–4, 92 confirms the book’s lack of a reception. Likewise Abū ʿAmr al-Harawī (died 255/869) kept his similarly titled work to himself until it was destroyed in the flooding of an army camp; Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, pp. 151–2 and 1386/1967, p. 196–7. The above mentioned *Kitāb Sībawayhi* was transmitted only after the death of its author. Bernards 1977, p. 5 and section 5.1 above.

<sup>91</sup> See Ibn al-Nadīm 1971, p. 58 and vol. 1, pp. 166–7 for the former and al-Khaṭīb 1422/2001, vol. 14, pp. 22–3 for the latter amount. See further al-Zubaydī 1392/1973, p. 99; Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, 153 and 1386/1967, p. 199.

<sup>92</sup> al-Lughawī 1954, p. 67.

<sup>93</sup> al-Zubaydī 1392/1973, p. 97; al-Khaṭīb 1422/2001, vol. 14, pp. 22–3.

debate to put him in his place.<sup>94</sup> In a couplet he emphasizes the importance in the learning process of asking questions:

A good question cures blindness,  
but keeping silence in ignorance prolongs blindness instead.

Be a questioner about what troubles you,  
you were created with reason in order to ask questions.<sup>95</sup>

Al-Riyāshī thus navigated between oral and written types of information and their combination, accepting scholarly books as necessary and unavoidable, but convinced that they needed an oral life to survive intact.

He is even on record for wanting clarification about Ibn al-Sikkīt's book without admitting it. In a session with the philologist Abū 'Ubayda he pretended to ask questions about Sibawayhi's book, but the scholar wised up to his true purpose and refused to give any information about "the book by that Khūzistānī."<sup>96</sup> Most likely al-Riyāshī's intent was not disinterested scholarship but an attempt to find errors to criticize.

In confronting the stationer in the book market, al-Riyāshī took offense not only at a book from the rival school but also its promotion by someone who was not a trained scholar. In his eyes the craftsman overstepped his competency. And he took the challenge seriously by counter-advertising his own school's superior method instead of attacking or insulting the merchant. He argued this in succinct parallel prose joining erudition to eloquence, coining slogans that were easy to remember. Al-Riyāshī felt the necessity to oppose an opinion from outside the scholarly circuit. The bookseller had launched a competition. But this was taking place not in a closed scholarly gathering but in the city's open market. The promotion by a merchant stood against the pronouncement of a scholar, and the buying public was to judge.

However, this scholar's protestations proved futile, and the subsequent reception of the book would vindicate the merchant. An unnamed colleague opined: "No book on lexicon like the *Rectification of Speech* has crossed the bridge to Baghdad." Further praise came from the great al-Mubarrad, who conceded the book's excellence and admitted that his own school had nothing to match it.<sup>97</sup> Al-Mubarrad did not always show himself to be this generous. He had even criticized the foundational book of his own school, Sibawayhi's *Kitāb* before endorsing

<sup>94</sup> al-Zubaydī 1392/1973, p. 97.

<sup>95</sup> Ibn al-Anbārī 1959, p. 154 and 1386/1967, p. 201.

<sup>96</sup> al-Lughawī 1954, p. 76. With this unflattering non-Arab *nisba* Ibn al-Sikkīt (hailing from a village in Khuzistan, southwest Iran) once identified himself in a class, and the inquiring teacher al-Farrā' felt ashamed to have exposed an honest student. Ibn al-Nadīm 1971, p. 79 [there misread as *khūdhi*] and vol. 1, p. 219; Ibn Khallikān 1968–72, vol. 6, p. 396.

<sup>97</sup> Ibn Khallikān 1968–72, vol. 6, pp. 396, 400; al-Khaṭīb 1422/2011, vol. 16, p. 400; al-Qifṭī 1406/1986, vol. 4, p. 53; Ibn al-Anbārī 1969, pp. 139–40 and 1386/1967, p. 179; Ibn al-Sikkīt, preface, p. 9.

it as the foundational work of Arabic grammar.<sup>98</sup> During al-Riyāshī's time, the *Kitāb Sibawayhi* was attaining the status of a classic. A century later, in al-Sirāfi's biographical dictionary of Basran grammarians, it is the book mentioned most as having been read in any class.<sup>99</sup> The Basran school had become a book-centered tradition. Basrans respected knowledge that came in book form and the absence of a match to Ibn al-Sikkīt's "Rectification" must have been a sore point.

This was only the beginning of the *Rectification*'s triumph, but before considering another, albeit unacknowledged tribute, the book itself deserves a closer look. Its opening chapters helped address the most pressing problem any user of the Arabic script faced: because of the unwritten short vowels, simple nouns (those lacking any long vowels, prefixes, or suffixes that would help derive the vowel sequence) could be pronounced in a number of ways. Some variants were synonymous, but often, a different reading altered the meaning, for instance, <k-b-r> could be realized as *kibr*, *kibar*, or *kubr*, signifying "pride," "old age," or "large size," respectively. A simple noun consisting of three radicals might offer up to nine ways of reading, though, of course, not all of these were real words in a given root.<sup>100</sup> Such word types, whose various phonetic realizations are not made explicit in the script, invited mispronunciation and confusion with their visual cognates. Their correct rendition was no mere matter of style but important to avoid misunderstandings, as the alteration of a single vowel could turn one word into another.

Ibn al-Sikkīt collected and arranged these words based on their unvowelled written form. He laid out his book in 114 chapters along clear and logical principles, placing the simple before the complex and making it usable for quick reference. His selection was furthermore problem-oriented, as he devoted special chapters to such letters whose orthography posed particular difficulties, namely the *hamza* sign for the glottal stop and the semi-vowels *w* and *y* whose double duty as consonants and long vowels made them ambiguous. For its time the book's arrangement was groundbreaking.

As a reference the *Rectification* offered practical advantages to the general reader: it was a handy book, assembling much information in a small space. The anonymous scholar already quoted states: "It no doubt belongs to the useful, dependable books that contain a great deal of vocabulary. Relative to its size (*ḥajm*) we know of nothing like it in its kind."<sup>101</sup> It was applied knowledge, limited to such words that people actually used, a handy book for specialists

<sup>98</sup> Bernards 1977, pp. 54, 87–93. All subsequent studies in the field would refer to it.

<sup>99</sup> al-Sirāfi, who also recorded the above dispute in the book market, noted carefully who read *Sibawayhi*'s *Kitāb*, which portion of it, how many times, and under whose direction.

<sup>100</sup> Mathematically, 12 readings are possible, but certain vowel combinations (*fi'il*, *fi'ul*, *fu'il*) rarely occur in the Arabic language; Wolfdietrich Fischer, *Grammatik des klassischen Arabisch* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987), p. 35, §62. All listed readings are discussed by Ibn al-Sikkīt, except for the last, which is added by Ibn Qutayba.

<sup>101</sup> Ibn Khallikān 1968–1972, vol. 6, p. 400.

and generalists, the latter of whom might well be the potential customers in the market the anonymous stationer had targeted.<sup>102</sup>

### *Implicit Praise*

Ibn al-Sikkīt also received praise in written form, albeit unacknowledged. Much of his material was lifted and reused for the most famous exemplar of the genre. Its author was a man of letters and one of the two most prolific book writers of the late third/ninth century: Ibn Qutayba (died 276/889). He was no scholar, but a provincial judge who produced books on sundry subjects for practical use and his own gain. Al-Lughawī, in his biographical entry on the author, showed little regard for such publishing frenzy:

[Ibn Qutayba] rushed things, not doing [his studies] properly, in order to begin composing his book on grammar, his book on *Dream Interpretation*, his book on *Prophetic Miracles*, *The Choicest Reports*, *Facts to Know*, *Poets*, and suchlike, which diminished him in the eyes of scholars, even if he profited from [these books] among commoners (‘amma) and uncritical [readers].<sup>103</sup>

Ibn Qutayba produced reference works which circulated widely and which comprised the repertoire of an educated individual of his time.<sup>104</sup> He covered a vast array of subjects indeed, from the religious to the secular and created a utilitarian prose style that was accessible and enjoyable for a new type of readership: the class beneath the elite of literati and would-be literati belonging to the upper stratum of merchants and artisans.<sup>105</sup> This is what ‘amma here implies; it does not mean the illiterate urban classes. Most of these maligned, rush-produced titles are today invaluable sources. But even at their time of composition these books were already sorely needed. Government scribes especially depended upon such practical knowledge, for instance on how to avoid embarrassing errors in speech that could cost them their jobs. Knowing the ‘arabiyya was furthermore the key for access to books on all other subjects, and scribes (who were often of non-Arab origin) were jacks of all trades and masters of none and could not conduct their multifarious business without digests on sundry skills, from spelling to geometrical formulas for land taxation. Clear organization of handbooks on such subjects was key to permit

<sup>102</sup> al-Tibrīzī remarks in the preface of his revision “Most of what it contains is the language in use, which one must know and take care to memorize.” Ibn al-Sikkīt 1368/1949, preface, p. 13.

<sup>103</sup> al-Lughawī 1954, pp. 84–5.

<sup>104</sup> Gérard Lecomte, *Ibn Qutayba (mort en 276/889): L’homme, son oeuvre, ses idées* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1965), p. 92.

<sup>105</sup> Lecomte 1965, p. 488 calls this *prose véhiculaire*. Lecomte 1965, pp. 490–91. The more brilliant paragon of this style was indisputably Ibn Qutayba’s contemporary al-Jāhīz; Lecomte 1965, pp. 487–9, Schoeler 2009, pp. 105–6. On this “sub-elite” see Schoeler 2009, pp. 104–5; Shawkat Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfur and Arabic Writerly Culture: A Ninth-century Bookman in Baghdad* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), p. 54.

quick consultation, for the scribes had no leisure to delve into each subject in depth. Ibn Qutayba devised his works precisely to facilitate quick reference and efficient study, focusing on the essential and omitting the superfluous.<sup>106</sup>

Irrespective of whether al-Lughawī's condemnation of Ibn Qutayba as an amateurish popularizer reflected an attitude of uncompromising scholarship or jealousy of commercial success, it confirms that Ibn Qutayba targeted, and indeed fostered, a market in which books replaced their authors and reached people who had no other access to knowledge. Gérard Lecomte qualifies Ibn Qutayba's achievement as a *synthèse humaniste*, and James Montgomery calls him a "popularist," "who created a common epistemological ground for Muslim society."<sup>107</sup> What is more, he was instrumental in creating the audience he wrote for. The scathing statement of a contemporary with a more narrow focus must be set in relation to Ibn Qutayba's muddying of the waters of pure scholarship, blurring the boundaries between different scholarly circles, and serving a mixed readership of professionals and amateurs. In this sense Ibn Qutayba took the same stance as the Basran stationer, except that he went further in conceiving his books from the outset for a wider public. He states his purpose openly in the preface of his "[The] Scribe's Vademecum" (*Adab al-kātib*):

I produced for him who neglected instruction (*mughfil al-ta'dib*) light sections on lexicon and on the straightening of hand and tongue [namely orthography and pronunciation], each section comprising a field (*fann*), and I kept this free of lengthiness and heaviness in order to incite [such a person] to memorize and study it, when his zeal will have returned, to give him control over the knowledge he has missed, and to take precautions for him by readying the tool (*āla*) for the moment of his ascent [to a position] or the fulfillment of his need, when he will see things clearly.<sup>108</sup>

Ibn Qutayba did not credit Ibn al-Sikkīt. Nonetheless, his close imitation and massive verbatim borrowing was a *de facto* endorsement. Ibn Qutayba largely adopted the structure of Ibn al-Sikkīt's *Rectification* and recycled it, together

<sup>106</sup> Lecomte 1965, p. 433.

<sup>107</sup> Lecomte 1965, p. 430; James Montgomery, "Of Models and Amanuenses: The remarks on the *qaṣīda* in Ibn Qutayba's *Kitāb al-Shi'r wa-l-shu'arā'*," in *Islamic Reflections and Arabic Musings: Studies in Honour of Professor Alan Jones*, ed. R. Hoyland, and P.F. Kennedy (Oxford: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004), pp. 1–47, particularly p. 36 and p. 38.

<sup>108</sup> He specifies his reader as a scribe in a parallel passage in the preface to his later "Choicest Reports" (*Uyūn al-akhbār*) referring to the "Vademecum": "I took it upon myself [to compose] a book for him who neglected instruction among the scribes ..." Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, ed. Yūsuf 'Alī Ṭawīl, 4 parts in 2 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-ma'ārif, [1985]), vol. 1, p. 42. Ibn Qutayba, *Adab al-kātib*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī l-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-sa'āda, 1382/1963), pp. 8–9 and French translation in Gérard Lecomte, "L'introduction du *Kitāb Adab al-kātib* d'Ibn Qutayba," in *Mélanges Louis Massignon*. 3 vols. (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1956–1957), vol. 3 (1957), pp. 47–65, particularly pp. 58–9. See also the even broader description of his readership in the preface to his *Uyūn*, Ibn Qutayba [1985], vol. 1, pp. 43–4: "I do not think it right that this book of mine should be limited ... to the elite to the exclusion of commoners (*āmma*), or to kings to the exclusion of their populace (*sūqa*)."

with the bulk of its material, for his *Vademecum*. This work, commissioned by the vizier ‘Ubaydallāh ibn Khāqān (ruled 237–47/851–61 and 256–63/870–77), earned the young author a judgeship in Dinawar, where he went on to compose the remainder of his oeuvre over the next two decades.<sup>109</sup>

The *Rectification* and the *Vademecum* overlap substantially in the latter’s third section on pronunciation, literally “Straightening the Tongue,” and the fourth and last section on morphology, entitled “Word Patterns”.<sup>110</sup>

Ibn Qutayba further served his audience by combining the subjects of both Ibn al-Sikkīt’s *Rectification* and his thesaurus, “The Words” (*al-Alfāz*), into a single handy book, adding a third subject, orthography, so that the *Vademecum* was actually three books in one.<sup>111</sup>

In essence, Ibn Qutayba retooled Ibn al-Sikkīt’s *Iṣlāḥ* for a new audience, “a burgeoning political and cultural group to the creation of which he was central, one in need of texts to define and vindicate it, and, on the strength of them, to be able to prove to other competing religio-political and cultural groups that it merited its hegemonic place in the community,” as James Montgomery puts it.<sup>112</sup> For this he picked the best available precursor and recycled much of his material as well as his organizational principles.<sup>113</sup> The unacknowledged dependence on the *Iṣlāḥ* by a work that would become the standard desk reference for scribes earns Ibn al-Sikkīt implicit acclaim as the perfect model. The borrowing by the popularizing author proves to be the highest compliment for Ibn al-Sikkīt.

In terms of distribution, the case of Ibn Qutayba resembles the situation of Ibn al-Sikkīt in that a book was promoted outside the circle of scholarship and beyond earshot of its author. But Ibn Qutayba had intended this, while in Ibn al-Sikkīt’s generation, the second quarter of the third/ninth century, the “unheard” reception of a book was still unusual and hesitantly accepted. Only few recognized the book’s potential to lead an independent life, and stationers

<sup>109</sup> Lecomte 1965, pp. 32–4, 42–3, 85–6.

<sup>110</sup> Ibn Khallikān compares both works in their opposite proportions of preface and text, but only implies matching content (Ibn Qutayba usually added long prefaces); Ibn Khallikān 1968–72, vol. 6, pp. 400. ‘Abd al-Tawwāb 1967, pp. 160–63 gives select evidence for Ibn Qutayba’s dependence on the *Iṣlāḥ*. A comparison of both works shows that Ibn Qutayba reuses circa 61 of the 114 chapters of the *Rectification*, title and content, the latter either totally or partially (the exact counting is made difficult by the fact that Ibn Qutayba subdivides some of the *Rectification*’s chapters or groups parts of others together). The reused chapters derive mainly from the first half of the book focusing on noun patterns, which Ibn al-Sikkīt organized most tightly and systematically.

<sup>111</sup> The *Alfāz* itself combines earlier thematic wordlists into a comprehensive book.

<sup>112</sup> Montgomery 2004, p. 40.

<sup>113</sup> Such a procedure is suggested by Tharwat ‘Ukāsha for two of Ibn Qutayba’s other books and deserves further investigation. Where Ibn Qutayba criticizes a predecessor, such as Abū ‘Ubayd’s *Gharīb al-hadīth* in his own work on the subject, he does so openly. Lecomte 1965, p. 203. This should not, however, be regarded as plagiarism, as rearrangement of transmitted material was a standard practice of scholarship as well as *adab*, and the failure to mention his sources (as was usual in scholarship) may have been the practical choice of an author writing for a broader public which was not interested in this.

were just becoming a new conduit for book distribution and for helping authors to transcend limited dissemination through teaching.

The *Rectification* would be read and debated avidly for the next four centuries.<sup>114</sup> Hajjī Khalīfā alone lists 11 scholars who revised it, commented on it, enlarged or abridged it, or wrote *responsae* from the fourth/tenth to the seventh/thirteenth centuries. Nearly 300 years after its composition, the book was still judged important enough by al-Tibrīzī (died 502/1109) to receive a revision.<sup>115</sup>

The unnamed stationer had proven his foresight and judgment. Perhaps he had observed customers' repeatedly choosing Ibn al-Sikkīt's handy and useful volume over others of its kind that had less to offer and were more cumbersome to use (there were many, though few survive). He was proven right over a rival philologist by the leader of that very school, the implicit praise of emulation by a "prime craftsman of Arabic literary prose,"<sup>116</sup> and three centuries of subsequent philologists—no small feat for a simple craftsman.

At this point we must consider that the case of the unknown *warrāq*, rare as it may be in the sources, stood for a multitude of men who plied this trade. There were a hundred book markets in Baghdad alone. Mosul, Kufa, Basra, and Ahwaz featured their own thriving book markets.<sup>117</sup> Quantitative research documents the tenfold increase of the *warrāq* label during the period under discussion in one biographical source, the "History of Islam and the Classes of the Famous and Illustrious" (*Ta'rikh al-islām wa-ṭabaqāt al-mashāhīr wa-l-a'lām*) by al-Dhahabī (died 748/1348) (see Figure 2.5 in Appendix to this chapter).<sup>118</sup>

Encroachments on theretofore scholarly terrain by such artisan-traders must have been numerous, even if they did not become stories that historians would tell.

## A NEW DISTRIBUTION NETWORK AND ITS POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE

With the onset of the third/ninth century, the rapidly increasing availability of books spread knowledge beyond the aurally or note-based sharing practiced in

<sup>114</sup> Ibn al-Sikkīt 1368/1949, preface, p.12.

<sup>115</sup> al-Tibrīzī, *Kitāb Tahdhīb Iṣlāḥ al-manṭiq*, ed. Muḥammad Badr al-Dīn al-Na'ṣānī (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-sa'āda, 1325/1907). See Ibn al-Sikkīt 1368/1949, preface, pp. 13–14.

<sup>116</sup> Thus Lecomte 1957, p. 64 describes Ibn Qutayba.

<sup>117</sup> Touati 2003, pp. 207–9.

<sup>118</sup> The numbers of listed stationers—many of whom were *also* scholars, as that trade alone did not warrant their inclusion—in half-century increments (to even out generational gaps) are respectively 2 (150–200 H), 13 (200–250 H), 26 (250–300 H), 28 (300–350 H) and 38 (350–400 H). In percentages this means a rise from 0.2 percent to nearly 2 percent of the total number of biographies per 20-year period. They average at 953 individuals, with 667 as the lowest and 1232 as the highest number. (This fluctuation is represented in the graph by the dotted curve and its trends marked in the third line from the bottom). With circa 30,000 entries including merchants and craftsmen, al-Dhahabī constitutes the most comprehensive biographical source at our disposal. Nonetheless it is difficult to say to what extent it actually represents Islamic society in terms of demography. I thank Maxim Romanov for placing his unpublished quantitative analysis of the *Ta'rikh al-islām* at my disposal and for producing the graph.

scholarly circles. Thus competing schools could secretly read each other, or a polymath like Abū ‘Ubayd could dare to combine the methods of traditionists (*isnād* sourcing) and philologists (alphabetical arrangement) in one book, a *ḥadīth* lexicon, which then became popular among both groups of readers.<sup>119</sup> This went along with an increasing sophistication in arranging the contents of a book, which came to be recognized as a distinct expertise (*taṣnīf*), and the growth of a public which expected and relied on this.

Books also allowed information to move across social strata. The beginning was made with books commissioned by caliphs and courtiers for information they wanted at their fingertips, without the time or intention to become experts. Even the urban middle classes gained access to religious knowledge as well as entertainment literature. The latter was frowned upon by scholars, who regarded the book as a vehicle of “useful” content. Here stationers became closest to authors themselves, for they produced love stories and fantasy tales directly for the market, while scholars accused them of “forgery”—an interesting charge in view of the fact that popular literature was by definition authorless and anonymous. The *warrāqūn* were a factor in changing the approach to, and circulation of, information. They moved it beyond the limitations of state usage and worked alongside book authors in bridging disciplinary boundaries. They furthermore allowed authors to exist independently of patronage and collaborated with them to broaden their reach.

In sum, the separation between the book as personally transmitted content and as a mobile physical object and the commercial possibilities of the latter as a commodity gave knowledge an unprecedented dynamic, which propelled the development of scholarship by widening access to it and making it financially viable. Stationers realized the potential of the book and thrived in the yet unregulated sphere of this new technology—for their own immediate benefit and the sustained flourishing of Arabic-Islamic civilization.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn al-Sallām ibn ‘Abdallāh Abī ‘Ubayd al-Harawī, *Gharīb al-ḥadīth*, ed. M. ‘Abd al-Mu‘īd Khān. 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘arabī, 1384/1964). For comments on this work by medieval scholars, see al-Khaṭīb 1422/2001, vol. 14, p. 394; al-Qifṭī 1406/1986, vol. 2, p. 14.

<sup>120</sup> Markets fell under the control of market overseers, but handbooks for these are preserved only from much later times, when the occasional banning of books finds mention.



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## APPENDIX

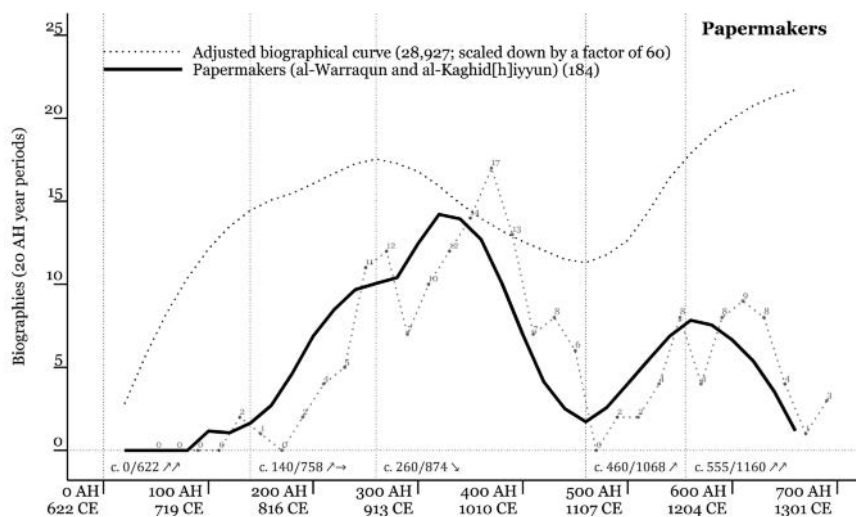


Figure 2.5 Papermakers. Graph created by Maxim Romanov, documenting the tenfold increase of the professional designation of stationer (*warrāq*) between 150 and 400 H. (corresponding to a rise from 0.2% to nearly 2% of the total number of biographies per 20-year period), based on the most comprehensive biographical source at our disposal, the “History of Islam and the Classes of the Famous and Illustrious” (*Ta’rīkh al-islām wa-ṭabaqāt al-mashāhīr wa-l-a’lām*) by al-Dhahabī (died 748/1348), which comprises circa 30,000 entries (see also note 118)

# Chapter 3

## Contexts and Content of Thābit ibn Qurra's (died 288/901) Construction of Knowledge on the Balance

Sonja Brentjes and Jürgen Renn

### THE TRANSMISSION OF MECHANICS AS GLOBALIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Analyzing the Arabic transmission of practical and theoretical knowledge on the balance in general and on the steelyard in particular as a process of the globalization of knowledge entails dealing with knowledge and its contexts in a broad sense, and considering its spread from a perspective of global history. Mechanical knowledge in the sense of knowledge about heavy bodies, mechanical devices, and their movements is as old as humanity itself, and even older in view of the fact that even certain animal species are capable of using mechanical devices. Mechanical knowledge documented by written texts and formulated in the form of general statements about mechanical devices goes back to Greek antiquity, but is also found in ancient Chinese texts. In the European Renaissance theoretical mechanical knowledge became a central concern of the so-called Scientific Revolution, a historical process in the course of which a “mechanistic worldview” was established, as well as the early modern scientific traditions. For the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century the improvement of mechanical devices such as the spinning frame and the power loom was essential.

Before the Industrial and Scientific Revolutions, however, mechanical knowledge played only a marginal role in the transmission and spread of knowledge anywhere in the world. Its history was nevertheless characterized by an astonishing persistence (or rather resilience) extending over millennia and across quite diverse cultural settings. The law of the lever (that is, the inverse proportionality of weights and distances on a balance in equilibrium), for instance, as it was first formulated in ancient Greek texts, remained a central point of reference for mechanical knowledge not only in Greek and Hellenistic times, but also in the Islamic world and in the Latin Middle Ages. In Renaissance mechanics and its sequel it even became the paradigm of a scientific law. This persistence cannot be explained by any transcendental power of scientific rationality, but must be considered a historical fact requiring historical explanation. Here we intend to offer such an explanation in terms of the globalization of knowledge.

We will thus not limit our attention to the transmission of the small number of rather specialized texts dealing with mechanical knowledge, as has often been done in the history of science. Such a view simply takes the above-described resilience of mechanical knowledge for granted, rather than explaining it. We shall instead consider such knowledge in its broader historical contexts and analyze the conditions under which it has been actually transmitted, transformed, or lost. In this way, we will be able first of all to account, at least in principle, for the surprising persistence of mechanical knowledge at least in the critical transition between Hellenistic, late antique, and Islamicate cultures. But we will also explain some of the specific features and characteristics of mechanical knowledge not as the result of an unfolding scientific rationality, but rather as traces of a concrete history of the globalization of knowledge. An essential feature of this approach is the attention paid to the role of material culture and practical knowledge, on the one hand, and to the role played in concrete historical circumstances by societal views on knowledge (images of knowledge in the sense of Yehuda Elkana) on the other.

## THE SOURCES

The kind of study we are undertaking here is still in its infancy. Yet it will become clear that the transmission of mechanical knowledge took substantially different turns in Islamicate and Catholicate societies. In the Islamicate world, one should differentiate with regard to this story of transmission between five larger regions and at least three main time periods. The regions encompass (1) al-Andalus and the Maghreb, (2) Egypt, Syria, and northern Iraq, (3) central and southern Iraq and Iran, (4) central Asia, and (5) India. The main time periods run from the third/ninth to the late fifth/early twelfth centuries (mainly Iraq, Iran, central Asia, northern India and Egypt), the seventh/thirteenth to the ninth/fifteenth centuries (mainly Egypt and Syria), and the tenth/sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth centuries (mainly Iran and India with a possibly isolated new turn to mechanics in Egypt). Until the late ninth/fifteenth century, the main Catholic centers of studying, teaching, or copying texts on mechanics seem to have been Paris, Cambridge, Oxford, and Italian cities, with a number of more isolated occurrences of such activities in monasteries or other localities in southern Germany and Flanders.

The greatest challenge for determining and evaluating the processes of transmission, as well as the content of the transmitted knowledge and the contexts that shaped the communities which acquired, supported, and disseminated this knowledge, is the still very insufficient study of the extant sources in Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish. These sources belong, by and large, to five major domains: texts presenting mechanical knowledge; material objects; bio-bibliographical dictionaries and historical chronicles; encyclopedias

and classifications of scholarly disciplines; geographies and travel literature.<sup>1</sup> A study of the encyclopedic material and of classifications is very useful for understanding the changed structures of mechanical knowledge in the course of history. Bio-bibliographical dictionaries offer important clues for how to describe and interpret the relevant transfer processes. They primarily present information about authors and texts, but also describe some forms of context, for instance the relationship between different scholars and texts, the role of patrons or—as is very important for the first period—the forms through which foreign manuscripts were acquired and by whom, as well as for whom they were translated into Syriac or Arabic.

Furthermore, in the future the existing research on texts must be complemented with archeological studies of the relevant material culture of mechanics, in particular on the role and distribution of balances in different historical settings.

## GREEK STUDIES ON THE BALANCE

In the early third millennium BCE balances with equal arms were introduced in Mesopotamia and Egypt and spread across the Mediterranean region.<sup>2</sup> Their introduction was associated with the emergence of a quantitative concept of weight and with a standardization of weight measures. Since Greek antiquity a theoretical field of knowledge existed to which the balance and the law of the lever are central. It is documented by texts in which the equilibrium of a balance is studied under various circumstances and in which fundamental statements about the balance and about other mechanical devices are derived from certain presuppositions within a deductive structure. To avoid anachronisms, we simply designate this field “balance studies.” We thus leave open, for the time being, its relation to the fields that are traditionally designated as “mechanics” or the “science of weights.”

Let us first review the situation of balance studies in the period of classical Greece and in Hellenistic times. The first extant text is the *Mechanical Questions*,

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<sup>1</sup> Mohammad Abbattouy has investigated primarily sources of the first type with a few additions from the last type. He focused on the known core texts with theoretical mechanical knowledge produced by scholars who lived mainly in Iraq and Iran. In addition, he provided a survey on texts dealing with practical aspects of measures and weights produced primarily by scholars who lived in Egypt and Syria between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries. Mohamed Abbattouy, “Greek Mechanics in Arabic Context: Thabit ibn Qurra, al-Isfizari and the Arabic Traditions of Aristotelian and Euclidean Mechanics,” in *Intercultural Transmission of Scientific Knowledge in the Middle Ages*, eds Mohamed Abbattouy, Jürgen Renn, and Paul Weinig *Science in Context* 14, no. 1–2 (2001): pp. 179–247.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Damerow, Jürgen Renn, Simone Rieger, and Paul Weinig, “Mechanical Knowledge and Pompeian Balances,” in *Homo Faber: Studies on Nature, Technology, Science at the Time of Pompeii*, eds Jürgen Renn, and Giuseppe Castagnetti (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2002), pp. 93–108, particularly p. 93.



traditionally ascribed to Aristotle.<sup>3</sup> It explains the force-saving effect of a variety of mechanical devices with the help of a “balance-lever model.” It incorporates the idea that differences of weight can be compensated by differences of length. This idea, in turn, is based on the practical experience with balances with unequal arms that had been invented in Greece in the late fifth century BCE. These balances are indeed at the same time balances and levers. In such balances different weights can be brought into equilibrium with one and the same counterweight by changing its position on the balance beam. In Roman times, the most widespread balance of this type was the one called the steelyard, with a fixed fulcrum and moveable counterpoise. The balance-lever model also became the basis for the formulation of the law of the lever, that is the inverse proportionality between weights and distances from the fulcrum in a balance in equilibrium.

In his *On the Equilibrium of Planes*, Archimedes demonstrated the law of the lever with the help of the concept of the center of gravity and a redistribution of weights on a balance maintaining its equilibrium. In his *Mechanics*, Hero dealt with complex machines for lifting weights, which he explained as a combination of simple mechanical devices.<sup>4</sup> He used the law of the lever and the concept of the center of gravity, but did not provide a proof of the law of the lever. He saw the reason for the force-saving effect of mechanical devices in their ability to distribute the weight to be lifted or transported over several moving agents. Accordingly, he saw, in agreement with Aristotelian dynamics, a compensation process at work in mechanical devices so that what is gained in force is lost in time.

There were also further texts on balance studies in Greek antiquity and in Hellenistic times, which are only partially known to us, mostly due to their later transmission via Arabic and Latin translations. Here we want to mention, in particular, two short treatises ascribed to Euclid, one on the balance, only extant in Arabic, and the other on specific weight, extant in Arabic and Latin. The text on the balance ascribed to Euclid—the *Kitāb fī l-mīzān* (“Book on the Balance”)—represents an attempt to prove the law of the lever on the basis of a three-dimensional mechanical arrangement comprising two balances in the form of a cross.<sup>5</sup> The proof proceeds by redistributing weights on this arrangement under the condition that its equilibrium be maintained. In this way, it is first demonstrated that one weight at a given distance from the fulcrum can be in equilibrium with two equal weights at half the distance from the fulcrum. Then a more general form of the law of the lever is demonstrated by using the concept of the force of a weight, depending on its position on the beam. The second text ascribed to Euclid is known in Latin as *Liber de ponderoso et levi* (“Book on the Heaviness and the Lightness”) and in Arabic as *Kitāb al-*

<sup>3</sup> Damerow, Renn, Rieger, and Weinig 2002, pp. 93–108.

<sup>4</sup> Hero, *Mechanica*, transl. L. Nix, with the fragments in Greek, ed. W. Schmidt, in *Heronis Opera*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1900).

<sup>5</sup> Franz Woepcke, “Notice sur des traductions de deux ouvrages perdus d’Euclide,” *Journal Asiatique*, Septembre/Octobre: 217–47, particularly pp. 220–32.

*thiqal wa-l-khiffa*.<sup>6</sup> It offers a natural philosophical basis for the concept of specific weight and proves six theorems about relations between two bodies regarding their weight, size, or force. Then there is a text on the steelyard of dubious origin, which Duhem believed to be a thirteenth-century translation of an ancient Greek text, the so-called *Liber de canonio*.<sup>7</sup> It proves theorems on the material beam of a balance taking into account its proper weight, which is typically neglected in the simpler treatments of the equilibrium of a balance. For its presuppositions such as the law of the lever and the possibility of substituting weights on a balance, which are not proven, it refers to prior books by Euclid, Archimedes, and others. We discuss this important, but misunderstood text in a different paper.<sup>8</sup>

The extant texts from Greek antiquity belong to different literary genres and probably also to different intellectual traditions. The Aristotelian *Mechanical Questions* belong to a *problemata* tradition in the sequel to Aristotelian natural philosophy and deal with the challenge that mechanical devices presented to the correspondence between cause and effect fundamental to natural philosophy: how can a small force overcome a large weight? Archimedes's *On the Equilibrium of Planes* belongs to a tradition of Greek mathematical writings, while Hero's *Mechanics* represents a technical treatise belonging to the context of the *Museion* of Alexandria. For the *Liber de canonio* and the short texts ascribed to Euclid no such contextualization is available. It is clear, however, that they belong to a tradition of deductive treatises in the style of Euclid and Archimedes. This remains a correct claim even after our conclusion about the Arabic origin of the *Liber de canonio*.

Balance studies in antiquity were only a small part of the wider field of theoretical and practical knowledge about mechanics and mechanical devices. While they constitute neither a homogeneous corpus nor part of a coherent tradition, the texts belonging to these studies nevertheless formed part of a system of knowledge held together by common subjects such as the balance and the law of the lever, by overlapping conceptual networks referring to balances, beams, and weights, as well as by a network of explicit and implicit references within the texts.

<sup>6</sup> Ernest A. Moody, and Marshall Claggett, *The Medieval Science of Weights* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1952), pp. 55–76; Faïza Larighi Bancel, *Kitāb Mīzān Al-Ḥikma de ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Khāzini* (Carthage: Beīt al-Ḥikma, 2008), pp. 194–7.

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Duhem, *Les origines de la statique*. 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie scientifique A. Hermann, 1905), vol. 1, pp. 93–7.

<sup>8</sup> Sonja Brentjes, and Jürgen Renn, "A Re-evaluation of the *Liber de canonio*," in *Scienza e rappresentazione. Studi in onore di Pierre Souffrin (1935–2002)*, eds Pierre Caye, Romano Nanni, and Pier Daniele Napolitani, (Biblioteca Leonardiana – Studi e documenti 5) (Florence: Olschki, forthcoming).

## THE STRUCTURE OF KNOWLEDGE ON BALANCES AND WEIGHTS

A deeper understanding of the transmission of knowledge underlying balance studies requires a closer look at the architecture of this knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Three layers may be distinguished, an anthropomorphic layer comprising virtually universal human experiences with the lifting and transport of material bodies, a practical layer referring to historically specific situations in which certain devices such as the lever or the balance are available, and a theoretical layer of knowledge typically articulated in written form. The structures of theoretical knowledge may be rooted in those of anthropomorphic and practical knowledge but are, due to their written fixation, typically more rigid and come with a claim of universal applicability. The precise way in which theoretical structures reflect practical knowledge depends, of course, on the specific cultural circumstances. Greek and Arabic texts on balances are, for instance, distinguished by the fact that in Arabic texts practical knowledge may be explicitly incorporated in theoretical texts. Neither is it *a priori* clear that different theoretical generalizations of anthropomorphic and practical knowledge lead to the same consequences or are even compatible with each other.

Knowledge encompasses social, material, cognitive, and cultural dimensions. An important social dimension is the degree to which knowledge is shared within a society; an important material dimension is the means of its external representation by objects or texts; an important cognitive structure is given by the shared mental models operating as units of shared knowledge; an important cultural dimension is the values, symbols, and codes associated with knowledge in a specific cultural setting.

There is an anthropomorphic mental model of heaviness according to which heavy bodies fall downward if not hindered from doing so, or else require a force to be moved. Such a model has been shown to underlie human thinking in different cultures and historical periods. Once balances were introduced, a practical mental model of weight became available, according to which two bodies have equal weight if they hold a balance in equilibrium. The invention of balances with unequal arms gave rise to a mental model according to which weight differences can be compensated by length differences.

As mentioned above, mental models of theoretical knowledge may go back to those of anthropomorphic and practical knowledge. Thus, corresponding to the anthropomorphic layer, a theory of material bodies may be conceived according to which each body is heavy or light, moving upward or downward, if not hindered. As a consequence, such a theory of material bodies would connect the

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<sup>9</sup> For the following, see the theoretical chapters in Jürgen Renn (ed.), *The Globalization of Knowledge in History*, (Max Planck Research Library for the History and Development of Knowledge, Studies 1) (Berlin: Edition Open Access), pp. 15–104, 205–43, 369–97. See also Jürgen Renn, and Peter Damerow, *The Equilibrium Controversy, Guidobaldo del Monte's Critical Notes on the Mechanics of Jordanus and Benedetti and their Historical and Conceptual Background* (Max Planck Research Library for the History and Development of Knowledge, Sources 2) (Berlin: Edition Open Access, 2012), pp. 39–61.

world of mechanical experiences with cosmological ideas about what upwards and downwards are. Or, still in agreement with the anthropomorphic layer, a theory of material bodies may be conceived according to which every body is moveable by a force over a distance in a certain time. As a consequence, in such a theory one may consider compensation mechanisms between heaviness, space, and time so that, for instance, less force would be needed to move a heavy body over a shorter distance in the same time or in a longer time over the same distance, and so on. Or, in agreement with the practical layer, a theory of material bodies may be conceived according to which every body could act as a balance.

According to this mental model, every body thus has a virtual fulcrum ("center of gravity") from which it can be suspended so as to be in equilibrium. Or, still corresponding to the practical layer, a theory of material bodies may be conceived according to which every body changes its weight according to its position ("positional weight"), just as a body does when it changes its position on the arm of a balance or a steelyard.

These theoretical options were indeed realized historically: The idea that every material body may be conceived of as being heavy or light and moveable by a force over a distance in a certain time was realized in Aristotelian dynamics and later used in Hero's *Mechanics*. The idea that every heavy body has a point from which it can be suspended so as to be in equilibrium was realized in Archimedean statics with its notion of center of gravity. The idea that heaviness may depend on position was realized in the text on the balance ascribed to Euclid, as well as in Arabic and Latin studies on the balance. The exploration of the mutual relations among these different theoretical frameworks, all rooted in the same anthropomorphic and practical experiences, was a major driving force of the historical development. However, its unfolding was profoundly shaped by the mechanisms and contingencies of the actual transmission and transformation of knowledge.

## STRUCTURES OF THE TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE ON BALANCES

The transmission of knowledge on balances has been largely considered a matter of texts and their mutual dependence. Texts were classified according to their authors, cultural contexts, and supposed approach or discipline (Archimedes's statics, Aristotelian dynamics, Hero's theory of machines, the Arabic and Latin sciences of weights/heavy bodies, Renaissance and classical mechanics). Lineages of textual inheritance were reconstructed, with a particular emphasis on the origin of such lineages and often supported by attempts to identify lost ancestors (an example is the search for the lost work of the "young Archimedes" by Knorr).<sup>10</sup> The main place of innovation has been located not so much in historical situations or processes, let alone in transmission processes, but in

<sup>10</sup> Wilbur Richard Knorr, *Ancient Sources of the Medieval Tradition of Mechanics; Greek, Arabic and Latin Studies of the Balance*, *Supplemento agli Annali dell'Istituto e Museo di Storia della Scienza* 2 (1982).

individual authors and their capacity to either coin new concepts (for example, center of gravity or positional weight) or to combine different approaches (for example, Archimedean statics with Aristotelian dynamics). The continued existence of a field of mechanical knowledge is more or less taken for granted or explained as being due to its universal significance, rather than to a sequence of specific historical constellations.

The co-transmission of practical and theoretical knowledge about the balance has hence not been accounted for systematically in standard accounts of the history of mechanics. What was the relationship between the invention of the balance with unequal arms and the creation of a textual tradition dealing with mechanical knowledge in Greek antiquity? Did theoretical knowledge about balances have any significance for the construction or improvement of the balance, or for the construction of other mechanical devices? Was the concentration of Arabic and Latin medieval treatises on the balance due to its practical significance or were there other reasons? Was the steelyard in continued existence from antiquity to the Middle Ages, or was it reintroduced in the West only through contact with people from Islamic societies?

There can be little doubt, in any case, that the transmission of studies on the balance would be unthinkable without a backbone of practical knowledge on balances, which continued to serve as their reference in the material world. Key concepts such as the center of gravity or positional weight would simply have made no sense without the shared mental models made possible by this practical background. Indeed, archeological evidence testifies not only to the wide spread of balances with equal and unequal arms in the Roman Empire, but also to their continued existence and use, and even to their propagation within and beyond the empires that succeeded it. The material culture of balances and the corresponding practical knowledge did not just serve as an anchor of balance studies in shared experiences. It also determined, at each given time, a historically specific horizon of possibilities for such studies, which changed, for instance, when balances with unequal arms were invented in ancient Greece, allowing for a new mental model to emerge, the balance-lever model. In principle, and to an extent to be discussed below, the material culture of balances and the corresponding practical knowledge would even have allowed balance studies to be recreated had their textual transmission been lost. It may well be the case, for instance, that the spread of practical knowledge about balances and about the steelyard, in particular, reached China from the West, stimulating an autonomous local tradition of balance studies. In any case, in the larger Mediterranean area, the material culture of balances and steelyards was transmitted over a period of more than two millennia across major cultural and political breaks.<sup>11</sup>

A tradition of practical knowledge is not, however, sufficient by itself to give rise to a tradition of theoretical studies. As a matter of fact, balance

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<sup>11</sup> Stefan Heidemann, “Weights and Measures from Byzantium and Islam,” in *Byzantium and Islam*, ed. Brandie Ratliff, and Helen C. Evans (New York: The MET, 2012), pp. 144–7, particularly p. 145.

studies emerged in ancient Greece in the context of a preexisting tradition of theoretical texts, namely that of Greek philosophy and science, as the Aristotelian *Mechanical Questions* suggests. Also, this theoretical tradition was itself transmitted across major cultural and political breaks for reasons that are quite independent of any concern with balances, which we will discuss further below. The transmission of balance studies across these breaks, from classical Greece to the Hellenistic period, then to late antique Byzantium followed by the Islamic world, and finally to the Latin Middle Ages and the Renaissance, was hence made possible by two quite independent conditions, the transmission of a material culture of balances and the transmission of a textual tradition in which this material culture was or could become the subject of theoretical analysis. To be more precise, under these conditions balance studies could have in principle emerged or have been revived at any point in this long history, even if no single ancient text on the balance had ever been written or survived. It follows in particular that the creation and transmission of balance studies must be characterized by a certain independence from the specific texts that were actually transmitted in the course of history.

This last observation can be made even more precise and thus allows for deeper insight into the relevant transmission processes. The system of knowledge underlying balance studies—or rather some variant of it—may be reconstructed even if only certain fragments survive, for instance, a knowledge of the law of the lever and the concept of center of gravity, as is illustrated by the work of the Renaissance scientist Francesco Maurolico, who reconstructed much of Archimedes's work on mechanics without knowing a single one of his texts.<sup>12</sup> For such a reconstruction to be possible it is also important, however, that certain images or models of organizing knowledge survive, such as the deductive structure of Euclid's *Elements*. In other words, both the self-organizing potential of a system of knowledge and the images of knowledge embedding such a system in a society's shared ideas about knowledge are important aspects of the transmission of knowledge. One should add that such images of knowledge change over the course of history and that the reconstruction of a system of knowledge on the basis of some surviving fragments may lead to a system quite different from the original one.

All in all, transmission is a layered and modular process that is always associated with a transformation of knowledge. It is layered in the sense of involving different layers of knowledge, such as practical and theoretical knowledge, as well as images of knowledge. And it is modular because it involves the recombination and re-contextualization, but also the creation or loss of elements of the knowledge to be transmitted. In the case of balance studies, such elements may be constituted by key concepts such as the center of gravity, but also by single propositions or presuppositions, or certain mathematical techniques. It may well be the case that these elements were

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<sup>12</sup> R. Moscheo, "L'Archimede del Maurolico," in *Archimede: Mito Tradizione Scienza, Atti del Convegno*, ed. Corrado Dollo, Siracusa-Catania, 9–12 October 1989 (Florence: Olschki, 1992), pp. 111–64.

transmitted independently from each other and then recombined into a whole that was either new or had existed before but was then lost. Finally, transmission processes are always transformation processes of knowledge because transmitted knowledge is always being actively selected, reinterpreted, and appropriated under specific social, material, and cognitive circumstances that necessarily affect its reconstruction from the available representations underlying its transmission.

Representations of knowledge may range from artifacts via social institutions to texts. All of these different forms of representation could become starting points for the active exploration of a transmitted system of knowledge, which constituted a major force of innovation. Thus, instruments may be tried out for new purposes, social institutions may emphasize new aspects of the transmitted system of knowledge, and texts may be interpreted or commented upon. Different representations behave quite differently in transmission processes, with far-reaching effects on the systems of knowledge transmitted. For instance, institutions of higher learning are typically more easily affected by political and cultural changes than the basic material culture of a society. Texts have a chance of being transmitted over long historical periods but may capture only certain aspects of a system of knowledge, while other aspects may have been articulated in institutional or more generally cultural contexts that left no historical traces. In historical transmission processes, different forms of representation usually act together, so that, for instance, material representations such as artifacts are used in institutional contexts like schools to transmit theoretical knowledge represented by texts in order to realize societal goals articulated in shared images of knowledge.

Finally, systems of knowledge as specific as those underlying balance studies are rarely themselves an independent unit of transmission, but rather are fellow travelers of larger “packages of knowledge.” The same—or more or less the same—system of knowledge may become, in the course of its transmission, part of quite different packages of knowledge. Thus, balance studies could—in a narrower or wider sense—belong to or be associated with natural philosophy, mathematics, engineering, medicine, astrology, religion, or law. Much of the dynamics of the transmission of balance studies was thus determined by that of the transmission of these packages of knowledge within which they were embedded or to which they were associated as a fellow traveler.

Some examples may illustrate this mechanism of fellow-traveling. Let us therefore take a look at the origin of Qusṭā ibn Lūqā’s (died after 310/922) *Kitāb fi l-awzān wa-l-akyāl* (“Book on Weights and Measures”) in the medical interests of a patron, not named in the copy available to us, but apparently belonging to the Banū Munajjim family.<sup>13</sup> Qusṭā’s text is addressed to this patron who found in the books of medicine weights designated with their Greek names. Since he does not know which quantities they signify, he feels hindered in his practice of preparing and using medical drugs. He hence turned to Qusṭā and asked him to write a treatise in which he was to collect all weights used in books of medicine and

<sup>13</sup> MS Istanbul, Aya Sofya 3711, ff 68a–74b.

to explain them. Claiming that patrons are generally interested in supporting knowledge whatever its discipline, he wishes that the books produced for him be useful for the general public. Given the virtues of the patron, Qusṭā felt motivated to study the topic seriously and organize his treatise such that its ideas became clear, were comprehensive, and followed a “natural” order. Medicine and the problems of translating cultural particularities like non-standardized weights and measures are thus seen as a motivation for a patron to request a specific treatise on the subject. This resembles one of the stories about why Caliph al-Ma'mūn (ruled 197–217/813–833) patronized the measurement of 1° meridian in the 210s/820s, namely to find out the quantity of a *stadion*. While this story is not necessarily a true account of what happened, it constituted a successful narrative since it was believed and transmitted time and again in all sorts of texts—about geography, astronomy, and history.

At the same time, these examples illustrate the role of shared images of knowledge and of challenging barriers for intercultural transmission. This means that culturally defined obstacles to an easy transfer of specific knowledge caused specific activities to overcome these challenging barriers. The activities triggered in this way involved patrons and clients. They shared images of knowledge that were articulated, for instance, in a narrative form that appealed to virtues of both parties, such as the story about Caliph al-Ma'mūn. Values like wishing to do something beneficial for the public good, to compose a well-ordered, easily accessible book, were part of the official rhetoric of knowledge transfer and production—and balance studies profited from such values. Qusṭā, like other scholars and their patrons, was aware that culturally specific knowledge existed not only in different societies, but also within different groups of one society such as the crafts, trades, and even practices of individual professionals like physicians. He realized that these different knowledge resources required scholarly efforts in order to make them accessible to people outside the individual arts, trades, or professions. His reaction to the quest of making such knowledge accessible beyond its borders was, however, not to standardize knowledge according to certain inherited classifications, but rather to contribute to building up a new stock of knowledge by observing, registering, reporting, and explaining according to the needs he perceived. And this is exactly what continued to happen in Islamic societies concerning weights and measures, resulting in the emergence of a specialized literature that paid attention to practicalities as well as theoretical dimensions.

## THE ARABIC TRANSMISSION OF PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

In Roman times, the steelyard became, as we have mentioned above, a widely used weighing instrument. Rather than relying on a set of standard weights like a balance with equal arms, a steelyard works with a single counterpoise that is attached to the balance. By working with different fulcra and different scales, a single steelyard can nevertheless cover a broad range of weights. By reinterpreting or rearranging its scale, a steelyard may also easily be adapted



to new units of weights and can thus be employed in conversion operations, for instance for currencies that are valued according to their weights. Thus it is faster to use a steelyard than a usual balance. It is more easily transported, and more broadly applicable.



Figure 3.1 Greco-Arabic decorated steelyard with two scales (uncial; Arabic letter numbers); Egypt or Syria; undated, possibly second/eight to fourth/tenth century. (Courtesy of Benaki Museum, Athens)

We may distinguish between the knowledge required to invent such balances, the knowledge required to produce them, and the knowledge required to use them. Here we are only interested in the latter two forms of knowledge. Although, from a modern perspective, the functioning of a steelyard is based on the law of the lever, it has been shown that the practical knowledge required to construct a steelyard does not require any such theoretical insights but relies on simple practitioners' rules establishing a relation between weight differences and length differences on the beam of the balance.<sup>14</sup> The use of a steelyard also requires some basic understanding of such a relation in order to be able to relate readings of the scale to weights measured by the steelyard. Gauging a steelyard involves the use of standard weights and thus relies on the availability of balances with equal arms and the identification of reference weights. The widespread use of steelyards—and the acceptance of their weighing results—is therefore dependent on the prior establishment and spread of weighing units and appropriate societal regulations for their implementation. This is not to say, however, that such regulations must impose any uniformity of standards. All that is needed is the existence of local ranges of the validity of weighing standards. In summary, the steelyard is a highly transportable and highly flexible weighing instrument that could be used wherever weighing was accepted as a societal practice. A steelyard can be made from metal or from wood and can be produced on the basis of a model and with the help of simple practitioners' rules by a single artisan. Remarkably, we find the first extant descriptions of this practical knowledge in Arabic balance studies. The widespread use of the steelyard in the Roman Empire could thus become the basis for its even wider

<sup>14</sup> Jürgen Renn, and Matthias Schemmel, *Waagen und Wissen in China*, Preprint N° 136 (Berlin: Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, 2000).

propagation during the Islamic conquest and the corresponding expansion of trade networks across Eurasia and Africa. It is an open question whether the steelyard also survived in the West or whether it was reintroduced through Arabic transmission.

## THE CULTURE OF TRANSMISSION OF THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE

### *The "Translation Movement" and its Historiographical Problems*

The appropriation of Greek texts on mechanical topics, among them the balance, must be understood as one of the many events of appropriation of knowledge that took place in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries under the rule of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs, although we cannot properly situate and contextualize them all due to a lack of sources. During the 110s/730s the first Sanskrit astronomical texts were apparently translated into Arabic in eastern Iran or perhaps northern India. Their contexts seem to be impenetrable.

The situation becomes somewhat easier with the Abbasids. According to Gutas, they appropriated an ideology that could be used to justify the translation of Middle Persian, Greek, and Indian knowledge into Arabic.<sup>15</sup> The background was a kind of cultural campaign among Zoroastrians as well as newly converted Iranian Muslims against what they perceived as the mounting threat of losing their language, religion, and secular knowledge, that is, their culture.<sup>16</sup> This acceptance of a "cultural politics of translation" had a number of consequences. The Abbasids established two court offices, which were not yet known in the Umayyad court—the offices of court astrologer and court physician. While names of physicians are reported for a few Umayyad caliphs, it is not clear whether that dynasty already had a formalized position of head physician and lower ranking doctors. Arabic historical sources do not mention astrology used at the Umayyad court. The strong presence of astrologers and hence the high regard for astrology as a science and a tool for decision-making under various Abbasid caliphs in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, in contrast, is well documented.<sup>17</sup> It brought with it the interest in and acceptance of mathematical knowledge as a basis and tool of astrology.

Here is neither the space nor the need to discuss all the details that are known about the further spread of intellectual activities in the Abbasid capital. It is well known that over the next one and a half centuries a broad corpus of philosophical, medical, mathematical, astronomical, astrological, alchemical, chiromantic, physiognomic, and other kinds of texts were translated from

<sup>15</sup> Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Greco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsīd Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 28–45, 109.

<sup>16</sup> Gutas 1998, pp. 17–27.

<sup>17</sup> Gutas 1998, pp. 45–52, 108–10; François Charette, "The Locales of Islamic Astronomical Instrumentation," *History of Science* 44, no. 2 (2006): 123–38, especially pp. 124–5.

Greek, Syriac, Middle Persian, and Sanskrit directly or via Syriac into Arabic. Four historiographical issues need to be stressed, however. The first concerns the overall portrayal of these historical processes that led to the creation of a rich and multifaceted body of knowledge in Arabic and the institutional forms that enabled and stabilized its continued existence over centuries. The second concerns the values attached by current historians to the various components of these processes, the emphasis put on some of them, and the almost total neglect of others. The third refers to the pragmatic details through which we know about these processes. The fourth, finally, has to do with our approaches to the surviving testimonies of this body of knowledge.

The standard perception of the translation of scholarly texts into Arabic is that of one large process that took place over almost two centuries. All fields of knowledge, languages, periods, and places are integrated into this perception. Hence, all these elements are seen as resulting from the same set of very limited causes and belonging to one and the same process, which is labeled the “translation movement.” Very often, one or at most two causes are identified for the emergence and continuous existence of this movement. Some locate the causes in the previous translation efforts among western and eastern Syriac Christian clerics and the study of Greek and Syriac philosophical, medical, and to a much lesser degree astronomical texts at monasteries in Mesopotamia, northern Syria, and southern Anatolia. Others trace them to ideological conflicts and debates between different Christian denominations and Muslims. Other groups, like Dualists and Gnostics, who are often mentioned as discussants or opponents in Arabic polemic literature, are rarely portrayed as relevant actors in the context of the translation movement. The third cause for the emergence of translations has been identified by historians of the twentieth century as the practical needs of healing and prognosticating. In 2007, Saliba proposed a variant of this thesis. He sharply rejects a major role for either Syriac religious scholars or Iranian astrologers in the emergence of translations into Arabic, pointing to the low scientific skills exhibited in the extant writings of first/seventh- and second/eighth-century Syriac authors and to the limited thematic breadth and number of Middle Persian texts translated into Arabic. In his view, the cause for the translations of high-level scientific texts was unemployment among Iranian and Greek scribes, which he believes resulted from the replacement of Middle Persian or Greek by Arabic in the late Umayyad administration.<sup>18</sup> Translating such high-level scientific texts was the strategy, he suggests, to recover lost social status and bread-winning positions. The basic methodological problem of this proposal is similar to the one Gutas made concerning the impact of Sassanian royal ideology and institutions: There are no contemporary sources that testify to either the unemployment or the re-employment of scribal families who had translated any high-level scientific text. But while Gutas’s suggestion has the merit of relying on fourth/tenth-century beliefs about a strong Sassanian impact on the early Abbasids and

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<sup>18</sup> Georges Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 58–63.

on the strong presence of Iranian courtiers, among them astrologers, in the entourage of all Abbasid caliphs of the second/eighth century, Saliba depends on late-third/ninth and fourth/tenth-century stories about a limited number of conflicts between a very few individual scribes in Syria and Mesopotamia and retrospective extrapolations of third/ninth-century scholars and translators to the second/eighth century. A further, important new step proposed by Gutas is his differentiation of the entire translation movement into two main phases: the so-called Iranian phase from the 120s/740s to the 190s/810s and the so-called philhellenic phase in the 200s/820s.<sup>19</sup>

In our view, a new historiographical reflection on the translation movement is urgently needed. There are sufficient indicators for rejecting the dominant interpretations. Neither did the translations come into being as one grandiose unified historical process, nor did all fields of knowledge experience the same attention, breadth, and speed of translating. During the second/eighth and early third/ninth century, a limited number of Middle Persian, Syriac, and Greek texts were apparently translated into Arabic, the content of which seems to have come very close to the spectrum of texts translated in previous centuries into Syriac, Middle Persian, or Armenian: Aristotle's *Organon*, a few texts on the universe (Pseudo-Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, John Philoponus), and one pseudo-Aristotelian work on ethics. In addition, there were several translations of medical texts by Galen and Hippocrates independent of or parallel to the translation of logic (and religious texts). Hence, it seems that in a first phase translations into Arabic exhibited impressive similarities with the earlier and in part parallel translations into Syriac, Middle Persian, and Armenian.

Only in the later second/eighth century did things slowly begin to change. Different motifs and different groups seem to have been at work. Gutas points to ideological tensions at the Abbasid court, in particular with Dualist and Gnostic groups, as a motif for ordering the translation of Aristotle's *Topic*.<sup>20</sup> Caliph al-Mahdī (ruled 158–168/775–785), moreover, opened the scholarly world of his courtly advisors to the Christian communities in Iraq, thus integrating Syriac scholars into the intellectual, administrative, and political world of the caliphate.<sup>21</sup> The rise of the Barmakid family as viziers and leading administrators of the dynasty brought with it patronage for translations of Indian as well as Greek texts on medicine, astronomy, and mathematics, and the foundation of the first hospital in Baghdad.<sup>22</sup> Translations of Greek philosophical texts in greater number and a larger thematic spread seem to have been undertaken only in the third/ninth century, after the beginning of Gutas's philhellenic phase. The first traceable context of such translations was Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī's (died about 256/870) Neoplatonic program and the circle of translators

<sup>19</sup> Gutas 1998, pp. 28–60, 75–106.

<sup>20</sup> Gutas 1998, pp. 61–9.

<sup>21</sup> Gutas 1998, pp. 61–3, 131–3, 135–8.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist of Ibn al-Nadīm*, ed. and transl. Bayard Dodge. 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), vol. 2, pp. 710, 826–7.

he created and patronized.<sup>23</sup> A second traceable context of translations of philosophical works is provided by the activities of Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (died 259/873) and his circle of family members and students. The close connection of this circle with translations of medical texts on the one hand, and patrons like the Banū Mūsā (the three brothers Muḥammad, Aḥmad, and al-Ḥasan), on the other, with their prevalent interest in mathematical, astronomical, and technological subjects, point to other intellectual orientations for these translations parallel and subsequent to the works of the Kindī circle. The Banū Munajjim (second-fourth/eighth-tenth centuries) comprised a further group of patrons. They are not as often discussed as al-Kindī or the Banū Mūsā, however. According to Arabic sources, they patronized, above all, translations or new productions of medical texts, among them Qusṭā ibn Lūqā's text on medical weights. Caliphs and physicians were further participants in the patronage of translations and other intellectual activities. A more specific analysis is needed to determine which interests these activities served.

The main issue of the preferences given by modern historians to these various translations is their almost exclusive focus on the texts of leading Greek philosophers, physicians, astronomers or astrologers, and geometers. Popular philosophy, practical mathematics, commentaries by minor authors, alchemical texts, works mixing religious themes with discussions of nature or the heavens, and religious texts including philosophical or other secular subjects are usually not studied by historians of science or philosophy, but left to historians of other fields. As a result, the depictions of the translation movement suffer not only under the mono-causal interpretive perspective and the high aggregation of data discussed in the previous point. They also suffer through the narrow definitions of the objects worthy of attention. Similarly, the separation between the languages from which and into which people translated during the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries has led, in our view, to a fundamental misunderstanding of the character of these processes. Gutas's work has clarified, even if he does not formulate his insights so strongly, that without the previous translations of Middle Persian texts and the activities of Iranian and Syriac scholars at the Abbasid courts of the second/eighth century, the later translations of a broad range of Greek texts would not have received the same attention and support as they did in the late second/eighth century and time and again throughout the third/ninth century. The substantially greater quantity and thematic breadth of these translations does not invalidate the historical importance of the role of Iranian models, beliefs, institutions, and scholars for the intellectual policies of the Abbasid dynasty in the second/eighth and first two decades of the third/ninth century. The true challenge is to decode the later stories told about the second/eighth-century motifs and orientations followed by different actors and to find means through which to establish the links between Sassanian antecedents and Abbasid practices.

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<sup>23</sup> Peter Adamson, *Al-Kindī. Great Medieval Thinkers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

The perhaps most important issue of the pragmatics of the translations is to understand how the texts that were translated from the late second/eighth century on were determined, chosen, and acquired. A second important question concerns the acquisition of the skills needed to translate and understand the chosen texts. For the first question, Arabic sources point to military booty, embassies sent to Constantinople, accidental discoveries of manuscripts stored in sealed buildings or caves, and voyages of learning, including quests for manuscripts. Although most of these stories, aside from the last one, have been questioned, and locally available manuscript collections in Abbasid Iraq have been proposed as a more plausible alternative, no systematic study has been undertaken with the aim of weighing the different possibilities. Since no manuscripts from the second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries are known to exist, no external evidence beyond the stories seems to be available. Monasteries of the Orthodox Syriac Church like Qenneshre are known to have owned Syriac and Greek manuscripts, among them perhaps also Ptolemy's *Almagest*. Letters by Patriarch Timothy of the Church of the East (Patriarch in Baghdad from 163–207/780–823) confirm that monasteries like Mār Mattai near Mosul owned philosophical manuscripts, including Aristotle's *Topic*, *Metaphysics*, and the *Organon*. But next to nothing is known about the medical and other scientific texts in their holdings.<sup>24</sup> Timothy's letters and his apology of Eastern Syriac Christianity reflect customs and intellectual approaches developed by the Church of the East in its century-long relationship with the Sassanian court.<sup>25</sup> If this is a reliable evaluation then such customs and perspectives continued to be practiced for more than a century after the fall of the Sassanian Empire in Iraq, western Iran, and possibly elsewhere in the East of the caliphate. Thus other ideas, practices, and perhaps even memories of institutions with roots in the Sassanian Empire, if not the institutions themselves, may well have survived among Christian, Zoroastrian, and other religious communities.<sup>26</sup>

The second issue of the acquisition of the skills needed for translating and understanding Middle Persian, Syriac, and Greek texts, in particular those with a complex technical content, is linked to what is called the "ancient" translations. They were produced at the very latest in the period of Hārūn al-Rashīd's (ruled 169–193/786–809) reign, if not already in the period of al-Manṣūr (ruled 136–158/754–775). Since apparently all of these old translations have been lost (at least in the mathematical sciences; this seems not to be the case for philosophy), it is very difficult to ascertain precisely the period to which this important element of the third/ninth- and fourth/tenth-century discourse on the history of knowledge transfer under the Abbasids refers. But it is clear that writers of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries believed in the existence of translations of Greek philosophical, medical, and mathematical (in the understanding of that time) texts long before al-Ma'mūn, which they dubbed

<sup>24</sup> Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 1024.

<sup>25</sup> Johnson 2012, pp. 1024–5.

<sup>26</sup> Gutas 1998, pp. 53–60.

“old translations.”<sup>27</sup> For a long time it was believed that those old translations were made by men who did not understand the texts’ content and for that reason translated the foreign works word by word. Studies of extant fragments indicate, however, that this idea, based on medieval Arabic claims, does not apply in a strict sense to all early texts. Hence, multilingualism, which is attested for Arabic, Syriac, as well as Greek native speakers, was not the only set of skills the early, mostly unknown, translators possessed. Some of them clearly had at their disposal technical knowledge in astronomy or astrology, arithmetic, logic, philosophy, and alchemy. Research on practitioners of such kinds of knowledge for the second/eighth century is needed to gain a better understanding of the pragmatics of translating.

The problems with approaches to the study of the “translation movement” and its results, the translations extant today, are too manifold to be discussed in their entirety. The two main shortcomings consist in their decontextualization and their primarily, if not exclusively, vertical integration into textual traditions. Horizontal connections between texts and authors are rarely studied and, if examined at all, are limited to certain technical terms or short passages. Hence, it is not surprising that the only scientific biography of a scholar of the third/ninth century that exists today has been written very recently about the philosopher al-Kindī.<sup>28</sup> The result of this preference for diachronic rather than synchronic studies is that we continue to have a very limited and superficial understanding of the connections between translations, translators, the development of scientific languages, and the production of new texts. This was one of the central problems we faced in our analysis of Thābit’s contributions to the construction of Arabic knowledge on the balance.

### *Institutional and Disciplinary Contexts*

Patronage was one of the main forms of institutionalizing the transfer of knowledge. A second major institution was teaching, although it is difficult to trace beyond the sparse information provided in medieval historical literature. The widespread negligence of non-scientific literature of the period as a potential source for understanding the contexts of knowledge transfer and production—aside from Ibn al-Nadīm’s (died circa 388/998) *Kitāb al-Fihrist*—is a serious shortcoming of classical studies of history of science in the early Abbasid centuries.<sup>29</sup>

Further features that characterized the intellectual climate regarding philosophy, astrology, and other sciences in third/ninth-century Baghdad were public debates, the founding of astrology on Aristotelian natural philosophy, and the struggles between different kinds of representatives of astrology, that is, struggles about the reliable, professional, and scientific character of astrology. The main representative of the philosophical underpinning of astrology and

<sup>27</sup> Gutas 1998, pp. 137–8.

<sup>28</sup> Adamson 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm 1970.

of refuting complaints against astrologers was Abū Ma'shar (died 272/886). The compilation of astrological histories to justify the rise of a new dynasty, undertaken already in the late second/eighth century by Māshā'allāh ibn Atharī (died 199/815) and again by Abū Ma'shar and others in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, is another sign of the importance of astrology as a tool of politics and legitimizing propaganda.

These features are in part understudied and in part overstated due to the often mono-causal and positivist explanations of complex cultural phenomena like the transfer, production, and distribution of knowledge.<sup>30</sup> The various high-level uses of astrology had a positive impact on the status of the mathematical sciences and their branches as well as philosophy. Caliph al-Ma'mūn's sponsoring of astronomical observations and expeditions, for instance, can be seen as a result of the Abbasid interest in astrology.<sup>31</sup> In Charette's view this observational program represented a "true turning point in the history of early Islamic astronomy, as it led to the wholesale adoption of the Ptolemaic system, with some improvements resulting from the new observations, and the rapid decline of Indian theories and parameters."<sup>32</sup> He suggested that the undeniable amalgamation between Aristotelian natural philosophy and astrology "created a pressing demand for accurate astrological predictions, hence the need for better computations of planetary positions."<sup>33</sup> If this conjecture can be substantiated, the Sassanian role model of the early Abbasids exercised via astrology a much more profound impact on the core mathematical sciences than has been recognized to date. The acceptance of ancient Greek astronomy and geometry in third/ninth-century Baghdad would then have been stimulated by the cultural function of astrology as an explanatory theory and a political instrument.

The position of astrologer was the only official position for a student of the mathematical sciences available at court, and most of the known authors of mathematical texts in the third/ninth century held it. The misunderstanding of the importance of astrology as the main "professional" career for those scholars that historians of science in Islamicate societies prefer to label mathematicians and astronomers is another historiographical problem that needs to be tackled anew. Other courtly functions exercised by some of the most famous scholars of the mathematical sciences in third/ninth-century Baghdad were that of the drinking companion of the ruling caliph and that of physician. Thābit ibn Qurra, the most important figure of balance studies in ninth-century Baghdad, combined all three functions in his hands.

It is not really clear, however, where the various forms of mechanical knowledge should be located in all this, both with regard to time and with regard to status. In our view, the philological features of the pseudo-Euclidean fragments on the balance and specific weight suggest a translation in the third/early ninth century. Ibn al-Nadīm's ascription of titles on the *qarasṭūn*, specific

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Saliba 2007.

<sup>31</sup> Charette 2006, pp. 125–6.

<sup>32</sup> Charette 2006, p. 125.

<sup>33</sup> Charette 2006, p. 135, fn. 18.



weight, floating bodies, and automata to Sanad ibn ‘Alī (first half third/ninth century), al-Kindī, Mu‘ammar al-Sulamī (died circa 227/842?), Qusṭā ibn Lūqā, the Banū Mūsā, and Thābit ibn Qurra imply a small, but steady stream of interest in such issues. A study of non-scientific sources of the third/ninth century might be helpful for understanding the contexts of these interests better than we do at the moment. One important feature that needs particular attention is the role of teaching activities in the transmission of such knowledge.

#### THĀBIT IBN QURRA AND HIS WORKS ON BALANCES

Extant treatises by Thābit as well as Ibn al-Nadīm’s information document that the Sabian scholar was active as a teacher and a popularizer of philosophy and the mathematical sciences.<sup>34</sup> He taught mathematics to the sons of Muḥammad ibn Mūsā, his main patron, and educated at least one Christian (Abū Mūsā ‘Īsā ibn Usayyid) and one Jew (Yehuda ibn Yūsuf, known as Ibn Abī l-Thanā) in the art of translating.<sup>35</sup> He answered questions about natural philosophical issues in a conversation with ‘Īsā ibn Usayyid and explained in written form astronomical questions for the vizier al-Qāsim ibn ‘Ubaydallāh ibn Sulaymān ibn Wahb (died 291/904). He exchanged views with his Christian translator-colleague Ishāq ibn Hunayn, who produced upon the vizier’s request a new translation of Aristotle’s *Physics*, and corresponded with the Jewish court astrologer and acquaintance of the Banū Mūsā, Sanad ibn ‘Alī.

Thābit also wrote about Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, commenting on the existence of the Prime Mover and disagreeing with the ancient philosopher with regard to the properties of essence. He reflected about why the ocean consists of salt water, an issue on which he subscribed to positions of Aristotle’s *Meteorology*. He composed a treatise about views expressed by Aristotle and other, unnamed philosophers. He discussed nine problems for a broader public, among others again from the *Meteorology*, but also one from the so-called *Problemata Physica*. This last epistle bears an interesting title, probably given to it by a later reader, in which Thābit’s goal is expressed to interest people “outside academia” for the various sciences.<sup>36</sup> In the fifth question about why the planets appear larger when in retrograde movement and smaller when in direct movement, Thābit refrained from giving a proof for his explanation saying that he “had only wished to clarify the answers to questions of this kind ... in order to awaken their interest in them.”<sup>37</sup> These texts and fragments, their content, and their addressees show clearly that Thābit was well acquainted with Aristotle’s works

<sup>34</sup> Sabit ibn Korra, *Matematicheskie traktaty*, eds B.A. Rozenfel’d, and A.P. Jushkevich, *Nauchnoe Nasledstvo* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), vol. 8, pp. 12, 20–21, 24, 243–7, 278–84, 321–8, 353–5, 365–7, 380–81.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm 1970, p. 648; Joel Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival During the Buyid Age*. Second edition (Leiden: Brill, 1993), p. 84.

<sup>36</sup> Sabit ibn Korra 1984, p. 243.

<sup>37</sup> Sabit ibn Korra 1984, p. 245.

and had particular interest in natural philosophical questions, an issue of some importance for the appreciation of his interest in the approach taken in the work on the steelyard attributed to him and its apparent lack of interest in Archimedes's theory of centers of gravity.

Four extant texts related to balance studies are ascribed to Thābit ibn Qurra: *Fī l-qaraṣṭūn* ("On the Steelyard"), *Fī ṣifat istiwā' al-waẓn wa-khtilāfuhū* ("On the Property of the Equilibrium of the Weight and Its Deviation"), *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn* ("Book of the Steelyard"), and *Liber karastonis* ("Book of the Steelyard"). The first text is probably not a work by Thābit. The three other texts represent an intertwined body of texts that document repeated and long-term efforts toward understanding and discussing the modes of operation of the equal- and unequal-armed balances. Several scholia in the four extant manuscripts of the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn* are closely related to these texts, as Wilbur Knorr has pointed out.<sup>38</sup> While we do not agree with Knorr's approach or with most of his results, we acknowledge his discussion of the textual filiations as an important contribution. We also wish to acknowledge that Khalil Jaouiche was the first to point out that the standard interpretation of the preface of the *Liber karastonis* as proposed by Pierre Duhem, Ernest A. Moody, and Marshall Clagett is wrong.<sup>39</sup> Our new translation of this preface below, which goes beyond Jaouiche's proposal with regard to the interpretation of several terms and expressions, serves as one central argument for our different interpretation of the character of the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn* and its relationship to the *Liber karastonis*.

The results proposed by Jaouiche in 1976 and Knorr in 1982 about the content, authorship, origin, and character of the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn* as well as its relationships to the *Liber karastonis* and the *Liber de canonio* oppose each other fundamentally. Jaouiche accepted the ascription of a *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn* to Thābit ibn Qurra in the medieval Arabic historical literature and in the manuscript to which he had access (MS London, British Library, India Office 461).<sup>40</sup> Knorr rejected this ascription and argued that Thābit was at best, if at all, an editor of an Arabic translation of a Greek text on the steelyard, which he attributed to the young Archimedes.<sup>41</sup> Knorr accepted the *Liber karastonis*, however, as a Latin translation by Gerard of Cremona of a treatise by Thābit ibn Qurra, in which the latter had reworked the postulates and propositions of the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn*.<sup>42</sup> Jaouiche did not engage substantially with the *Liber karastonis* and its Arabic ancestor, except for Theorem VI, for which he denied any involvement in its extant and false proof by Thābit ibn Qurra.<sup>43</sup> The two scholars also differed principally in their evaluation of the *Liber de canonio*. Knorr accepted the position taken by Duhem, Moody, and Clagett, according to whom this text was

<sup>38</sup> Knorr 1982.

<sup>39</sup> Khalil Jaouiche, *Le Livre du Qaraṣṭūn de Ṭābit ibn Qurra* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1976), pp. 14–26; Duhem 1905, pp. 83–4; Moody, and Clagett 1952, pp. 79–84, 88–9.

<sup>40</sup> Jaouiche 1976, pp. 29–31.

<sup>41</sup> Knorr 1982, pp. 48, 56, 72, 81, 86–7, 89–105, 108, 110–14.

<sup>42</sup> Knorr 1982, pp. 37, 41–2, 46–8, 59–72, 108.

<sup>43</sup> Jaouiche 1976, pp. 32, 102–5.

a Latin translation of an ancient Greek treatise.<sup>44</sup> Jaouiche was of the opinion that the *Liber de canonio* could not be understood in this sense, but had to be seen as a work written after the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn*.<sup>45</sup> These differences, summarized very briefly here, are of such importance that we had to determine our own positions toward the seven texts and their mutual relationships. The remainder of our chapter is a summary of some of our new insights and results, leaving the detailed analysis and arguments for another occasion.

The most important results of our analysis concern our acceptance of the importance of contextual information for interpreting the texts ascribed to Thābit, the new interpretation of the character of the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn* and the *Liber de canonio*, and the new evaluation of the relationships between the various texts. These last two topics cannot be discussed here. The *Liber de canonio* is the subject of a special paper, as stated above. The relationships between the various texts linked to Thābit will be part of our detailed discussion.

### *The Contexts of the Texts on the Balance Ascribed to Thābit ibn Qurra*

The contextual features of the Arabic and Latin texts that we discuss in this chapter can be found within the texts themselves, as colophons and other notes at their ends or in their margins, in the textual contexts in which each single text was transmitted, in the people or groups for whom they were produced, and in medieval historical and geographical literature. They often bring together actors who lived in different centuries and regions. The most important examples that document the importance of the contexts for the emergence of the body of Arabic texts on the balance are the claims in the Arabic copies of the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn* that Thābit taught this text; the preface of the *Liber karastonis*, according to which Thābit was involved in a sustained discussion with an unnamed partner about the difficulties presented by translations and errors of copyists as well as the conceptual and methodological problems posed by (fragmentary) forms of theorems and proofs; the colophons to the extant copies of the Arabic translation of Pappus's *Collectio*, Book VIII and the (pseudo?)-Euclidean *Kitāb fī l-mizān*; the information provided by Arabic historians, in particular Ibn al-Nadīm, Ibn al-Qiftī, and Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a; the correspondence between Abū Sahl al-Kūhī (fourth/tenth century) and Ibrāhīm ibn Hilāl al-Ṣābī (fourth/tenth century); and the presence of parts of these texts in 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Khāzini's (died after 416/1025) *Kitāb mizān al-ḥikma*.

This information attests to three centuries of continuous and broadening engagement of scholars with the study of balances and steelyards as both a theoretical and a practical enterprise, in cities of Iraq as well as central and eastern Iran. It documents the changing content and status of this knowledge as a member in an organized system of knowledge. It proves the participation of leading scholars of geometry, astronomy, and astrology in the formation, maintenance, and modification of *'ilm al-athqāl* (the science of weights/heavy

<sup>44</sup> Knorr 1982, pp. 15–30, 107.

<sup>45</sup> Jaouiche 1976, pp. 67–73.

bodies), hence the liveliness of this project. It reiterates the relevance of courtly patronage for certain aspects of knowledge production and brings collecting, library maintenance, and familial dedication to the fore as important elements that made this knowledge and its dispersion sustainable. Collecting and library maintenance are represented in the activities of the Banū Mūsā and Abū Saʿīd Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Jalīl al-Sijzī (fourth/tenth century). The latter was particularly significant for the survival of about a fourth of Thābit's works. The importance of families for the preservation and continuation of knowledge over centuries in the domain of the mathematical sciences, including the science of weights/heavy bodies, is illustrated by the many activities of Thābit ibn Qurra's relatives in the fourth/tenth century. One of them was al-Muḥassin ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Hilāl al-Ṣābiʿ (died after 399/1008), who was married to one of Thābit's granddaughters. He drew up a bibliography of Thābit and collected the works of his father-in-law Sinān ibn Thābit (died 331/942). Others like al-Muḥassin's father Ibrāhīm ibn Hilāl and friend of al-Kūhī copied several of Thābit's works directly from autographs.<sup>46</sup>

The body of Arabic texts on the balance is best understood as a network of texts and scholars that spanned from Iraq to the northeast of Iran, today southern Turkmenistan. Al-Khāzinī's *Kitāb mizān al-ḥikma* is the most impressive material and intellectual representative of this network character of the creation, reproduction, and distribution of knowledge about the balance. In a different, perhaps more humble manner, the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn* represents the same feature. It came into being in an early phase of Thābit's occupation with the equal- and unequal-armed balances. It is a composite text that emerged out of Thābit's studies of translations and copies of several Greek texts, some of which seem to have existed only as fragments. Our analysis of the philological and symbolic peculiarities and of the content of the set of texts mentioned above strongly suggests that among the works Thābit read before assembling the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn* were (a part) of the *Mechanical Questions*, Hero's *Mechanics*, Pappus's *Collectio*, Book VIII, Ptolemy's *Almagest* in the translation of al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf ibn Maṭar and Sergius ibn Elias, the (pseudo?)-Euclidean *Kitāb al-thiqal wa-l-khiffa*, Euclid's *Elements* in one of the two versions produced by al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf ibn Maṭar, and in all likelihood at least two further unknown ancient fragments on the steelyard as an immaterial as well as a material beam. One of these unknown fragments seems to have originated in an Archimedean context. With this claim we mean that Propositions 3 to 5 (according to Jaouiche's edition) were either part of one of the Archimedean treatises on the balance and related themes or come from a text derived from some of them. The reason for this conclusion consists in the methodological differences that exist between Thābit's own texts on the parabola, bodies of rotation, the trisection of an angle, or two straight lines that cut each other, and the procedure followed in the proof of Proposition 4. Since Propositions 4 and 5 form a consistent package, both

<sup>46</sup> Thābit ibn Qurra, *Œuvre d'astronomie*, transl. Régis Morelon (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1987), p. 168; Thābit ibn Qurra, *Science and Philosophy in Ninth-century Baghdad*, ed. Roshdi Rashed (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 330–31.

must come from the same environment, despite the fundamentally negative evaluation that the proof of Proposition 5 has found in the eyes of Jaouiche and Knorr.<sup>47</sup>

Thābit acted as the compiler and editor, student and teacher of all those texts, picking up philological, formal, and content elements from different sources, as indicated by differences in concepts, methods, and idiomatic representation of the same content. The comparison of the language and the diagram letters of the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn* with other Greco-Arabica of the third/ninth century confirms Thābit's use of different Greek ancestors for three parts of the text in the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn* (Part 1: Postulate 1, the Lemma and Proposition 1; Part 2: Proposition 2 plus the two statements that Jaouiche called Postulates 2 and 3; Part 3: Propositions 3 to 5). The same kind of comparison between the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn* and Thābit's other mathematical and astronomical works leaves no doubt that although the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn* consists of at least three different philological layers, its language conforms overall with that of Thābit's other treatises. The amalgamation of Greek and Arabic intellectual activities on the levels of language, representation, and content in Thābit's works has reached such a scale that it is impossible for us to decide with certainty which part can or must be considered as a literal translation of a direct Greek ancestor and which part reflects the Greco-Arabic character of Thābit's entire oeuvre, that is, was written by himself on the basis of his fluency in the three main languages of the translations of ancient Greek works during the third/ninth century (Greek, Syriac, Arabic), and his profound familiarity with ancient Greek knowledge and its transformation during the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries.

### *Teaching and Discussing Knowledge of the Steelyard*

Thābit's engagement with the balance did not end once he had assembled the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn*. Together with an explanatory comment on Euclid's *Elements* by Thābit, the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn* is the earliest Arabic text known to us that contains early variants of what two centuries later became standardized in the form of teaching certificates.<sup>48</sup> One variant of such a statement is found in the Florentine copy of this text. It states that Thābit taught this material to listeners, beginning with a postulate (Postulate 1 in Jaouiche's edition of the text in the London manuscript) and ending with the proof of Proposition 2.<sup>49</sup> A second variant is found in two other manuscripts of the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn*, which reports that Thābit had dictated the entire text as transmitted in them, that is, until the end of Proposition 5.<sup>50</sup> Despite their differences when describing the educational form of the *Kitāb al-qaraṣṭūn*, all three copies thus agree that this work was a text that combined written and oral forms of creation and distribution. Other texts

<sup>47</sup> Jaouiche 1976, pp. 141–2; Knorr 1982, pp. 32–3, 37.

<sup>48</sup> MS Tehran, Malik 3586, f 243b,3–4; Adam Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers*, Handbuch der Orientalistik 1/98 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 52.

<sup>49</sup> MS Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Or. 118, ff 71a,1 and 72b,19.

<sup>50</sup> Jaouiche 1976, pp. 168–9; MS Cracow, University Library, Mq 559, f 224,16.

by Thābit as well as reports by medieval historians confirm that Thābit indeed had students and discussed mathematical, astronomical, and philosophical themes and works with them and further unnamed people. Furthermore, the *Kitāb al-qarastūn* itself contains parts—usually considered as scholia or interpolations—that appear to bear witness to this combination of written and oral production.

Thābit's occupation with the balance did not end with his classes. The next steps in Thābit's study of the balance were discussions and the exchange of written reflections with an unnamed friend, which finally led to a substantial revision of the *Kitāb al-qarastūn*. This substantial revision is today extant in its not always correct Latin translation by Gerard of Cremona under the title *Liber karastonis*. Its comparison with the *Kitāb al-qarastūn* reveals that Thābit worked hard in order to achieve a better and more easily comprehensible presentation of his knowledge on the immaterial and material steelyard. In all likelihood, he now considered parts of his earlier compilation as not truly necessary for understanding the steelyard (the so-called Postulates 2 and 3, as well as Proposition 2). Moreover, he modified parts of the vocabulary and phraseology and added simple explanatory statements and numerical examples. The inclusion of numerical examples may reflect his pedagogical efforts. In addition, it also may signify an inspiration exercised by Hero's *Mechanics*. Furthermore, Thābit replaced the extraordinarily rare use of one and the same diagram letter twice for designating a geometrical object (arc *aa*, *bb*, and so on) by the standard form of two different letters, that is, arc *ab*. He deleted most of the comments or corollaries from the *Kitāb al-qarastūn* and replaced one by a new theorem with proof (Theorem V). The proof of Proposition 5 on the determination of the counterweight of a steelyard contains a mistake, which Thābit might have overlooked when he compiled this earlier work. At some point in time he certainly discovered it, since he introduced a new theorem between the former Propositions 4 and 5 that serves to prevent this error (Theorem VII). As a further result of his investigation of Proposition 5, he also modified the details on how to determine the counterweight and rewrote the proof. A substantial problem occurred in the altered Archimedean-type proof of the previous Proposition 4, now Theorem VI. It begins like that former proof in an indirect manner, without carrying this type of proof until its completion. Moreover, it commits a *petitio principii* and is thus invalid. It is not easy to decide who the author of this new proof was, since it did not replace the older indirect proof fully, but emerged only after it was introduced as an indirect proof. Although it does not end in the manner of a true indirect proof, there is no sign that this was intentional. Rather, the end is repetitive and somewhat garbled. These features speak against Thābit ibn Qurra as the inventor of the new proof. Independent of the age and state of education Thābit had reached when he worked on transforming the *Kitāb al-qarastūn* into the Arabic ancestor of the *Liber karastonis*, he certainly would have been capable of taking out the entire previous proof and replacing it with his new proof. On the other hand, the core part of this new proof is clearly an application of Thābit's new Theorem V. This new theorem extends Proposition 3 of the *Kitāb al-qarastūn*, which shows that an immaterial beam remains in

equilibrium if two weights suspended from two different points at one of its unequal arms are taken together and suspended at the midpoint between the two previous points of suspension, to more than two weights.<sup>51</sup> The problem that the author of the new proof of Theorem VI did not manage to solve is the transition from this finite case of Theorem V to the infinite case of Theorem VI.

In addition to these internal changes and modifications, Thābit added a long preface and an epilogue to the transformed text. In the preface, he reported on his cooperation with his unnamed friend and the difficulties they encountered with regard to mistakes found in translations and copies and the obscurity of some theorems. At the end, he described in summary fashion the construction of a steelyard and expressed his hope that his friend now better understood the matter of the steelyard. While the *Kitāb al-qarastūn* contains a few short statements that seem to reflect Thābit speaking in class, the *Liber karastonis* applies a language that classifies it much more clearly as Thābit's personal answer to his unnamed friend. We present below our translation of the Latin text. This translation not only corrects mistakes by earlier interpreters, but also relies on probable Arabic terms behind various Latin phrases, taking into account Gerard's literal style of translating. As a result, it gives a more adequate account of the character of the interchange between Thābit and his interlocutor, illuminating the complex sociocultural character of the manner in which Thābit and his partner acquired, corrected, exchanged, and preserved knowledge of the balance.

Extract from the preface of the *Liber Karastonis*

legi, o frater, epistolam tuam in eo quod dixi de speculatio tua in causis karastonis cum vestigiis inventis in eo ex figuris demonstratis super ipsum. et tu quidem invenisti ea; postquam cessans ab aliis occupatus fuisti in eis et bene exercuisti cognitionem in eis inter ignotum quod non recipiunt mentes et ignotum quod non verificat experimentum. perpendi ergo frater super illud super permutationem linguarum interpretum et vicissitudines manum scriptorium. hesitavi ergo cum illo. et tu non sanasti ex malitia opinionis animam tuam et tu quidem quesivisti a me expositionem eius conditionibus planis et intensionibus detectis et viis que appropinquare faciunt a longitudine eius et alleviant difficultatem. et ego quidem respondebo tibi in eis de eo quod quesivisti. Et ultime dicam tibi ex eis ubi volueris

I have read, O Brother, your epistle on that which I have said on your reflection about the causes of the steelyard with traces found in it of the theorems demonstrated about it. Indeed, you have found the mentioned (things). After you stopped with other (things), you have occupied yourself with them (i.e. the theorems or/ and their proofs?) and employed yourself well in acquiring knowledge about them (which is) between the strange that the mind does not admit and the unknown/ unfamiliar that experience does not confirm. I thus carefully pondered it, Brother, according to the translation/s [permutatio = naql = translation, transfer, displacement etc.] by the interpreters of languages and the changes through the hands of scribes. Hence I had doubts about it. And you did not cure your soul from the falseness of opinions, and asked

<sup>51</sup> Jaouiche 1976, 152–5; Moody, and Claggett 1952, 96–103.

cum significationibus sufficientibus  
et demonstranibus sanis. (Moody, and  
Clagett 1952, 88)

from me indeed an explanation of it  
through clear conditions and uncovered  
purposes and ways that make (us) draw  
near to its distance. I shall indeed reply  
to you about them in that which you have  
requested [i.e. in the explanation]. Finally,  
I shall speak to you about them, if you  
wish, in satisfactory proofs and sound (or:  
whole) demonstrations.

An important conclusion from the fact that Thābit taught the *Kitāb al-qarastūn* and was involved in a repeated discussion in oral and written form of Arabic translations and copies of Greek fragments on the steelyard is that the texts of the *Kitāb al-qarastūn* and the *Liber karastonis* as we have them today are not exclusively the result of an author-copyist-commentator chain, but reflect the complexities of the intellectual process, which allowed other participants to add comments to their copies made by Thābit during the lecture or thoughts developed in the discussions. Brief statements in the Florentine manuscript leave room for such a possibility to understand the layers of the extant text. One example appears immediately after Proposition I: *thumma yakūnu l-sabīl fī l-athqāl al-mu'allaqa bi-aṭrāfihi l-hāfiẓa li-muwāzat al-ufuq al-sabīl alladhī dhakarnā fī l-khaṭṭ alladhī lā thiql lahū. nh.* (Then the cause for the weights, which are suspended at its extremities and preserve the parallelness to the horizon, is the cause that we mentioned about the line that has no weight. End.)<sup>52</sup> The shorthand *nh* usually marks a quote or a comment taken from some other text or, as we propose to consider here, a note made by one of the listeners of Thābit's lecture reflecting one of Thābit's explanations of the text he discussed.

Other texts by Thābit confirm our understanding of the highly social nature of his manner to compose texts. He opens, for instance, his uncontested *Kitāb fī shakl al-qīṭā'* ("Treatise On the Sector-Figure") with a description of discussions and written exchanges in which he was involved with three friends and students. This description illuminates how the intertwinement of the interests in the works of one ancient author, namely Ptolemy, and those of Thābit's contemporaries comprised the oral and written background of Thābit's research and writing. Although we do not intend to suggest that this complex sociocultural network of texts and men contributed to the coming into being of all of Thābit's texts, the preface of the *Liber karastonis* and the introduction to the *Kitāb fī shakl al-qīṭā'* share important features.<sup>53</sup>

The correspondence between the introductions of the two texts offers strong support for our reading of the *Kitāb al-qarastūn* as a component of Thābit's practice of creating Greco-Arabic texts on the balance as an enterprise that brought together ancient knowledge and contemporary debate, analysis, and conclusions. This reading is supported not only by the

<sup>52</sup> MS Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Or. 118, f 71a.

<sup>53</sup> Thābit ibn Qurra, *On the Sector-Figure and Related Texts*, ed. and transl. Richard Lorch (Augsburg: Rauner, 2008), pp. 43, 47, 49, 51.



three texts ascribed to Thābit, but also by the larger scholarly culture of which Thābit was a member and the general characteristics of his mathematical, astronomical, philosophical, and medical oeuvre. This oeuvre is squarely anchored in the translation movement and its creation of a hybrid scientific, medical, and philosophical culture. His extant Arabic corpus clearly represents the emergence of the Greco-Arabic component of this hybrid culture. The overwhelming majority of his works take Greek mathematical, astronomical, philosophical, and medical texts, methods, or problems as their starting point. His work as a translator and editor focused exclusively on Greek texts, mostly in the mathematical sciences, and on Arabic translations of Greek texts by his colleagues and friends, primarily Ishaq ibn Ḥunayn. Hence, to find a text written by Thābit permeated with elements undeniably of Greek provenance is nothing astonishing. In Thābit's case such a "Greekish" outlook is the norm, not the deviation. By no means does it signify that his texts were nothing more than polished editions of single Greek texts. Thābit composed his own texts as Greco-Arabica in a very literal sense of the expression. He wrote in Arabic using Greek and Arabic texts he had read, translated, edited, or extracted about themes and problems discussed in those Greek and Arabic treatises, applying arguments, techniques, concepts, terminologies, and styles of representation learned from those written sources as well as from his teacher-patrons, the Banū Mūsā, and his friends and colleagues. These working methods do not signify, however, that Thābit's methods and ideas were always specific borrowings from one or more Greek text(s). All kinds of imaginable situations could have yielded particular texts attributed to Thābit: straightforward translations, editions, texts composed anew steeped in Thābit's successful mastership of Greek terms, concepts, and procedures and adapted to his own specific needs or the interests of his patrons, and mixed forms of such components.

The overlap of important vocabulary between the various texts ascribed to Thābit ibn Qurra and accepted by their modern editors as authentic works of the Sabian scholar, and the language of the *Kitāb al-qarastūn* that our comparative studies brought to light, leaves little doubt as to the appropriateness of its ascription to him. He certainly adapted the ancient fragments and the other literature he had studied to his own mode of scholarly writing. The Greco-Arabic nature of his other texts is also visible in the *Kitāb al-qarastūn*. This sweeping hybridization, marked in this paper by the term Greco-Arabica, provided the model of the balance studies in Arabic. Its success is at the roots of the major problem that we face in our analysis and therefore in our conclusions: it is only possible to discover discrete traces of older layers of knowledge, while the amount of cultural work done in the process of hybridization cannot be determined with complete certainty.

The philological closeness of the vocabulary of the *Kitāb al-qarastūn* to Quṣṭā ibn Lūqā's translation of Hero's *Mechanics*, the Ḥajjājīan tradition of the *Elements* and the *Almagest*, the (pseudo)-Euclidean *Kitāb fī l-mizān*, and to some extent to the anonymous translation of Book VIII of Pappus's *Collectio* supports the thesis that Thābit's language in general and the language of the *Kitāb al-qarastūn* in particular reflect the translation background of Greco-Arabica. Our extensive

studies of the languages of important mathematical, mechanical, and natural philosophical texts, translated from Greek or written anew, demonstrate that the question of authorship cannot be answered in a simple, binary form of yes or no. In our view, there is strong evidence for the necessity to consider the *Kitāb al-qarastūn* as a mixed, multi-layered text to which several scholars contributed, one of them being Thābit ibn Qurra.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have attempted to reconstruct the particular situation in which Thābit ibn Qurra and his contemporaries created their balance studies, which became the model for the later science of weights/heavy bodies, both in the Islamicate and the Catholicate worlds. It has become clear that the emergence of these balance studies cannot be explained by a linear transmission chain, starting from one or more Greek original texts that were then appropriated and possibly transformed by scholars of the Arabic world. We have rather identified traces of some of the collective processes of intellectual exchange and original work that were responsible for the emergence of these studies, as well as some of the contexts in which these studies were undertaken. Rather than repeating their significance in these concluding remarks, we prefer to once more look back at Thābit and his specific intellectual situation.

Clearly he had more and different texts at his disposal than we can reconstruct today. Yet, in our comprehensive investigations we were able to identify important landmarks of his intellectual field that offer a rather surprising picture. The texts that we know, with some certainty, that he had access to and those we know, with some degree of uncertainty, he did not possess, actually constitute a most unlikely constellation of intellectual resources when judged from our perspective on Greek knowledge of mechanics. What is often considered the greatest intellectual achievement of Greek mechanics, Archimedes' treatise *On the Equilibrium of Planes*, was not at Thābit's disposal or, if so, must have been largely ignored by him in his balance studies.

Instead, he may have encountered the obscure *Book on the Balance* ascribed to Euclid, since it was part of the collection of the Banū Mūsā. The reasoning by which this text arrives at a demonstration of the law of the lever is certainly ingenious but rather contrived, as it makes use of a complicated planar arrangement of beams, along which weights are shifted around as on a chessboard. This text could have served as a substitute regarding a demonstration of the law of the lever, but Thābit abstained from using it. Proposition 2 and Postulates 2 and 3 of the *Kitāb al-qarastūn* rather speak for the existence of another, even earlier and less deductive version of this (pseudo?)-Euclidean treatise, which fulfilled this role. The second treatise ascribed to Euclid with which Thābit was definitely familiar does not even deal with balance studies, but with what we would call today the specific weights of bodies and their motion in media.

Thābit was probably familiar with at least a part of the famous Aristotelian *Mechanical Questions*, but these, too, would have been of little help to him in constructing the sophisticated theory that became the core of his treatise in the *Kitāb al-qarastūn*. He also seems to have known parts of the great unknown of the Western mechanical tradition, Hero's *Mechanics*. Unfortunately, however, Hero also did not provide a proof of the law of the lever, but instead referred to a lost book by Archimedes.

Then Thābit knew a Greek fragment (in Arabic translation?) that treated the impact on the equilibrium of the steelyard by replacing a finite or infinite number of weights suspended at one of the unequal arms of a steelyard into one particular point as one combined weight, and had a rule for determining the quantity of the counterweight needed to equilibrate a steelyard. This fragment used methods known in part from Archimedean texts, some of which are not found in extant ancient works.

Finally, Thābit seems to have worked with a fragment that apparently somehow linked Aristotelian and Heronian features on the level of lexic, diagram letters, and concepts. It is in this context that he might have encountered a proof of the law of the lever. But as our chapter has repeatedly emphasized, despite the small number of indubitable survivors of a Greek textual ancestry in this part of the *Kitāb al-qarastūn*, it is impossible to dissect the hybrid text such that ancient and modern components can be separated with certainty.

What could Thābit and his colleagues do under these perplexing circumstances? Certainly, they did have important elements of a theory of the balance. They knew the law of the lever, the concept of center of gravity, and rules for dealing with the material beam. And they also had at their disposal some concepts and ideas that are less familiar to us today, such as the determination of heaviness by motion or the idea of the force of a weight, depending on its position, or the partition of a load among several movers. Finally, they had the hint in Hero's *Mechanics*, supported by the Aristotelian *Mechanical Questions*, that a proof of the law of the lever could make use of the properties of a circle, considering the weight on the balance as a cause of circular motion.

What Thābit, his correspondence partners, his students and listeners did under these circumstances may be described as an intellectual interpolation among different fixed points. This involved philological and terminological work with textual fragments from Greek and Hellenistic antiquity; in all likelihood the search for further material of Greek provenance; an exchange with practitioners experienced in building steelyards and performing practical calculations; the vision of something like a science of weights/heavy bodies; making contact with practice, while being at the same time embedded within an Aristotelian philosophical framework, and, perhaps most importantly, extended, seminar-like discussions to build conceptual bridges between disparate worlds of knowledge.

What Thābit eventually created, as a broker between these different worlds of knowledge, was a most original work without direct precedent in Greek mechanics. In the *Kitāb al-qarastūn* and in the *Liber karastonis* the law of the lever

is formally derived from a compensation argument between motion and weight, while the properties of a material beam are derived from a consideration of the position-dependent power of one weight to compensate for another. In the later Latin appropriation of Thābit's work this would give rise to the concept of positional weight, shaped by a scholastic context of the science of weights. Without this concept Jordanus Nemorarius, its most prominent representative, would not have been able to offer the first consistent analysis of the inclined plane that would later become the basis for Galileo's new science.

In the introduction we promised to show that the development of mechanical knowledge bears traces of the concrete historical circumstances under which it unfolded. Here we could demonstrate this for the understanding of the positional dependence of weight and for compensation processes between weights and motions. In the later development of physics, these relations were to give rise to such fundamental concepts as torque, angular momentum, the vectorial character of force, work, and energy. The pivotal role of these relations in the earlier history of mechanical knowledge was not due to this later significance, however, but resulted from the specific circumstances under which balance studies evolved in the Islamicate world.

The spread of the material culture of the steelyard, the ideological significance of the translation movement, the accidental survival of a specific constellation of fragmentary Greek texts, the role of mechanical devices in the larger framework of Islamicate astronomy and mathematics, and the interaction between these components created the conditions for an emergence of balance studies as they are associated with names such as Thābit and al-Khāzinī. In these balance studies the positional dependence of weight and the compensation processes between weights and motions were central.

The concentration of these studies on the balance was due to a combination of factors, among which its overwhelming practical significance and its relevance as a religious and ethical metaphor had a long-term impact. The use of a generalized concept of weight as a basis for deriving the law of the lever by means of a compensation argument (instead of using the concept of center of gravity) was due to problems encountered in the available Greek fragments. It was perhaps reinforced by a gap perceived in Hero's *Mechanics*. The embedding of mechanics within an Aristotelian framework was partly a result of the fragmentary nature of the available Greek material. Partly, it can also be understood as the outcome of the growing adoption of ancient Greek philosophical doctrines and methods of research and arguing by scholars in third/ninth-century Abbasid Baghdad and the identification of Aristotle as "the First Teacher." Thus this process of embedding mechanics in an Aristotelian framework was one of several steps in the third/ninth century that gave this conceptual framework the overwhelming significance it possessed for the next three centuries in the Islamicate world, and, partly as a consequence, later in the Latin West.

While Hero's *Mechanics* as well as most of the sophisticated insights preserved in al-Khāzinī's *Balance of Wisdom* were long lost to Western mechanics, the transmission of the core of Thābit's balance studies to the Latin world eventually

gave rise to a science of weights that became one of the starting points of Renaissance mechanics and the processes that are often called the Scientific Revolution. The main characteristics of the medieval science of weights, that is, its very existence, the concentration on the balance, the use of a generalized concept of weight, and the embedding of mechanics within an Aristotelian framework, are due to Islamicate transformations of Greek mechanics and philosophy. The emergence of a science of weights in the Islamicate world and later in the Latin Middle Ages was of paramount importance for Renaissance mechanics because it kept, albeit in a nuclear form, a theoretical tradition of mechanics alive, because it created a link between mechanics and cosmology, mediated by Aristotelianism, and also because it formed a conceptual basis without which modern mechanics would be unthinkable.

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## Chapter 4

# Monarchs and Minorities: “Infidel” Soldiers in Mediterranean Courts

Hussein Fancy<sup>1</sup>

When the pilgrim Anselm Adorno passed through Tunis in the fifteenth century, he noted something remarkable.<sup>2</sup> Adjacent to the most beautiful street in the city, there existed a Christian community, segregated but indistinguishable from their Muslim neighbors in terms of language and custom save for a minor sartorial detail: they wore small Teutonic hats rather than turbans.<sup>3</sup> Ignorant of Latin, these Christians nevertheless celebrated religious rituals freely in a large and beautiful church, dedicated to St. Francis, who once sought martyrdom on these shores. The church itself contained eight altars and precious relics. More significantly, it possessed three large bells, a concession not granted to the other Christian communities in Tunis, the Genoese and the Venetians. This community’s exceptional privilege, according to Anselm, derived from a special service that they provided to the Hafsid sultan; they served as his personal protectors, as his royal guardsmen: “They surround the person of the king, whom they always accompany, whether into battle or otherwise.”<sup>4</sup> As his most intimate and loyal companions, these soldiers and their three captains commanded immense authority in Tunis, Anselm added, even before the Muslim princes. What does one make of the intimacy between a Muslim monarch and a religious minority?<sup>5</sup> What does this relationship reveal about the connections between political authority and religion in the late medieval Mediterranean?

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<sup>1</sup> Research for this chapter was supported by the Carnegie Scholars Program. All archival documents were consulted directly, and all translations and transcriptions are my own unless noted. The following notations are used: [ ... ] = illegible; <text> = uncertain reading; [text] = interpolation; \text/ = superscript; /text\ = subscript; //text// = redacted.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Heers and Georgette de Groer (eds), *Itinéraire d’Anselme Adorno en Terre Sainte (1470–1471)* (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche scientifique, 1978), pp. 106–8.

<sup>3</sup> Heers and Groer 1978, p. 108: “Non enim mappas sed capucia parvula Teutonicorum more in capite gerunt.”

<sup>4</sup> Heers and Groer 1978, p. 108: “Tamen quia rex istos christianos et ita omnes predecessores regis summe dilexerunt et eos tutores atque defensores suorum corporum habuerunt, ipsos maxime privilegiavit: regem enim semper vel in guerra vel alio quovis proficiscentem proxime juxta ejus corpus concomitantur.”

<sup>5</sup> The title of this chapter is borrowed from David Abulafia, “Monarchs and Minorities in the Christian Western Mediterranean around 1300: Lucera and Its Analogues,” in *Christendom and Its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution, and Rebellion, 1000–1500*, ed. Scott L. Waugh, and Peter Diehl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 234–63.



While remarkable to Adorno, these Christian soldiers were nevertheless far from unique in their service. In fact, they stood at the end of a lengthy tradition. Over the course of the Middle Ages, from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries, thousands of Christian soldiers from the Iberian Peninsula traversed the Mediterranean to serve in the armies and courts of Muslim rulers in al-Andalus and North Africa. Not only did the use of Christian soldiers by these Islamic kingdoms span a period of centuries, the practice is also well documented in both Latin and Arabic sources. Thus it is not surprising that the phenomenon has received considerable attention from historians over the past century.<sup>6</sup>

What is surprising, however, is that this body of scholarship has produced a consistent understanding and image of these soldiers. From the early liberal Arabists, for whom these soldiers cast off the chains of religious dogma—and their romantic conservative opponents, for whom these soldiers were national and religious traitors—to the more temperate contemporary cultural historians,

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<sup>6</sup> José Alemany, “Milicias cristianas al servicio de los sultanes musulmanes del Almagreb,” in *Homenaje á D. Francisco Codera en su jubilación del profesorado: estudios de erudición oriental con una introducción de D. Eduardo Saavedra*, ed. Eduardo Saavedra (Zaragoza: Mariano Escar, tipógrafo, 1904), pp. 133–69; Andrés Giménez Soler, “Caballeros españoles en África y africanos en España,” *Revue Hispanique* 12 (1905): 299–372 and 16 (1907): 56–69; Istvan Frank, “Reverter, vicomte de Barcelone: vers 1130–1145,” *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona* 26 (1955–1956): 195–204; Robert Ignatius Burns, “Renegades, Adventurers and Sharp Businessmen: The Thirteenth-century Spaniard in the Cause of Islam,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 58, no. 3 (1990a): 341–66; Mariano Gual de Torrella, “Milicias cristianas en Berberia,” *Bolletí de la Societat Arqueològica Lulliana* 89 (1973): 54–63; Felipe Maíllo Salgado, “Precisiones para la historia de un grupo étnico-religioso: los farfanés,” *Al-Qanṭara* 4 (1983): 265–81; José Ruiz Domènec, “Las cartas de Reverter, vizconde de Barcelona,” *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona* 39 (1984): 93–118; Carmen Batlle Gallart, “Noticias sobre la milicia cristiana en el Norte de África en la segunda mitad del siglo XIII,” in *Homenaje al profesor Juan Torres Fontes*, ed. Juan Abellán Pérez. 2 vols. Murcia: Universidad-Academia Alfonso X el Sabio, 1987, vol. 1, pp. 127–37; Eva Lapiedra Gutiérrez, “Giraldo Sem Pavor: Alfonso Enríquez y los Almohades,” in *Bataliús: el reino taifa de Badajoz: estudios*, ed. Fernando Díaz Esteban (Madrid: Letrúmero, 1996), pp. 147–58; Ángel Custodio López y López, “El Conde de los cristianos Rabī Ben Teodulfo, exactor y jefe de la guardia palatina del emir al-Ḥakam I,” *Al-Andalus-Magreb* 7 (199): 169–84; Simon Barton, “Traitors to the Faith? Christian Mercenaries in Al-Andalus and the Maghreb, circa 1100–1300,” in *Medieval Spain: Culture, Conflict and Coexistence. Studies in Honour of Angus MacKay*, ed. Roger Collins, and Anthony Goodman (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 23–45; Roser Salicrú i Lluch, “Mercenaires castillans au Maroc au début du XVe siècle,” in *Migrations et diasporas méditerranéennes (Xe–XVIe siècles)*, ed. Michel Balard, and Alain Ducellier (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002), pp. 417–34; François Clement, “Reverter et son fils, deux officiers catalans au service des sultans de Marrakech,” *Medieval Encounters* 9, no. 1 (2003): 79–106; Simon Barton, “From Mercenary to Crusader: The Career of Álvaro Pérez de Castro (d. 1239) Re-Examined,” in *Church, State, Vellum and Stone: Essays on Medieval Spain in Honor of John Williams*, ed. Therese Martin, and Julie A. Harris (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), pp. 111–30; Alejandro García Sanjuán, “Mercenarios cristianos al servicio de los musulmanes en el norte de África durante el siglo XIII,” in *La Península Ibérica entre el Mediterráneo y el Atlántico, siglos XIII–XV*, ed. Manuel González Jiménez, and Isabel Montes Romero-Camacho (Sevilla-Cádiz: Diputación de Cádiz-SEEM, 2006), pp. 435–47; Eva Lapiedra Gutiérrez, “Christian Participation in Almohad Armies and Personal Guards,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 2, no. 2 (2010): 235–50.

for whom these soldiers evinced the essential malleability of religious identity—all have seen these soldiers as mercenaries, as men driven by secular motivations rather than religious ones.<sup>7</sup> What unites these disparate views? They all derive from a particularly modern way of thinking about religion, one that tends to see collaboration as something that can only occur despite or in resistance to religious commitments or beliefs.

This chapter proposes viewing Christian militias in North Africa and al-Andalus in a different light. In re-narrating the history of these soldiers, it departs from earlier studies in two important respects. First, using under-examined archival documents from the *Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó*, it challenges the assumption that these men were merely soldiers of fortune or religious transgressors. Second, it reveals a previously unrecognized connection between these Christian and Muslim soldiers in the service of the Christian kings of medieval Iberia. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Christian and Muslim soldiers were in fact traded for one another, and like the strokes of an engine, the movement of one came to rely upon the other. And perhaps most significantly, both Christian and Muslim rulers came to agree upon common practices and limits for the use of religious others as soldiers. Thus, far from ignoring religious differences, the service of these soldiers became the occasion for the creation and enforcement of religious boundaries. What then was the logic that bound these kings to “infidel” soldiers in their armies and courts? If not religious indifference or incipient secularism, what explains this intimacy between monarchs and minorities? The use of “infidel” soldiers in Mediterranean courts was an extension of the Islamic tradition of military slavery, which bound political and theological conceptions of imperial authority to the privileged service of religious others and ethnic outsiders. As such, the exchange of soldiers provides a significant example of the transmission and circulation of particular political and religious ideals in the post-antique Mediterranean world.

## CHRISTIAN MILITIAS IN THE IBERIAN PENINSULA

Although the earliest evidence is sparse, within the Iberian Peninsula the use of foreign Christian soldiers by Muslim rulers can be traced at least as far back as the Umayyad period (92–422/711–1031).<sup>8</sup> As part of a wider military

<sup>7</sup> Alemany 1904, p. 147; Giménez Soler 1905, pp. 299, 300; Ramón Menéndez Pidal, *La España del Cid*. 2 vols. (Madrid: Editorial Plutarco, 1929), vol. 1, p. 77. See for the relevant literature, for instance, Burns 1990a, p. 353; Robert Ignatius Burns, *Islam Under the Crusaders: Colonial Survival in the Thirteenth-century Kingdom of Valencia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1973, p. 298; Robert Ignatius Burns, *Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Crusader Kingdom of Valencia: Societies in Symbiosis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 15; Elena Lourie, “A Jewish Mercenary in the Service of the King of Aragon,” *Revue des Etudes Juives* 137, no. 3–4 (1978): 367–73, particularly p. 368; Barton 2002, p. 38; García Sanjuán 2006, p. 446.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the Umayyad army, see Évariste Lévi-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane*. 3 vols. (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1950–1953), particularly vol. 3 (1953),

reform, the *amīr* al-Ḥakam I (ruled 180–206/796–822) established an army of foreign, salaried troops, known as the *hasham*, composed of both Europeans and Berbers.<sup>9</sup> Simultaneously, he also organized a palatine guard (*dā'ira*), a bodyguard, composed of Galician and Frankish slaves or manumitted slaves (*ʿabīd* or *mamālik*).<sup>10</sup> Known as “the mute” (*al-khurs*)—perhaps because they could not speak Arabic—these guardsmen were led by a Mozarab (*mustʿarab*), that is, an Arabic-speaking Christian captain (*qāʿid*), named Rabīʿ ibn Teodulfo.<sup>11</sup> Al-Ḥakam’s son, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II (ruled 206–238/822–852) continued this tradition, employing foreign soldiers in both his armies and personal guard.<sup>12</sup> The palatine guard of slave or formerly slave soldiers is attested to again during the reign of ʿAbdallāh (ruled 275–300/888–912).<sup>13</sup> The first Umayyad to proclaim himself caliph, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III (ruled 300–350/912–961), also employed foreign soldiers in both his armies and his royal entourage.<sup>14</sup> Although the nature and origin of these troops remain obscure, elements of the tradition that Adorno witnessed centuries later were already in place.

The decline and splintering of Umayyad authority in Iberia that followed, known as the *Tāʾifa* period, increased the opportunities for military alliances between Muslims and Christians. In this climate, various rulers competed to cast themselves as the legitimate successors to the Umayyads. For instance, in imitation of the caliphs, the ruler of Valencia, Ibn Jaḥḥāf, was said to parade with an army of slaves (*ʿabīd*) before him.<sup>15</sup> The fragmentation of political authority

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pp. 66–85 and on the personal guard vol. 2 (1952), pp. 122–130. See also Mohamed Méouak, “Hiérarchie des fonctions militaire et corps d’armée en al-Andalus umayyade (IIe/VIIIe–IVe/Xe siècles): nomenclature et essai d’interprétation,” *Al-Qanṭara* 14, no. 2 (1993): 361–92, particularly pp. 371–75; María Jesús Viguera Molins, “El Ejército,” in *El Reino Nazarí de Granada (1232–1492)*, ed. María Jesús Viguera Molins, *Historia de España*, ed. Ramón Menéndez Pidal, 8 vols., 1935–2004, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 429–75 (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 2000). See also Andrew Handler, “The ‘*abid* under the Umayyads of Cordova and the *Mulūk al-Ṭawāʾif*,” in *Occident and Orient: A Tribute to the Memory of Alexander Scheiber*, edited by Robert Dán, pp. 229–41 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó and Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> Ibn Saʿīd, *Al-Mughrib fī ḥulā al-Maghrib*, ed. Khalīl al-Manṣūr (Beirut: Dar al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya), vol. 1, p. 31: “huwa awwal man istakthara min al-ḥasham wa-l-ḥafad.” On the term *hasham*, see Méouak 1993, pp. 371–2.

<sup>10</sup> Lévi-Provençal 1953, vol. 3, pp. 71–6. Lévi-Provençal contends that al-Ḥakam’s predecessors, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I (ruled 138–172/756–788) and Hishām I (172–180/788–796) also recruited foreign troops. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I had a sizable personal guard of black African soldiers (*ʿirafat al-sūd*). See E. Lafuente y Alcántara (ed. and transl.), *Akhbār al-majmūʿa [Ajbar Machmuʿa. Crónica anónima del siglo XI]* (Madrid: Imprenta y Estereotipia de M. Rivadeneyra, 1867), p. 109. See also Barton 2002, p. 26; Clement 2003, p. 80.

<sup>11</sup> His name appears in several different forms of Ibn Ḥayyān’s *Muqtabas* and is conventionally presumed to be Teodulfo.

<sup>12</sup> Lévi-Provençal 1950, vol. 1, p. 260 and vol. 3, pp. 73–4.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn Ḥayyān, *Al-Muqtabas fī taʾrikh rijāl al-Andalus (III)*, ed. M. Martínez Antuña (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1937), p. 94 as cited in Méouak 1993, p. 374.

<sup>14</sup> Ibn Ḥayyān, *Al-Muqtabas fī akhbār balad al-Andalus (VII)*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥajjī (Beirut: Dār al-thaqāfa, 1965), pp. 48, 94, 129, 195–6 as cited in Méouak 1993, p. 374.

<sup>15</sup> Ibn ʿIdhārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib fī akhbār al-Andalus wa-l-Maghrib*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās. 4 Vols. (Beirut: Dār al-thaqāfa, 1998), vol. 4, p. 32: “wa-yarkabu fa-yataqaddamuhu al-ʿabīd.” See also

also precipitated the movement of Christian political exiles into Islamic courts.<sup>16</sup> For one example among many, one need only mention the nobleman, Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, also known as El Cid, who served the Muslim ruler of Zaragoza in the eleventh century before establishing his own principality.<sup>17</sup>

Superficially, the events of the eleventh and twelfth centuries appeared to be less propitious to such border crossings on the peninsula. Two Berber dynasties, the Almoravids and Almohads, successively united al-Andalus under a single authority and placed restrictions on interactions between Muslims and Christians. Simultaneously, crusade ideology entered Christian Iberia. All this did little, however, to impede the movement of men and arms into armies of the other faith. When the enthusiasm for crusading quickly dissolved, men like Fernando Rodríguez de Castro (1125–1185), a Castilian nobleman, served openly in the armies of the Almohads.<sup>18</sup> His son, Pedro Fernández, fought with the Almohads at the battle of Alarcos in 1194 against Alfonso VIII of Castile.<sup>19</sup>

Although the Christian realms of Spain united briefly to deal a decisive blow to the Almohads at the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, the fragmentation of political authority that followed—a second *Ṭāʾifa* period—encouraged political exiles and adventurers to cross into Islamic kingdoms once again. Despite continuing papal censure, noblemen from Navarre, Castile, and Aragon regularly took up residence in Muslim territory.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the flow of soldiers was such that Ibn Hūd, a rebel against Almohad rule, could maintain a personal guard of 200 Christian soldiers in his service.<sup>21</sup> This trading of allegiances continued well into the rule of the last Islamic principality on the Iberian Peninsula, the Naṣrids (629–897/1232–1492), who relied heavily upon foreign soldiers, both Berber and European, to serve in their armies.<sup>22</sup>

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Viguera Molins 2000, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> For the Umayyad period see José Manuel Ruiz Asencio, “Rebeliones leonesas contra Vermudo II,” *Archivos Leoneses: revista de estudios y documentación de los Reinos Hispano-Occidentales* 45 (1969): 215–41. See also Barton 2002, p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Fletcher, *The Quest for El Cid*, (London: Hutchinson, 1989); Simon Barton, and Richard Fletcher, *The World of El Cid: Chronicles of the Spanish Reconquest* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> Barton 2002, p. 24. See also Burns 1990a, p. 354.

<sup>19</sup> Barton 2002, pp. 28–9.

<sup>20</sup> Burns 1990a, pp. 351–5.

<sup>21</sup> María Desamparados Cabanes Pecourt, *Crónica latina de los reyes de Castilla* (Valencia: J. Nácher, 1964), p. 117: “Christiani milites nobiles ducenti qui serviebant ei pro stipendiis suis,” as cited in Burns 1990a, p. 351.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *Taʾrikh Ibn Khaldūn [Kitāb al-ʿibar]*, ed. ʿĀdil ibn Saʿd. 7 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2010), vol. 6, p. 311 for the use of Christian militia against the Banū Ashqilūla. Compare ACA, R 1389: 31: “Los varones e ricos hombres de nuestro senyorio han de costumbre muy antiga del tiempo aqua que la tierra es de Cristianos que puedan yr con sus companyas en ayuda de qual Rey se quiera xpiano o moro.” See also Barton 2002, p. 32; Viguera Molins 2000, p. 432.

## CHRISTIAN MILITIAS IN NORTH AFRICA

The Almoravid ruler ‘Alī ibn Yūsuf ibn Tāshfin (ruled 453–499/1061–1106) first introduced the practice of employing Christian Iberian soldiers in North Africa.<sup>23</sup> According to the *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*, the chronicle of the reign of Alfonso VII of León (ruled 1126–1157), the first such soldiers had been captives of war, who eventually rose to a privileged position:

At that time God granted His grace to the prisoners who were in the royal court of their lord, King ‘Alī, and moved His heart toward them in order to favour the Christians. ‘Alī regarded them above all of the men of his own eastern people, for he made some of them chamberlains of his private apartments, and others captains of one thousand soldiers, five hundred soldiers and one hundred soldiers, who stood at the forefront of the army of his kingdom. He furnished them with gold and silver, cities and strongly fortified castles, with which they could have reinforcement in order to make war on the Muzmutos [Almohads] and the king of the Assyrians, called Abdelnomen [‘Abd al-Mu‘min], who attacked his territories without interruption.<sup>24</sup>

Precisely where in Iberia these Christians came from is unclear. They may have been among the Mozarabs deported by the Almoravids following a rebellion in 1125.<sup>25</sup> The status and history of the leader of these troops between 1135 and 1137, Berenguer Reverter, the viscount of Barcelona and lord of La Guardia de Montserrat, is similarly obscure. Reverter may have come to North Africa of his own volition.<sup>26</sup> Several letters held at the Archives of the Crown of Aragon

<sup>23</sup> Ibn ‘Idhārī 1998, vol. 4, p. 102; Ibn Simāk al-‘Āmilī, *Al-Ḥulal al-mawshīyya fī dhikr al-akhbār al-Marrakashiyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Būbāya (Cairo: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 2010), p. 149: “wa huwa awwal man ista‘mala al-Rūm bi’l-Maghrib;” Ibn Abī Zar‘ al-Fāsī, *Kitāb al-anīs al-muṭrib bi-rawḍ al-qirtās fī akhbār mulūk al-Maghrib wa-ta’rikh madīnat Fās* (Rabat: al-Maṭba‘a al-malikiyya, 1999), p. 199; al-Nuwayrī, *Ta’rikh al-Maghrib al-Islāmī fī al-‘aṣr al-waṣīf*, ed. Muṣṭafā Abū Ḍayf Aḥmad (Casablanca: Dār al-nashr al-maghribiyya, 1985), p. 391. See also Alemany 1904, pp. 135–6.

<sup>24</sup> Maya Sánchez, A. (ed.). *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris. Chronica Hispana Saeculi XII, Corpus Christianorum*. (Continuatio Medievals 71) (Turnhout: Brepols, 1990), vol. 2, § 10, as cited and translated by Barton 2002, p. 27. See also García Sanjuán 2006, p. 440.

<sup>25</sup> García Sanjuán 2006, pp. 440–41; Vincent Lagardère, “Communautés mozarabes et pouvoir almoravides en 519H/1125 en Andalus,” *Studia Islamica* 67 (1988): 99–119; Delfina Serrano, “Dos fetuas sobre la expulsión de mozarabes al Magreb en 1126,” *Anaquel de estudios árabes* 2: 163–82; particularly p. 167.

<sup>26</sup> Maya Sánchez 1990, vol. 2, § 10, as cited and translated by Barton 2002, p. 27. For more on Reverter, see the texts cited above as well as F. Carreras Candi, “Relaciones de los vizcondes de Barcelona con los árabes,” in *Homenaje á D. Francisco Codera en su jubilación del profesorado: estudios de erudición oriental con una introducción de D. Eduardo Saavedra* (Zaragoza: Mariano Escar, tipógrafo), pp. 207–15; Santiago Sobrequés-Vidal, *Els barons de Catalunya*, (Barcelona: Editorial Teide, 1957), pp. 39–40.

suggest that this may have been the case.<sup>27</sup> All the same, Reverter served the Almoravids loyally, dying in battle against the Almohads.<sup>28</sup> The histories of Reverter's sons, however, underscore the challenge of making sense of this phenomenon or identifying these soldiers' motivations. One, known as Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ruburtayr, converted to Islam and served the Almohads.<sup>29</sup> The other, also Berenguer Reverter, moved between North Africa and Barcelona, signed his letters in Arabic and Latin, and eventually joined the Knights Templar, a crusading order.<sup>30</sup>

Although the same *Chronica Adelfonsi Imperatoris* reports that many Christian soldiers fled from Islamic lands to Christian Toledo after the siege of Marrakesh in 551/1147 and the rise of the Almohads, within a year, the Almohads, too, employed Christians in their armies in North Africa.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the rise of the Almohad Empire marked an important step toward the institutionalization of Christian militias. Like their predecessors and contemporaries, the Almohads maintained a palatine guard of Christian slaves or former slaves, on two occasions referred to as "Ifarkhān" or "Banū Farkhān," an enigmatic and perhaps insulting term.<sup>32</sup> Yet they also recruited large numbers of apparently free Christian soldiers from the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>33</sup> The well-known Portuguese warlord Geraldo Sempavor (the "Fearless") and the Castilian prince Don Enrique are worth mentioning in this context.<sup>34</sup> According to Ibn Khaldūn, the Almohad Caliph al-Ma'mūn (ruled 624–630/1227–1232) reportedly recruited some 12,000

<sup>27</sup> Frank 1954, p. 198 accepts on the authority of the *Chronica Aldefonsi Imperatoris* that Reverter was a captive of war. José Ruiz Domènec, "Las cartas de Reverter, vizconde de Barcelona," *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona* 39: 93–118, particularly p. 96, argues that Reverter came voluntarily.

<sup>28</sup> Ibn Khaldūn 2010, vol. 6, pp. 245–6; Ibn 'Idhārī 1998, vol. 4, p. 103; Clement 2003, pp. 94–5; Alemany 1904, p. 136; García Sanjuán 2006, p. 438.

<sup>29</sup> Ibn Khaldūn 2010, vol. 6, pp. 205, 259–60, 264 on 'Alī ibn Reverter's role in the conquest of Mallorca by the Almohads.

<sup>30</sup> Frank 1954, pp. 201–2; Clement 2003, p. 95; Charles-Emmanuel Dufourcq, *L'Espagne catalane et le Maghrib aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1966), p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> Maya Sánchez 1990, vol. 2, § 110, as cited and translated by Barton 2002, p. 28. See also Jean-Pierre Molénat, "L'organization militaire des Almohades," in *Los almohades: problemas y perspectivas*, ed. Patrice Cressier, Maribel Fierro, and Luis Molina, (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2005), pp. 545–65, particularly p. 554; Barton 2002, p. 28. See also Halima Ferhat, "Lignages et individus dans le système du pouvoir Almohade," in *Los Almohades: problemas y perspectivas*, edited by Patrice Cressier, Maribel Fierro, and Luis Molina (Madrid: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 2005), pp. 685–704.

<sup>32</sup> On the various interpretations of the term "Ifarkhān," see Eva Lapiedra Gutiérrez, "Christian Participation in Almohad Armies and Personal Guards," *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 2, no. 2: 235–50, particularly p. 238; Victoria Aguilar, "Instituciones militares. El ejército," in *El retroceso territorial de al-Andalus: Almorávides y Almohades, siglos XI al XIII*, ed. María Jesús Viguera Molins, *Historia de España*, ed. Ramón Menéndez Pidal, 8 vols, 1935–2004 (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1997), vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 188–208; Clement 2003, p. 81.

<sup>33</sup> Salicrú 1998, p. 418.

<sup>34</sup> See Ibn Khaldūn 2010, vol. 7, p. 69; David Lopes, "O Cid português: Geraldo Sempavor," *Revista portuguesa de história* 1 (1940): 93–109; Lapiedra Gutiérrez 1996, pp. 147–58.

Christian soldiers through an agreement with Fernando III of Castile.<sup>35</sup> Not unlike the Christians at Tunis, with whom this article began, these free soldiers were allowed to build a church at Marrakech, a rare privilege.<sup>36</sup>

After the rise of the Almohads, the influence of these soldiers over North African courts increased. Once in the corridors of power, Christian militias and their captains became embroiled in palace intrigues and coups.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, as Ibn Khaldūn suggests, they continued to be prized as heavy cavalry, which were unknown in North Africa:

We have mentioned the strength that a line formation behind the army gives to the fighters who use the technique of attacking and fleeing (*al-karr wa-l-farr*). Therefore the North African rulers have come to employ groups of Franks (*tā'ifa min al-ifranj*) in their army, and they are the only ones to have done that, because their countrymen only know *al-karr wa-l-farr*.<sup>38</sup>

The Almohads entrusted these soldiers to collect taxes, suppress rebellions, and make demonstrations of force (*maḥalla*) among the nomadic tribes at the empire's fringes.<sup>39</sup> The Almohad caliphs only seem to have hesitated to use these soldiers against other Christians.<sup>40</sup> In practice, this trust seems to have been well placed. Christian militia played a prominent role in the defense of the Almohads against the advancing Marinid armies.<sup>41</sup> In one striking example of loyalty, after the conquest of Fez in 646/1248–9, two Christian captains, known as Zunnār and Shadīd, conspired with the inhabitants of Fez to expel the Marinids.<sup>42</sup>

Three new Zanāta Berber dynasties emerged over the course of the thirteenth century: the Hafids at Tunis, the 'Abd al-Wādids at Tlemcen, and

<sup>35</sup> Ibn Khaldūn 2010, vol. 6, p. 270. See also Barton 2002, p. 33; García Sanjuán 2006, p. 437. Alemany 1904, pp. 138–9 connects the rise in the number of these soldiers to al-Ma'mūn's rejection of Ibn Tūmart.

<sup>36</sup> P. de Cenival, "L'Église chrétienne de Marrakech au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Hespéris* 7 (1927): 69–84.

<sup>37</sup> Alemany 1904, pp. 138–9; Clement 2003, p. 81; Barton 2002, p. 30; García Sanjuán 2006, p. 438.

<sup>38</sup> Ibn Khaldūn 2010, vol. I, p. 214 [*The Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 227].

<sup>39</sup> See Ibn Khaldūn 2010, vol. 6, pp. 272–3 for the use of the Christian militia against the rebelling Khulṭ tribe. See also García Sanjuán 2006, pp. 439–40; Ambrosio Huici Miranda, *Historia política del imperio Almohade* (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2000), vol. 2, p. 465. On the *maḥalla*, see Jocelyne Dakhliā, "Dans la mouvance du prince: la symbolique du pouvoir itinérant au Maghreb," *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 43, no. 3: 735–60; Maribel Fierro, "Algunas reflexiones sobre el poder itinerante almohade," *e-Spania* 8 (2009): 1–12.

<sup>40</sup> Ibn Khaldūn 2010, vol. 1, p. 211–5 suggests that this was generally true for North African rulers.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn Khaldūn 2010, vol. 7, p. 179.

<sup>42</sup> Ibn Khaldūn 2010, vol. 7, pp. 182ff and vol. 6, p. 279; ACA, R 15: 130v; García Sanjuán 2006, pp. 439–40; Alemany 1904, pp. 130–40.

the Marinids at Fez.<sup>43</sup> Despite the fact that the Almohads had depended upon Christian soldiers in their wars against them, these new Berber kingdoms systematically recruited these same men to serve in their armies and in their courts.<sup>44</sup> In a telling example, after their victory over the Almohads, the 'Abd al-Wāḍids immediately incorporated their rival's Christian guard, mainly men of Castilian origin, into their army and royal entourage. Still loyal to the Almohads, however, these Christian troops rebelled, but rather than dispensing with foreign militias altogether, the 'Abd al-Wāḍid sultan dismissed the Castilians and sought replacements directly from the lands of the Crown of Aragon.<sup>45</sup> In other words, the value of these Christian soldiers outweighed the threat of subversion.

In general, the pattern of use of Christian soldiers in this period remained the same as before. Independent adventurers and exiles—for example, the sons of the Castilian king Ferdinand III (ruled 1217–1252) and the nobleman Alonso Perez de Guzmán (1256–1309)—continued to travel to North Africa.<sup>46</sup> And sultans

<sup>43</sup> See Robert Brunschvig, *La Berbérie orientale sous les Hafsides des origines à la fin du XV siècle* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1940); Ramzi Roughi, *The Making of a Mediterranean Emirate: Ifriqiya and Its Andalusis, 1200–1400* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Dominique Valérian, *Bougie, port maghrébin, 1067–1510* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2006); M. Kably, *Société, pouvoir et religion au Maroc à la fin du Moyen Âge. (Islam d'hier et d'aujourd'hui)*. (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1986); Ahmed Khaneboubi, *Les premiers sultans mérinides et l'Islam (1269–1331). Histoire politique et sociale* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987); Maya Shatzmiller, *The Berbers and the Islamic State: The Marinid Experience in Pre-Protectorate Morocco* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000).

<sup>44</sup> For example, Ibn Khaldūn 2010, vol. 7, p. 180 on the Marinids. The fact that these new kingdoms were employing Christian soldiers was also apparent to Iberian commentators. See, for instance, *Cantigas de Santa María*, Cantiga 181 as cited in Barton 2002, p. 31.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn Khaldūn 2010, vol. 7, p. 83: Upon capture of Tlemcen, Yaghamrāsān ibn Zayyān, the dynasty's founder, incorporated Christian (*al-ʿasākīr min al-rūm*) and Kurdish (*ghuzz*) lancers and archers (*rāmīḥa wa-nāshiḥa*). See also, Ibn Khaldūn 2010, vol. 7, pp. 88–9: "After the death of al-Saʿīd [the last Almohad Caliph, Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Saʿīd (ruled 640–646/1242–1248)] and the defeat of the Almohad army, Yaghamrāsān employed some of the corps of Christian troops that were in al-Saʿīd's army (*qad istakhdama ṭāʾifa min jund al-naṣārā alladhina fi jumlatihi*), grateful to add their number to his army as well as display them in his military processions (*al-mawāqif wa-l-mashāhid*). These Christian troops grew so powerful that they conspired against Yaghamrāsān. A failed coup attempt prompted the populace to turn against these troops and massacre them according to Ibn Khaldūn. On new recruitment, see ACA, R 55: 49v (1291). See also Alemany 2004, p. 155; Salicrú 1998, p. 418.

<sup>46</sup> See the letters, purported to be translated from Arabic, from Spanish knights seeking employment in North Africa in the *Chronica de Alfonso X: según el Ms. II/2777 de la Biblioteca del Palacio Real*, Madrid, ed. M. González Jiménez (Murcia: Real Academia Alfonso X el Sabio, 1998), pp. 70–75. On the sons of Ferdinand III, see Alemany 2004, p. 161. On Guzmán el Bueno, see Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada, "Una biografía caballeresca del siglo XV: 'La Cronica del yllustre y muy magnifico cauallero don Alonso Perez de Guzman el Bueno'," *En la España Medieval* 22 (1999): 247–83; Luisa Isabel Álvarez de Toledo, "Guzmán el Bueno, entre la leyenda y la historia," *Estudios de historia y de arqueología medievales*, no. 7–8 (1987): 41–58; Enrique Gosalbes Cravioto, "Las relaciones hispano-marroquíes en la época de Guzmán el Bueno (I)," *Aljarenda* 75 (1990): 35–41. The primary source for the life of Guzmán el Bueno is the sixteenth-century account in Pedro Barrantes Maldonado, *Ilustraciones de la casa de Niebla*, ed. Pascual de Gayangos y Acre. Memorial Histórico Español IX and X (Madrid: Imprenta nacional, 1857).



continued to maintain royal guards, composed of Christian slaves or former slaves.<sup>47</sup> Like the Almohads, they never employed their Christian militias against Christians on the Iberian Peninsula. And they continued to recruit more soldiers directly from the kings of the Crown of Aragon and Castile.

The Latin and Romance chancery registers of the *Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó* provide a more detailed picture of these knights in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, revealing the degree to which the service of Christian soldiers in North Africa had become an affair of state, a fact that brought these armies greater legitimacy, authority, and influence in both North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>48</sup> As these records demonstrate, the Aragonese kings were concerned principally with asserting their jurisdiction over Christian soldiers in North Africa.<sup>49</sup> Regularizing the traffic in Christian soldiers became a diplomatic priority in the thirteenth century.<sup>50</sup> For instance, in accepting the service of Christian knights, Muslim rulers were asked to confirm and codify customary privileges related to pay and religion.<sup>51</sup> Fixed salaries for different ranks of soldiers from squire to knight were enumerated. Assurances were made that these soldiers would be free to perform religious services.<sup>52</sup> Soldiers were

<sup>47</sup> Ibn Khaldūn 2010, vol. 6, pp. 318–19 on the royal guard of the Hafids; vol. 7, p. 109 on the royal guard of the 'Abd al-Wāḍids; vol. 7, p. 250 on the royal guard of the Marinids. See also Alemany 1904, p. 160; Clement 2003, p. 82.

<sup>48</sup> Salicrú 1998, p. 419.

<sup>49</sup> For Tunis, see ACA, R 13: 216r (September 1264); ACA, R 21: 140v (s.d.); ACA, R 46: 120r (September 1283); ACA, R 47: 81r–82v, cit. 82v (June 1285): "Item que tots los cavallers o homems darmes crestians qui son huy, ne seran daqui avant, en la senyoria del rey de Tunis, que y sien tots per nos, et que nos lus donem cap aquel que nos vulrem"; ACA, R 100: 258r. See also Dufourcq 1966, pp. 150–51; Giménez Soler 1905, pp. 303–4. For Tlemcen, ACA, R 14: 141r (1272): "Comendamus et concedimus vobis nobili et dilecto nostro G. Gaucerandi, alcaydiam Tirimicii Christianorum terre nostre militum scilicet mercatorum et quorum libet aliorum hominum terre et iurisdiccione nostre qui ibi sunt vel fuerint constituti ... " ACA, R 14: 142v (1272); ACA, R 40: 53v; ACA, R 73: 104v–105r (May 1291); ACA, R 93: 281v (October 1292); ACA, R 337: 260v. See also Alemany 1904, pp. 160–61; Dufourcq 1966, p. 272.

<sup>50</sup> For instance, ACA, R 64: 178r–178v (April 1286), negotiations with Tlemcen: "Item que todos los christianos que seran en la terra del Rey de Tirimçe de qualesquier condiciones o senyorias, que sean jutgados por fuero d'Aragon por aquel alcayt que el Rey don Alfonso ala enbiarra;" ACA, R 64: 192r–129v (1286), negotiations in Tunis; ACA, R 64: 191r–192r (March 1286), negotiations with Tunis, which do not mention Christian knights but only navy; ACA, R 73: 90r–90v (December 1290), negotiations with Tunis; ACA, R 252: 53r–53v (May 1293), negotiations with Tlemcen; ACA, R 252: 99r (July 1294), letter to Tunis; ACA, R 337: 195r–196r (July 1313), negotiations with Tunis.

<sup>51</sup> Although these stipulations are only vaguely referred to in the Almohad period, they were likely similar. See Ibn Khaldūn 2010, vol. 6, p. 270: "wa-ʿstamadda al-ṭāghiya ʿaskaran min al-naṣārā wa-amarahu ʿalā shurūṭ taqabbalahā minhi al-Maʿmūn."

<sup>52</sup> ACA, Cartas árabes, no. 155 (1287, bilingual): "wa-yakūnu mubāh lahum an yaḥmilū jasad jāshū qarīsīt bi-ʿalāmat nāqūs ʿalā mā jarrat bihi al-ʿāda/et qui possint portare corpus Cristi cum signo campane sive squille." See also, ACA, R 73: 90r: "Item quel Barril del vi sia venut als crestians per aquel preu quels era donat en lo dit temps den Guillelm de Muncada." For an edition of this text as well as a full discussion of the curious transliteration of "Jesus Christ" into Arabic as "jāshū qarīsīt," see Hussein Fancy, "The Last Almohads: Universal

assigned uniforms and banners, bearing the colors of the Crown of Aragon, a white cross on a colored background.<sup>53</sup> The king gained the right to name a captain (Lat. *Alcaidus* or Rom. *Alcayt* from Ar. *al-qā'id*) over these soldiers, who would administer justice on the king's behalf.<sup>54</sup> In return for accepting royal jurisdiction, the Aragonese kings granted these soldiers absolution from any religious crimes that they might incur while aiding non-Christians.<sup>55</sup> In sum, these Aragonese diplomatic efforts aimed to mark these soldiers more clearly with religious and political identities that reinforced their difference.

Such was the character of the phenomenon during its peak in the High Middle Ages. By the middle of the fourteenth century, Aragonese and Castilian interest in or control over these troops had waned.<sup>56</sup> In Tunis, where Aragonese control had been strongest, we find a Genoese captain in 1358.<sup>57</sup> The movement of 50 families of Christian soldiers, known as the *farfanes*, from Fez to Castile at the end of the fourteenth century may have indicated that the political climate in Morocco had also shifted away from reliance on non-Muslim troops.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, these militias certainly continued to exist. Roser Salicrú has found permits for individual Castilians to depart to North Africa in the fifteenth century.<sup>59</sup> When the friar Juan Gallicant arrived in Tunis in 1446 to negotiate the release of captives, he sought the assistance of the captain of the Christian militia, Mossen Guerau de Queralt.<sup>60</sup> As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the pilgrim Anselm Adorno found a thriving and well-assimilated Christian community at Tunis a few decades later. Almost at the end of Hafsid rule, Leo Africanus (died 1552) attested to the continued existence of a Christian "secret

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Sovereignty between North Africa and the Crown of Aragon," *Medieval Encounters* 19, no. 1–2 (2013a): 102–36.

<sup>53</sup> ACA, R 197: 7v (October 1299); ACA, R 240: 204v–205r (May 1313); ACA, R 337: 195r–196r (July 1313). See also Alemany 1904, pp. 134, 165–8. Barrantes Maldonado 1857, p. 67.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, ACA, R 14: 141r: " ... Dantes vobis plenam licenciam et potestatem audiendi et iudicandi causas que ibi inter aliquos Christianos predictos terre nostre contingerit ventilari et faciendi ibi iustice criminales et alias prout faciendum sit et exercendi in omnibus et per omnia officium ipsius alcaidie secundum quod alii alcaidi consuerunt ipsam hactenus exercere ... " Among many records naming or confirming captains, see ACA, R 197: 7v (Tunis); ACA, R 203: 33v (Tunis); ACA, R 203: 35r (Tunis); ACA, R 203: 220r (Tunis); ACA, R 244: 286v (Tlemcen); ACA, CR, Jaume II, caja 19, no. 2406 (Tunis); ACA, CR, Jaume II, caja 134, Judíos y Musulmanes, no. 178 (Rabat).

<sup>55</sup> For example, ACA, R 42: 214v (February 1279), an absolution and protection for a soldier and his army traveling to Tunis; ACA, R 60: 25r (February 1282), protection for a soldier who had served in North Africa and now serves in the king's army in Sicily; ACA, CR, Jaume II, caja 136, Judíos y Musulmanes, no. 497 (1312); ACA, R 201: 46v–47r (1303), absolution for father and son; ACA, R 245: 148r.

<sup>56</sup> On Tunis, see Brunschvig 1940, vol. 1, pp. 447–8. On Tlemcen, see Alemany 1904, p. 159.

<sup>57</sup> Alemany 1904, p. 169.

<sup>58</sup> Maíllo 1983; Salicrú 1998, pp. 423–5 suggests that perhaps a famine or plague prompted the departure of these families.

<sup>59</sup> Salicrú 1998, pp. 427–31.

<sup>60</sup> ACA, R 1954:10v and R 2855:190v as cited by Alemany 1904, pp. 68–9.

guard.”<sup>61</sup> If the trade in Christian soldiers had slowed, the use of elite Christian royal guardsmen in North African courts continued unabated.

Already, this brief survey complicates some of the assumptions that have undergirded previous studies. First, it has been widely accepted that Christian militias in North Africa were consciously transgressing or ignoring religious boundaries. These negotiations and privileges from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries suggest, in contrast, that religious or, more precisely, pastoral concerns were of central importance to the soldiers. North African caliphs and sultans permitted Christian militias to build and maintain churches and to celebrate public rituals. Soldiers sought absolutions from the Aragonese kings for potential sins. What is more, these kings and soldiers were not alone in demonstrating such concerns. Popes and religious lawyers were both more permissive of and involved in these activities than one might imagine. It is true that in 1214, after the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, Innocent III (ruled 1198–1216) excommunicated all Christians who offered military aid to Muslims.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, as Simon Barton and Michael Lower have shown, these rigid attitudes masked flexibility.<sup>63</sup> Over the thirteenth century, the papacy eased or added subtlety to its stance toward Christian militias in North Africa. Fearing that they would alienate Christians living abroad, some popes began to recognize the spiritual needs of Christian mercenaries. Honorius III (ruled 1216–1227) absolved these soldiers of their sins and urged the Almohad caliph to allow them to practice Christianity freely.<sup>64</sup> For his part, Innocent IV (ruled 1243–1254) saw the Muslim sultans’s dependence upon these troops as an asset and used the threat of withdrawing his approval of their residence in North Africa for diplomatic leverage. By the time of Nicholas IV (ruled 1288–1292), the pope claimed that the presence of Christian soldiers might have a positive effect on the conversion of the Muslims.<sup>65</sup> Ramón de Penyafort (died 1275), the

<sup>61</sup> Louis de Mas-Latrie, *Traité de paix et de commerce concernant les relations des chrétiens avec les arabes de l’Afrique septentrionale au moyen âge* (Paris: H. Plon, 1866), pp. 339–40.

<sup>62</sup> AHN, Madrid, Codices, 996b, fol. 44r [23 January 1214] as cited in Barton 2002, pp. 24–5. On papal attitudes toward Christian mercenaries, see James Muldoon, *Popes, Lawyers, and Infidels: The Church and the Non-Christian World, 1250–1550* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), pp. 45, 52, as well as Mas-Latrie 1866, docs. 10, 15, 17–18.

<sup>63</sup> Barton 2002; Michael Lower, “The Papacy and Christian Mercenaries of Thirteenth-century North Africa,” *Speculum* 89, no. 3 (2014): 601–31. See also Peter Linehan, *The Spanish Church and the Papacy in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Damian Smith, *Innocent III and the Crown of Aragon: The Limits of Papal Authority* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>64</sup> Demetrio Mansilla, *La documentación pontifica de Honorio III (1216–1227)* (Rome: Instituto Español de Estudios Eclesiásticos, 1965), docs. 243, 439, 562, 579, 588, 590, 595 as cited in Barton 2002, p. 37.

<sup>65</sup> Barton 2002, p. 37. See also Muldoon 1979, pp. 41, 52, 54; Alemany 1904, pp. 137–42; Mas-Latrie 1866, docs. 10, 15, 17, and 18. The related question of whether it was licit in Islamic law for a Muslim ruler to use Christian soldiers was addressed by al-ʿUtbi in Ibn Rushd al-Jadd, *Kitāb al-bayān wa-l-taḥṣīl wa-l-sharḥ wa-l-tawjīh w-l-taʿlīl fī masāʾil al-mustakhrāja*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥajjī (Beirut: Dār al-gharb al-islāmī, 1988a), vol. 3, pp. 10–11. Al-ʿUtbi concludes that it is legitimate to use such troops but that their specific rights differ from those of Muslim soldiers.

master-general of the Dominican Order and advisor to Jaume I, clarified that all soldiers serving in North Africa with the king's permission did so licitly.<sup>66</sup> For his part, the Bishop of North Africa openly acknowledged the leadership of Bernat Seguí in Morocco.<sup>67</sup> Were these venal gestures, attempts to justify political ends? For certain, they were belated attempts to legitimize the enduring presence of Christian soldiers in Muslim kingdoms and bring them under their control, but to say these gestures were merely political begs the question. Political and pastoral concerns were entangled and inextricable in papal policy.

Second, although earlier studies have tended to emphasize the presence of mercenaries and warlords, men who were attracted by the prospect of making their fortunes or seeking political refuge, these free men were employed alongside Christian slaves or converts of slave origin.<sup>68</sup> North African sultans had depended heavily upon these slave populations in a variety of capacities beyond the army. Significantly, it is also extremely difficult to distinguish free from slave soldiers in Arabic sources. Chronicles refer to Christian soldiers sometimes specifically as slaves (*ʿabīd* or *mamālīk*) and other times more generically as barbarians (*ʿulūj*) or simply Christians (*rūm* or *naṣārā*).<sup>69</sup> If one wanted to generalize, then the term "slave" does appear more frequently in conjunction with descriptions of the royal entourage (*biṭāna*, *dāʿira*, *hāshiya*, *khāṣṣa*, *ʿabīd al-dār*, or *sanīʿa*).<sup>70</sup> Although it seems important to differentiate between types of Christian soldiers in North Africa, as Eva Lapiedra has argued, this textual ambiguity reflects the fact that these distinctions in status were irrelevant to Islamic rulers and chroniclers.<sup>71</sup> From the perspective of royal authorities, whether or not they were actually slaves, foreign Christian soldiers were still thought of as slaves, as possessions of the royal court.<sup>72</sup> These Muslim rulers were not the first or only kings to use the language of slavery in this fashion.

## MUSLIM SOLDIERS IN CHRISTIAN COURTS

Although a great deal of ink has been spent on the topic of Iberian Christian militias, far less has been written about a parallel phenomenon: the presence

<sup>66</sup> François Balme, Ceslaus Paban, and Joachim Collomb (eds), *Raymundia; Seu: Documenta Quae Pertinent Ad S. Raymundi de Pennaforti Vitam et Scripta*. vol. 4, fasc. 1–2. Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Historica (Rome: Joseph Roth, 1898), p. 35 as cited in Burns 1990a, p. 354.

<sup>67</sup> ACA, CR, Jaume II, caja 25, no. 3189 (1308). These bishops were Dominican and Franciscan legates of the Papacy. See Atanasio López, *Obispos en el África septentrional desde siglo XIII* (Tangier: Tipografía Hispano-Árabe, 1941), pp. 1–10.

<sup>68</sup> Lapiedra Gutiérrez 2010, p. 237.

<sup>69</sup> Lapiedra Gutiérrez 2010, p. 245.

<sup>70</sup> Lapiedra Gutiérrez 2010, p. 242.

<sup>71</sup> Lapiedra Gutiérrez 2010, pp. 236, 247.

<sup>72</sup> See S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), vol. 1, pp. 130–31 speaking of *mamlūk* tradition.

of foreign Muslim soldiers in Aragonese and Castilian armies and courts.<sup>73</sup> Across the period of the Spanish Middle Ages, from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries, individual Muslim noblemen and warlords traveled regularly to Spanish Christian courts. What follows focuses again on the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, another period of institutionalization that brought the histories of Christian and Muslim soldiers directly together.

Over this period, the Crown of Aragon recruited and employed thousands of foreign Muslim cavalry soldiers, known as *jenets* (Lat. *jeneti*; Rom. *genets*). These soldiers appear everywhere from far flung battlefields across the Mediterranean to the royal court, where they acted as members of the king's royal household, his protectors, his diplomats, and even on occasion, his entertainment. Hundreds of records preserved in the *Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó* permit a detailed examination of how these soldiers were used. Nevertheless, these figures have remained virtually absent from general histories of the Crown of Aragon. The Crown of Aragon recruited these Muslim soldiers from a seemingly unlikely source, a motley band of Zanāta Berber cavalry soldiers, known as *al-Ghuzāh al-Mujāhidūn* and under the command of Marinid princes, who had come to the Iberian Peninsula for the purpose of *jihād* in 660/1262.<sup>74</sup> Additional *jenet* soldiers were recruited directly from North Africa and placed under the command of these Marinid commanders.<sup>75</sup>

Why did the Crown of Aragon rely on seemingly hostile troops? As in the case of North African rulers, this choice was partly strategic. Whereas Christian Iberian cavalry were heavily armed, North African cavalry were lightly armed, bringing distinct advantages to the battlefield.<sup>76</sup> Extreme necessity also

<sup>73</sup> See Hussein Fancy, "Theologies of Violence: The Recruitment of Muslim Soldiers by the Crown of Aragon," *Past & Present* 221, no. 1 (2013b): 39–73. Previous studies: Brian Catlos, "'Mahomet Abenadalill': A Muslim Mercenary in the Service of the Kings of Aragon (1290–1291)," in *Jews, Muslims and Christians in and around the Crown of Aragon: Essays in Honour of Professor Elena Lourie*, ed. Harvey J. Hames (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 257–302; Lourie 1978; Faustino D. Gazulla, "Las compañías de Zenetes en el reino de Aragón," *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 90 (1927): 174–96; Ana Echevarría Arsuaga, *Caballeros en la frontera: La guardia morisca de los reyes de Castilla (1410–1467)* (Madrid: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, 2006); Roser Salicrú i Lluch, "Caballeros granadinos emigrantes y fugitivos en la Corona de Aragón durante el reinado de Alfonso el Magnánimo," in *Estudios de Frontera: Actividad y vida en la frontera. En memoria de Don Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz*, Alcalá de Real, 1997, vol. 2, pp. 727–48. Jaén: Disputación Provincial de Jaén. (Ediciones del congreso celebradas y obras publicadas, 1998); José Enrique López de Coca Castañer, "'Caballeros moriscos' al servicio de Juan II y Enrique IV, reyes de Castilla," *Meridies* 3 (1996): 119–36, particularly p. 119.

<sup>74</sup> Fancy 2013b.

<sup>75</sup> This may have also been true of the later *guardia morisca* of the Castilian kings. See Echevarría Arsuaga 2006, p. 154; Ana Echevarría Arsuaga, "La conversion des chevaliers musulmans dans la Castille du XVe siècle," in *Conversion islamiques: Identités religieuses en Islam méditerranéen*, ed. Mercedes García Arenal. (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2001), p. 121 on the presence of Marinid princes.

<sup>76</sup> Ibn Khaldūn 2010, vol. 1, pp. 211–2. See also Alvaro Soler del Campo, *La evolución del armamento medieval en el Reino Castellano-Leonés y Al-Andalus (siglos XII–XIV)* (Madrid: Servicio de publicaciones del E.M.E, 1993), pp. 159–60; Rachel Arié, *L'Espagne musulmane au temps des Nasrides (1232–1492)*. (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1973), p. 258; Pierre Guichard, *Les musulmans de*

prompted the Aragonese to recruit *jenets* in large numbers. Facing the threat of a French invasion, King Pere III (ruled 1276–1285) was the first to employ these soldiers in significant numbers in 1284.<sup>77</sup> Pere's successors expanded upon his success, using *jenets* not only against external threats to their kingdoms but also against internal threats, in order to suppress rebellions.<sup>78</sup> The presence of Muslim soldiers in the king's army met with resistance from both local villagers, who attacked the Muslim troops, and powerful noblemen, who saw the soldiers as symbols of overreaching royal authority. Despite this steady opposition, however, the Aragonese kings continued to use these troops well into the fourteenth century.<sup>79</sup> After this moment and again in parallel with the history of Christian militia, the evidence for the presence of these troops declines, a fact that may be attributed to the declining influence of the *Ghuzāh* and their ultimate disbandment in 1369.<sup>80</sup>

Although the recruitment of *jenet* soldiers began along the Aragonese frontier with Granada, the effort to recruit them eventually expanded to North Africa and reveals a previously unrecognized connection between these parallel histories. In 1286 and 1291, for instance, Abraham Abengallel, an Arabic-speaking Jew, traveled to Fez and Tlemcen to seek additional *jenet* soldiers for the Crown of Aragon.<sup>81</sup> Abengallel was instructed to offer Christian soldiers and navies in exchange for Muslim *jenets*. In other words, these soldiers were traded directly for one another. And perhaps more significantly, in agreements such as these, rulers agreed to reciprocal limits on the use of these soldiers: Christian troops could only fight Muslims, and Muslim troops could only fight Christians.<sup>82</sup>

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*Valence et la Reconquête: XIe-XIIIe siècles* (Damas: Institut français de Damas, 1990), vol. 2, p. 390; Ferdinand Lot, *L'art militaire et les armées au moyen âge en Europe et dans le Proche Orient* (Paris: Payot, 1946), vol. 1, p. 440.

<sup>77</sup> Pere could only muster 38 Aragon knights and 70 footsoldiers for his battle against the French. See María Teresa Ferrer i Mallol, "La organización militar en Cataluña en la Edad Media," *Revista de Historia Militar-Extra* 1: 119–222.

<sup>78</sup> On these rebellions, see Luis González Antón, *Las uniones aragonesas y las Cortes del reino (1283–1301)* (Zaragoza: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Escuela de Estudios Medievales, 1975); C. Laliena Corbera, "La adhesión de las ciudades a la Unión: poder real y conflictividad social en Aragón a fines del XIII," *Aragón en la Edad Media* 8 (1989): pp 319–413, particularly p. 319; Donald J. Kagay, "Rebellion on Trial: The Aragonese Union and Its Uneasy Connection to Royal Law, 1265–1301," *The Journal of Legal History* 18, no. 3: 30–43, especially p. 30; Thomas Bisson, *Medieval Crown of Aragon: A Short History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 90.

<sup>79</sup> See María Teresa Ferrer i Mallol, *Organització i defensa d'un territori fronterer: la governació d'Oriola en el segle XIV*. (Barcelona: Consell Superior d'Investigacions Científiques, Institució Milà i Fontanals, 1990), p. 179, provides evidence for the use of *jenets* during the reign of Pere IV (ruled 1336–1387).

<sup>80</sup> Ibn Khaldūn 2010, vol. 7, pp. 389–91.

<sup>81</sup> ACA, R 64: 176r–176v (22 December 1286); ACA, R 90: 118r (October 1291).

<sup>82</sup> ACA, R 64: 176r–176v (22 December 1286): "Item que Abeniuçef li vayla contra tots los Christians del mon. E los Seynor Rey, el contra tots los Sarrains del mon"; ACA, R 64: 191r–192r (21 April 1287); ACA, R 55: 54r–54v (1291): "E aytamben en ajuda dels nostres enemics Christians, nos trametretz al estiu ab lo nostre nauili C cavaller janetz pagats per vos per tres meses"; ACA, R 90: 118r (October 1291); ACA, R 252: 121r (18 November 1295): "Item

In short, the trade of soldiers confirmed rather than contradicted ideologies of religious violence.

Superficially, these agreements appear to have contradicted Islamic law. Like those of Innocent III, the opinions (*fatāwā*) of Iberian and North African Mālikī jurists have been invoked in this regard. Al-Wansharīsī (died 914/1508), for example, suggested that any Muslim who offered military support to a non-Muslim state should be considered an outlaw (*muḥārib*) and polytheist (*mushrik*).<sup>83</sup> Similar opinions were expressed by Ibn Rushd al-Jadd (died 520/1126) and Ibn Rabīʿ (circa 719/1320).<sup>84</sup> As opposed to legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), however, these *fatāwā* were born out of practice and reflected specific social and historical circumstances.<sup>85</sup> The hardline opinions often coincided with periods of war. A wider examination of Mālikī opinion has revealed diversity and flexibility.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, petitioners were not limited to Mālikī opinions. Some traveled as far as Egypt to seek other views.<sup>87</sup> Finally, regardless of existing *fatāwā*, it is worth recognizing that the agreements and negotiations cited above were also approved by religious authorities, and thus, in and of themselves, provide significant evidence of judicial approbation.<sup>88</sup> In short, like Canon law, Islamic law bent to accommodate changing circumstances.

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que Abenjacob li vayla contra tots los Christians del mon. El Senyor Rey a el contra tots los Sarrayns del mon.”

<sup>83</sup> al-Wansharīsī, *Miʿyār al-muʿrib wa-l-jāmiʿ al-mughrib ʿan fatāwā ʿulamāʾ ahl Ifrīqiya wa-l-Andalus wa-l-Maghrib*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥajjī. 13 vols. (Rabat: Wizārat al-awqāf wa-l-shuʿūn al-islāmiya, 1981–1983), vol. 2, pp. 129–30. On the *muḥārib*, which may also be translated as bandit, and the question of *hirāba*, banditry, see Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 51–61.

<sup>84</sup> Ibn Rushd al-Jadd, *al-Muqaddimāt al-Mumahhidāt*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥajjī (Beirut: Dār al-gharb al-islāmī, 1988b), vol. 2, pp. 151–4; Ibn Rushd al-Jadd 1988a, vol. 4, pp. 170–71. See also Peter Sjoerd van Koningsveld, and Gerard Albert Wiegers, “The Islamic Statute of the Mudejars in the Light of a New Source,” *Al-Qanṭara* 17, no. 1 (1996): pp 19–58, particularly pp. 24–5.

<sup>85</sup> David Powers, *Law, Society, and Culture in the Maghrib, 1300–1500*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); David Powers, “Fatwās as Sources for Legal and Social History: A Dispute over Endowment Revenues from Fourteenth-century Fez,” *Al-Qanṭara* 11, no. 2 (1990): 295–341; Mohammad Fadel, “Rules, Judicial Discretion, and the Rule of Law in Naṣrid Granada: An Analysis of al-Ḥaḍīqa al-mustaḥilla al-naḍra fī al-fatāwā al-ṣādira ʿan ʿulamāʾ al-ḥaḍra,” in *Islamic Law: Theory and Practice*, ed. R. Gleave, and E. Kermeli (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), pp. 49–86; Jocelyn Hendrickson, *The Islamic Obligation to Emigrate: Al-Wansharīsī’s Asnā Al-Matājir Reconsidered*. PhD, Emory University, (Atlanta: 2009).

<sup>86</sup> Al-Wansharīsī cited the opinion of the Mālikī jurist al-Māzarī (died 536/1141), for instance, who considered it permissible for Muslims to live in non-Muslim territory if they continued to struggle to restore that territory to Muslim rule or spread the message of Islam in it. See al-Wansharīsī 1981–1983, vol. 2, pp. 133–4. See also ʿAbdel-Magid M. Turki, “Consultation juridique dʼal-Imam al-Māzarī sur le cas des musulmans vivant en Sicile sous lʼautorité des Normands,” *Mélanges de lʼUniversité Saint-Joseph* 50, no. 2 (1984): 691–704; Khaled Abou El Fadl, “Islamic Law and Muslim Minorities: The Juristic Discourse on Muslim Minorities from the Second/Eighth to the Eleventh/Seventeenth Centuries,” *Islamic Law and Society* 1, no. 2 (1994): pp 141–87, particularly p. 151.

<sup>87</sup> Van Koningsveld, and Wiegers 1996.

<sup>88</sup> Brunschvig 1940, pp. 63–6.

In practice, the Aragonese kings and *jenets* respected these limitations. Just as North African rulers employed their Christian militias against their Muslim enemies, the Aragonese refrained from using Muslim cavalry against other Muslims. At some level, this reflected pragmatism on the part of kings, who may not have wished to test the loyalty of their troops. Nevertheless, on the occasions that these limits were tested, the *jenets* themselves balked. In 1304, the *jenet* commander and Marinid prince, al-ʿAbbās ibn Raḥḥū, despite the fact that the *Ghuzāh* were in open rebellion against Granada, wrote to the Aragonese king to explain that his soldiers refused to support an emerging Aragonese conflict with Granada.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, during the war itself, Ibn Raḥḥū and his soldiers temporarily joined the Granadan forces, raising a great deal of alarm among royal officials.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps more tellingly, Ibn Raḥḥū's *jenets* returned to Aragonese service after the war's conclusion.<sup>91</sup> In this case and despite their political inclinations, the *jenets*' service was contingent upon respecting certain religious boundaries.

The parallels between Christian militias and the Muslim *jenets* run deeper. Aragonese kings and later Castilian kings used *jenets* and other Muslim soldiers as privileged members of their entourage and royal guardsmen. The Aragonese kings outfitted these Muslim knights with rich and colorful "Saracen" tunics as well as parade saddles and swords, gifts that flaunted the sumptuary laws pertaining to religious minorities, including the Crown's Muslim subjects.<sup>92</sup> In fifteenth-century Castile, a period characterized by deep hostility toward Muslims, the Trastámara kings also maintained a "Moorish Guard" (*guardia morisca*), who appeared in parades alongside them, physically marking out the space of the sovereign.<sup>93</sup> Rather different from the Aragonese case, however, many of these "Moorish" soldiers were converts to Christianity. All the same, the Castilian kings continued to dress their royal guardsmen lavishly as "Moors"—as caricatures of Muslims, adorned in turquoise tunics, sheepskin garments, doublets, and laced boots. In other words, the Castilian kings imposed religious difference on the "Moorish Guard" even after that difference had vanished—that is, even after they had become Christians.<sup>94</sup> As in the case of Christian soldiers above, the presence of foreign "infidel" soldiers in the royal court endured well after the use of these troops on the battlefield had ceased. Significantly, while conferring these conspicuous and exceptional privileges on the *jenets*, the Aragonese kings also spoke of these free and salaried Muslim

<sup>89</sup> ACA, CR, Jaume II, caja 91, no. 11093 (24 March [1304]): " ... Quant en ço que yo podia entendre en ell, molt se f[a] volenteros de servir vos, mas empero tots los jenets de mes li dixeran yo estan en Xativa, que ells no farien mal al Rey de Granada ... "

<sup>90</sup> ACA, R 307: 107r (1 September 1304).

<sup>91</sup> ACA, R 243: 264v (5 April 1317).

<sup>92</sup> See, for instance, ACA, R 17: 57r (1265); ACA, R 52: 83v; ACA, R 58: 22r (1285); ACA R 58: 22v (1285).

<sup>93</sup> The fifteenth-century *Hechos de condestable Miguel Lucas de Iranzo*, p. 138 as cited in Echevarría Arsuaga 2006, p. 108.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Echevarría Arsuaga 2006, p. 86.



knights as their slaves or servants (*servi*) and possessions (*de domo regis*).<sup>95</sup> As both David Romano and David Abulafia have shown, Sicilian and Iberian kings first used these expressions to speak of Jews, whom they considered part of the royal treasure.<sup>96</sup> But what did this language of slavery imply in a military context? What bound privilege, servitude, and religious difference together in these parallel traditions of royal guardsmen in Spain and North Africa?

## MILITARY SLAVERY

My argument thus far has been that to see these Christian and Muslim soldiers as merely mercenaries, falls short of a full explanation of these connected phenomena. The trade of Christian and Muslim soldiers across the Mediterranean not only reflected but also reproduced religious boundaries. In the case of royal guardsmen, moreover, the presence of “infidels,” spoken of as slaves whether they were or were not, was essentially a matter of pageantry and theater. How does one explain the significance of religious difference for this history of exchange?

Looking beyond the western Mediterranean, one notes that the Spanish Umayyads were not the first or only rulers to employ foreign soldiers in their armies and in their courts. Although armed slaves can be found in numerous contexts from ancient Greece and Rome to the American Revolution, the scope and significance of military slavery in the Islamic world is unparalleled.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup> ACA, R 44: 178v (May 1280); ACA, R 81: 10r (January 1289); ACA, R 82: 146r (September 1290); ACA, R 82: 164v (September 1290). See also John Boswell, *The Royal Treasure: Muslim Communities Under the Crown of Aragon in the Fourteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 186–7.

<sup>96</sup> David Romano, “Los Funcionarios judíos de Pedro el Grande de Aragón,” *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona* 33 (1970): 5–41; David Abulafia, “Nam Iudei Servi Regis Sunt, Et Semper Fisco Regio Deputati: The Jews in the Municipal Fuero of Teruel (1176–7),” in *Jews, Muslims and Christians in and around the Crown of Aragon: Essays in Honour of Professor Elena Lourie*, ed. Harvey Hames (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 97–126.

<sup>97</sup> On military slaves across history, see a recent collection of essays, *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age*, ed. Leslie Christopher Brown, and Philip D. Morgan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 40–78. On military slavery in the Islamic context, see Speros Vryonis, “Seljuk Gulams and Ottoman Devshirmes,” *Der Islam* 41 (1965): 224–52; Claude Cahen, “Note sur l’esclavage Musulman et le Devshirme Ottoman, à propos de travaux récents,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 13, no. 2 (1970): 211–18; David Ayalon, *The Mamluk Military Society* (London: Variorum, 1979); Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Daniel Pipes, *Slave Soldiers and Islam: The Genesis of a Military System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Christopher Beckwith, “Aspects of Early History of the Central Asian Guard Corps in Islam,” *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 4 (1984): 29–43; David Ayalon, “The Mamlūks of the Seljuks: Islam’s Military Might at the Crossroads,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 6, no. 3 (1996): 305–33; Peter B. Golden, “Some Notes on the Comitatus in Medieval Eurasia with Special Reference to the Khazars,” *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 28 (2001a): 153–70; Matthew Gordon, *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords: A History of the Turkish Military of Samarra, A.H. 200–275/815–889 C.E.* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Peter B. Golden, “The Terminology of

Beginning at least with Caliph al-Mahdī (ruled 158–169/775–785) and fully developed under al-Muʿtaṣim (ruled 218–227/833–842), the Abbasids imported Turkic slaves to serve in their armies, transforming the nature of Islamic armies for centuries to come.<sup>98</sup> As young boys, these soldiers were trained in both martial and courtly arts. Although they continued to be called slaves (*ʿabid*, *ghilmān*, or *mamālīk*), they were usually and at least nominally converted to Islam and manumitted.<sup>99</sup> Occasionally, these soldiers became part of the ruling elite, enjoying extraordinary wealth and power. This military servitude, in other words, was a strange one, different from the “social death” associated with Atlantic slavery, different from domestic slavery or slavery in the service of state enterprises.<sup>100</sup> While foreigners in the Islamic heartlands, in the Abbasid context, these men celebrated their servile status as a sign of privilege. Their privileged servitude was a form of clientage (*walāʾ*?), a sign of absolute obedience and loyalty to the Abbasid caliphs, whom they protected against internal and external threats.<sup>101</sup> In theory at least, these slave soldiers depended upon and reflected the power of the Abbasid caliphs.

Although the origins and nature of Islamic military slavery remain under dispute, the strongest influences for this idea of servitude appear to have

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Slavery and Servitude in Medieval Turkic,” in *Studies on Central Asian History in Honor of Yuri Bregel*, ed. Devin DeWeese (Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series 167) (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Research Institute for Inner Asia, 2001b), pp. 27–56; Peter B. Golden, “Khazar Turkic Ghulams in Caliphal Service,” *Journal Asiatique* 292, no. 1–2 (2004): 279–309; Reuven Amitai, “The Mamlūk Institution, or One Thousand Years of Military Slavery in the Islamic World,” in *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age*, ed. Christopher Leslie Brown, and Philip D. Morgan (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 40–78; Mohamed Méouak, “Slaves, noirs et affranchise dans les armées Fatimides d’Ifriqiya: histoires et trajectoires marginales,” in *D’esclaves à soldats: Miliciens et soldats d’origine servile XIIIe–XXIe siècles*, ed. Carmen Bernand, and Alessandro Stella (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2006), pp. 15–37; D.G. Tor, “The Mamluks in the Military of the Pre-Seljuq Persianate Dynasties,” *Iran* 46 (2008): 213–25; Yaacov Lev, “David Ayalon (1914–1998) and the History of Black Military Slavery in Medieval Islam,” *Der Islam* 90, no. 1 (2013): 21–43.

<sup>98</sup> Jacob Lassner, *The Shaping of ‘Abbasid Rule*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 116–36. On the choice of Turkic soldiers, see Helmut Töllner, *Die türkischen Garden am Kalifenhof von Samarra: Ihre Entstehung und Machtergreifung bis zum Kalifat Al-Muʿtadids* (Walldorf-Hessen: Verlag für Orientkunde, 1971), pp. 20–21.

<sup>99</sup> Crone 1980, p. 78; Etienne de La Vaissière, *Histoire des marchands sogdiens* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des hautes études chinoise: Diffusion, De Boccard, 2002), p. 305; David Ayalon, “The Mamluks: The Mainstay of Islam’s Military Might,” in *Slavery in the Islamic Middle East*, ed. Shaun E. Marmon (Princeton N.J.: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), pp. 89–117, particularly p. 90. Whether or not these soldiers were original slaves or only spoken of as such is a matter of controversy. M.E. Shaban, *Islamic History, a New Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), vol. 2, pp. 63–4 and Beckwith 1984 argue the Turks were not originally slaves. Gordon 2001, pp. 40–41 and Golden 2004, p. 287 argue the opposite.

<sup>100</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); Golden 2004, p. 293.

<sup>101</sup> Golden 2004, pp. 288, 308.

been pre-Islamic Turkic and Iranian royal guards.<sup>102</sup> For example, the imperial guardsmen of the Sasanid shahs were known as the *bandagān*, that is, bondsmen or slaves.<sup>103</sup> They wore a distinctive dress—earrings or belts that symbolized servitude. They received certificates of manumission (*āzād nāmāh*) as a reward for extraordinary service. But they were not slaves. Instead, as Peter Golden has argued, “political dependence was expressed in the vocabulary of slavery.”<sup>104</sup> This background to the Islamic tradition of military slavery suggests that the performative or symbolic value of military slaves to imperial authority was as central as, if not more so, their practical or military value, which regularly fell short of the ideal of absolute obedience.<sup>105</sup>

The Abbasids not only adapted this tradition of military service but also expanded it dramatically, making it a central feature of Islamic rulership until the nineteenth century. For instance, in Khurasan, the Samanids (204–389/819–999) and their successors, the Ghaznawids (366–582/977–1186) and Seljuqs (428–590/1037–1194), each employed Turkic military slaves. The Ayyubids (566–648/1171–1250) also relied upon military slaves, who eventually established their own political authority in the form of the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt (648–923/1250–1517).<sup>106</sup> Finally, the Ottomans carried this practice into the modern period. As Yaacov Lev has recently argued, scholars have insufficiently examined the use of military slaves in North Africa as an extension of this phenomenon.<sup>107</sup> North African rulers did not rely upon Turkic but rather European and black slaves (*saqāliba* and *ʿabīd*).<sup>108</sup> The Aghlabids (800–909), Tulunids (184–296/868–905), Ikhshidids (323–358/935–969), and Fatimids (297–567/909–1171) all employed black African slaves.<sup>109</sup> All this is to say, when the Spanish Umayyads, and later the Almoravids and Almohads first employed Frankish and Galician military slaves—whom they also called *ʿabīd* or *mamālīk*—they were invoking and drawing comparison with the practices of

<sup>102</sup> A view shared by Golden 2001a; Beckwith 1984; Shaban 1971, vol. 2, pp. 63–5; Richard N. Frye, *History of Ancient Iran*, (München: C.H. Beck, 1984), pp. 352–4; Richard N. Frye, *The Heritage of Central Asia from Antiquity to the Turkish Expansion* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers), pp. 195–6; Etienne de La Vaissière, *Samarqand et Samarra: élites d’Asie centrale dans l’empire abbasside* (Paris: Association pour l’avancement des études iraniennes, 2007). Gordon 2001, pp. 7–8, 156 sees the tradition as fundamentally Near Eastern.

<sup>103</sup> Golden 2004, p. 288; Mohsen Zakeri, *Sāsānid Soldiers in Early Muslim Society: The Origins of ʿAyyaran and Futuwwa* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995). The other parallel is the Soghdian *chakar*.

<sup>104</sup> Golden 2001b, p. 29.

<sup>105</sup> Crone 1980, p. 79 emphasizes the military function over the political function: “They were designed to be not a military elite, but military automata.”

<sup>106</sup> Jere L. Bacharach, “African Military Slaves in the Medieval Middle East: The Cases of Iraq (869–955) and Egypt (868–1171),” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 4 (1981): pp. 471–95, particularly p. 481. See also, David Ayalon, “On the Eunuch in Islam,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979): 109–22.

<sup>107</sup> Lev 2013, p. 31.

<sup>108</sup> Ayalon 1996, p. 321; Méouak 2006.

<sup>109</sup> Lev 2013, pp. 30–32; Zaki Mohamed Hassan, *Les Tulunides: études de l’Égypte musulmane à la fin du IX<sup>e</sup> siècle: 868–905*. (Paris: Busson, 1933), pp. 165–8 on the influence of the Abbasids.

their contemporaries and rivals to the east. The history of Christian mercenary soldiers in North Africa should thus be understood as an important but unacknowledged extension of a far more ancient tradition of military slavery.

The Abbasid tradition may have also influenced other imperial models around the Mediterranean. For instance, in the third/ninth century, the Byzantine emperor established the *hetaireia* (ἑταιρεία), an imperial bodyguard composed mainly of Turkic Khazars, which is to say, the very same soldiers who were used in the caliphal military retinues.<sup>110</sup> Contemporary observers saw the Abbasids and Byzantine practices as indistinct.<sup>111</sup> The Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (ruled 1220–1250) also maintained a palatine guard of Muslim slave soldiers.

From here, we need only travel a short distance to close the circuit of ideas. In fact, the thirteenth-century Aragonese kings drew upon precedents from both Islamic and Christian courts to articulate their imperial ambitions.<sup>112</sup> Above all, they styled themselves as the heirs of Frederick II and as the new Holy Roman emperors.<sup>113</sup> King Pere, for instance, married the granddaughter of Frederick, Constanza, who arrived with an entourage of influential Sicilian noblemen at the Aragonese court.<sup>114</sup> Partly under the influence of these new arrivals, the Aragonese kings instituted sweeping palatine ordinances and administrative reforms that borrowed wholesale from the sumptuous, imperial style, and bureaucratic structure of the Sicilian court.<sup>115</sup> It was both fitting and revealing that King Pere charged a grandson of Frederick II with recruiting

<sup>110</sup> Golden 2001a, p. 7; Golden 2004, p. 283; Warren T. Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army, 284–1081* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 110, 115; Mark Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium, 600–1025* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 169–70; Alexander P. Kazhdan (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), vol. 2, p. 925.

<sup>111</sup> Golden 2004, p. 284 citing al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-badʿ wa-l-taʾrīkh*, ed. Clément Huart. 6 vols. (Paris: Leroux, 1899–1919), vol. 4, p. 68 and Ibn Rusta, *Kitāb al-aʿlāq al-nafisa*, ed. M.J. De Goeje (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1892), pp. 120, 124.

<sup>112</sup> As argued in Fancy 2013a. See also Maribel Fierro, “Alfonso X ‘The Wise’: The Last Almohad Caliph?” *Medieval Encounters* 15, no. 2 (2009): 175–98.

<sup>113</sup> Jerome Lee Shneidman, “Aragon and the War of the Sicilian Vespers,” *Historian* 22, no. 3 (1960): pp. 250–63, particularly p. 254; Ferran Soldevila, *Pere el Gran, la Infanta* (Barcelona: Institut d’Estudis Catalans, 1950), vol. 1, p. 93; Robert Ignatius Burns, “Warrior Neighbors: Alfonso El Sabio and Crusader Valencia, an Archival Case Study in His International Relations,” *Viator* 21, no. 1 (1990b): 147–202, particularly pp. 156–62.

<sup>114</sup> Ramon Muntaner, *Crònica*, in *Les quatre gran cròniques*, ed. Ferran Soldevila (Barcelona: Editorial Selecta, 1971), ch. 1; Luc d’Achery, *Spicilegium sive Collectio veterum aliquot scriptorium*. 3 vols. (Paris: Montalant, 1723), vol. 3, p. 644.

<sup>115</sup> Helene Wieruszowski, “The Rise of the Catalan Language in the 13th Century,” *Modern Language Notes* 59, no. 1 (1944): 9–20; Hans Schadek, “Die Familiaren der sizilischen und aragonischen Könige im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert,” *Spanische Forschungen der Görresgesellschaft: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kulturgeschichte Spaniens* 26 (1971): 201–348; Marta Van Landingham, *Transforming the State: King, Court and Political Culture in the Realms of Aragon, 1213–1387* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

the first *jenets* from among the Marinid *Ghuzāh*.<sup>116</sup> The fact that the *jenets* were not actually slaves or of slave origin mattered little to the Aragonese kings. The Aragonese tradition was not an aberration from the tradition of military slavery but a revelation of its deepest logic. In addition to adding military might, these soldiers brought imperial prestige to rulers. By speaking of these “infidel” soldiers as their possessions, both North African and Iberian kings were articulating their claims to absolute authority and jurisdiction.<sup>117</sup> These foreign soldiers were just another in a line of military slaves belonging to Mediterranean emperors.

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<sup>116</sup> ACA, R 47: 130v (28 October 1284). On Conrad Lancia, see Helene Wieruszowski, “La corte di Pietro d’Aragona e i precedenti dell’impresa siciliana,” in *Politics and Culture in Medieval Spain and Italy* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1971), pp. 182–222, particularly p. 194, no. 3; Muntaner 1971, chap. 18.

<sup>117</sup> Fancy 2013b, pp. 55–7.

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## Chapter 5

# The *Synonyma* Literature in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries

Charles Burnett

One approach to the study of the globalization of knowledge consists in analyzing word lists (*synonyma*) that give equivalents in several different languages for *materia medica*. I will follow this path starting from Ibn Baklarīsh's *Kitāb al-Mustaʿīnī* from early twelfth-century Saragossa, through Stephen of Antioch's *Breviarium* written in 1127 in Antioch, to Simon of Genoa's *Clavis sanationis*, written in the Papal Court in the late thirteenth century. These *synonyma* show a deep concern on the part of the authors in enabling readers in different areas of the Mediterranean, and familiar with different languages, to correctly identify individual plants, animals, stones, and other medically useful items. They bear witness to their authors' and users' interests in philology, society, and culture.

### INTRODUCTION

One way of globalizing knowledge was through the use of dictionaries. A dictionary, after all, can provide a mirror reflecting words, concepts, or phrases in one language with those of another. A two-way dictionary would become a double mirror—with the capacity to reflect an image back and forth indefinitely. It is well known that dictionaries in the Middle Ages, along with grammars, were a rarity. We have a huge number of texts translated from Greek into Latin, Arabic into Latin, Latin into the vernaculars, Latin and Arabic into Hebrew, or Hebrew into Latin, but very little evidence of the dictionaries the translators used, if they used them at all. There are conspicuous exceptions: the Leiden Latin–Arabic glossary of circa 1175 used to reconcile Arabic-speaking Mozarabic Christians to the Latin rite; the College of Arms's Greek–Latin dictionary of 1275–1300, which might have been a copy of the dictionary commissioned by Robert Grosseteste (circa 1175–1253); and Samuel ben Tibbon's (circa 1150–circa 1230) Hebrew–Italian glossary of the early thirteenth century compiled as an aid to understanding Maimonides (1138–1204).<sup>1</sup> The focus of my chapter, however,

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<sup>1</sup> P.Sj. Van Koningsfeld, *The Latin-Arabic Glossary of the Leiden University Library* (Leiden: New Rhine Publishers, 1977); Carlotta Dionisotti, "On the Greek Studies of Robert Grosseteste," in *The Uses of Greek and Latin: Historical Essays*, ed. A.C. Dionisotti, Anthony Grafton, and Jill Kraye

is another context in which equivalent words are placed side by side, in a less studied context: that of the medical *synonyma*.

*Synonyma* is a term used to describe medical works that provide synonyms in the same or different languages for the ingredients of medicines—the medical simples. I shall concentrate on two examples, which happen to come from the two ends of the Mediterranean world, and emerged within a generation of each other. The example from the Western Mediterranean has Arabic as the language from which it starts, whereas that in the East has Latin. So there is a neat swap-over or chiasma here: the Western text employs a language imported from the East; the Eastern text, a language imported from the West. The Western text is the *Kitāb al-Mustaʿīnī* by Ibn Baklarīsh (flourished 494/1100); the Eastern, the *Breviarium* that Stephen of Antioch (flourished 1127) added to his translation of ʿAlī ibn al-ʿAbbās's (late fourth/tenth century) *Royal Book* on medicine. I shall end by looking at a text which draws on the *Breviarium*: the *Clavis sanationis* by Simon of Genoa.

### IBN BAKLARĪSH'S KITĀB AL-MUSTAʿĪNĪ

The *Kitāb al-Mustaʿīnī* was written for Mustaʿīn bi-Llāh Abū Jaʿfar Ahmad, the king of the Banū Hūd dynasty who ruled the Arabic kingdom of Saragossa from 478–494/1085–1110. Ibn Baklarīsh was a Jewish doctor of whom we know nothing aside from what he tells us in this book (namely that he had written an earlier book on dietetics).<sup>2</sup> We are lucky in having a copy that could have been written within his lifetime, being signed with the *hijra* date 6 Šafar 524, equivalent to 18 January 1130 AD, which is among the holdings of the Arcadian Library in London.<sup>3</sup> The manuscript is written on good quality Spanish cream-colored paper (similar to that used for the Leiden glossary), contrasting with the contemporary Latin manuscripts of Stephen of Antioch, which are still written on parchment (paper only came into use in Latin manuscripts later in the twelfth century).

The title describing the contents of the book is *Kitāb al-adwiya al-mufrada* (“The Book on Simple Medicines”). It begins with a substantial introduction, followed by tables describing each of the simple medicines (that is, plants, animals, animal parts, “earths,” and minerals), in five columns, providing

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(London: Warburg Institute, 1999), pp. 19–39, particularly pp. 24–6; G. Sermoneta, *Un glossario filosofico ebraico-italiano del XIII° secolo* (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1969). For further glossaries see *Dictionnaires et répertoires au moyen âge*, ed. Olga Weijers (Turnhout: Brepols, 1990); *Les manuscrits des lexiques et glossaires de l’Antiquité tardive à la fin du Moyen Age*, ed. J. Hamesse (Louvain-la-Neuve: FIDEM, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> For further details on *Kitāb al-Mustaʿīnī* see *Ibn Baklarish’s Book of Simples: Medical Remedies between Three Faiths in Twelfth-century Spain*, ed. Charles Burnett (Oxford: The Arcadian Library, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Reproductions of 52 pages of this manuscript are given in *Ibn Baklarish’s Book of Simples* (see note 2 above).

respectively (1) their names, (2) their elemental qualities and degrees, (3) their synonyms, (4) their substitutes, and (5) their uses.<sup>4</sup>

What interests us is the range of “synonyms” used for the simple medicines. The author himself claims to include the equivalent names in Syriac, Persian, classical and Byzantine Greek, Arabic, and ‘ajamiyya (non-Arabic, usually referring in the Western Mediterranean to Latin and Romance languages). The majority of these synonyms are from Arabic literary sources (this means they were appropriated from Arabic philologists who collected terms from all over the Arab world, hence there are references to words used in Oman, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and the Hijaz, as well as, on one occasion each, words in Nabatean and Coptic). Aside from his literary sources, however, Ibn Baklarīsh also appears to draw on his own experience of local terms, twice mentioning “a variant used in al-Andalus” (in the entries on *kummathrā* and *mahlab*) and once a term specific to Córdoba (the entry on *shāhisbaram/shāhishbaram*). More local words are taken from Arabic authorities in al-Andalus, such as Ibn Juljul (circa 322–circa 384/circa 944–circa 994), Abū l-Qāsim al-Zahrawī (351–403/961–1013), and Ibn Janāh (died circa 431/1040). The last was a native of Saragossa, who included in his works Romance terms specific to the Saragossa region. Although most of the terms in the copy of Ibn Baklarīsh’s dictionary are written in Arabic script, whatever their origin, there also are examples of the Latin script, both Visigothic and Caroline, and an isolated word in Hebrew. The bilingual nature of the Arcadian manuscript (in distinction to Ibn Baklarīsh’s original work) is highlighted by the text appearing on the last page, which gives in two languages a kind of magical formula, perhaps for protecting the book against being used by the wrong people.<sup>5</sup>

The process of identifying simple medicines in a variety of languages (and especially that of the reader or scribe) continues in the copying of the manuscripts of the *Kitāb al-Mustaʿīnī*. Even in the margins of the Arcadian Library manuscript we have words written in Latin script, alongside some equivalents in Arabic script. The main hand of the Latin script is distinguished by having accent marks added, reflecting, or assisting, the oral delivery of the terms. When we turn to the other manuscripts of the *Kitāb al-Mustaʿīnī* we find variants and glosses, which reflect further on the living languages of the copyists or readers. A Madrid manuscript of the twelfth century adds Castilian equivalents in the margin.<sup>6</sup> A fifteenth-century manuscript from Naples adds that “Deer horn (*qarn al-ayyil*) ... is called in the ‘ajamiyya ‘baynah dy sirbuh’ since among them ‘baynah’ means ‘horn’ and ‘sirbuh’ deer, and this is the

<sup>4</sup> Ana Labarta, “El prólogo de *al-Kitāb al-Mustaʿīnī* de Ibn Buklaris (texto árabe y traducción anotada),” in *Estudios sobre historia de la ciencia árabe*, ed. Juan Vernet (Barcelona: CSIC, 1980), pp. 181–316.

<sup>5</sup> This text is reproduced in Figure 5, and transcribed and translated on p. 10 of *Ibn Baklarish’s Book of Simples*.

<sup>6</sup> Juan Carlos Villaverde Amieva, “Towards the Study of the Romance Languages in the *Kitāb al-Mustaʿīnī*,” in *Ibn Baklarish’s Book of Simples*, pp. 43–74, particularly pp. 57–8.



‘ajamiyya of Aragon in the regions of Saragossa and Valencia.”<sup>7</sup> Other terms are referred to as coming specifically from Valencia, which Juan Carlos Villaverde Amieva has characterized as reflecting the “Arabic (Andalusi)-Romance (Catalan) bilingualism of late medieval Valencia.”<sup>8</sup> This trend continued into later centuries when the *Kitāb al-Musta‘īnī* was copied in Marrakesh in the seventeenth century and again somewhere in Morocco in the nineteenth century, when the scribes substituted words in their contemporary Castilian.<sup>9</sup>

What these manuscripts attest to is a living dictionary. It was possible to change the original lists of synonyms by Ibn Baklarīsh, and they were changed in the text, with new synonyms added in the margins by copyists and doubtless by medical practitioners, who were keen to identify medical ingredients correctly. And, true to the spirit of these earlier users of the *Kitāb al-Musta‘īnī*, subsequent lexicographers, such as Reinhart Dozy for Arabic and Francisco Javier Simonet for Spanish Romance, exploited the *Kitāb al-Musta‘īnī* for their dictionaries, which are still used by Arabists and historians of the Arabic and Romance languages.<sup>10</sup>

#### STEPHEN OF ANTIOCH’S *BREVIARIUM*

Let us now travel to the other end of the Mediterranean to look at the example of Stephen of Antioch’s *Breviarium*.<sup>11</sup> This glossary occurs at the end of his translation of the 20-book compendium of ‘Alī ibn al-Abbās al-Majūsī (“Haliabbas”), called in Arabic the *Kitāb al-malikī*, because it was composed for the Buwayhid prince ‘Aḍud al-Dawla (reigned 337–372/949–983) in the 60s of the fourth/70s of the tenth century. The Latin translation, the *Liber regalis*, is a truly regal and complete book of medicine, consisting of 10 volumes of medical theory and 10 volumes of practice. Stephen promised, at the end of his preface to the second, practical part of the work, to include a “breviary” of all the *materia medica* in Dioscorides’s book.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Villaverde Amieva 2008, p. 61.

<sup>8</sup> Villaverde Amieva 2008, p. 60.

<sup>9</sup> Villaverde Amieva 2008, pp. 64–72.

<sup>10</sup> Reinhart Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*. Second edition (Leiden: Brill, 1927); Francisco Javier Simonet, *Glosario de voces ibéricas y latinas usadas entre los Mozárabes : Precidido de un estudio sobre el dialecto hispánomozárabe* (Madrid: de Fortanet, 1881) and reprinted several times.

<sup>11</sup> For the intellectual context of Stephen of Antioch see Charles Burnett, “Antioch as a Link between Arabic and Latin culture in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,” in *Occident et Proche-Orient: contacts scientifiques au temps des croisades*, ed. I. Draelants, A. Tihon, and B. van den Abeele (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 1–78. (Reprinted in Charles Burnett, *Arabic into Latin in the Middle Ages* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), no. IV). For a fuller account of Stephen’s *Breviarium*, see Charles Burnett, “Simon of Genoa’s use of the *Breviarium* of Stephen, the Disciple of Philosophy,” in *Simon of Genoa’s Medical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Zipser (London: Versita, 2013), pp. 67–78.

<sup>12</sup> See Burnett 2000, p. 37; Burnett 2013, p. 68.

We are lucky in having two mid-twelfth century manuscripts of the *Liber regalis*, which were written not long after its translation: one now divided between the libraries of Leipzig (Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig, 1131) and Berlin (Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Staatsbibliothek, lat. Fol. 74), the other in Worcester (Cathedral Library, F 40). The *Breviarium* turns out to be a list of 583 medical simples, arranged in three columns, with the Greek on the left side, the equivalent Arabic terms on the right, and the occasional Latin translations in the middle. The Greek and Arabic words have all been transliterated into Roman script, but the list follows the Greek alphabetical order. The source of Stephen's Greek list is an index, which follows the text of Dioscorides in one family of manuscripts. But Stephen's list is found in manuscripts that are 200 years older than any of the Greek manuscripts providing this gloss.<sup>13</sup> They therefore prove that the Greek glossary dated to a much earlier period than had previously been thought, on the evidence of the Greek manuscripts. The source of the Arabic equivalents has not yet been identified. Stephen may have had access to a Greek manuscript of Dioscorides's text with Arabic annotations, such as the famous Anicia Juliana manuscript of the early sixth century, in which Dioscorides's herbs are already rearranged in alphabetical order, or the Pierpont Morgan manuscript of the tenth century, in which they are rearranged by categories.<sup>14</sup> He evidently had no such help for the Latin, since he had to work out himself what the equivalents were. He only succeeded in 162 cases. A large proportion of these, too, are simply the Greek or Arabic words with Latin terminations—a feature that we also find in the body of his translation of the *Liber regalis*. Sometimes, instead of a translation, a description is given: for instance, ἀθήρα is described as “a certain porridge that is made” (*polenta quedam que fit*) and Αἰθιοπῆς as a “spice whose name comes from Ethiopia” (*species et est ei nomen ab ethiopia*).<sup>15</sup>

Stephen of Antioch's *Breviarium*, therefore, is a literary piece: he takes his information predominantly from books, rather than from his personal experience of medicaments. At the end of the *Breviarium* he confesses that what he has presented is not his own work, but rather what he found in the work of others. He promises to devote more time to verifying and completing both the Greek and the Arabic terms.<sup>16</sup> But with respect to the Latin terms he begs

<sup>13</sup> I am grateful to Marie Cronier for identifying this source, which is the Syro-Palestinian family of the Greek Dioscorides. It has been edited in *Pedanii Dioscuridis Anazarbei De materia medica libri quinque*, ed. Max Wellmann, 3 Vols (Berlin: apud Weidmannos: 1906–14), vol. 3, pp. 109–35.

<sup>14</sup> The same names and alternative names, and many of the same phrases (such as “a plant which is named from coughing”) are written in Arabic alongside the illustrations in the Pierpont Morgan manuscript, 652 (reproduced in facsimile, *Pedanii Dioscuridis Anazarbaei De materia medica libri VII*, Paris: no publisher name, 1935). In both cases the Arabic annotations are considered to have been added after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople.

<sup>15</sup> MSS Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Staatsbibliothek, lat. Fol. 74, f. 334v; Worcester, Cathedral Library, F 40, f. 135ra.

<sup>16</sup> MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, lat. Fol. 74, f. 343r. Burnett 2000, pp. 39–40; Burnett 2013, p. 71.

his readers to ask Greek and Arabic speakers “in Sicily and Salerno” for the Latin equivalents.<sup>17</sup>

Stephen refers several times to “Syria” as the place where he was situated. This is likely to be Antioch, for we know that the various books of the *Liber regalis* were translated (or at least copied) in Antioch on several dates within 1127. But Stephen’s reference to consultation in Sicily and Salerno suggests that he was envisaging a readership in Italy (he himself came from Pisa). Did the *Breviarium* reach audiences in Italy? If so, what did they make of it? The three earliest witnesses to the text, in fact, are definitely not Italian. The manuscript divided between Berlin and Leipzig was in the south of France. It is tempting to think that it had something to do with the nascent medical school of Montpellier, of which the first signs of existence date from the mid-twelfth century.<sup>18</sup> The Worcester manuscript was written in the scriptorium of Worcester cathedral in the mid-twelfth century. The third witness is an antidotary (a collection of medical recipes) by the monk Northungus of Hildesheim, who already had access to Stephen’s text in Northern Germany back in 1140.<sup>19</sup> This suggests diffusion not from Italy, but from the Principality of Antioch, which included a cosmopolitan society of European crusaders, clerics, and adventurers, who may have taken copies back to their home centers. Of diffusion in Italy there is little evidence before the fifteenth century, when two manuscripts were copied in Venice, and an edition was made in Novara.<sup>20</sup>

So to early readers not in contact with speakers from Sicily or Salerno, the Greek and Arabic of the glossary would have been of little help. And the absence of marginal equivalents in a more familiar language—and of marginal annotations altogether—corroborates the impression that the *Breviarium* was not used by doctors. What we have, then, is almost the complete opposite of the *Kitāb al-Mustaʿīnī*, in which local names already occur among the synonyms of the original, and to which more names in the local vernacular were added in each manuscript copy.

#### SIMON OF GENOA’S *CLAVIS SANATIONIS*

The lack of understanding on the part of the readers and the copyists of the *Breviarium* meant that the text progressively deteriorated with time. Evidence for this are the citations of the work by Simon of Genoa in the late thirteenth

<sup>17</sup> Burnett 2000, p. 39; Burnett 2013, pp. 68–9. Stephen is presumably referring to the Medical School of Salerno, and maybe another school in Sicily, but Greek and Arabic would also have been spoken in parts of the countryside of both these places and Stephen could have communicated with these informants in a Romance vernacular.

<sup>18</sup> I am grateful to Bernd Michael of the Staatsbibliothek, Berlin for this information on the Berlin manuscript.

<sup>19</sup> See Mary Wack, “‘Ali ibn al-‘Abbas and Constantine on Love,” in *Constantine the African and ‘Alī ibn al-‘Abbās al-Mağūsī: The Pantegni and Related Texts*, ed. Charles Burnett, and Danielle Jacquart (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 161–202, especially pp. 189–92.

<sup>20</sup> Printed by Bernardino Rizzo in 1492.

century. In his *Clavis sanationis* (“Key to health”) Simon drew upon a large range of authors, as available in Latin, to describe each simple medicine in terms of its appearance, its varieties, its properties, and its uses, and to give equivalents in Greek and Arabic.<sup>21</sup> It is written in narrative form rather than in tables or as a glossary. The simples are arranged in a strict alphabetical order, but this time following the Latin rather than the Greek alphabet.

Simon refers to a *Synonyma Stephani* frequently throughout his catalog of medical simples. That he is referring to a book of the same format as the *Breviarium* is clear from an instance in which he describes the arrangement of the lemmata:

Idem error apparet in synonymis Ste<phani> ubi nomina G<raeca> exponuntur per A<rabica>, deinde per Latina

The same error [concerning the *nux romana*] appears in the *Synonyms* of Stephen, where Greek names are explained through Arabic ones, and then through Latin.

And when one looks for the quotations from the *Synonyma* in the *Clavis sanationis*, one finds them in very similar words in the *Breviarium*. But the difference is that the text Simon had in front of him was often corrupt. Where the *Breviarium* has “agaloxon” for the Greek ἀγάλοχον, Simon has “agalosia”; where it has “adarkis” (ἀδάρκης) Simon has “adharsis”; Stephen’s “aegiros” (αἰγείρος), with the Arabic equivalent “lauzrumia” (*lawz rūmiyya*) becomes “agiros ... geum romi”; Stephen’s “catafum” (Arabic *qataf*) becomes “coatutum”; his “acalifi” (ἀκαλύφη) *engera et est corisum* becomes in Simon: “acalife evagna est drisum non est arabicum, nam amure est urtica arabice”; “amaracon (ἀμάρακον) achauanum” becomes “almaracum ... est acvavum.”<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, where Stephen had written “alisma (ἄλισμα) zemarat elrai” Simon added the correct interpretation of the Arabic “zemat elray,” namely “fistula pastoris” (“shepherd’s pipe” = *zamārat al-rāʿī*).<sup>23</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

What I have tried to show is that Ibn Baklārīsh’s *Kitāb al-Mustaʿīn* not only continued to be copied over the centuries, but continued to be used and improved, as witnessed by the addition of local names of herbs, or substitution

<sup>21</sup> The whole text is available in transcription on “Simon Online”: [www.simonofgenoa.org](http://www.simonofgenoa.org) last accessed 26 October 2014 (the passages referred to in the following paragraph can be accessed by a simple search mechanism).

<sup>22</sup> Stephen regularly transliterates the Greek *khi* with the “x” symbol, while he transliterates *xi* as “ks.”

<sup>23</sup> Of course, the manuscripts of the *Clavis sanationis* should be fully checked to see whether they reflect the same corruptions observable in the version used for Simon Online.

of more recent terms for obsolete ones. Stephen of Antioch's *Breviarium*, on the other hand, remained the same in the process of its transmission; in fact, its text progressively deteriorated as it was copied, and when the book that it accompanied (Haliabbas' *Liber regalis*) was printed, it was dropped altogether in favor of a version of Simon of Genoa's *Clavis sanationis*.<sup>24</sup> The lack of use of the glossary might be explained in part by its format. The *Kitāb al-Mustaʿīnī* usually was the only text in a manuscript, and its tabular form made it easy to use. Stephen's glossary was an appendix to a very bulky medical text which generally filled two manuscripts. It was not easy to read, especially since the entries in each of the columns tended to get displaced so that, in the Berlin manuscript at least, the equivalent words in Greek, Latin, and Arabic had to be linked by lines.

Pharmacy affords very rich evidence for networks of transmission, for ingredients of medicines are transported great distances. As Oliver Kahl writes in his introduction to the *Dispensatory* of Ibn al-Tilmīdh (465–560/1073–1165), a Baghdādī contemporary of Ibn Baklarīsh: "If we were to compare Arabic pharmacology to a building, we would be looking at a very elaborate and complex architectural structure, made by using materials and styles from different parts of the world and joining them together in an ingenious though somewhat idiosyncratic fashion." Kahl mentions the Greek-Syriac tradition, the experience of the vast Islamic empire, and trade and commerce with the southern regions of China, as sources for the Arabic tradition.<sup>25</sup> Merely exploring the ways a single medical simple, musk, traveled from its homelands in Tibet and Western China reveals a vast network of routes followed, by land and by sea.<sup>26</sup> The study of medical *synonyma*, such as those of Ibn Baklarīsh and Stephen of Antioch, and their manuscripts, shows how the knowledge of these medical simples was diffused throughout the Mediterranean, in between Arabic, Greek, and Latin-reading communities, sometimes in a bookish way, but at other times through experience of the terms and usages of the localities through which they passed.

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<sup>24</sup> This is the case for the printing by Iacobus Myt in Lyon in 1523 (*Haly filius Abbas, Liber totius medicine necessaria continens*).

<sup>25</sup> *The Dispensatory of Ibn al-Tilmīdh*, Arabic text, English translation, study and glossaries by Oliver Kahl (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 1–2.

<sup>26</sup> These are a leitmotif in the collection of articles in *Islam and Tibet-Interactions along the Musk Routes*, ed. Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

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### Website

[www.simonofgenoa.org](http://www.simonofgenoa.org)

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## Chapter 6

# The Cultural Transfer of Zaydī and non-Zaydī Religious Literature from Northern Iran to Yemen (Sixth/Twelfth Century through Eighth/Fourteenth Century)<sup>1</sup>

Hassan Ansari and Sabine Schmidtke

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Zaydī community is a branch of Shīʿī Islam that has flourished mainly in two regions, namely the mountainous Northern Highlands of Yemen and the Caspian regions of Northern Iran. It has survived mainly in the modern state of Yemen. The community's historical roots can be traced back to the second/eighth century, when Zayd ibn ʿAlī (died 122/740)—a great-great-grandson of the prophet Muḥammad—was killed during a Shīʿī uprising in Kufa, in Iraq. By recognizing Zayd ibn ʿAlī as the fifth imām (after ʿAlī, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, and ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn), the Zaydiyya seceded from the rest of the Shīʿī community. During its formative phase the group was located in Kufa, and it was there that the earliest scholars laid the foundations for the emerging Zaydī legal tradition as reflected in the works attributed to Zayd ibn ʿAlī.<sup>2</sup> Gradually, several legal schools arose within Zaydism, although historically the school founded by Imām al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm al-Rassī (died 246/860) remained the most influential. In

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<sup>1</sup> This is the sixth in the authors' series of studies dealing with the transmission of knowledge from Iran to Yemen in the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries: Hassan Ansari, and Sabine Schmidtke, "Muʿtazilism after ʿAbd al-Jabbār: Abū Rashīd al-Nīsābūrī's *Kitāb Masāʾil al-khilāfī l-uṣūl*," *Studia Iranica* 39 (2010a): 227–78; Hassan Ansari, and Sabine Schmidtke, "The Zaydī Reception of Ibn Khallād's *Kitāb al-Uṣūl*: The *taʿlīq* of Abū Ṭāhir ibn ʿAlī al-Ṣaffār," *Journal Asiatique* 298 (2010b): 275–302; Hassan Ansari, and Sabine Schmidtke, "The Literary-Religious Tradition among 7th/13th-century Yemenī Zaydīs: The Formation of the Imām al-Mahdī li-Dīn Allāh Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Qāsim (died 656/1258)," *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 2 (2011b): 165–222; Hassan Ansari, and Sabine Schmidtke, "Muʿtazilism in Rayy and Astarābād: Abū l-Faḍl al-ʿAbbās ibn Sharwīn," *Studia Iranica* 41 (2012): 57–100; Hassan Ansari, and Sabine Schmidtke, "Between Aleppo and Ṣaʿda: The Zaydī Reception of the Imāmī Scholar Ibn al-Bīṭrīq al-Ḥillī," *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 4 (2013a): 160–200.

<sup>2</sup> Najam Haider, *The Origins of the Shīʿa: Identity, Ritual and Sacred Space in Eighth-century Kufah* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Najam Haider, "A Kūfan Jurist in Yemen: Contextualizing Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Kūfī's *Kitāb al-Muntakhab*," *Arabica* 59 (2012): 200–17.



theology, his views deviated from earlier Zaydī dogma, as he advocated human free will and the absolute otherness of God from His creation, as opposed to predeterminism and anthropomorphism.<sup>3</sup> In the third/ninth century, Zaydī activity had shifted to Northern Iran. During the lifetime of al-Qāsim, his legal doctrine was brought to Tabaristan by some of his followers, and a first Zaydī state was established in 250/864 on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea. From the third/ninth through the early seventh/thirteenth century, the leading intellectual centers of Zaydism were located in Tabaristan, Daylaman, and Gilan in the Caspian region, as well as in Rayy and in Bayhaq in Khurasan. In these regions, the teachings of Imām al-Nāṣir al-Kabīr al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī al-Uṭrūsh (died 304/917), who emphasized the early Kufan tradition in his teaching, became dominant. His followers were called Nāṣiriyya, after him. A second Zaydī state was founded by al-Qāsim’s grandson al-Hādī ilā l-Ḥaqq (died 298/911), who rejected the Caspian model, in the tribal region of the mountainous Northern Highlands of Yemen, with Ṣa‘da as its capital. Al-Hādī, who hailed from Jabal al-Rass in the Hijaz, brought the Zaydī *da‘wa* (“summons to allegiance”) to Yemen in 284/897 and was accompanied by a sizeable group of ‘Alid and Zaydī Ṭabarī immigrants. He systematized his grandfather’s doctrines in several seminal works, and although he deviated in some respects from al-Qāsim’s legal and doctrinal thought, the Yemeni Zaydīs principally identified the Hādawī with the Qāsimī legal tradition.<sup>4</sup>

The two Zaydī states that were established in Yemen and Northern Iran constituted separate political and cultural entities. As a result of their geographical remoteness and political isolation, during the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries the Zaydīs of Yemen became increasingly isolated

<sup>3</sup> Wilferd Madelung, *Der Imam al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen*. Studien zur Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965). Binyamin Abrahamov’s studies on al-Qāsim’s doctrinal thought should be treated with caution since they are partly based on works that have been falsely attributed to him. See his *On the Proof of God’s Existence*. Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr (Leiden: Brill, 1990) and *Anthropomorphism and Interpretation of the Qur’ān in the Theology of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm*: Kitāb al-Mustarshid (Leiden: Brill, 1996). Compare Wilferd Madelung, “Imam al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm and Mu‘tazilism,” in *On Both Sides of al-Mandab: Ethiopian, South-Arabian and Islamic Studies Presented to Oscar Löfgren on his Ninetieth Birthday 13 May 1988 by Colleagues and Friends*. Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, Transactions (Stockholm: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 1989), vol. 2, pp. 39–48 (Reprinted in Wilferd Madelung, *Studies in Medieval Shī‘ism* (Farnham: Ashgate 2012), no. IV); Wilferd Madelung, “Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm and Christian theology,” *Aram Periodical/Majallat Ārām* 3, no. i–ii (1991b): 35–44 (Reprinted in Wilferd Madelung, *Studies in Medieval Shī‘ism* (Farnham: Ashgate 2012), no. V).

<sup>4</sup> For al-Hādī’s biography and political career, see the *sīra* composed by his companion ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-‘Abbāsī al-‘Alawī, *Sīrat al-Hādī ilā l-Ḥaqq*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Beirut: Dār al-fikr li-l-ṭibā‘a wa-l-nashr wa-l-tawzī‘, 1392/1972). The *sīra* was the principal source of Cornelius van Arendonk, *De opkomst van het zaiditische imamaat in Yemen* (Leiden: Brill, 1919). On this document see also Wilferd Madelung, “Land Ownership and Land Tax in Northern Yemen and Najrān: 3rd–4th/9th–10th Century,” in *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East*, ed. Tarif Khalidi (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1981), pp. 189–207 (Reprinted in Wilferd Madelung, *Religious and Ethnic Movements in Medieval Islam* (Hampshire: Variorum, 1992), no. XI).

from their coreligionists in Iran. While the Zaydīs outside Yemen were exposed during this period to the flourishing intellectual life that was unfolding in their immediate vicinity and took an active part in its development, the Zaydīs of Yemen continued to be confined to the religious legacy of the Imāms al-Qāsim, al-Hādī, and the latter's two sons, al-Murtaḍā li-Dīn Allāh (died 309/922) and al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh (died 322/934). Moreover, in addition to facing internal strife and the rise of sectarian movements such as the pietist Muṭarrifiyya (mid-fourth/tenth century), they were increasingly under threat of extinction during the reign of the Ismā'īlī Ṣulayhids, who had captured Sanaa in 446/1054, making it the capital of their state, which encompassed most of Yemen. The situation changed radically in the early sixth/twelfth century, when a rapprochement between the two Zaydī communities began that eventually resulted in their political unification. In 501/1108 Abū Ṭālib, a great-grandson of Imām al-Mu'ayyad bi-Llāh (died 411/1020), successfully rose up in Gilan, claiming the Zaydī imamate. A few years later, in 511/1117, he was endorsed by the Zaydīs of Yemen as well. In addition, he was able to restore the sovereignty of the Zaydī state in Yemen, defeating the Ṣulayhids. Although Abū Ṭālib *al-akhīr* died in 520/1126, his political legacy continued after his death. In 531/1137, Aḥmad ibn Sulaymān (died 566/1171) rose up in Yemen as Imām al-Mutawakkil 'alā Llāh, expressly acknowledging the legitimacy of the Zaydī *imāms* of the Caspian region and maintaining the unity of the Zaydīs. With the rise of al-Mutawakkil's successor, the Yemeni Imām al-Manṣūr bi-Llāh (ruled 593/1197–614/1217), who had claimed the Zaydī imamate 17 years after the death of his predecessor and was endorsed by the Zaydīs of Yemen and the Caspian region alike, the political center of Zaydism eventually shifted from Iran to Yemen, with Iranian Zaydism gradually falling into oblivion.<sup>5</sup>

#### THE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER FROM NORTHERN IRAN TO YEMEN (SIXTH/TWELFTH THROUGH EIGHTH/FOURTEENTH CENTURY) AND ITS INTELLECTUAL REPERCUSSIONS

The political unification of the two Zaydī states was accompanied by a transfer of knowledge from Northern Iran to Yemen that comprised nearly the entire literary and religious legacy of Caspian Zaydism. Moreover, in view of the intimate involvement of Iranian Zaydī scholarship in the intellectual life of the time, this transfer comprised other religious traditions and literary sources as well, including a wealth of Sunnī, Imāmī, and Ismā'īlī works. Most of this legacy is preserved today in the private and public libraries of Yemen as well

<sup>5</sup> Madelung 1965 remains the authoritative study on the evolution of Zaydism in Yemen up until the thirteenth century. For the political and social history of Yemen during this period, see also David Thomas Gochenour, *The Penetration of Zaydī Islam into Early Medieval Yemen*, PhD dissertation (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1984) and Thomas Gochenour, "A Revised Bibliography of Medieval Yemeni History in Light of Recent Publications and Discoveries," *Der Islam* 63 (1986): 309–22.

as in the various European collections of manuscripts of Yemeni provenance. The transfer of knowledge was initiated by Abū Ṭālib al-akhīr, who dispatched the learned Caspian qāḍī Abū Ṭālib Naṣr ibn Abī Ṭālib ibn Abī Jaʿfar to Ṣaʿda to introduce the rich religious legacy of Northern Iran to the Zaydīs of Yemen. During the reign of al-Mutawakkil, the knowledge transfer from Iran to Yemen was further intensified. Additional scholars were invited to come to Yemen, among them the renowned Fakhr al-Dīn Zayd ibn al-Ḥasan al-Bayhaqī al-Barawqanī, who arrived in 540/1146 bringing along numerous books by Khurasanian and Northern Iranian authors and acting as a teacher to the imām and to other scholars of Yemen. At the same time, Zaydī scholars of Yemen left for Iran and Iraq for the purpose of studying, the most renowned being Qāḍī Jaʿfar ibn Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Salām al-Buhlūlī al-Abnāwī (died 573/1177), who left Yemen in 544/1149. The available sources provide a detailed picture of the journey that led him to Mecca, Iraq (particularly Kufa), and Iran. One of Qāḍī Jaʿfar’s most influential teachers was Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn Abī l-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī al-Kanī al-Ardastānī (died *circa* 559/1164–5), with whom he studied in Rayy, one of the most important centers of Zaydī and non-Zaydī scholarship at the time. With his return to Yemen, around 553/1158, Qāḍī Jaʿfar brought with him a large number of literary sources, Zaydī and non-Zaydī, that were subsequently transmitted through him.<sup>6</sup>

During the reign of al-Manṣūr, the knowledge transfer to Yemen reached its peak. The imām founded a library in Ṣafār, his town of residence, for which he had a wealth of textual sources copied by a team of scholars and scribes. In 1929 the rich holdings of his library, which continued to grow under his successors, were transferred from Ṣafār to the newly founded al-Khizāna al-Mutawakkiliyya in Sanaa, which had been established by Imām al-Mutawakkil ʿalā Llāh Yaḥyā Ḥamīd al-Dīn (ruled 1286–1367/1869–1948). The library, which is housed even today in the complex of the Great Mosque of Sanaa, is also known as al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya (since 1984: Maktabat al-Awqāf).<sup>7</sup> During al-Manṣūr’s reign the intellectual dependence of Yemeni Zaydism on the northern Zaydī state was inverted, and the relationship worked the opposite way. This is suggested by the fact that the imām dispatched Yemeni scholars abroad not only for the purpose of learning but also in order to teach, and by the recent discovery of some texts from Yemen in Iranian libraries.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For Qāḍī Jaʿfar, see Madelung 1965, pp. 212–8 and *passim*; Wilferd Madelung, “Djaʿfar b. Abī Yaḥyā, Shams al-Dīn Abu ʿl-Faḍl,” *EF*, eds P.J. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, vol. 12 (Supplement), (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p. 236.

<sup>7</sup> A brief sketch of the history of the library is given in Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid, *Sources de l’histoire du Yémen à l’époque musulmane. Textes et traductions d’auteurs orientaux 7* (Cairo: al-Maʿhad al-ʿilmī al-farānsī li-l-āthār al-sharqiyya, 1974), p. 420. The holdings of the library have been catalogued twice during the twentieth century: *Fihrist kutub al-khizāna al-Mutawakkiliyya al-ʿāmirā bi-l-Jāmiʿ al-Muqaddas bi-Ṣanʿā* (Sanaa: Wizārat al-maʿārif, 1361/1942); Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ruqayḥī, ʿAbd al-Allāh al-Ḥibshī, and ʿAlī Wahhāb al-ʿAnsī, *Fihrist Makhṭūʿāt Maktabat al-Jāmiʿ al-kabīr Ṣanʿā* ([Sanaa: Wizārat al-awqāf wa-l-irshād, 1404/1984).

<sup>8</sup> Hassan Ansari, and Sabine Schmidtke 2010b.

There are sufficient indications that the Zaydīs of Yemen continued to travel abroad seeking knowledge, at least until the time of Imām Yahyā ibn Ḥamza (died 749/1348–9), bringing additional literary sources back to Yemen.<sup>9</sup> There is also the fact that the Sunni environment in the coastal regions of Yemen, which presented a constant challenge to the Zaydī community, changed significantly during the period under consideration, namely from traditionalism to Shāfi‘ism/Ash‘arism, a development that also left its mark on the intellectual evolution of Zaydism in Yemen. Al-Manṣūr, for example, is known not only to have engaged in polemical exchanges with Sunnī scholars in his immediate locale, but also to have studied with a fair number of them.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, since the time of al-Hādī, the Zaydīs had been confronted with a strong Ismā‘īlī presence, which constituted not only a military and political challenge but also an intellectual one, a situation that also left its mark on Zaydī, particularly Muṭarrifī, thought as it evolved over time.

Intellectually, Yemeni Zaydism underwent dramatic changes during the period under consideration, prompted by the knowledge transfer described above. Theology was clearly the most fiercely contested discipline during this period. For centuries, the Zaydīs of Yemen adhered to a rather limited canon of doctrinal texts from the pen of the early Imāms al-Qāsim, al-Hādī, and the latter’s descendants. At the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century, the Muṭarrifiyya emerged—named after Muṭarrif ibn Shihāb (died circa 459/1067)—which became the most important school of Zaydism in Yemen during the fifth/eleventh and early sixth/twelfth centuries. Its adherents insisted on following the Hādawī doctrine while at the same time developing a cosmology and natural philosophy of their own. Most renowned among their teachings was their view that God had created the world out of three or four elements, namely water, air, wind, and fire. Changes in the world result from the interaction of these constituents of the physical world rather than from God’s acting upon it directly.<sup>11</sup> Imām al-Mutawakkil initially seems to have

<sup>9</sup> See the forthcoming study and collection of relevant material by Hassan Ansari, and Sabine Schmidtke, *Licence to Transmit. The Spread of Mu‘tazilī and Zaydī Thought as Documented in Ijāzas. Volume One: Iran and Iraq. Volume Two: Yemen up to Imām Yahyā ibn Ḥamza (died 749/1348–9). Volume Three: Yemen (mid 8th/14th–11th/17th Century)*.

<sup>10</sup> Hassan Ansari, and Sabine Schmidtke 2013a.

<sup>11</sup> For an outline of their doctrinal views, based on the analysis of an authentic Muṭarrifī work by Sulaymān ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Muḥallī (flourished second half of the sixth/twelfth century), *al-Burhān al-rā‘iq*, see Wilferd Madelung, “A Muṭarrifī Manuscript,” in *Proceedings of the Vth Congress of Arabic and Islamic Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), pp. 75–83 (Reprinted in Wilferd Madelung, *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* (London: Variorum reprints, 1985), no. XIX); see also Wilferd Madelung, “The Origins of the Yemenite Hijra,” in *Arabicus felix lumenus britannicus: Essays in Honour of A.F.L. Beeston on his Eightieth Birthday* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1991a), pp. 25–44 (Reprinted in Madelung 1992, no. XIII); Wilferd Madelung, “Muṭarrifiyya,” *EP*, eds C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, and Ch. Pellat, ass. F.Th. Dijkema (pp. 1–384), P.J. Bearman (pp. 385–1058), and Mme S. Nurit (Leiden: Brill, 1998), vol. 7, pp. 772–73; Madelung 1965, pp. 202–3. See also ‘Alī Muḥammad Zayd, *Tayyārāt Mu‘tazilat al-Yaman fi l-qarn al-sādis al-hijri* (Sanaa: al-Markaz al-faransī li-l-dirāsāt al-yamaniyya, 1997) (which is based on the author’s doctoral dissertation submitted in 1986 to

adhered to Muṭarrifi doctrines, especially during the first decades of his reign, when he depended on the movement's political and military support, whereas later he turned towards the doctrines of the Caspian Zaydis, who were faithful followers of the rival Bahshamite strand of the Mu'tazila. During his reign, Yemen was exposed to the doctrinal literature of the Bahshamiyya, and in their sophistication the doctrines of the Bahshamiyya clearly eclipsed those of the Muṭarrifiyya, particularly in the crucial areas of ontology and causality.<sup>12</sup> The conflict between the two strands intensified during the interregnum between al-Mutawakkil and al-Manṣūr, when the Muṭarrifiyya was able to regain ground. Most of the (few) Muṭarrifi texts that are still extant were apparently written during this period.<sup>13</sup> Their respective authors were well acquainted with the recently imported theological literature. In their fight against the doctrines of the Bahshamiyya they refined their initially rather simple doctrines and argumentation by employing the writings of representatives of the school of Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī (died 319/931), an important rival strand to the Bahshamiyya within the Mu'tazila, some knowledge of which had also reached Yemen during this period.<sup>14</sup> With al-Manṣūr's rise to the imamate, Bahshamite doctrines finally gained the upper hand and an all-out war was waged against the Muṭarrifiyya.<sup>15</sup> While countless refutations of the Muṭarrifiyya are preserved that were written during al-Manṣūr's reign and the following decades of the seventh/thirteenth century,<sup>16</sup> we possess only a few fragments of Muṭarrifi works from this period.<sup>17</sup>

The Bahshamite trend had to face other challenges during the seventh/thirteenth and particularly the eighth/fourteenth centuries: opposition arose during the first half of the seventh/thirteenth century, led by scholars such

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Université de Paris III). There are a few dogmatic works by Muṭarrifi authors that still await thorough analysis, for example Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Buḥayrī (died 577/1181), *Sharḥ 'alā faṣl al-Imām al-Murtaḍā Muḥammad ibn al-Imām al-Hādī fī l-tawḥīd*. The text is extant in two manuscripts, see 'Abd al-Salām ibn 'Abās al-Wajīh, *Maṣādir al-turāth fī l-maktabāt al-khāṣṣa fī l-Yaman*, 2 vols. (McLean, VA: Mu'assasat al-Imām Zayd ibn 'Alī al-thaqāfiyya, 2002), vol. 2, pp. 87, 137. See also Madelung 1985, part XIX (addenda), for another relevant manuscript in the British Library (MS London, British Library, Or. 4009).

<sup>12</sup> Jan Thiele, *Theologie in der jemenitischen Zaydiyya: Die naturphilosophischen Überlegungen des al-Ḥasan al-Raṣṣāṣ* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> See above, n. 10, for details.

<sup>14</sup> For al-Balkhī's doctrines, see Racha el-Omari, *Abū l-Qāsim al-Ka'bi/al-Balkhī and the Baghdādī Mu'tazilite School* (Leiden: Brill [forthcoming]).

<sup>15</sup> The principal historical source for al-Manṣūr's fight against the Muṭarrifiyya is the *sīra* of the imām by his chief secretary Abū Firas ibn Dī'ṭham. Volumes Two and Three have been published in the edition of 'Abd al-Ghanī Maḥmūd 'Abd al-'Āṭī, *Al-Ṣirā' al-fikrī fī l-Yaman bayn al-Zaydiyya wa-l-Muṭarrifiyya* (al-Haram [Giza]: 'Ayn lil-dirāsāt wa-al-buḥūth al-insāniyya wa-l-ijtimā'iyya, 2002) Another copy of Volume Two that was not consulted by the editor is preserved as MS Vatican ar. 1061; see Giorgio Levi Della Vida, *Elenco dei manoscritti arabi islamici della Biblioteca vaticana*. 3 vols. (Vatican: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1935), vol. 1, p. 131. Hassan Ansari has identified copies of Volumes One and Four of the *sīra*, which previously had been presumed lost; see his "Dū jild-i tāze yābe sīra-yi Manṣūr bi-li-lāh," accessed 14 November 2014, <http://ansari.kateban.com/entry2096.html>.

<sup>16</sup> 'Abd al-'Āṭī 2002.

<sup>17</sup> See above, n. 10.

as Ḥumaydān ibn Yaḥyā (died 656/1258), who sought to weaken the influence of Muʿtazilite doctrine and methodology on Zaydī theology, emphasizing the latter's independence.<sup>18</sup> His younger contemporary, ʿAbdallāh ibn Zayd al-ʿAnsī (died 667/1269), shared Ḥumaydān's desire to return to the early Zaydī doctrines but at the same time he supported the methodology of *kalām*. In his eyes, the views of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (died 436/1045)—a former student of ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī (died 415/1025), the head of the Bahshamiyya, who in many ways departed from the Bahshamite doctrine of his teacher—were much closer to the teachings of the early Zaydī imāms than to Bahshamite doctrines, and he formulated a doctrinal thought that can in many ways be considered original.<sup>19</sup> The different rival strands continued to exist during most of the seventh/thirteenth century and beyond, with their respective adherents fiercely polemicizing against each other. In many cases they also represented the rival political factions that evolved during this period.

The field of prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) likewise underwent dramatic changes during this period. Zaydī scholars had compiled comprehensive collections of *ḥadīth*. In contrast to Twelver Shīʿites, who consistently rejected any non-Shīʿī traditions, the Zaydis of Iran included both Sunnī and Shīʿī traditions. Among the earliest comprehensive Zaydī *ḥadīth* collections that are extant and that comprise both Sunnī and Shīʿī traditions are *Sharḥ al-Tajrīd* by the Caspian Imām al-Muʿayyad bi-Llāh, the *Amālī* by al-Nāṭiq bi-l-Ḥaqq (died 424/1033),<sup>20</sup> the *Amālī* by Abū Saʿd al-Sammān (died 445/1053),<sup>21</sup> and the *Amālī* by al-Murshad bi-Llāh (died 479/1086–7 or 499/1106).<sup>22</sup> In contrast to their Iranian coreligionists, the Zaydis of Yemen were unfamiliar with Sunnī *ḥadīth* material prior to the unification of the two communities. In the course of the transfer of knowledge to Yemen, works such as the *Sharḥ al-Tajrīd* and the various *Amālī* books arrived in Yemen. Moreover, the Zaydis of Yemen were

<sup>18</sup> For his writings and thought, see al-Sayyid Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, *Al-Imām Ḥumaydān ibn Ḥumaydān wa-ārāʾuhu al-kalāmiyya wa-l-falsafiyya* (Alexandria: Dār al-wafāʾ li-dunyā, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> See Hassan Ansari, and Sabine Schmidtke, *Zaydī Theology in 7th/13th Century Yemen: Facsimile Edition of Kitāb al-Maḥajja al-bayḍā fi uṣūl al-dīn of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Zayd al-ʿAnsī (died 667/1269)* (MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. arab. 1286) (Tehran: Mīrāth-i maktūb [forthcoming]) and our forthcoming study, *Zaydī Muʿtazilism in 7th/13th Century Yemen: The Theological Thought of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Zayd al-ʿAnsī (died 667/1268)*. On Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, see Wilferd Madelung, “Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam. Three* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), fasc. 2007–1, pp. 16–19 (with further references).

<sup>20</sup> See Etan Kohlberg, *Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Tāwūs and His Library* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 110–11, no. 29. The work was repeatedly published in the recension of Qāḍī Jaʿfar, entitled *Taysīr al-maṭālib min [fi] Amālī Abī Ṭālib*. See, for instance, Qāḍī Jaʿfar ibn Aḥmad al-Ṣanʿānī, *Taysīr al-maṭālib min [fi] Amālī Abī Ṭālib*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Ḥammūd al-ʿIzzī (Amman: Muʿassasat al-Imām Zayd ibn ʿAlī al-thaqāfiyya, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> On the work and its author, see Hassan Ansari, “Un muḥaddith muʿtazilite zaydite: Abū Saʿd al-Sammān et ses *Amālī*,” *Arabica* 59 (2012): 267–90.

<sup>22</sup> His *al-Amālī al-khamisiyya* or *Amālī al-Shajari* in the recension of Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Walīd al-Qurashī al-Anf (died 623/1226) were published repeatedly. In addition, he compiled *al-Amālī al-ithniniyya*, or *al-Anwār*. These are likewise published.

now increasingly keen on using Sunnī pro-ʿAlid traditions in their battle against the Shāfiʿīs in Yemen, who were polemicizing against Shīʿism. During the time of al-Manṣūr, when the Zaydis of Yemen did not yet have independent access to Sunnī collections, they also used Ibn al-Maghāzili's (died 483/1090) *Manāqib ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib* and Twelver Shīʿī works such as Ibn al-Biṭrīq's (died 600/1203–4 or 601/1204–5) *ʿUmda*—that is works containing numerous pro-ʿAlid traditions culled from Sunnī canonical *ḥadīth* collections.<sup>23</sup> Although the corpus of Sunnī *ḥadīth* collections—which grew rapidly over time—was used primarily to bolster the Shīʿī perspective against Sunnī opponents, this development helped to pave the way for the eventual “Sunnification” of Zaydism, a process that is usually said to have started with Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Wazīr (“Ibn al-Wazīr”, died 840/1436) and to have reached its peak with Muḥammad al-Shawkānī (died 1250/1834).<sup>24</sup> However, this important trend had in fact started centuries before and was the immediate result of the transfer of religious literature to Yemen. The successive stages of this process can be traced in detail on the basis of the available manuscripts, *ijāzas*, chains of transmission, and kindred (documentary) material.<sup>25</sup>

Similar processes can be observed in other disciplines of learning during this period, such as legal methodology, Qurʾanic exegesis, and law, to name only the most prominent fields of inquiry. The transfer of a massive body of religio-cultural knowledge from Northern Iran and Iraq to Yemen stretched over a period of nearly three centuries and is without parallel in its intensity and comprehensiveness. The intellectual environment in which it initially began continually evolved and was subject to dramatic transformations as time went on. The mechanisms at work were highly variegated, as were the modes of preserving, transmitting, and consuming an ever-growing corpus of “old” and “new” texts. Although the basic historical facts as outlined above are relatively well known, to date the details of the chronological dynamics of the extended and comprehensive process of knowledge transfer and its implications for the intellectual development of Yemeni Zaydism have been determined with respect to just a few case studies, which only scratch the surface of the rich and diverse source materials that are available for a more comprehensive study of the entire process in all its complexities.

Importing and dispatching scholars, establishing libraries, and systematically transcribing literature are known to have been among the important vehicles of transfer, but none of these has been studied so far in any detail, neither from a diachronic perspective nor as phenomena of social and institutional history. The role of libraries established during the period under

<sup>23</sup> Ansari, and Schmidtke 2013a.

<sup>24</sup> Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muhammad al-Shawkānī* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). The thought of Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Wazīr is currently being investigated in the framework of a doctoral dissertation by Damaris Wilmers at Georg August University Göttingen, entitled *What Do We Need to Know? Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Wazīr's (died 840/1436) Epistemology of Uncertainty in the Context of the 9th/15th Century Zaydiyya*.

<sup>25</sup> Ansari, and Schmidtke, *Licence to Transmit* (forthcoming).

investigation may serve as one example to highlight the many issues to be addressed. While it is well known that al-Manṣūr founded a library in Ṣafār, the town where he resided, for which he engaged a team of scholars-cum-scribes to transcribe a wealth of texts, no attempt has been made to reconstruct the holdings of the library during al-Manṣūr's lifetime or at any later stage.<sup>26</sup> We still lack sufficient information about the modes of selecting titles for transcription or any other criteria that were formulated in the course of the formation of the library and its subsequent development. Moreover, the exact mode of operation of the team(s) also still needs to be analyzed. A first handlist of the Khizāna al-Mutawakkiliyya was published in 1942, but it is well known that by the end of the nineteenth century numerous codices that originally belonged to the imām's library had already been removed (possibly stolen) from the collection.<sup>27</sup>

Little is known about the functionality and accessibility of the imām's library during al-Manṣūr's lifetime and beyond. Many of the manuscripts that are held at the Maktaba al-Sharqiyya today appear not to have been used extensively, if at all. A prominent example is the multi-volume copy of 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī's extensive theological summa, *Kitāb al-Mughnī fi abwāb al-tawhīd wa-l-'adl*, the only extant copy of the text in Yemen.<sup>28</sup> The 16 (out of an original 20) preserved volumes of the work are completely free of margin notes, such as readers's notes, corrections, collation notes, and other remarks. That the *Mughnī* was evidently inaccessible and thus completely unknown to the majority of scholars in Yemen is further confirmed by the lack of references to it in the theological literature by Yemeni theologians. A telling exception is Imām al-Mu'ayyad bi-Llāh Yaḥya ibn Ḥamza, who quotes from the *Mughnī* extensively in his comprehensive theological summa, the *Kitāb al-Shāmil li-ḥaqā'iq al-adilla al-'aqliyya wa-uṣūl al-masā'il al-dīniyya*—in his

<sup>26</sup> A prominent role was played by Muḥyī l-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn al-Walīd al-Qurashī al-Anf (died 623/1226), a close companion of Imām al-Manṣūr and a prominent scholar in his own right, who had transcribed and/or collated many of the manuscripts that became part of al-Manṣūr's library. On him, see Hassan Ansari, and Sabine Schmidtke 2010a, pp. 227–78, *passim*.

<sup>27</sup> See above, n. 10. This possibility is suggested by the fact that numerous codices from the imām's library were sold to European collectors, such as Eduard Glaser (1855–1908), during the latter half of the nineteenth century, and can nowadays be found in the Berlin State Library, the Austrian National Library, the British Library, and Leiden University Library, as well as the Ambrosiana in Milan. For an overview of the European collections of Yemeni manuscripts, see Sabine Schmidtke, and Jan Thiele, *Preserving Yemen's Cultural Heritage: The Yemen Manuscript Digitization Project* (Sanaa: Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland/Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Orient-Abteilung, Außenstelle Sanaa, 2011). See also Sabine Schmidtke, and Jan Thiele, "Eduard Glaser (1855–1908) as a collector of Yemeni Manuscripts" [forthcoming].

<sup>28</sup> On the transmission of the work, see the editors' introduction to Omar Hamdan, and Sabine Schmidtke (eds), *Nukat al-Kitāb al-Mughnī*. A Recension of 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī's (died 415/1025) *al-Mughnī fi abwāb al-tawhīd wa-l-'adl*: *Al-Kalām fi l-tawhīd*. *Al-Kalām fi l-istiṭā'a*. *Al-Kalām fi l-taklīf*. *Al-Kalām fi l-naẓar wa-l-ma'ārif*. The Extant Parts Introduced and Edited (Beirut/Berlin: Deutsches Orient Institut/Klaus Schwarz, 1433/2012).



function as imām he evidently did have access to the holdings of the library.<sup>29</sup> By contrast, references to and quotations from other books that are known to have been easily accessible and preserved in numerous manuscripts are legion, as is the case, for example, with ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s more concise doctrinal work, the *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa*. The text was usually read together with the *ta’līq* by the latter’s student Abū l-Ḥusayn Aḥmad ibn Abū Hāshim Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Qazwīnī, known as Mānkdim Shashdīw (died 425/1034) and/or possibly with the *ta’līq* of Abū Muḥammad Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Alī al-Farrazādhī, who wrote two generations after Mānkdim.<sup>30</sup> Both commentaries were evidently in wide circulation, as is suggested by the dozens of extant manuscripts of Yemeni provenance. Observations such as these suggest that only a restricted audience had access to the imām’s library, which was a typical “central ruler library,” not meant to serve a wider audience.<sup>31</sup>

From pertinent statements on the title pages of several codices it is equally evident that numerous representatives of the social and political elites were actively involved in the knowledge transfer process. Among other “private” initiatives, we know of manuscript collections belonging to individual scholars and notables, many of which are in family possession until today, as is the case with the library of the Wazīr family at Hijrat al-Sirr, located in the vicinity of Sanaa. None of these historical private libraries has so far been documented, let alone studied with respect to their holdings, their history and organization, their accessibility and social function(s).<sup>32</sup> In addition to the “central ruler library” and the many private collections, there also existed “public” libraries, such as those known to have been established in other parts of the Islamic world from the Middle Period (fifth/eleventh to early tenth/sixteenth century) onwards. These were attached to some of the renowned academic institutions that were founded at the time (for example, the Madrasa al-Manṣūriyya in Ḥūth, a town located in the territory of Ḥāshid between Ṣa‘da and Sanaa) or located in the many retreats (*hijras*) that were originally founded by representatives of the Muṭarrifiyya and often continued by “orthodox” Zaydis as centers of learning.<sup>33</sup>

The paucity of attention paid so far to the social and intellectual aspects of the described process of knowledge transfer and the mechanisms involved is all the more astonishing in view of the relatively advanced stage of research,

<sup>29</sup> See Sabine Schmidtke, “Imām al-Mu‘ayyad bi-Llāh Yahya ibn Ḥamza (669–749/1270–1348/9) and his *K. al-Ṣāmil li-ḥaqā’iq al-adilla al-‘aqliyya wa-uṣūl al-masā’il al-diniyya*” [forthcoming].

<sup>30</sup> Edited (as a work by ‘Abd al-Jabbār) by ‘Abd al-Karīm ‘Uthmān, Cairo 1384/1965 [with numerous reprints].

<sup>31</sup> See Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Brief sketches of their respective histories are included in the relevant entries in al-Wajih 2002 as well as ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Ḥibshī, *Fihris makhtūṭāt ba‘da l-maktabāt al-khāṣṣa fi l-Yaman* (London: Furqan Foundation, 1994).

<sup>33</sup> See Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Hajarī, *Majmū‘ buldān al-Yaman wa-qabā’ilihā*, ed. Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Alī al-Akwa‘ (Sanaa: Wizārat al-a‘lām wa-l-thaqāfa, 2009), vol. 1, pp. 213–26, 300; al-Wajih 2002, *passim*.

particularly on the social aspects of the transmission of knowledge in some of the central regions of the Islamic world during the Middle Period.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the fact that the library established by al-Manṣūr has survived until today and that ample material is available to study it in depth makes it largely unique among the “central ruler libraries” that were founded during the Middle Period. From comparable libraries that were established in earlier periods next to no remnants are left.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981); İsmail E. Erünsal, *Türk kütüphaneleri tarihi* (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi, 1988); Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Stefan Leder, et al., *Muʿjam al-samāʾāt al-dimashqiyya al-muntakhaba min sanat 550 ilā 750. Les certificats d'audition à Damas, 550-750 h./1155 à 1349* (Damascus: al-Maʿhad al-faransī li-l-dirasāt al-ʿarabiyya, 1996); Stefan Leder, et al., *Wathāʾiq al-samāʾāt li-Muʿjam al-samāʾāt al-dimashqiyya al-muntakhaba min sanat 550 ilā 750. Recueil de documents facsimilée des certificats d'audition à Damas, 550-750 h./1155 à 1349* (Damascus: al-Maʿhad al-faransī li-l-dirasāt al-ʿarabiyya, 2000); Daphna Ephrat, *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition: The Sunnī ʿUlamāʾ of Eleventh Century Baghdad* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000); Joseph E. Lowry, Devin J. Stewart, and Shawkat M. Toorawa (eds), *Law and Education in Medieval Islam: Studies in Memory of Georges Makdisi* (Cambridge: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004); Hirschler 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Sarah Stroumsa, *Al-Andalus und Sefarad: Von Bibliotheken und Gelehrten im muslimischen Spanien* (Trier: Kliemedien, 2012); Hirschler 2012. In later centuries, Mamluk, Timurid, Ottoman, and Safavid rulers and high-ranking officials had also established palatial libraries of which we possess traces, but little systematic effort has been made to get a comprehensive picture of their holdings; the same applies for remnants of Maghribī palatial libraries as well as various Indian rulers' libraries. For Ottoman libraries, see the studies by Erünsal 1988; Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu (ed.), *Bibliography on Manuscript Libraries in Turkey and the Publications on the Manuscripts Located in these Libraries* (Istanbul: Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA), 1995); *Osmanlı vakıf kütüphaneleri: Tarihi gelişimi ve organizasyonu* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2008). For the fate of the library of the Moroccan sultan Mülāy Zidān (reigned 967–1036/1560–1627), see Daniel Hershenzon, “Travelling Libraries: The Arabic Manuscripts of Muley Zidan and the Escorial Library,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 18 (2014): 535–58. There is also a fair amount of studies devoted to the reconstruction of the holdings of the library of the Bukharan Khwāja Muḥammad Pārsā (756–822/1355–1420), an important Naqshbandī scholar. See, for example, Lola Dodkhudoeva, “Rukopisi s pechat’ju vakfa Muḥammada Pārsā iz arabskogo otdela fonda vostochnykh rukopisej Natsional’noj biblioteki Frantsii,” in *Kniga v razvitii kul’tury narodov Vostoka: Istoriya i sovremennost’* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1990), pp. 31–3; Lola Dodkhudoeva, “La bibliothèque de Khwāja Mohammad Pārsā à Boukhara,” *Cahiers d’Asie centrale* 5, no. 6 (1998): 125–42; A.B. Khalidov, “Rukopisi iz biblioteki Muḥammada Pārsā,” *Petersburgskoe Vostokovedenie* 6 (1994): 506–19; Aširbek Muminov, and Šovasil Zijadov, “L’horizon intellectuel d’un érudit du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle: Nouvelles découvertes sur la bibliothèque de Muḥammad Pārsā,” *Cahiers d’Asie centrale* 7 (1999): 77–96; Francis Richard, “Manuscripts persans de la Bibliothèque nationale de France se rapportant à l’Asie centrale musulmane,” *Cahiers d’Asie centrale* 7 (1999): 57–63; Maria Eva Subtelny, “The Making of Bukhārā-yi Sharīf: Scholars, Books and Libraries in Medieval Bukhara (The Library of Khwāja Muḥammad Pārsā),” in *Studies on Central Asian History in Honour of Yuri Bregel*, ed. Devin deWeese. Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series 167 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Research Institute for Inner Asia, 2001), pp. 79–111; Maria Eva Subtelny, *Timurids in Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in*

Much of the religious legacy that was brought to Yemen during the sixth/twelfth through the eighth/fourteenth century from the central Islamic lands, and particularly Iran, was lost in Iran and Iraq for a number of reasons. While the center of Zaydism had gradually shifted from Northern Iran to Yemen, in Iran Zaydism soon fell into oblivion, such that the erstwhile flourishing intellectual life of the Iranian Zaydī communities came to an end, and the transmission of its cultural and literary legacy ceased.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, significant parts of the “Sunni” Mu‘tazilī intellectual legacy were destroyed there during the post-Buyid age. The significance of Yemen as a unique treasury of manuscripts in virtually all the historical disciplines of learning is well known and widely acknowledged.<sup>37</sup> Although little effort has been made until now to produce a comprehensive systematic and diachronic overview of the religio-literary canon in the various disciplines that reached Zaydī Yemen during this period—with the exception of some works belonging to the literary legacy of the Mu‘tazila, the most significant strand of rational theology from the third/ninth through the sixth/twelfth century, which was transferred to Yemen during the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries—case studies touching upon works that belong to other scientific fields, such as legal methodology, *ḥadīth*, and history, suggest that in virtually all domains Yemeni collections hold unique copies of countless Zaydī and non-Zaydī works.<sup>38</sup> These significantly enrich and complement the holdings of manuscript collections originating in the central lands of the Muslim world, and a detailed study of their transmission to Yemen will yield important results relevant to intellectual history far beyond Yemen.

#### METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In view of the increased accessibility of a critical number of collections of manuscripts of Yemeni provenance (in Yemen and in Europe) and significant advances in Zaydī studies over the past decades (with major contributions by Western, Egyptian, Iranian, and Yemeni scholars), the conditions are now ideal for an in-depth study of the knowledge transfer process described and the

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*Medieval Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 248; ‘Alī Bahrāmīyān, “Atharī nā-shanākhtah az Maqrīzī (Muntakhab durrat al-aslāk fī dawlat al-atrāk az majmū‘a-yi Kh‘āja Muḥammad Pārsā),” *Nāma-yi Bahārīstān* 6–7, no. i–ii (1384–5/2005–6): 211–16; Sabine Schmidtke, “Early Aš‘arite Theology: Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (died 403/1013) and his *Ḥidāyat al-mustaršīdīn*,” *Bulletin d’Etudes Orientales* 60 (2011): 39–72.

<sup>36</sup> Wilferd Madelung (ed.), *Arabic Texts Concerning the History of the Zaydī Imāms of Ṭabaristān, Daylamān and Gilān* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1987); Hassan Ansari, and Sabine Schmidtke, “Iranian Zaydism during the 7th/13th Century: Abū l-Faḍl ibn Shahr dawīr al-Daylamī al-Jīlānī and his Commentary on the Qur‘ān,” *Journal Asiatique* 299 (2011a): 205–11.

<sup>37</sup> See, most recently, Anne Regourd, “Introduction: Sur la trace de l’histoire des collections et des bibliothèques du Yémen,” *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 5 (2014): 111–24.

<sup>38</sup> See the editors’ introduction to Camilla Adang, Sabine Schmidtke, and David Sklare (eds), *A Common Rationality: Mu‘tazilism in Islam and Judaism* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2007).

resulting intellectual development of Yemeni Zaydism during the period under consideration and beyond.<sup>39</sup>

Such an inquiry should focus (i) on analyzing the diachronic development of the process, the mechanisms and persons involved and their respective social settings, and the geographical routes by which scholars and books traveled to Yemen, as well as institutions of learning (*madrāsas*, libraries, *hijras*, and mosques) and reading practices and other modes of transmission; (ii) on reconstructing the literary “canon” (to use this elusive notion) as it evolved over time, providing for each discipline a detailed picture of which titles had reached Yemen when and through which channels, and how and through what means and transmitters they became part of the canon; and (iii) on analyzing the ways the “new” and “old” texts were put to use by Yemeni scholars in their respective disciplines during the period under investigation.

The various aspects of such an inquiry can be studied on the basis of a broad range of pertinent genres of documentary sources as well as literary texts (the borders between the two often being blurred). The main genres of sources are the following: (1) comprehensive biographical dictionaries; (2) biographies; (3) comprehensive biographical works drawn from *siyār*; (4) histories; (5) letters; (6) *ijāzas*; (7) *isnāds*; (8) manuscripts.

### *Comprehensive Dictionaries*

It was only during the second half of the eleventh/seventeenth century that comprehensive biographical dictionaries were compiled by Yemeni authors collecting all known information on the earlier Zaydī *imāms*, *sayyids*, *qādis*, and scholars, providing comprehensive repositories of the scholarly and political elite(s). The earliest among them is *Maṭlaʿ al-budūr* by the *qādi* of Sanaa, Aḥmad ibn Šāliḥ ibn Abī l-Rijāl (died 1092/1690), followed by *al-Mustaṭāb* by Yaḥyā ibn al-Husayn ibn al-Qāsim (died 1099/1688) (preserved in several manuscript copies). The latter’s nephew, Ibrāhīm ibn al-Qāsim al-Shahārī (died 1150/1736), compiled *Ṭabaqāt al-Zaydiyya al-kubrā*, which is based primarily on Ibn Abī l-Rijāl’s *Maṭlaʿ al-budūr*. During the same period, Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Yaḥyā al-Šanʿānī (died 1121/1709) completed another biographical dictionary of Yemenī scholars and poets, *Nasmat al-saḥar bi-dhikr man tashayyaʿa wa-shaʿar*. These works constitute the most extensive source of our knowledge of the Zaydī scholarly tradition of Northern Iran up to the seventh/thirteenth century and of Yemen until the eleventh/seventeenth century. At the same time, the distance in time between the compilation of these works and the period under investigation is immense, and although the respective authors culled their information from a wealth of sources, such as earlier Zaydī historiographical and biographical literature, documentary materials (for example, *ijāzas*), and manuscripts, the preserved manuscripts and available editions contain numerous mistakes and inaccuracies, particularly when it comes to personal names (especially those

<sup>39</sup> See also Sabine Schmidtke, “History of Zaydī Studies: An Introduction,” *Arabica* 59 (2012): 185–99.

of Iranian scholars that are not attested elsewhere) and other details that have been lost (or forgotten) over time.

We possess only a single contemporary biographical dictionary for the period under investigation, namely the *Akhbār al-Zaydiyya bi-l-Yaman* by the Muṭarrifi author Musallam ibn Muḥammad al-Laḥjī (alive in 544/1149), who included biographies of Zaydī rulers and scholars of Yemen, arranged in five generations.<sup>40</sup> It is particularly the information on the fifth generation, to which the author himself belonged, that is of special significance for the first decades of the period under consideration, while the material of earlier generations reflects on the intellectual, religious, and societal situation of the Zaydī community prior to the arrival of new textual sources from Iran.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to the works by representatives of Zaydism, Shāfiʿī/Sunnī scholars of Yemen also composed biographical dictionaries and historiographical works. Although these are mostly concerned with the Shāfiʿī/Sunnī scholarly tradition, they provide at times valuable complementing information. For the period under investigation the most important ones are *al-Sulūk fi ṭabaqāt al-ʿulamāʾ* of Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Janādī (died circa 732/1332) and *al-ʿAqd al-fākhir al-ḥasan* of ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥasan al-Khazrajī (died 811/1409–10). Additional valuable sources are the *Ṭabaqāt ṣulahāʾ al-Yaman* by ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Burayhī (died 904/1499) and al-Shawkānī's *al-Badr al-ṭālīʿ*.

### Biographies

A genre that is characteristic for the Zaydī communities both in Iran and in Yemen is the biographical literature relating to the careers of individual imāms (*sīra*, pl. *siyar*). These documents were composed as a rule by close companions, secretaries, or other personnel in their circle, often inspired in structure and terminology by the *sīra* of Prophet Muḥammad. As their primary function was to legitimize the *imāms*, describing their merits was an important element of such documents. In addition to documentary material such as official correspondence, treaties, decrees, and letters of instruction, as well as personal memoirs and the like, sections detailing the *imām*'s religious education and praising his proficiency in various branches of knowledge were regular components of such works. These often include accounts of the academic training of a later *imām*, with details about his curriculum and his teachers. Only a few of these documents have been studied in detail, mostly for the political information they contain, and only a fraction of the material is

<sup>40</sup> Partially edited in Wilferd Madelung (ed.), *The Sīra of Imām Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh from Musallam al-Laḥjī's Kitāb Akhbār al-Zaydiyya bi l-Yaman* (Exeter: Ithaca Press, 1990). See also Ḥasan Anṣārī, "Tārīkh-i Musallam Laḥjī," *Maʿārif* 45 (1998): 132–52.

<sup>41</sup> Since the various parts of al-Laḥjī's work are preserved in unique manuscripts only, some of the information provided cannot be retrieved with certainty (personal names that are not attested elsewhere constitute a major challenge).

available in print.<sup>42</sup> A systematic analysis of the data they contain with respect to the transmission of knowledge during the period under investigation is still a desideratum.

For the period under investigation, the following works are immediately relevant: the *sīra* of Imām al-Mutawakkil by Sulaymān ibn Yaḥyā al-Thaqafī (flourished sixth/twelfth century); the *sīra* of Imām al-Manṣūr by his chief secretary, Abū Firas ibn Dī‘tham; and the *sīra* of Imām al-Mahdī Abū Ṭayr Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn (died 656/1258) by Sharaf al-Dīn Yaḥyā ibn al-Qāsim al-Ḥamzī (died 677/1278–9). Although hagiographical tendencies can often be discerned and need to be taken into consideration when using the *siyar*, they contain valuable information that is unparalleled in any other type of source. The *sīra* of Abū Ṭayr, for example, contains a comprehensive chapter devoted to his scholarly training. It not only lists his teachers and the works he studied with each one of them, it also informs us about the age at which he studied each field and work, something that is apparently not attested in other sources from the period under investigation.<sup>43</sup>

### *Comprehensive Biographical Works Drawn from Siyār*

On the basis of the *sīra* literature, comprehensive biographical works that were concerned with the Zaydī imāms were composed (a genre labeled *jawāmi‘ as-siyar*). For the period under investigation, *al-Ḥadā‘iq al-wardiyya fī manāqib a‘immat al-Zaydiyya* of Ḥumayd al-Muḥallī (died 652/1254) is relevant. It is concerned with the biographies of the Zaydī imāms up to al-Manṣūr. The work was later continued by Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Fand with his *al-Lawāḥiq al-nadiyya*, written in 916/1510, and by Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Sharafī (died 1055/1645–6) in his *al-La‘ālī al-muḍiyya*, providing additional data for the periods following the completion of the *Ḥaḡā‘iq*.

### *Histories*

Closely linked to the *sīra* and biographical literature are chronicles and historiographical works. Here again, Zaydī and non-Zaydī works need to be taken into consideration. Among the relevant works by Zaydī authors, mention should be made of *Rawḍat al-akhbār* by Yūsuf ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥajūrī (died after 627/1230) and *Anbā’ al-zamān fī ta’rikh quṭr al-Yaman* by Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Qāsim (died 1109/1698), the “single most valuable general history of Yemen.”<sup>44</sup> From among the non-Zaydī chronicles, those covering the Rasūlid period (626–858/1229–1454) are the most relevant for the period under investigation, as well as works of the Ismā‘īlī-Fatimid historical tradition. In addition, works on the history of Northern Iran by Zaydī and non-Zaydī authors alike provide additional valuable information on the Zaydīs of the region, which

<sup>42</sup> Madelung 1992; Ansari, and Schmidtke 2011b.

<sup>43</sup> Ansari, and Schmidtke 2011b.

<sup>44</sup> Gochenour 1984, p. 314.

often complements what is known on the basis of historiographical works by Yemeni Zaydīs, such as several works on the history of Tabaristan, Daylaman, and Gilan, as well as Ibn Funduq's (died 564/1169–70) *Tārīkh Bayhaq*.

### Letters

An important genre of contemporary documentary sources that sheds light on the period under investigation is the correspondence between Zaydī scholars or rulers of Northern Iran and Yemen. So far only a few documents have been studied.<sup>45</sup> We possess, for example, several letters by the prolific Caspian Zaydī scholar Bahā' al-Dīn (also: Muḥyī l-Dīn) Yūsuf ibn Abī l-Ḥasan ibn Abī l-Qāsim al-Daylamī al-Jīlānī al-Mirkālī (al-Mirqālī) addressed to the Imām al-Manṣūr and to the Yemeni Zaydī scholar 'Imrān ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Nāṣir al-'Udhri al-Hamdānī.<sup>46</sup> A systematic search for similar documents in the various manuscript collections as well as in the relevant biographical and historiographical literature into which correspondence has often been integrated will shed additional light on the evolving relations between scholars and rulers of the two main regions of Zaydism during the period under consideration. While the majority of relevant documents belong to the period under investigation, correspondence between the Zaydīs of Yemen and their coreligionists in Iran (and with non-Zaydīs elsewhere) are also preserved for the ninth/fifteenth century and beyond.<sup>47</sup>

### *Ijāzas*

The most valuable, and to date the least explored genre of sources, are the many *ijāza* documents that were issued by scholars to one or several student(s), granting them the permission to transmit what they had read with their teacher. Both the recipients and the issuers come from virtually all strata of the society that were involved in the knowledge transfer process. The documents range from fairly brief *ijāzas* attesting the transmission of a specific work, detailing, as a rule, the manner through which the teacher received the work in question, to comprehensive *ijāzas* granting the transmission of a whole range of titles in various disciplines, which provide precious glimpses into the curriculum a given person was acquainted with. These documents are particularly valuable, as they constitute contemporary testimonies of the knowledge transmission process. Taken together, they allow for a reconstruction of the network(s) of scholars during the period under investigation. Moreover, since such documents are generally dated or can be dated exactly by other means, they allow for a detailed

<sup>45</sup> Madelung 1987; Ḥasan Ansari, "Nāme-hā-yi beh Gilān." Accessed 14 November 2014. <http://ansari.kateban.com/entry1377.html>.

<sup>46</sup> Ansari, and Schmidtke 2011a.

<sup>47</sup> *Majmū' kutub wa-rasā'il al-Imām al-Manṣūr bi-Llāh al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām ibn 'Abbās al-Wajīh (Sanaa: Mu'assasat al-Imām Zayd ibn 'Alī al-thaqāfiyya, 2003).

diachronic analysis of the religio-literary “canon” that was available to the Zaydīs in Yemen over the course of time.<sup>48</sup>

These documents are dispersed in thousands of preserved manuscripts and remain often unmentioned in the catalogs. Moreover, some later scholars have collected such documents in so-called *majmūʿ al-ijāzāt*. This was the case, for example, for Aḥmad ibn Saʿd al-Dīn al-Miswarī (died 1079/1668), who in his *Majmūʿ al-ijāzāt* collected some two hundred *ijāza* documents that he had culled from the manuscripts available to him. Several copies of the work, which have neither been edited nor analyzed, are preserved in various private libraries in Yemen. Another comparable collection, listing the chains of transmission of Imām al-Mutawakkil Yaḥyā Sharaf al-Dīn (died 964/1557), the founder of the local dynasty of the Sharaf al-Dīn family in and around Kawkabān, and comprising the entire texts of numerous *ijāzāt* of earlier scholars, was compiled by one ʿIzz al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Muzaffar (alive in 969/1562) and is preserved in the Eduard Glaser collection in the State Library Berlin (MS Glaser 16). A similar work is preserved in the Ambrosiana library under the title *Kitāb Musalsalāt ʿulamāʾ al-riwāya* (MS Ambrosiana B 17).

### *Isnāds*

The data contained in the *ijāza* documents are complemented by the *chains of transmission* (*isnād*, *sanad*) quoted at the beginning of a given work or with a quotation culled from another work. As in the case of the *ijāzas*, such chains of transmission that end with the transmitter of the text at hand constitute contemporary testimonies to the latter’s placement in the network of scholars, relating that person back to the earlier generations of Zaydīs in Iran and elsewhere (or Sunnīs or Twelver Shīʿīs, depending on the nature of the work in question). However, in contrast to the *ijāza* documents that were issued for books of all disciplines of knowledge, as a rule, chains of transmission were given only at the beginning of *ḥadīth* works or when citing quotations gleaned from such works. Another important methodological consideration applies to *ḥadīth* works. While works belonging to most disciplines mentioned in an *ijāza* were generally available, this is not necessarily the case with *ḥadīth* collections. The six Sunnī canonical *ḥadīth* works, for example, for which Imām al-Manṣūr provides detailed chains of transmission at the beginning of his *al-Shāfi*, were available to him and his contemporaries primarily through the *ʿUmda* of the Twelver Shīʿī scholar Ibn al-Biṭrīq. Moreover, given the particular prestige works of *ḥadīth* enjoyed, it is not surprising that transmitters made efforts to obtain permission to transmit the same works through as many chains as possible, but again, this phenomenon has no implications for the factual availability of a given book.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> For a detailed study of these documents, including critical editions of a large corpus of *ijāzas* together with an in-depth analysis, see Ansari, and Schmidtke, *Licence to Transmit* (forthcoming).

<sup>49</sup> Ansari, and Schmidtke 2013a.



### Manuscripts

Another source of primary significance is the tens of thousands of manuscripts of Yemeni provenance that are preserved either in the libraries of Yemen or in the various European collections of Yemeni manuscripts. These provide the definitive evidence that a given work was in fact available in Yemen. In many cases, the colophons, and ownership and reading statements (and other margin notes throughout the manuscript) inform us about the *Vorlage* from which the text was copied, often attesting when and how a certain work had reached Yemen, and how and by whom it was studied. Taken together, the manuscripts provide the most detailed and reliable information for reconstructing the evolution and diachronic development of the religio-literary “canon” of Yemeni Zaydism. Moreover, it is exclusively through a close study of the manuscripts that historical libraries can be reconstructed. Usually, as no sufficiently detailed information is included in the available manuscript catalogs, a direct inspection of all codices of Yemeni provenance within reach is indispensable.<sup>50</sup> Despite their superior value, the manuscripts need to be studied in close correspondence with the remaining sources. It needs to be borne in mind that a significant number of the manuscripts that were available in Yemen during the period under consideration is no longer extant. It is surprising, for example, that only a few manuscripts that were copied outside Yemen and subsequently taken there have survived. Considering the number of manuscripts that according to the historical sources was brought to Yemen, this is striking.

The fact that any given work was available in Yemen does not necessarily imply that it had an (immediate) impact on the scholars of Yemen. For example, adherents of the different doctrinal camps used the works of the various branches of Muʿtazilism selectively for their respective purposes, to mention only the example of theology. Moreover, the mere presence of a given work in Yemen does not imply its availability to the “average” scholar, as has been suggested for the holdings of the imām’s library. There are cases in which scholars may have been prevented from using a specific work for other reasons. In the field of legal theory, for example, it has been shown that Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī’s *al-Muʿtamad* had apparently already reached Yemen during the lifetime of Qāḍī Jaʿfar (and perhaps even earlier than that). Later it turned out to be one of the most popular and influential works in this discipline among the scholars of Yemen. However, for some reason Qāḍī Jaʿfar chose to ignore the *Muʿtamad* when writing his own works in this discipline, favoring other books that had also been imported to Yemen from Northern Iran.<sup>51</sup> These examples demonstrate

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Hassan Ansari, Wilferd Madelung, and Sabine Schmidtke, “Yūsuf al-Baṣrī’s Refutation (*Naqḍ*) of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī’s Theology in a Yemeni Zaydi Manuscript of the 7th/13th Century,” in *The Yemeni Manuscript Tradition*, ed. David Hollenberg, Christoph Rauch, and Sabine Schmidtke (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

<sup>51</sup> Hassan Ansari, and Sabine Schmidtke, “The Muʿtazilī and Zaydī Reception of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī’s *Kitāb al-Muʿtamad fī uṣūl al-fiqh*: A Bibliographical Note,” *Islamic Law and Society* 20 (2013b): 90–109.

that a close investigation of the scholarly production of the Zaydīs of Yemen in the various disciplines during the period under investigation is required in order to determine which of the available textual sources they had actually used in their own works, either citing them explicitly or using them quietly without attribution.

## CONCLUSIONS

Research on the intellectual development of Yemeni Zaydī scholarship before, during, and after these three important centuries (sixth/twelfth through eighth/fourteenth century) is in its infancy. Except for some advances that have been made in the fields of theology and legal theory during the time of al-Manṣūr (and beyond), little is known about the intellectual developments of Yemeni Zaydism from the eighth/fourteenth century up until the twelfth/eighteenth century, and fields such as law, exegesis, and ḥadīth are still uncharted territory.<sup>52</sup> The case studies we possess suggest, however, that the Zaydīs of Yemen used the rich legacy they were exposed to in an innovative and original manner and that through an analysis of the works belonging to those disciplines, the gradual “Sunnification” of the Zaydiyya and its effects on Yemen in the contemporary period can be studied in detail. Moreover, in conjunction with the rich documentary material that is at our disposal, the study of the intellectual developments of Yemeni Zaydism from the sixth/twelfth century onwards can be complemented by a study of the socio-political conditions and mechanisms at work.

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<sup>52</sup> Madelung 1965; Ansari, and Schmidtke, *Zaydī Mu‘tazilism* (forthcoming); Bernard Haykel, and Aron Zysow, “What Makes a *Maḏhab* a *Maḏhab*: Zaydī Debates on the Structure of Legal Authority,” *Arabica* 59 (2012): 332–71; Gregor Schwarb, “MS Munich, Bavarian State Library, Cod. arab. 1294: A Guide to Zaydī *Kalām*-Studies During the Ṭāhirid and Early Qāsimite Periods (mid-15th–early 18th centuries),” in *The Yemeni Manuscript Tradition*, ed. David Hollenberg, Christoph Rauch, and Sabine Schmidtke (Leiden: Brill, 2015, pp. 155–202); Jan Thiele, “Propagating Mu‘tazilism” in the 6th/12th Century Zaydiyya: al-Ḥasan al-Raṣṣāṣ,” *Arabica* 57 (2010): 536–58; Jan Thiele, *Kausalität in der mu‘tazilitischen Kosmologie* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Thiele 2013.

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## Chapter 7

# Iskandar the Prophet: Religious Themes in Islamic Versions of the Alexander Legend

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Alexander the Great is an ideal object of study in research concerned with the globalization of knowledge in the post-ancient Mediterranean world for several reasons. “One of the greatest catalysts in history,” Alexander offers one of the best examples of transregional cultural diffusion in antiquity and post-antiquity, with his conquests extending from the Mediterranean into North India and his legacy far beyond those lands.<sup>1</sup> Explaining his success as a leader and conqueror, recent scholarship has pointed to the achievements of his father Philip II of Macedon, but it would be foolish to deny Alexander’s own contributions to his fame.<sup>2</sup>

Determined, ruthless, and adventurous, Alexander was also a gifted political strategist. While his earlier campaigns were led in the spirit of Greek liberation and revenge against the Persians, the expansion into Bactria and Sogdiana and, in particular, the crossing of the Indus river in 326 BCE, marked the grander ambitions of an Asian king. At the same time, Alexander is known to have sacrificed to local deities as well as adopting local languages of political authority, becoming a pharaoh in Egypt and a new Babylonian king in Mesopotamia, and rising to the rank of city founder with several Alexandrias marking and delimiting the landscape of Eastern Hellenism, a strategy which also entailed religious implications.<sup>3</sup> Alexander, who fashioned himself a new Achilles, may very well have believed that he was of divine descent, a belief perhaps encouraged by his mother Olympias. An enthusiastic practitioner of Dionysian and snake cults, she competed with other wives on behalf of her son. Alexander himself used this myth as a legitimizing strategy. In 327 BCE, however,

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Anson, *Alexander the Great: Themes and Issues* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> Anson 2013; Ian Worthington, *By the Spear: Philip II, Alexander the Great, and the Rise and Fall of the Macedonian Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> For an introduction to religious elements in Alexander’s kingship, both concerning his relationship to the gods and his own divinity, see Ernst Fredricksmeyer, “Alexander’s Religion and Divinity,” in *Brill’s Companion to Alexander the Great*, ed. Joseph Roisman (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 253–78. See also Anson 2013, pp. 83–120.

Alexander overplayed his hand when after the Sogdian invasion and his marriage with Roxana, he tried to introduce the ritual of bowing before the ruler known as *proskynesis*. The practice was alien and unpalatable to his companions who had grown up with the informal tradition of Macedonian kingship.

For the legacy of a deified Alexander, however, Egypt is of particular interest. Robin Lane Fox writes:

As Pharaoh, he was the recognized representative of god on earth, worshipped as a living and accessible god by his Egyptian subjects: he was hailed as Horus, divine son of the sun god Ra whose worship had prevailed in Lower Egypt, and as beloved son of Amun, the creator god of the universe, whose worship had flourished in the temples of Upper Egypt and grown to incorporate the worship of the more southerly Ra. This divine sonship fitted him into the dynastic past of the native Pharaohs, for he could be said to share their common father Amun-Ra.<sup>4</sup>

In 331 BCE, Alexander went out of his way to visit the oracle of Zeus-Ammon in the Egyptian oasis of Siwah. There he was recognized as the son of Zeus and his divine pedigree was symbolized by the two horns of a ram, originally a southern Egyptian tradition associated with Ammon which had spread north. The coins of the Diadochi Lysimachus of Thrace and Ptolemy Soter of Egypt show the conqueror adorned with his two horns, although the story of the symbol's afterlife is complicated and controversial, as we will soon see in more detail.

What Alexander had already begun continued long after his empire had disintegrated, as his legacies unfolded in multiple and interconnected ways. Alexander had conquered most of the territories of the future empires of late antiquity—Byzantium and Persia—and left his footprints much further to the East in Central Asia and northwestern India, where the Arab conquerors would arrive centuries later. After the antagonism between Byzantines and Sassanians that marked the political landscape on the eve of the rise of Islam, it was only in the course of the Muslim conquests that many of these lands were reunited. Although no simple description can capture the extent to which political unity facilitates the flow of cultural products, one cannot help but think that these politico-military developments had such an effect. While the emerging Muslim culture carried its own Alexandrian narratives with it, Alexander's legacy in its different shapes was already present in many of the conquered lands. New Alexanders developed in all of these and many other locations and encountered each other when new conquerors crossed these lands. Alexander's posthumous career intrigues as a formidable example of intertwined history, exemplified by writers like Niẓāmī (died between 575/1180 and 613/1217), who hailed from the same region as the queen of the Amazons Alexander encountered, and devoted a book to the conqueror's life.<sup>5</sup> According to his Greek biographer Kritoboulos, the

<sup>4</sup> Robin Lane Fox, *Alexander the Great* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 196–7.

<sup>5</sup> Johann Christoph Bürgel, "Conquérant, philosophe et prophète," in *Pand-o Sokhan: Mélanges offerts à Charles-Henri de Fouchécour*, ed. Christophe Balaÿ, Claire Kappler and Živa

Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (835/1432–886/1481) visited Troy, where Alexander celebrated his hero Achilles and Mehmed did the same.<sup>6</sup> In more recent times, British adventurers traveled with Alexander in their pockets.<sup>7</sup> Geneticists argue about the persistence of the Greek legacy in the East.<sup>8</sup>

Many scholars have commented on the fact that Alexander has long attracted projections of whatever anyone wishes to see in him, which goes some way towards explaining his presence in a great variety of contexts. In what follows we will focus on religious projections, contexts and functions. As we have seen, Alexander himself had taken the first steps to enter a Eurasian pantheon, a strategy perpetuated by his immediate successors. Long before his two horns made a reappearance in Syriac Christian literature and Alexander developed into a stock character of monotheistic apocalypics, we already find him far away from the Mediterranean in a very different religious setting.

## ALEXANDER AND GANDHARA BUDDHISM

One of the most exquisite legacies of Eastern Hellenism can be found in Gandhara Buddhism.<sup>9</sup> During the first three centuries of the Common Era, Buddhist art in Pakistan and northwestern India exploded in figural constellations, including individuals as objects of worship as well as narrative scenes. Truly remarkable, albeit not unprecedented, were the human representations of the Buddha as well as the proliferation of other characters of Buddhist mythology, in particular the Buddhas of the past and the Bodhisattvas.

Explanations for this transformation of Buddhist art range from ideological to material; no texts elucidate these transformations in visual culture. The stabilizing rule of the Central Asian Kushans and the opening of the sea route south of Gandhara led to increased trade through the region and, as a consequence, greater wealth and patrons who were eager to demonstrate their piety. This socio-economic development coincided with the rise of the Mahāyāna movement, whose emphasis on devotion and a more elaborate

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Vesel (Tehran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1995), pp. 65–78.

<sup>6</sup> Kritovoulos, *History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, transl. Charles T. Rigg (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 181.

<sup>7</sup> Llewelyn Morgan, *The Buddhas of Bamiyan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 152–73.

<sup>8</sup> Contributions to the debate include Raheel Qamar, et al. “Y-Chromosomal DNA Variation in Pakistan,” *The American Journal of Human Genetics* 70, no. 5 (2002): 1107–24; Toomas Kivisild, et al. “The Genetic Heritage of the Earliest Settlers Persists Both in Indian Tribal and Caste Populations,” *The American Journal of Human Genetics* 72, no. 2 (2003): 313–32. For a summary see Garrett Hellenthal, et al. “Genetic Atlas of Human Admixture History,” *Science* 343, no. 6172 (2014): 747–51.

<sup>9</sup> For a survey, see Georgios T. Halkias, “When the Greeks Converted the Buddha. Asymmetrical Transfers of Knowledge in Indo-Greek Cultures,” in *Religions and Trade: Religious Formation, Transformation and Cross-Cultural Exchange between East and West*, ed. Peter Wick and Volker Rabens (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 65–115.

Buddhist pantheon have been adduced as an explanation for the shift from aniconic to anthropomorphic representation.<sup>10</sup> Pia Brancaccio and Xinru Liu suggested that the innovative narrative representations in Buddhist sites in Gandhara reflected the popularity of theater as a Greek legacy, which was also gaining popularity in northern India at the time.<sup>11</sup>

Be that as it may, the scholarly consensus on a Greek or Greco-Roman dimension of Gandharan art seems plausible if we look at the actual artifacts. The Gandharan elite acquired dishes with Greek scenes such as the drunken Hercules, perhaps for conspicuous consumption or for libation rituals, whereas in Buddhist art the detailed representation of garments and the naturalistic style are frequently identified as features of classical visual culture. More stunning are the Dionysian scenes that decorate outer areas of stupas such as stair risers. The choice of music, wine, and dancing for a sacred space seems odd, especially since such pleasures would have been unacceptable in a Buddhist monastery. Modern scholars interpret the scenes as references to prosperity and agricultural fertility. While some explanations point to older Indian practices around nature deities (*yakṣa*), others suggest that Dionysian cults may have been celebrated to give Buddhist laypeople a taste of the more propitious rebirth they were aiming for, while monks had higher ambitions and adhered to stricter ascetic principles.

Panhellenic characters made it into Gandharan Buddhist iconography too. One of the most striking cases is Vajrapāṇi, who stands on the Buddha's side as his perpetual acolyte and who is sometimes represented as Hercules with his characteristic lion skin and club. The Greek demigod was a good choice. Vajrapāṇi is the bearer of the *vajra*, the thunderbolt, and Hercules's club lent itself to easy identification. But even more than that, Vajrapāṇi is the protector of the Buddha, symbolizing wrath and using violence where necessary, just as Hercules is known for his physical strength.<sup>12</sup>

A sculpture discovered in Hadda offers a rarer variation on the Herculean iconography of Vajrapāṇi. Located in eastern Afghanistan not too far from the Khyber Pass, Hadda encapsulates the phenomenon of Greco-Buddhist culture more than any other archaeological site. Located in the site are typical niches with the Buddha at the center, surrounded by a few other characters, including Vajrapāṇi. While one of the niches has a bearded Vajrapāṇi with the lion skin and *vajra*, another one has none of these typical features of Hercules, but rather resembles the familiar youthful, troubled, and haughty face of Alexander the

<sup>10</sup> Siglinde Dietz, "Buddhism in Gandhāra," in *The Spread of Buddhism*, ed. Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 49–74.

<sup>11</sup> Pia Brancaccio and Xinru Liu, "Dionysus and Drama in the Buddhist Art of Gandhara," *Journal of Global History* 4 (2009): 219–44.

<sup>12</sup> For Vajrapāṇi see Monika Zin, "Vajrapāṇi in the Narrative Reliefs," in *Migration, Trade and Peoples: Proceedings of the Eighteenth Congress of the European Association of South Asian Archaeologists* (London, 2005), ed. Michael Willis (London: The British Association for South Asian Studies, 2009), pp. 73–88. See also Jessie Pons, *Inventaire et étude systématique des sites et des sculptures bouddhiques du Gandhāra: ateliers, centres de production*, 4 vols, PhD dissertation, (Université Paris IV, 2011).

Great.<sup>13</sup> In both iconography and style, Gandharan representations of Vajrapāṇi are marked by some variety. Certain features of this Hadda Vajrapāṇi have parallels in other representations. A relief panel with two Buddhist scenes, made around 200 CE and currently on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum (museum number IS. 78-1948), for example, also shows in its upper half a youthful and beardless Vajrapāṇi. This Vajrapāṇi, however, does not display the same striking resemblance to Alexander that we can find in the Hadda sculpture. This *mise-en-scène* of Alexander, unusual, albeit not entirely alien within its iconographic and stylistic context, may not come as a surprise. The conqueror, his contemporaries and successors had identified him with Hercules long before he became (if only visually) Vajrapāṇi.

### ALEXANDER IN THE ISLAMIC TRADITION

In many respects, Alexander's career as a religious figure in the Islamic tradition played out very differently, but we will return to parallels towards the end of this chapter. The conqueror's textual manifestations in the Middle East are as voluminous as they are complicated.<sup>14</sup> The reception of Alexander in the Islamic world started earlier, lasted longer and unfolded a greater and more diverse dynamics than that of any other classical character. The career of the literary Alexander cannot be captured in a single line of transmission, but criss-crosses over different languages, religions and cultures, gaining in detail and substance, and morphing into different personalities. Several of the traditions which fed into the formation of Islamic religion and culture during the first three centuries had already developed their own views of Alexander. Syriac Christians transformed him into a religious and apocalyptic figure; the Sassanian Persians, seeing themselves as the successors of the Achaemenids, maintained a negative view; in Greek gnomological and philosophical literature, the conqueror was marked by his relationship to Aristotle. These traditions were entangled with each other and influenced centuries of Muslim views of Alexander the Great. As an additional difficulty, many of the relevant texts come with their own problems of composition, dating, transmission and preservation, sometimes having been subject to several translations and retranslations.

The following survey will be limited to four developments which are critical and representative of major trends in the reception of the Alexander legend. A particular interest lies in the mechanisms used by different milieus to integrate Alexander into their own traditions. The developments covered include (1) the Qur'anic Alexander; (2) material transmitted in the milieu of the Greco-Arabic translation movement in Umayyad and Abbasid times; (3) the South Arabian

<sup>13</sup> Zémaryalai Tarzi, "Hadda à la lumière des trois dernières campagnes de fouilles de Tapa-é-Shotor (1974-1976)," *Comptes rendus des séances* (Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres) (1976): 381-410, especially pp. 402-3; John Boardman, *The Diffusion of Classical Art in Antiquity* (Washington, D.C.: Thames and Hudson, 1994), p. 143.

<sup>14</sup> It is beyond the scope of this chapter to include the visual material as well.

Alexander; and (4) the Persian Alexander. Much of this brief survey relies on Doufikar-Aerts' *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*. The book should also be consulted for stemmatological matters.

### *The Qurʾanic Alexander*

The earliest testimony to the presence of the Alexander legend in the Islamic world is Sura 18 of the Qurʾān. While the holy book does not call him by his name—Alexander or Iskandar—but rather Dhū l-Qarnayn—“the two-horned one”—elements of the Alexander legend are clearly recognizable.<sup>15</sup> These parallels were not lost on medieval Muslim commentators, most of whom identified Dhū l-Qarnayn with Alexander, the Macedonian conqueror. In Sura 18, the story of Alexander is told in verses 83 to 98 and follows that of Moses and his mysterious companion, who is often identified with Khidr, the timeless traveler and green man. This context is important for Dhū l-Qarnayn's story as it takes up the theme of the wondrous journeys. As I have argued in more detail elsewhere, these Qurʾanic neighbors of Alexander also had an effect on his characteristics in his later career and his religious significance. Alexander's own episode is introduced with the following words: “They ask you about Dhū l-Qarnayn. Say: ‘I will relate to you something of it.’ We made him powerful on the earth and gave him a way to all things” (18: 83–4). According to a common interpretation, God instructs Muḥammad in this passage how to answer a question posed to him by the Jews. This trope of testing prophetic authenticity suggests that Alexander (like Adam, Noah, Moses, and other prophets) served as a common ground in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian salvation history. In the following passage, the divine speaker presents Alexander as a traveler who reaches the ends of the known world. In the Sura, he travels three times. The first journey leads Dhū l-Qarnayn to people who live where the sun sets. He declares that those who do wrong will be punished by God and those who are good and believe will be rewarded in paradise. Here, we can see that the man with the two horns shares Muḥammad's and the Qurʾān's belief in God and the afterlife. There is thus a religious notion to the character, but it is not a very detailed or specific one. The second trip leads Dhū l-Qarnayn to people who live where the sun rises, but the Qurʾān does not offer many details as to what happens here. The third journey, finally, leads Dhū l-Qarnayn to the famous place between two mountains where people live who ask him to build a wall to protect them from Gog and Magog. Dhū l-Qarnayn fulfills their wish and it is stated that when the world comes to an end, Gog and Magog will be set loose again. The Qurʾān continues with eschatological and apocalyptic elaborations.

<sup>15</sup> For a recent assessment of the textual connections see Kevin van Bladel, “The Alexander Legend in the Qurʾān 18:83–102,” in *The Qurʾān in its Historical Context*, ed. G.S. Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 175–203. For exegesis see also Brannon Wheeler, “Moses or Alexander? Early Islamic Exegesis of Qurʾān 18: 60–65,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 57, no. 3 (1998): 191–215.

In two recent articles Kevin van Bladel has confirmed Theodor Nöldeke's earlier theory that the Qur'anic passage was informed by the *Christian Syriac Alexander Legend*.<sup>16</sup> The text was composed in about 629 against the backdrop of Byzantine-Persian wars.<sup>17</sup> Its effect was, among other things, to popularize and introduce into the Islamic scriptural canon the legend of Gog and Magog. The roots of this legend are centuries old and cannot be discussed here. Suffice it to say that Alexander's historical act of building the wall secured him a safe place in the apocalyptic corpus.

Beyond that, Alexander's two-horned appearance in the Qur'ān occasioned discussions in exegetical literature and stories of the prophets. Commentators were interested in the identity of the man with the two horns, explanations for this curious feature, his status as a prophet, and the location of Gog and Magog and the wall; they often offered more elaborate stories. In his stories of the prophets, for example, al-Tha'alabī (died 427/1035) claims that Alexander built the first mosque.<sup>18</sup> Beginning with the Qur'ān, Muslim legends of Alexander (similar to Jewish and Christian legends) thus integrated the conqueror into religious contexts according to their own principles. Instead of relying on divine descent, Alexander is presented along the lines of the Biblical prophets. The fact that this took place in scripture itself distinguished Alexander from other classical figures who were also "monotheized," such as Socrates. This paved the way for further trajectories.

### *Alexander in the Translation Movement*

Syriac sources were also crucial for some texts in the second area surveyed here, literature translated in the milieu more conventionally associated with the Greco-Arabic translation movement and its Umayyad and Abbasid patrons.

The biography of Alexander attributed to his contemporary Callisthenes, but composed in third-century Egypt, became one of the most influential texts concerning the conqueror's life in the Middle Ages. It took on independent but entangled lives in different languages. The text, which was originally written in Greek, made its way into Arabic via Middle Persian and then Syriac, as Nöldeke already established and van Bladel recently confirmed. In the Arabic tradition,

<sup>16</sup> Theodor Nöldeke, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans* (Vienna: in Kommission bei F. Kemptsky, 1890); van Bladel 2007.

<sup>17</sup> For further details concerning the *Christian Syriac Alexander Legend*, see Gerrit J. Reinink, "Heraclius, the New Alexander. Apocalyptic Prophecies during the Reign of Heraclius," in *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. Gerrit J. Reinink and Bernard H. Stolte (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), pp. 81–94, particularly p. 84. See also Gerrit J. Reinink, "Die Entstehung der syrischen Alexanderlegende als politisch-religiöse Propagandaschrift für Herakleios' Kirchenpolitik," in *After Chalcedon: Studies in Theology and Church History Offered to Professor Albert van Roey for his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Carl Laga, Joseph A. Munitiz, and Lucas van Rompay (Leuven: Peeters, 1985), pp. 263–81, particularly pp. 279–80.

<sup>18</sup> Z. David Zuwiyya, "The Alexander Romance in the Arabic Tradition," in *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Z. David Zuwiyya (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 73–112, particularly p. 93.



this text, commonly known as the Alexander Romance, is usually transmitted together with apocalyptic passages which are extraneous to pseudo-Callisthenes. Doufika-Aerts dates the Arabic translations of the Syriac pseudo-Callisthenes as well as of the *Christian Syriac Alexander Legend* to “the second half of the eighth and the end of the ninth century,” but no details concerning the translator are available, and a version without the apocalyptic additions has yet to be discovered.<sup>19</sup> A number of indicators point to an early date within this time range. Thus, “Umāra’s *Qisṣat al-Iskandar* which is informed by the Alexander Romance may have been compiled in the second half of the eighth century.”<sup>20</sup> Related strands of the tradition such as the sixteenth-century *Rrekontamiento del rrey Ališandre*, written in *aljamiado*, which include similar references to early Islamic authorities such as Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (died circa 32/652), have also led scholars to the earlier dating,<sup>21</sup> but it is hard to assess the reality behind such references. Much attention has also been paid to the Ethiopic translation of the Arabic text which dates from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, but has been exploited as a testimony of the Arabic translation.

Even though we are not in the position to reconstruct a precise line of transmission, what we do know about the early Arabic reception of the Alexander Romance points to the early Abbasid milieu which Dimitri Gutas has described in his *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*. While we cannot tell which role, if any, Abbasid caliphs played in the translation of pseudo-Callisthenes, Alexander’s Qurʾanic appearance and apocalyptic function inspired al-Wāthiq (reg. 227–232/842–847) to send an expedition with Sallām, the Translator, to verify the state of the wall.<sup>22</sup> The religious valorization in the Qurʾān and the geographical nature of the Alexander narrative, which allowed for the projection of imperial ambitions (see below), also gave him a different standing than the heroes of ancient Greece such as Aristotle and Socrates, who were integrated into religious systems in their own ways.

Syriac sources play a less critical role in the transmission and compilation of a body of texts Gutas labeled “The Epistolary Cycle between Aristotle and Alexander,” a large part of which (45 percent) served as a source for the *Secret of Secrets*.<sup>23</sup> While some parts of the collection were either transmitted from Greek into Arabic via Syriac (such as pseudo-Aristotle’s *De mundo*) or have Syriac counterparts (such as passages classified as wisdom literature), the relationship

<sup>19</sup> Faustina Doufika-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus: A Survey of the Alexander Tradition through Seven Centuries: from Pseudo-Callisthenes to Šūrī* (Paris: Peeters, 2010), p. 79.

<sup>20</sup> Doufika-Aerts 2010, p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> Zuwiyya 2011, p. 77.

<sup>22</sup> Travis Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam: Geography, Translation and the ʿAbbāsid Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); E.J. Van Donzel and A.B. Schmidt, *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources: Sallām’s Quest for Alexander’s Wall* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Dimitri Gutas, “Review Article: On Greco-Arabic Epistolary ‘Novels,’” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 12 (2009): 59–70; Miklos Maróth, “The Correspondence between Aristotle and Alexander the Great. An Anonymous Greek Novel in Letters in Arabic Translation,” *Acta antiqua* (Piliscsaba) 45, no. 2–3 (June 2005): 231–315.

between Greek and Middle Persian sources remains somewhat uncertain.<sup>24</sup> The latter, however, seem to have played a crucial role for the composition of the cycle at the hands of Sālim Abū l-‘Alā’, an Umayyad chancellery secretary of Persian origin who was involved in the development of an Arabic epistolary style that betrays Persian influences. The compilation and translation has been dated to 730 and would thus precede the translation of the Alexander Romance into Arabic.<sup>25</sup> The *Christian Syriac Alexander Legend* and the Qur’anic Dhū l-Qarnayn do not seem to be significant in this context, although we can find the typical tendency of introducing religious beliefs. In one of the narratives (no. 4), “Philip, in his deathbed, is consoled by Aristotle who tells him that he would have the fate of the pious and god-like in afterlife.”<sup>26</sup>

These three appearances of Alexander—as Dhū l-Qarnayn in the Qur’ān, Macedonian ruler in pseudo-Callisthenes, and Aristotle’s disciple in the letters—paved his way into a larger body of literature. His career was connected with basic questions of history, geography, non-prophetic wisdom and royal virtue. He was thus well-represented from early on in some of the major fields of intellectual activity of the time: the Islamic sciences, the Qur’ān, *adab*, and “foreign sciences.”

### *The South Arabian Alexander*

Some authors reworked these traditions according to their own purposes. Of particular interest are two sets of narratives which situate Alexander or his Qur’anic double, Dhū l-Qarnayn, within a different regional or “national” context by presenting him as a local ruler. Given that the latter’s identity was the subject of some controversy, these stories may have had some verisimilitude; claiming Alexander as one of one’s own was not a new phenomenon either. Pseudo-Callisthenes had done the same in Egyptian terms. Curiously, Ibn Hishām’s (died circa 218/833) “Book of Crowns” (*Kitāb al-tjān*), which identifies Dhū l-Qarnayn with a South Arabian ruler and can be traced back to Umayyad times, portrays him with stronger prophetic features.<sup>27</sup> He has powerful visions and thus resembles Muḥammad.<sup>28</sup>

While Alexander stories typically begin with the conqueror’s parentage and early life, the chapter on Dhū l-Qarnayn in the “Book of Crowns” begins with a grown-up ruler who has a series of visions. These apparitions begin with a glimpse of hell and divine power, convincing him to give up his loftiness and pomp. In the following visions, he gets a sense of overwhelming ambition for

<sup>24</sup> Gutas 2009, pp. 62–3.

<sup>25</sup> Gutas 2009, p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> Gutas 2009, p. 61.

<sup>27</sup> Tilman Nagel, *Alexander der Große in der frühislamischen Volksliteratur* (Walldorf-Hessen: Verlag für Orientkunde H. Vorndran, 1978); Anna Akasoy, “Alexander in the Himalayas: Competing Imperial Legacies in Medieval Islamic History and Literature,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 72 (2009): 1–20.

<sup>28</sup> Anna Akasoy, “Geography, History and Prophecy: Mechanisms of Integration in the Alexander Legend” [Forthcoming].

world domination. As the ruler becomes increasingly distressed by these experiences, his people become more and more alienated from him. His court astrologers refuse to interpret his dreams, but he is finally referred to a prophet in Jerusalem. Dhū l-Qarnayn gathers the largest army a Southern ruler has ever had, swears allegiance to God, and travels to Jerusalem. There, he meets the prophet who turns out to be Mūsā al-Khiḍr. The meaning of the dreams is that he will conquer the world, but should remain loyal to God. The two men set out on a journey of mission, war and adventure which is interrupted by further visions of Dhū l-Qarnayn. Within the corpus of Alexander literature, such experiences are not entirely exceptional. In other texts, for example, Alexander converses with angels, a mode of gaining knowledge in which Muḥammad's experience of revelation is conventionally described. In Firdawsī's (329–410/940–1019 or 416/1025) *Shāhnāmāh*, for instance, Alexander meets Isrāfil, and an angel with similar names appears in different Arabic texts where he informs Alexander of the source of life.<sup>29</sup>

The portrayal of the great conqueror in the “Book of Crowns” is nonetheless peculiar. Alexander may not be an example of conventional behavior elsewhere either, but the experience of Ibn Hishām's Dhū l-Qarnayn bears the hallmarks of a more profound conversion story and is reminiscent of Muḥammad's case. For both men, the experience of the divine is deeply disturbing and frightening. It alienates them from their contemporaries and it takes a person associated with previous monotheisms to validate their visions. Moreover, both men have the experience of divine silence, which generates great despair. In other respects, their religious sides are different from one another. Dhū l-Qarnayn is clearly proselytizing, although the nature of the religion he promotes remains strangely vague. The same is true for the infidels he fights, who are only referred to as *kuffār* (“unbelievers”). Apart from occasional references to Abraham, no other religion is present in the narrative. Against this backdrop the physiognomical features of two peoples Dhū l-Qarnayn comes across are particularly interesting. One of them is said to have faces like apes and the other one faces like pigs.<sup>30</sup> This is reminiscent of the transformation of Jews into apes and pigs that the Qurʾān refers to (5: 60).

### *The Persian Alexander*

Another “nationalist” version of the Alexander legend can be traced back in Arabic to at least the “Book of the Biographies of the Kings, also called The Ultimate Aim on the History of the Persians and Arabs” (*Kitāb siyar al-mulūk al-musammā bi-Nihāyat al-arab fī akhbār al-furs wa-l-ʿarab*).<sup>31</sup> The text, which is wrongly attributed to the philologist al-Aṣmaʿī (died circa 213/828), contains a section on Alexander the Great in which the conqueror is presented as the son of

<sup>29</sup> Doufīkar-Aerts 2010, pp. 173–9; Zuwiyya 2011, pp. 101–2, 111.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb al-tijān fī mulūk Ḥimyar* (Sanaa: Markaz al-dirāsāt waʾl-abḥāth al-yamaniyya, 1979), p. 110.

<sup>31</sup> Doufīkar-Aerts 2010, pp. 29–34.

a Greek mother and the Persian emperor. In an epic twist of fate, his actions lead to the death of his half-brother Darius. As we have already seen, the strategy to incorporate Alexander into a “national” history by means of genealogical redrafting was not new. While the South Arabian variant reflects the spread of the Alexander legend into Yemeni circles and Islamic empire building, the origins of the Persianized Alexander remain unclear. Hayrettin Yücesoy has addressed the issue in connection with a similar passage written by Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī (died circa 282/895). The scholar versed in disciplines ranging from botany to linguistic sciences also composed a work on history, “The Long Narratives” (*Al-Akhhbār al-ṭiwāl*). Yücesoy’s assumption that the story stemmed from Persian sources is not supported by any evidence and stands in contrast to Yamanaka’s theory about the Sassanian influences in Firdawsī’s chapter on Alexander in the *Shāhnāmāh*.<sup>32</sup> Written around the turn of the second millennium CE, the Persian epic combines positive views of Alexander which include his half-Achaemenid ancestry and Christianity, with a negative representation as a destroyer and oppressor. The latter elements, according to Yamanaka, betray Sassanian origins. Wiesehöfer presents a third theory: the Persian ancestry may have been introduced during the Middle Persian reception of pseudo-Callisthenes, although this theory does not chime well with the Syriac version, which maintains the Greek claim that Nectanebo fathered Alexander.<sup>33</sup> Having reviewed various theories about the possible origins of a positive Iranian image of Alexander, Shayegan concludes that such an oral tradition may have already surfaced under the Arsacids who embraced their Seleucid heritage in their conflict with the Romans who were enmeshed in their own *imitatio Alexandri*.<sup>34</sup>

Be that as it may, the above-mentioned texts exemplify a prominent trend among authors of Persian origins, among whom we also need to mention al-Ṭabarī (died 310/923) and his work on history. The Alexander who appears in the *Shāhnāmāh* indicates a tendency in later Persian literature that accords with a general trend to integrate Alexander into an Islamic framework. Firdawsī’s mixed image of Alexander, both destroyer and hero, gave way to a more positive image. In Nizāmī’s *Iskandarnāmāh*, for example, Alexander’s destruction of the fire temples is a commendable act.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Hayrettin Yücesoy, “Ancient Imperial Heritage and Islamic Universal Historiography: al-Dīnawarī’s Secular Perspective,” *Journal of Global History* 2 (2007): 135–55, particularly p. 142; Yuriko Yamanaka, “Ambiguïté de l’image d’Alexandre chez Firdawsī: les traces des traditions sassanides dans le *Livre des Rois*,” in *Alexandre le Grand dans les littératures occidentales et proche-orientales*, ed. Laurence Harf-Lancner, Claire Kappler and Françoise Suard (Nanterre: Centre des sciences de la littérature de l’Université de Paris X, 1999), pp. 341–53.

<sup>33</sup> Josef Wiesehöfer, “The ‘Accursed’ and the ‘Adventurer’: Alexander the Great in Iranian Tradition,” in *Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. David Zuwiyya (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 113–32, particularly p. 128.

<sup>34</sup> M. Rahim Shayegan, *Arsacids and Sasanians: Political Ideology in Post-Hellenistic and Late Antique Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 295–307 and 340–49.

<sup>35</sup> For further details regarding the Persian reception of the Alexander story see also Yuriko Yamanaka, “From Evil Destroyer to Islamic Hero: the Transformation of Alexander the Great’s Image in Iran,” *Annals of the Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 8 (1993): 55–87;

### Assessment

How can we assess the religious dimension of the Alexander material in the Islamic world? At first sight a number of cases come to mind in which Alexander becomes “Islamicized.” His appearance in the Qurʾān opened the door to a more profound transformation into a religious figure and quasi-prophet. In the “Book of Crowns” and for al-Dīnawarī, the victory over Persia almost counted as Alexander’s religious war. Here it was Aristotle, transformed into a monotheist, who convinced Alexander to convert polytheists. The conquest of Iran is a consequence of Darius’s rejection of this enterprise. Finally, on his way back from India, the wide-striding conqueror visits Mecca and performs a form of pilgrimage. Likewise, in the illustrated tradition of the *Shāhnāmāh* we can find paintings showing Alexander next to the Kaʿba and Niẓāmī devotes an entire chapter to this episode.<sup>36</sup> In the Malay *Hikayat Iskandar Zulkarnain*, which was compiled from various Islamic sources in fifteenth-century Sumatra, Aristotle appears as an *ustaz* who instructs Alexander in the Qurʾān.<sup>37</sup> A curious episode comes from the more recent past. The French traveler Henri d’Ollone (1868–1945) reports that according to the Turkani Muslims in northwestern China, Alexander had introduced Islam there. Alexander’s soldiers had married local women and thus became the ancestors of the Turkani.<sup>38</sup> Before assessing such traditions a few methodological comments are in order.

### RELIGION AND THE TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE PREMODERN PERIOD

How can we account for Alexander’s popularity? As the above has shown, and as an examination of a larger amount of material would confirm, Alexander was a significant and attractive figure for different people and different reasons. Apart from his presence in certain textual contexts that triggered his appearance elsewhere, the wondrous nature of his exploits was appealing to writers and readers. The multi-dimensional transformations generated by a diversity of agents, sources and trajectories make a simple and singular answer seem inadequate. The Qurʾānic appearance or the Abbasid imitation of Sassanians alone would fall short as an explanation. In what follows, I focus on religion as one particular aspect of the Alexander legend, both as a manifestation and as a vector.

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Minoo Southgate, “Portrait of Alexander in Persian Alexander-Romances in the Islamic Era,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 97 (1977): 278–84.

<sup>36</sup> Marianna Shreve Simpson, “From Tourist to Pilgrim: Iskandar at the Kaʿba in Illustrated *Shahnama* Manuscripts,” *Iranian Studies* 43 (2010): 127–46.

<sup>37</sup> Su Fang Ng, “Global Renaissance: Alexander the Great and Early Modern Classicism from the British Isles to the Malay Archipelago,” *Comparative Literature* 58 (2006): 293–312, particularly pp. 299–300.

<sup>38</sup> H.M.G. d’Ollone, “Recherches sur les musulmans chinois. Mission d’Ollone,” *Revue du monde musulman* IX, no. 12 (1909): 522–98, p. 547.

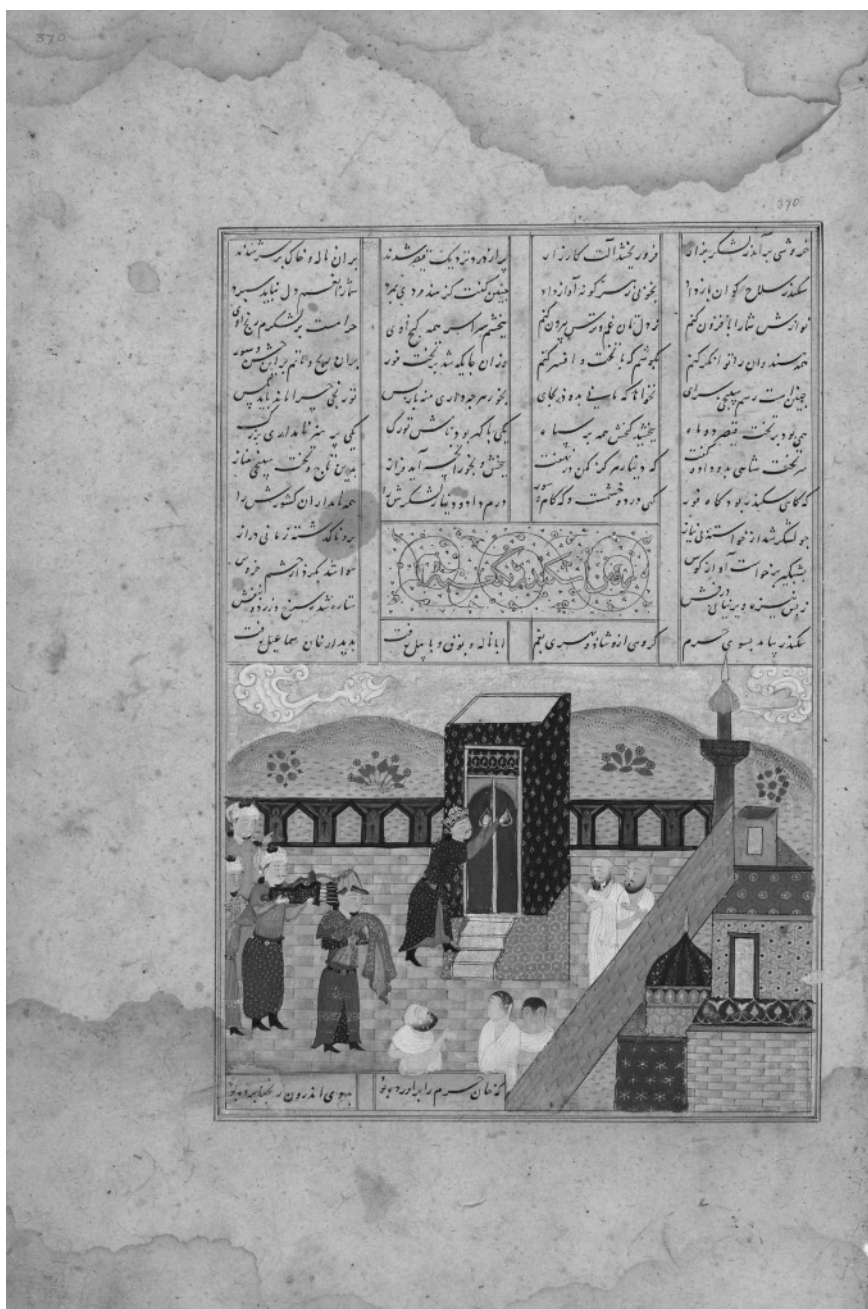


Figure 7.1 *Shāhnāmah* of Firdawsī, dated 995/1480. (Image © The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin [CBL Per. 157.370])

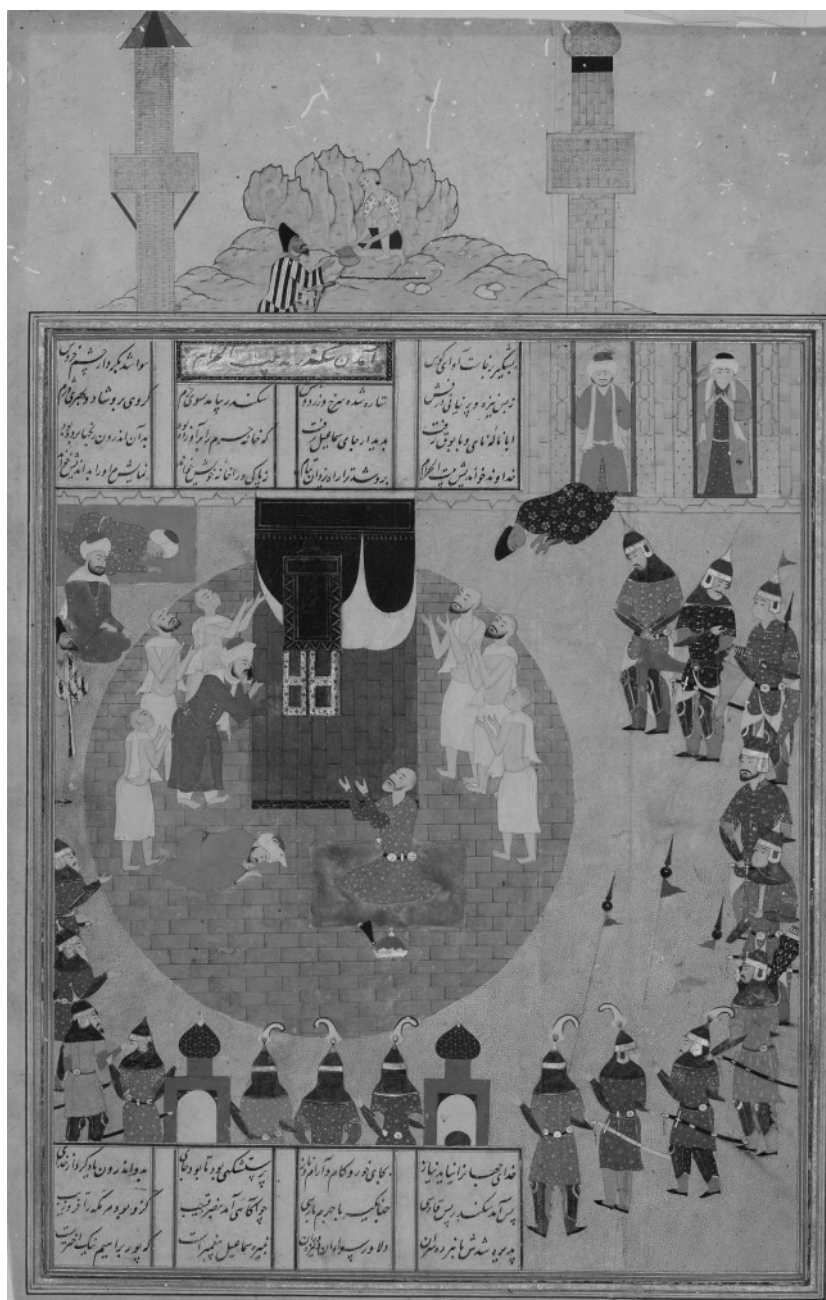


Figure 7.2 *Shāhnāmah* of Firdawsī, mid-sixteenth century. The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, London, inv. no. MSS 771. (© The Nour Foundation. Courtesy of The Khalili Family Trust)

Historians who study the transmission of knowledge across cultural boundaries in the premodern period frequently acknowledge the important role of religion in these processes. Impressive examples include the cultural transformations following the Arab-Muslim conquests in the seventh century and the building of the Umayyad and Abbasid empires. The Arabic language spread with the Islamic religion, and an Arabic learned culture developed which absorbed ancient and late antique knowledge and entertained a creative and productive relationship with the religious sciences. Medieval Muslim authors distinguished different categories of knowledge which correspond to a certain extent with a distinction between “religious” and “secular,” but, as Birgit Krawietz has pointed out, these categories were connected.<sup>39</sup>

An example from the Christian realm and a later period which illustrates the significance of religion for the transmission of knowledge might be the translation movement in twelfth-century Toledo. Some of the protagonists of this enterprise, such as Dominicus Gundissalinus (circa 1110–1190) and Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada (died 1247), occupied high ecclesiastical positions. Christian infrastructure was also part of the westward transmission of knowledge from Central and East Asia, the destination of missionaries like John of Plano Carpini (1182–1252) in the thirteenth century. Likewise, Ramon Llull (1232–1315) and other Dominican missionaries in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries learned Arabic in order to proselytize, and established links with the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean.<sup>40</sup>

In order to explore the significance of religion for the transmission of knowledge in premodern times in a more systematic way, I would like to use a statement in the introduction by Jürgen Renn and Malcolm Hyman to *The Globalization of Knowledge in History* for purposes of a tentative exploration:

Religions have been one of the most important conveyors of the globalization of knowledge and of science in the period between antiquity and the early modern era. With the rise of Buddhism in India and of Christianity and Islam in the West (as well as Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple), religion became decoupled from the state to a previously unparalleled degree, emerging as a source of authority separate from and potentially in conflict with that of the state, thus developing a potential for global spread (world religions).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Birgit Krawietz, “Normative Islam and Global Scientific Knowledge,” in *Globalization of Knowledge*, ed. Jürgen Renn (Berlin: Open Access Edition, 2012), pp. 295–310. For classical Islamic divisions of knowledge and the sciences see also Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 52–73.

<sup>40</sup> For a later period see Sonja Brentjes, *Travellers from Europe in the Ottoman and Safavid Empires, 16th–17th Centuries: Seeking, Transforming, Discarding Knowledge* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> Jürgen Renn and Malcolm D. Hyman. “The Globalization of Knowledge in History: An Introduction,” in *Globalization of Knowledge*, ed. Jürgen Renn (Berlin: Open Access Edition, 2012), pp. 15–44, particularly p. 32.



### Elaborating on the role of religions, Renn states:

Religious or quasi-religious traditions, such as philosophical movements or state ideologies, played a special role. These traditions, especially the world religions, were not only the most effective in the large-scale spread of knowledge associated with them, even across geographical, political and economic boundaries, they also provided and continue to offer overarching second-order epistemic frameworks governing the value and role of knowledge for societies and individuals.<sup>42</sup>

These descriptions capture many of the examples mentioned above as well as numerous others that come to mind such as, very generally speaking, the spread of religious knowledge which tied the Muslim world together. The Islamic religion gave and continues to give a certain degree of cohesion to a large and highly diverse area—to the extent that we refer to it as “the Islamic world.” It may be easiest to assess the significance of religion in the spread of knowledge primarily and unambiguously associated with the Islamic religion. When Muslims moved into new regions, they introduced practices, beliefs, and objects that were crucial to their religious identity: Islamic forms of prayer and other rituals, the doctrine of Muḥammad as a prophet, the Qurʾān, mosques, Islamic law, and more. In the context of our subject, the Qurʾanic manifestation of Alexander as Dhū l-Qarnayn is such an example, although the precise relationship between the spread of Islamic religion and knowledge of Alexander the Great varies from context to context and the above-quoted statement is more suitable for some than for others. In some regions that were conquered fairly early by the Arab Muslims, knowledge of Alexander and his apocalyptic significance may have existed because of the presence of Jews or Christians, even though the historical Alexander never set foot in those regions (Iberia, North Africa, Yemen). The popularity of Alexander (even where he appeared as a South Arabian conqueror) may be owed to his Qurʾanic double. In other regions which had been the theater of Alexander’s actual exploits (notably Iran), knowledge of Alexander changed with the spread of Islam (one can even say that the accuracy of the knowledge decreased), whereas in a third category of region—such as at least some areas of China, knowledge of Alexander first spread with Muslims.<sup>43</sup>

A more precise evaluation of the role of religion in these and other contexts, however, involves a number of questions. To what extent was the religious affiliation of individuals and collectives critical to the spread of knowledge? Can we picture the gnomological literature and the *Alexander Romance* as “fellow travelers” of the Qurʾanic adaptation of the *Christian Syriac Alexander Legend*?<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Jürgen Renn, “Survey: Knowledge as a Fellow Traveler,” in *Globalization of Knowledge*, ed. Jürgen Renn (Berlin: Open Access Edition, 2012), pp. 205–43, particularly pp. 206–7.

<sup>43</sup> Yamanaka 1993.

<sup>44</sup> For the expression “fellow traveler” see Renn 2012, pp. 205–43.

And how should the former be classified? What might be benefits and downsides of their classification as “secular knowledge”?

Furthermore, the increasing cosmopolitanism of the political centers of the Islamic world in the Umayyad and especially the early Abbasid empires reveals that knowledge often also traveled from the margins to the heartlands of the empire, but this journey was not conducted alongside an expanding religion which could be described as a “fellow traveler.” On the contrary, the journey took place in the opposite direction. The concept of networks offers a plausible alternative model for the multi-directional transmission of knowledge which also accounts for the role of religion. Thus, one of the networks which connected Iraq to Central Asia (or westwards to North Africa and al-Andalus, for that matter) were Muslim scholars who traveled as part of their religious education. Other relevant networks were diplomats and traders.<sup>45</sup> We are dealing with communications that led to the spread of knowledge into different directions, producing different and interconnected layers.

Since Alexander was present in the Qurʾān and its hermeneutics, these circles go some way towards explaining his sustained presence throughout the Islamic world, but they do not capture parallel and rivaling traditions of Jews and Christians or the “national” adaptations in South Arabia and Persia. This leads to broader questions concerning the extent to which certain kinds of knowledge were considered to be rooted in specific social, cultural and religious circles, and whether greater prestige was attributed to such knowledge by virtue of stemming from certain sources.

These are problems for parallel developments as well. Was knowledge produced and transmitted by Muslim scientists and philosophers, for example, associated with the Islamic religion? While medieval Latin literature contains references to this effect, it is much more difficult to assess what such associations meant. Speaking about Averroism, for instance, Aquinas referred to the doctrine of “gentiles,” but his response against the Averroists was not one of anti-Islamic polemics.

Furthermore, what could the “overarching second-order epistemic frameworks” that Renn and Hyman wrote about correspond to in an Islamic context? Connections between Islamic religion and learned culture in lands under Islamic rule are manifold, but how did the Islamic religion provide a “second-order epistemic framework” that facilitated the transmission of “secular” knowledge? One might think of divisions of the sciences such as al-Fārābī’s (died 339/950–51), which offered space for “secular” and “religious” knowledge as well as the patronage provided by political leaders who also used a religious language of power, but here, too, the exact relationship remains somewhat unclear. Again, Alexander’s presence in the Qurʾān may have facilitated the spread of the legend, but this is hard to verify and it is difficult

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<sup>45</sup> Manuel Vásquez, “Studying Religion in Motion: A Networks Approach,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 20 (2008): 151–84; *Muslim Networks from Hajj to Hip Hop*, ed. Miriam Cooke, and Bruce B. Lawrence (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

to distinguish between “religious” and “secular” knowledge. Likewise, Yücesoy’s classification of the Alexander passages in al-Dīnawarī’s “History” as “secular” falls short in explaining the function of those narratives in the text. The stories had filtered through Christian recipients, and al-Dīnawarī’s Alexander acts in ways that are religiously valorized.

While many historians apparently seem to agree that religion was important for the transmission of knowledge in the premodern period, scholars have not yet developed a model that accounts for the significance of religion. The challenge for such a model would be to explain what exactly it is about religion in general, a specific religion, or a specific religion in a specific context that triggers and facilitates the transmission of knowledge not primarily identified as religious. As the case study of the Alexander legend in the premodern Islamic world suggests, general statements about the significance of Islam as a religion or Islam as a specific religion for the spread of that legend are hard to make, but further case studies might help us to identify regularities in the relationship between religion and the spread of knowledge and to develop such general theories into more complex and empirically substantiated models.

#### CRITICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Before we can address these questions, however, we must dig even deeper. The difficulty of describing certain branches of knowledge as “secular” and others as “religious” illustrates the problem of categories in modern scholarship. Historians of the premodern Islamic world oftentimes use these expressions in a wide variety of contexts taking an obvious and common understanding for granted. Those divisions of the academy however which are more deeply marked by postcolonial thought than medieval studies have recently presented contributions to the debate about religion which suggest that the uncertainties about the role of religion in the transmission of knowledge are much more profound, and that the basic analytical tools and categories we operate with may not be suitable at all. A brief survey of statements from a few recent publications with a particular focus on religious studies and comparative religion will illustrate this.

In the introduction to his *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age*, Hans Kippenberg offered a succinct account of the consequences of secularization for the study of religion:

Max Weber ends his study of the emergence of modern capitalism with a comment on the fact that few people consider religion as a historical force in the modern age. “The modern man is in general, even with the best will, unable to give religious ideas a significance for culture and national character which they deserve.” Despite many studies that have emphasized this deficiency, the situation today, almost a century later, is still the same. It is difficult for anyone who talks of religion to avoid being considered a theologian. Religion

is ignored by historical scholarship and exposed as ideology by the social sciences. It lacks a recognized place in the academy.<sup>46</sup>

Kippenberg, like a number of other recent authors, analyzed the relationship between more general attitudes to religion and the academic study of religion in nineteenth-century Western Europe, in particular in what he considered to be the evolving field of comparative religion. The studies mentioned above already suggest a turn in the humanities and a greater willingness to acknowledge religion rather than ignoring it, but appropriate theoretical models are still few and far between. While Kippenberg implies that modern scholars underestimate religion, other critics argue that the concept of religion has been applied too freely in certain contexts. Thus, Tomoko Masuzawa has examined the “invention of world religions” which took place in a similar period as the rise of comparative religion Kippenberg discussed. Combining her observation that “world religions” were invented in the nineteenth century and replaced earlier divisions into Christians, Jews, Muslims, and “the rest,” as well as into “nations,” with a trenchant critique of the current understanding of religion in academic circles, she states:

We seem to imagine ourselves living in a world mapped—though not very neatly—in terms of so many varieties of religion, which sometimes overlap, converge, and syncretize and often conflict with one another. It is presumed, moreover, that religion is one of the most significant—possibly the most significant—factor characterizing each individual society and that this is particularly true in “premodern” or otherwise non-Western societies. Broadly speaking, the more “traditional” the society, the greater the role religion plays within it—or so we presume, regardless of how much or how little we happen to know about the society in question or about its supposed tradition.

To be sure, these are mostly precritical, unreflected assumptions on the order of street-corner opinions, but when it comes to the subject of religion, it appears that the scholarly world is situated hardly above street level. In the social sciences and humanities alike, “religion” as a category has been left largely unhistoricized, essentialized, and tacitly presumed immune or inherently resistant to critical analysis.<sup>47</sup>

The difference between Kippenberg and Masuzawa also reflects the diverse assessments of religion in post-9/11 public debates. For some, religion in general is a force of evil, others see in it the key to peaceful coexistence, some demand that it should be taken more seriously in order to understand the actions of religiously motivated people, whereas others recognize the

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<sup>46</sup> Hans G. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. XIII.

<sup>47</sup> Tomoko Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 1–2.

marginalizing function of religion. The probably most prominent critic of the current academic use of the concept of religion is the anthropologist Talal Asad. Notably in his *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, he analyzed the extent to which our understanding of religion as a category is shaped by nineteenth-century European secularization and the significance of this process for our worldview. “Secularism as political doctrine arose in modern Euro-America,” Asad explains.

It is easy to think of it simply as requiring the separation of religious from secular institutions in government, but that is not all it is. Abstractly stated, examples of this separation can be found in medieval Christendom and in the Islamic empires—and no doubt elsewhere too. What is distinctive about “secularism” is that it presupposes new concepts of “religion,” “ethics,” and “politics,” and new imperatives associated with them.<sup>48</sup>

In other words, in order to develop a properly historicized concept of religion, we have to historicize secularization and the secular as well. In the light of this critique, whether or not one agrees with the precise form in which it is presented, classifications of knowledge into secular and religious ought to be reconsidered. The label “secular” in the case of al-Dīnawarī’s chapter on Alexander seems to fit neither set of criteria. As I have argued above, neither should the term secular be used too readily for material that is not part of a religious canon.

In order to identify the implications of this critique for historical research, a closer look at the relevant analyses is instructive. Masuzawa describes her book project in terms that might give us an idea where precisely we have been misled by modern Western European bias:

The principal objective is a genealogy of a particular discursive practice, namely, “world religions” as a category and as a conceptual framework initially developed in the European academy, which quickly became an effective means of differentiating, variegating, consolidating, and totalizing a large portion of the social, cultural and political practices observable among the inhabitants of regions elsewhere in the world. This pluralist discourse is made all the more powerful, I believe, by a corollary presumption that any broadly value-orienting, ethically inflected viewpoint must derive from a religious heritage. One of the most consequential effects of this discourse is that it spiritualizes what are material practices and turns them into expressions of something timeless and suprahistorical, which is to say, it depoliticizes them.<sup>49</sup>

What does this criticism mean for the role attributed to religion in the transmission of knowledge, and how can it be applied to the Alexander legend?

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<sup>48</sup> Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 1–2.

<sup>49</sup> Masuzawa 2005, p. 20.

Two conclusions come to mind which might be either mutually exclusive or dependent on each other. The first impression is that we may be orientalizing the past by grossly exaggerating the role of religion. To use Masuzawa's words: we are differentiating an "Islamic" from a "Christian" world and we totalize the Islamic world and the phenomena which took place in this world by labeling them as "Islamic." Just as Crusaders and religious doctors prevail in the dark ages of the popular imagination, we give too much credit to Islam for the spread of Arabic and too much credit to Christianity for the arrival of knowledge about East Asia in Western Europe. A spread of Alexander under the spell of Dhū l-Qarnayn would neither do justice to the parallels in Judaism, Christianity, and even Buddhism, nor would it be able to account for the multiple transformations of Alexander within the Islamic world. In fact, it is perfectly possible—and for many historians more plausible—to describe the expansions these phenomena resulted from as political processes (such as the South Arabian or Persian Alexanders or Ottoman adaptations of the model).

The second impression, which I take from Kippenberg, is that we may have failed to take religion seriously—perhaps most obvious in the endemic lack of attention that medievalists pay to the theoretically informed study of religion. The latter area, if understood as theology, seems to be made up of representatives of different communities who engage in faith-based studies, as Kippenberg suggested, or of social scientists who ask questions that medievalists cannot even begin to ponder without entering into ultimately pointless speculation. If nothing else, however, one would hope that scholars of religious studies have digested the criticism of the modern understanding of religion and produced definitions that are also workable for historians. As has been the case with other concepts such as state or nation, medievalists and historians of regions other than what is conventionally called the West can use such definitions in order to challenge their exclusive presence in modern times and in the West. If we have unduly privileged religion, we need not conclude that "cutting back" on religion as an explanatory category is the solution. We will return to this point later in this chapter.

#### THE STUDY OF MEDIEVAL ISLAM AND THE PROBLEM OF RELIGION I: THE MIDDLE AGES

Before we accept too readily that the study of the transmission of classical knowledge in the medieval Islamic world (if such a term should be used in the first place) is methodologically deeply flawed insofar as it operates with an undertheorized category of religion, it would be important to review some of the debates which take place among the scholarly community concerned with this area and period. They indicate potential directions for some answers.

In fact, even the briefest glance at the critical studies mentioned above suggests that their scope may not warrant such a fundamental methodological critique. Due to their ambition to disclose the colonialist workings of the concept of religion, in particular as manifest or implicit in comparative studies,

their analyses put a particular emphasis on the peculiarities of the discourse in the nineteenth century and barely stretch into the premodern period. Other authors at least acknowledged discourses on religious diversity that were not modern or Western European and which displayed some understanding of religion as a universal category. In his history of comparative religion, Eric Sharpe mentions al-Ṭabarī, al-Masʿūdī (c 280-/893–956) and al-Bīrūnī (362–circa 442/973–circa 1050) in passing and credits al-Shahrastānī (died 548/1153) with “the honour of writing the first history of religion in world literature.” “This outstanding work far outstrips anything which Christian writers were capable of producing in the same period.”<sup>50</sup> While some scholars have used a terminological approach in order to address historical notions of “religion” in the Islamic world and the appropriateness of terms derived from the Latin “religio,” to date the most detailed studies of works of comparative religion written by medieval Muslims come from the Belgian scholar of religion Jacques Waardenburg.<sup>51</sup> He, too, suggests that internal discursive categories of premodern Muslim writing can be used to address religion and religious difference.

While it seems that the study of religion in a comparative perspective is not entirely an invention of nineteenth-century Western Europe, the degree of convergence of modern Western European and medieval Islamic discourse is another matter. Waardenburg gave a section of his book *Muslims and Others: Relations in Context* the title “World Religions seen in Islamic Light” and presented a survey of historical encounters between Muslims and Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and Christians as well as statements regarding the respective religions made by Muslims in the premodern period. To a certain extent, his categories replicate those used in medieval texts. Although Waardenburg did not address the kind of criticism Masuzawa expressed and does not expound his understanding of “religion” and “world religions” (or his choice of “Hinduism” as one of them), both the historical material Waardenburg analyzed and his interpretation makes us redress the criticism presented by Masuzawa and others.

Waardenburg assumes that medieval Muslims had their own “theology of religion,” which was shaped by distinctive features of Islamic thought and which determined their view of other religions and of religious pluralism. The concept of Islam as the primordial religion of pure monotheism is key to this vision. Both other religions and Muslim sects are seen as deviations from this one true religion, which can be classified according to their sins like

<sup>50</sup> Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion. A History* (New York: Scribner’s, 1975), p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> Reinhold Gleis, and Stefan Reichmuth, “Religion between Last Judgement, Law and Faith: Koranic Dīn and its Rendering in Latin Translations of the Koran,” *Religion* 42, no. 2 (2012): 247–71. Waardenburg explored this subject as early as 1974. See Jacques Waardenburg, “Tendances d’histoire des religions dans l’Islam médiéval,” in *Akten des VII. Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft* (Göttingen, 15. bis 22. August 1974), ed. Albert Dietrich (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1976), pp. 372–84. For more recent work see Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslims and Others: Relations in Context* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003) as well as two volumes edited by him: *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and *Scholarly Approaches to Religion, Interreligious Perceptions and Islam*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg (Bern: P. Lang, 1995).

worshipping a plurality of deities or believing in the eternity of the world.<sup>52</sup> Yet Waardenburg describes the understanding of “religion” in these texts as a fairly unsophisticated category. Muslim theologians and jurists “spoke in fact not about Judaism and Christianity as religions for their own sake, but rather about the implications of the Qur’anic views and concepts of Judaism and Christianity.”<sup>53</sup> Future research will reveal the extent to which this statement is a representative observation concerning premodern Muslim writing about other religions, or how significant this bias is for the classification of these texts as exercises in comparative religion. Either way, it also explains how easily Alexander could be transformed into a monotheist of various kinds even though his status as a prophet was by no means clear. This view allowed Muslim writers (and others too) to integrate Alexander into Islamic historiography.

Furthermore, in certain respects, premodern Muslim writing about religion shares features of modern Western discourse as analyzed by the critical scholars. To be sure, premodern Muslim authors did not distinguish themselves as “secular,” or different from “religious” non-Muslims. If anything, religion was used as a feature which differentiated Muslims from “savages” without religion. Independent of the details of these mechanisms, political rule also played a critical role for Muslim accounts of different religions. It was due to conquest and empire building that the religious diversity al-Shahrastānī wrote about existed within his purview. Another case in point are the religious categories of people under Islamic law, such as Muslims; *dhimmīs*, meaning tolerated religious groups; *ahl al-kitāb* who are the privileged “People of the Book”; and *dār al-ḥarb* or the “house of war,” which describes peoples not under Islamic rule. The function of these categories extended beyond their instrumentality for political rule into deliberations of theology and salvation history, but it also approximates what critical authors have seen as a hallmark of modern Western hegemonic discourse.<sup>54</sup> One can also see some of this dynamic in the case of Alexander, who is used as a narrative tool for imperial competition, proto-nationalist manifestation, and expansion. Likewise, the Qur’anic Dhū l-Qarnayn who traveled from the place where the sun sets to the place where it rises allowed for an imaginary geography which exposed the entire world to Islamic presence and allowed new Muslims to integrate into the expanding *umma*.<sup>55</sup>

To elaborate, I would like to offer a brief comparison with a biography that can be classified in outlook and function as much more unambiguously religious, namely that of Muḥammad.<sup>56</sup> The “Book of Crowns” is not representative as regards the prominent portrayal of Dhū l-Qarnayn as a prophet. Medieval Muslim authors disagreed about Alexander’s status as a prophet, as his actions

<sup>52</sup> Waardenburg 2003, p. 192.

<sup>53</sup> Waardenburg 2003, p. 194.

<sup>54</sup> Likewise Waardenburg 2003, pp. 168–9: “One of the most important elements in the historical encounters of Muslims with people of other religions has been power of various kinds: military, political, economic, demographic, and legal.”

<sup>55</sup> Akasoy 2009; H.T. Norris, *Saharan Myth and Saga* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 26–73.

<sup>56</sup> For a more detailed discussion see Akasoy, “Geography, History and Prophecy”.



in the Qurʾān did not offer sufficient evidence for such a distinction. However, my suggestion in this chapter is to read the Alexander legend within a religious context even though he did not receive full and explicit religious validation. Muḥammad's biography is an obvious point for comparison, not only because it is the most significant prophetic biography of the Islamic world, but also because of the parallels between Muḥammad and the various positive historical figures in the Qurʾān.<sup>57</sup> An obvious difference is the way in which the geography of Alexander's biography changed from one version to another. The Qurʾānic reference to the places where the sun rises and where it sets embraces all of the known world and allows the conqueror of the Islamic narratives to set foot on lands the historical man has never seen. In some versions of the biography, he is accompanied by Khidr, who facilitates Alexander's journeys into unknown territories. Muḥammad's biography, by contrast, has a fairly fixed topography. To be sure, modern critical scholars see hardly more historical reality in the classical Islamic biographies of Muḥammad which date to the third/ninth century than they would acknowledge for those of Alexander. Medieval attitudes, however, differed considerably in their tolerance for variations in the two traditions. The underlying religious principle of the Muḥammad biographies was that they were part of the *sunna* and had legal as well as theological implications. Within the framework of the prophetic biography (*sīra*) as it developed in the formative period of Islam, it is difficult to imagine that authors would have drastically expanded the geography of Muḥammad's actions, claiming, for example, that he went to al-Andalus or Khurasan. Such obvious manipulations might have undermined the claim for historical accuracy implied in the *sīra*'s religious ambition. Alexander's biographies did not have such implications and developed, as we have seen, an astonishing geographical flexibility. What does this mean for their religious function? As I argue elsewhere in more detail, it allowed Muslims all over the expanding *Dār al-Islām* to place themselves in the imaginary geography of Islamic history. Rather than being uncivilized new additions to the empire who had never received any prophetic blessings, their place in the monotheistic *Heilsgeschichte* is deeply rooted in mythos and epics. Although it may only have been Muslims who introduced the story of Alexander into a region, the narrative traditions produced there sometimes claimed that it was the other way around, meaning that it was Alexander who introduced Islam there. China is a case in point. In this case, knowledge was a "fellow traveler" of religion. The Alexander legend was thus a force and an instrument of integration. He himself had integrated vastly different regions into one empire. The literary traditions surrounding him were used by new Muslims to integrate themselves into the map of their empire. These traditions may have had a similar function in Arabic/Islamic learned culture, integrating religious sources such as the Qurʾān and "foreign traditions," "religious" and "secular" knowledge.

The critique of the history of religious studies and comparative religion may lead us to abandon the term religion as an analytical category or force.

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<sup>57</sup> See also Wheeler 1998.

Both primary and secondary sources concerning the concept of religion, the exercise of comparative religion and what Waardenburg calls a “theology of religion” suggest, however, that the category is not entirely inappropriate, even if the contrast with the secular shows little analytical potential. It is thus possible that the critics who exposed the colonial underpinnings of the Western study of religion are themselves Orientalists who unduly limited their analyses to modern Western Europe. Before turning to what this means for Alexander, I would like to discuss a few views expressed by scholars of Islamic history who have dealt critically with these categories.

## THE STUDY OF MEDIEVAL ISLAM AND THE PROBLEM OF RELIGION II: MODERNITY

As has already become obvious, the material that the critical scholars excluded from their analysis is not only of medieval origin. The critics may also have faulted modern scholarship more than they should have. In fact, historians of the medieval Islamic world cannot be accused of entirely ignoring theoretical or methodological implications of the concept of religion. Some of the most relevant debates have taken place around the use of the terms “Islamic” and “Islam.”

Further examples will illustrate the nature of the debate which often asks what it is that holds different phenomena together as “Islamic.” Discussions surround “Islamic history,” the “Islamic city,” or “Islamic architecture.” In 2011, New York’s Metropolitan Museum opened the doors to its “New Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia,” which remains commonly referred to as the “Islamic Gallery”—even on the Museum’s own website. Other debates concern the transmission of knowledge (see above) into the Islamic world and whether the Islamic religion hindered or helped the integration of specific branches of “foreign” knowledge. In the history of philosophy and science, scholars discuss—frequently in response to a more public and often polemical discussion—the extent to which “Islam” helped or hindered intellectual developments and rationalism in particular.<sup>58</sup> One view, for example, which is mostly associated with the scholarship of Leo Strauss (1899–1973) and his followers, posits an inherent conflict between philosophy in the Greek tradition and the Islamic religion with its legal and political ambitions.<sup>59</sup> In these contexts, Islamic law is often perceived as inflexible. Another point of view stresses positive statements in the sacred texts

<sup>58</sup> Ahmad Dallal, *Islam, Science, and the Challenge of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 149–76.

<sup>59</sup> Dimitri Gutas, “The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29 (2002): 5–25; Anna Akasoy, “Was Ibn Rushd an Averroist? The Problem, the Debate, and its Philosophical Implications,” in *Renaissance Averroism and its Aftermath*, eds Anna Akasoy, and Guido Giglioni (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), pp. 321–47.

regarding knowledge and the intellect. Both views reflect a perspective that considers Islam an agent independent of its human followers. Some cases betray a coincidental effect of religion. David King, for example, recognized in part the need to establish the direction of the *qibla* behind the quest for astronomical knowledge.<sup>60</sup> Another example is the utility of mathematics for dealing with inheritance problems.

The Chicago historian Marshall Hodgson (1922–1968) addressed the terminological and conceptual problem in the first volume of his *Venture of Islam*:

I plead that it has been all too common, in modern scholarship, to use the terms 'Islam' and 'Islamic' too casually both for what we may call religion and for the overall society and culture associated historically with the religion. I grant that it is not possible nor, perhaps, even desirable to draw too sharp a line here, for (and not only in Islam) to separate out religion from the rest of life is partly to falsify it. Nevertheless, the society and culture called 'Islamic' in the second sense are not necessarily 'Islamic' in the first. Not only have the groups of people involved in the two cases not always been co-extensive (the culture has not been simply a 'Muslim culture', a culture of Muslims)—much of what even Muslims have done as a part of the 'Islamic' civilization can only be characterized as 'un-Islamic' in the first, the religious sense of the word. One can speak of 'Islamic literature', of 'Islamic art', of 'Islamic philosophy', even of 'Islamic despotism', but in such a sequence one is speaking less and less of something that expresses Islam as a faith.<sup>61</sup>

The solution, for Hodgson, was to distinguish between “Islamic” and his own neologism, “Islamicate”:

I have been driven to invent a term, “Islamicate”. It has a double adjectival ending on the analogy of “Italianate”, “in the Italian style”, which refers not to Italy itself directly, not to just whatever is to be called properly Italian, but to something associated typically with Italian style and with the Italian manner. One speaks of “Italianate” architecture even in England or Turkey. Rather similarly (though I shift the relation a bit), “Islamicate” would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> For mathematics and lexicography see Krawietz 2012, p. 298. For a review of some of these tendencies see Sonja Brentjes, “Probleme der Historiographie der Wissenschaften in islamischen Gesellschaften vor 1700,” *NTM: Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Wissenschaften, Technik und Medizin* 19, no. 2 (2011): 191–200.

<sup>61</sup> Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), vol. 1: *Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, p. 57.

<sup>62</sup> Hodgson 1974, p. 59.

With “Islamicate,” Hodgson thus acknowledged the significance of the Islamic religion for the development of a historical culture, without unduly prioritizing religion understood in a narrow sense as a set of beliefs and practices. Hodgson’s terminology has not been universally adopted, not least because the underlying distinction between religion and civilization bears its own problems. Yet Hodgson’s approach does help to categorize the Alexander material where we can distinguish an Islamic Dhū l-Qarnayn in the Qur’ān and its exegesis from an Islamicate Alexander in the wisdom literature. These terms are best used as relative labels, however, to describe the relationship between different branches of Alexander literature produced by Muslims. Given that these traditions were shared to a certain extent by other religious communities (and had often been derived from them), they do not recommend themselves as absolute labels.

Another question is in what sense, if any, our Islamicate Alexander was indeed part of “the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims.” A number of reasons explain why the relationship between the Islamic religion and different cultural traditions remains so controversial and in how many ways Islam as a religion might be related—or not—to the wisdom literature around Alexander, to theories of music written in Arabic, to the *Arabian Nights*, or to the horseshoe arch. The Greco-Arabic translation movement was associated with Islam and Muslims, but what did that mean for a historical-legendary character who was part of the transmitted corpus? The case might be easier for the South Arabian and Persian Alexanders; their role may not be primarily religious, but can be explained in terms of religious valorization. We can ask similar questions for other material. We may be able, for example, to establish a connection between the philosopher al-Kindī’s (circa 185–259/circa 801–873) writing about music, the patronage al-Kindī received from the Abbasids and the relationship between political and religious authority which may have triggered this patronage, but it is not at all clear how contemporaries or specific groups of them saw the relationship between the treatise on music and the Islamic religion.

Furthermore, we need to be aware of the variables necessary to historicize religion, religious identity, and affiliation. Many of the academic controversies about the religious nature of certain historical phenomena blank out these difficulties. They seem to assume that “Islam” and “religion” are sufficiently well-established categories. At least they seem to come with a clarity that allows us to argue that certain subjects are *not* Islamic, which is why we should speak of Middle Eastern rather than Islamic history or of Arabic rather than Islamic literature. Yet, as historians of early and medieval Islam and in particular the political and social history of the Atlantic-to-Ganges region in that period have shown, the questions of what it meant to be a Muslim and what may have constituted the more abstract category of Islam or of religion, if such categories existed at all, are difficult to answer. In particular, the relationship between kinship, cultural practices, and what we more conventionally regard as religious beliefs in a person’s identity is difficult to assess.

Despite their many and fundamental disagreements concerning the environment in which Islam emerged, for instance, most scholars of that period agree that kinship (variably glossing ethnicity, tribal identities and so on) played a significant role in the formation of the religious community. Debates among historians of this era illustrate well more general disagreements among modern academics regarding religion—along the lines described by the critics, albeit without the theoretical reflection demanded by them. While some historians argue, for example, that the significance of religion in the formative period of Islam has been exaggerated, and that the primary explanation for *jihād* or for the Umayyads's restrictive conversion policy was material, i.e., that the new Muslim rulers wanted to keep collecting the *jizya* from non-Muslims, others insist that religious ideas should be taken seriously. The Qur'ān preserves an early understanding of Islam as the religion of the Arabs which differs from another understanding present in the holy book. It was the notion of Islam as a universal religion which ultimately won out. A concept of Islam as a religion based on kinship offers a persuasive explanation for the Umayyad policy. It is indeed suspiciously modern to suggest that the Umayyads had a cynical attitude to faith and that their dogmas were only a veneer, a superficial, rhetorical layer on top of their actual material and political interests. It would, however, be as important to take these material and political aspects into consideration as a historicizing understanding of religious principles. The two attitudes correspond to the critical observations made by Masuzawa and Kippenberg, i.e., the excessive importance attributed to religion and the failure to historicize religion.

This brief survey reveals that, although scholars of the Atlantic-to-Ganges region in the premodern period have hardly been oblivious to the category of Islam, the category of religion leaves room for further exploration which pays attention to the debates produced in other fields. Models and theories would help. How can we develop a theoretical approach to the history of the transmission of knowledge that does justice to the significance of religion? Needless to say, within the limits of this contribution it is impossible to discuss this in any adequate manner. I would rather like to present a few further thoughts concerning the example of knowledge related to Alexander and his religious dimension that may offer a few starting points for further investigation.

#### ALEXANDER AS A RELIGIOUS FIGURE IN MEDIEVAL ISLAM: A MODEL AND ITS POTENTIAL

Before we turn to a more detailed discussion of Alexander as a religious figure in knowledge in the medieval Islamic world, two further preliminary remarks are in order, the first concerning religion, the second concerning knowledge.

As important as it may be to historicize religion and religious affiliation, as I have argued above, the hermeneutical gap which emerges from historical change should not stop us from using religion as an analytical category, although it would be useful to reconsider definitions.

## Religion

When it comes to definitions, scholars of the humanities may find efforts in the social sciences instructive. To be sure, there are countless definitions of religion, but that should not stop us from exploring the potential benefit of at least one of them for our analysis. Volkhard Krech, for example, defines religion in the following way:

The legitimisation and reassurance method that I hypothetically identify as religion has to do with *reassurances by the ultimate authority*; with an *understanding on how to deal with what is considered unavailable and inescapable*. Religion establishes different ways of dealing with the unavoidable. ... Religion has to do with the problem of how one can describe the transcendence *that cannot be represented in everyday experience* with immanent means, so how one can transform the unavailable into the available or the unsayable into the sayable.<sup>63</sup>

How can we apply such a definition to our context? I will return to this question after discussing the second crucial concept.

## Knowledge

Since we are concerned with the spread of knowledge, in what sense does familiarity with or the presence of textual material related to Alexander the Great constitute “knowledge”? I would like to use a definition offered in the publication by Renn and Hyman already mentioned above for the present purposes as well:

Knowledge is conceived here as the capacity of an individual, a group, or a society to solve problems and to mentally anticipate the necessary actions. Knowledge is, in short, a problem-solving potential. Knowledge is often conceived (especially in disciplines such as psychology, philosophy and the cognitive sciences) as something mainly mental and private. But from the historical and social viewpoint, it is necessary to consider knowledge as something that moves from one person to another: something that may be shared by members of a profession, a social class, a geographic region or even an entire civilization. From this perspective, knowledge and its movements may be mapped. Shared knowledge is especially important to the artistic, religious, legal and economic systems that constitute cultures; and knowledge

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<sup>63</sup> Volkhard Krech, “Dynamics in the History of Religions. Preliminary Considerations on Aspects of a Research Programme,” in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe: Encounters, Notions, and Comparative Perspectives*, eds Volkhard Krech, and Marion Steinicke (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 15–70, particularly pp. 23–4.

travels along with artifacts and artistic styles, myths and rituals, laws and norms, goods and wealth.<sup>64</sup>

What kind of “problem-solving potential” can we recognize in Alexander’s legend? This depends on the specific text, the context in which it is read, as well as our perspective on the specific function of knowledge. One case is the fictitious exchanges of letters between Alexander and Aristotle, in which the ruler asks the philosopher for advice on a number of issues. The problems addressed in this text include manners and virtues of kings, health regime, dietary principles, physiognomy, alchemy, and magic. The format of the text thus ties in nicely with the definition of knowledge as “problem-solving potential” insofar as it offers answers to “how-to” questions: How can I be a just king? How can I remain healthy? How do I recognize an untrustworthy person? We can extend this to readers of the *Secretum secretorum* who are of lower social rank and who can exploit at least parts of the text regarding their “problem-solving potential.” The *regimen sanitatis* is useful regardless of the readers’ social rank. Their knowledge of just kingship will not allow them to put it into practice themselves, but they can recognize a just king.

Practical application is a different matter, however. While the extent to which the knowledge described in these exchanges was actually used may be doubtful, knowledge of the texts and their contents presumably had an important social function. In other words, knowledge of a certain physiognomical principle (for instance, that short fingers indicate inferior intellectual skills) did not solve the problem of how to approach individuals with short fingers, but rather how to demonstrate one’s familiarity with certain cultural traditions in a certain environment.

This can be extended as an explanation to other Alexander material. The cultural prestige of ancient learning is often adduced as an explanation for patronage and the transmission of knowledge. But, as outlined above, Alexander was different from other characters of classical learning since his story was received through a religious Christian interpretation and was already present in the Qurʾān. What was the effect for the quality of Alexander-related knowledge? If we can assume that it was prestigious knowledge, what exactly is this prestige based on? Furthermore, at what point and why did the association with Alexander the Great imply cultural prestige? Once Aristotle was established in Arabic learned culture, the prestige associated with him probably had an effect on the reputation of his disciple Alexander. Yet, can we also assume that Alexander’s earlier religious prestige had a positive effect on Aristotle’s reputation? Did Alexander’s role as a quasi-prophet make Greek learning more attractive, more desirable, more palatable? We are not in the position to offer even tentative answers to these questions and we may never be able to. One obstacle is our limited understanding of how these diverse texts were related to each other. Traditionally, the Qurʾān and the apocryphal exchange between Aristotle and Alexander are treated as two different categories of texts, and

<sup>64</sup> Renn, and Hyman 2012, pp. 20–21.

they are usually examined by two different groups of experts. But how did contemporaries see the relationship between them? Did one text perhaps serve as a source of cultural prestige for the other? Reconstructing stemmatological connections might be an easier exercise than establishing associations that are less exclusively text-based. A dilemma modern scholars face is that we have to rethink the categories into which we divide our objects of research as well as why these objects are important. Different versions of Alexander's biography, for instance, have frequently been exploited as testimonies to text transmission, but if we see them as part of a different category of texts, we will recognize new perspectives and interpretations. Thus, if we read texts about Alexander with regard to their meaning for and significance in the religious field, we will ask new questions. In order to respond to both Kippenberg and Masuzawa, we need a model of human culture that acknowledges religious interpretations of objects which are not primarily religious, but which does not imply that this religious interpretation is exhaustive.

Throughout his career, both historical and legendary, Alexander was an ambiguous figure. His relationship with philosophy and the philosophers offers ample illustration of this.<sup>65</sup> Ancient authors connected different lessons with the conqueror. Indeed, Alexander offered a variety of both positive and negative examples. His connection with Aristotle may have been positive, but his even closer connection with Callisthenes had a bitter end when Callisthenes was put to death during the conflict over Alexander's introduction of *proskynesis*. Likewise, in his famous encounter with Diogenes, Alexander appears as a negative example. Diogenes seeks a simple life and shows courage, whereas Alexander represents excessive ambition. Then again, the conqueror is sometimes seen as an admirer of the philosophers. In the encounter with the Brahmins described in the Alexander legend, the ruler himself is shown as possessing wisdom. As Richard Stoneman argued, the most important function of the character of Alexander in ancient philosophy was rhetorical.<sup>66</sup> His rich and extraordinary life allowed philosophers to use him as a tool for arguing a variety of points. For example, they discussed the question of how important fortune is for a person's achievements.

This ambiguity of Alexander captures his position in other contexts as well. His legacy in Persian historiography is ambiguous, his identity in the Qur'ān was open to debate, and the friction between the ambitious historical conqueror and the Qur'anic Dhū l-Qarnayn put Alexander into "the ambiguous category of a 'friend of God.'"<sup>67</sup>

To conclude my analysis I would like to suggest that it is precisely this ambiguity which allowed the figure of Alexander to develop a very specific religious function. In order to tease out this function, I would like to return to Krech's definition of religion:

<sup>65</sup> Richard Stoneman, "The Legacy of Alexander in Ancient Philosophy," in *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great*, ed. Joseph Rois (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 325–45.

<sup>66</sup> Stoneman 2002.

<sup>67</sup> Yamanaka 1999; Zuwiyya 2011, p. 75.



Religion establishes different ways of dealing with the unavoidable. ... Religion has to do with the problem of how one can describe the transcendence *that cannot be represented in everyday experience* with immanent means, so how one can transform the unavailable into the available or the unsayable into the sayable.

The representations of Alexander in the ancient world described at the beginning of this article already give us an idea of how this explanation can apply. In his self-image, Alexander used demigods to reflect his potential, ambition, and fate. In Gandharan art, his strength is expressed in dialog with the Buddha's wrath. Another parallel between Vajrapāṇi and Alexander is their cosmological references. In the former's case, this concerns the *vajra*, the diamond-shaped weapon. As Filigenzi explains, "One could say that the *vajra* is ... connected to the idea of the manifest universe—the world of forms, changeable and impermanent—but, at the same time, to the idea of the divine immanent in this universe, visually represented by the shape of the hourglass in which the two opposite shapes meet."<sup>68</sup> As already mentioned, in the Islamic tradition the Alexander in the Qurʾān travels to the extreme ends of the world, a theme which is later expanded. His journeys are a narrative device to mark the borders of the "manifest universe."

None of this can count as an "everyday experience." In Ibn Hishām's "Book of Crowns" too, Dhū l-Qarnayn's experience is anything but ordinary and defined by an exceptional religious ambiguity. He experiences all the troubling sides of revelation, but this is not resolved by receiving an actual revelation. He is not spiritually redeemed. The second overwhelming experience is Dhū l-Qarnayn's quest to find the source of life, which we can also find elsewhere in literature produced in the Islamic world, although his struggle with mortality eventually fails. Here and elsewhere, Alexander's exceptional fortune pushes him to the extremes of what is humanly possible.

Ultimately, the conqueror's crises feed into questions concerning the purpose of empire building as an extreme case of worldly ambition, as Vincent Barletta discussed in his study of Alexander in expansionist rhetoric in Iberian literature.<sup>69</sup> Yet, Barletta argued that Alexander was more than a "trope for empire." His "death, like the life that it finally confronts, darkens the rise and development of empire in what would come to be the Latin West. It presents itself as a framework to theorize the perceived glories and all-too-real dangers of empire, the mortal angst that underlies and shapes colonial expansion."<sup>70</sup> Only some of Barletta's remarks can be applied to Islamic contexts. Cosmopolitan from its onset, there may have been less angst in the Abbasid Empire towards

<sup>68</sup> Anna Filigenzi, "Ānanda and Vajrapāṇi: An Inexplicable Absence and a Mysterious Presence in Gandhāran Art," in *Gandhāran Buddhism: Archaeology, Art, Texts*, ed. Pia Brancaccio, and Kurt Behrendt (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), pp. 270–85, particularly p. 277.

<sup>69</sup> Vincent Barletta, *Death in Babylon: Alexander the Great and Iberian Empire in the Muslim Orient* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>70</sup> Barletta 2010, p. 32.

the cultural other and descending into exotic temptations and ultimately an undignified death. In the Islamic tradition, he shows a more universal angst. At the same time, the Alexander of the Islamic tradition confronts the finitude of human life, one of the greatest concerns of religions in general. To put it in Krech's words, he confronts "what is considered unavailable and inescapable." When Alexander mourned his beloved Hephaestion, he descended into a deep crisis just as Achilles had been profoundly affected by the death of his Patroclus. The unavailability of his own immortality is obvious in his failed search for the source of life. The Greek source is expanded here through the Syriac reception. It is his companion Khidr, however, who reaches the spring and becomes immortal.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, in the Alexander legend, the conqueror's death is described in detail. Olga Davidson examined the theme of death and mortality in Persian versions of the Alexander story and identified the roots for this topic in ancient Greek literature.<sup>72</sup> However, in the later versions the theme of death became more prominent.

Combining the above-mentioned definitions of religion and of knowledge allows further insights into the religious meaning of these episodes. What marks the human condition perhaps more than anything else is awareness of our mortality and the constant struggle to overcome our fear which results from this awareness. We may seek greatness wherever we can, but we will always fail to achieve immortality. Alexander marks the limits of what is humanly possible in this struggle. In a more traditionally religious language, he expresses "the vanity and limitations of humans before God."<sup>73</sup> The line between Alexander and Khidr marks the difference between our condition and that which we can never achieve. There are, of course, alternative ways of classifying this conflict and crisis—as philosophical, psychological, ethical, or even political; while it does not pertain exclusively to the religious field, from the perspective of the latter we find a distinctive set of solutions. Alexander's struggle presents itself differently when read as part of a religious text.

The appeal of Alexander to the modern reader shows that there is knowledge connected with the great conqueror that is different from military techniques. (Although aficionados of military history will find it thrilling to reenact the battle of Gaugamela.) Rather, it has a lot to do with a story that was important for Alexander himself. At the beginning of the Trojan war, Achilles faced the choice between a long, quiet, and happy life and the short life of a hero. Only the latter would grant him immortality. Achilles was the son of a goddess and Alexander a god's son. None of us is given the opportunity to choose a short life which leads to immortal glory, but we, too, must make choices. The divine declaration that "We gave him the means to achieve everything" is one of potentiality, not

<sup>71</sup> Doufikar-Aerts 2010, pp. 171–80.

<sup>72</sup> Olga M. Davidson, "The Burden of Mortality: Alexander and the Dead in Persian Epic and Beyond," in *Epic and History*, ed. David Konstan, and Kurt A. Raaflaub (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 212–22.

<sup>73</sup> Firuza Abdullaeva, "Kingly Flight: Nimrūd, Kay Kāvūs, Alexander, or Why the Angel Has the Fish," *Persica* 23 (2009–2010): 1–29, 18.

reality. Alexander may have had the means to achieve everything, but that too is humanly impossible. He had to choose because we cannot be everything.

Alexander's disposition is comparable to that of the young Siddhārtha Gautama. (This is especially the case in Ibn Hishām's story, which begins with Dhū l-Qarnayn in his palace.) After Siddhārtha's miraculous birth out of his mother's right side he was examined and his unusual bodily features marked him as having the potential to become either a universal ruler or a holy man. As we all know, he chose the latter. Another great figure of Buddhism, however, the emperor Aśoka, became the former and so did Alexander. It was impossible to be both.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is not possible within the limits of this chapter to discuss how historians of the medieval Islamic world can appropriately "theorize" religion. What I have tried to show instead is that our conventional use of the category of religion (by providing explicit references to the religion, its key figures, texts, rituals etc.) only captures some of the religious nature of past phenomena. Such a superficial Islamization of Alexander may not amount to much and may not even have an important religious function.

If, however, we take "religion" rather than Islam as the starting point and break the religious down into its fundamental components, we may discover functions that throw new light on the significance of religion for the transmission of knowledge. This may also allow us to look at the Alexander legend as a "globalized" phenomenon which lasted longer (from his own time until our present day) and is regionally less confined than the Greco-Arabic translation movement. The latter is often seen as a phenomenon of late antiquity, and while some aspects of the Islamic Alexander legend can be explained in the context of what are considered to be late antique constellations, such as the Christian-Byzantine influence on the emergence of Islam, or the Greek, Syriac, and Persian influences on an Arabic learned culture, we are dealing with a much bigger, more diverse, and more continuous phenomenon located in an area much larger than the Mediterranean.<sup>74</sup> It can be better understood against the backdrop of an integrated history of the classical heritage that begins with antiquity itself and does not confine the study of its reception to Europe or even to Europe and the Middle East.

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<sup>74</sup> See Robert Hoyland, "Early Islam "Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 1053–77, who includes further examples of such an understanding.

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# Postface

Sonja Brentjes and Jürgen Renn

Erasing or drawing boundaries, questioning or highlighting continuities, or shaking entire interpretations, and modifying or introducing concepts is the daily bread of the historian independent of her or his specialty. Hence, there is nothing surprising in the fact that these concerns are at the heart of each of the seven chapters in this book written by ten historians specializing in five different disciplines. The thread that connects them is the question of how, due to which motivations, means, people, and events and where did knowledge in its various forms flow through countries and among cultures around the Mediterranean basin, the Persian Gulf, and the Arabian Sea. The timeframe, as the subtitle of the book indicates, focuses on the centuries after antiquity. The earlier centuries are not fully excluded, however, because two chapters, the first by J. Niehoff-Panagiotidis and the last by A. Akasoy, tell *longue durée* stories for large cultural spaces. On one of their historiographical levels, Akasoy and Niehoff-Panagiotidis discuss continuities over many centuries and empires. On a different level, they raise questions of interpretation with regard to fundamental texts and acts of translation and transformation of knowledge across historical, geographical, philological, and systemic boundaries.

The other seven authors focus clearly on later, more limited periods, and more confined spaces, thus moving within the temporal framework of the book's title. Four of them, H. Ansari, S. Schmidtke, H. Fancy, and C. Burnett, write about the material and doctrinal transport of knowledge between distant communities over several centuries, including issues such as physical transport over thousands of kilometers; the creation of physical spaces such as libraries, palaces, or churches for the migrant objects and people; and the differences of survival between individual carriers of knowledge or groups of objects and people. They address issues of the exclusion and inclusion of people, texts, ideas, and institutions into and from new communities as well as matters of outreach and mobility. As Akasoy and Niehoff, Fancy, Ansari, and Schmidtke study primarily knowledge forms within religiously defined epistemic, ritual, and behavioral spaces. They either question the principles behind current approaches to religion and the neglect of religious properties of the studied subjects by former researchers, or lay out unresolved research questions and the conditions for their successful investigation. Fancy and Burnett focus on movements across the Mediterranean, while Ansari and Schmidtke discuss the movements of scholars, religious leaders, books, institutions, and beliefs



between a region south of the Caspian Sea and areas in the South of the Arabian Peninsula.

The three remaining writers, B. Gruendler, J. Renn, and S. Brentjes, tell stories about people of a single city and their activities to transform knowledge and learning and teaching practices. All three attempt to overcome the biases of historical sources and the prejudices of former generations of researchers. Gruendler's study of the emergence of a new professional identity and the impact of their holders on the production, spread, and acceptance of handwritten books as new carriers and new organizers of knowledge shows how difficult it is to penetrate the silence of the literate elites as well as their penchant for anecdotal information, and what historians of science miss when they do not include her questions and sources in their own investigations of translations, transformations, institution building, and other processes of globalization of knowledge in the third/ninth century. Brentjes and Renn argue that important boundaries against our understanding of such processes rest in our methodological and conceptual prejudices, meeting here, albeit in a very different format and context, with one of Akasoy's main concerns. They show that even the interpretation of a single text, of its cross-cultural properties, and of the intellectual struggles of its compilers and users, can change profoundly when such prejudices are recognized and consciously eliminated from the repertoire of research questions, methods, and techniques.

The conclusions of each author are multifaceted and shall not be repeated here in the form of a simple enumeration. The task of this postface is rather to highlight some of the consequences and unanswered questions addressed in the seven contributions to this volume in the hope that readers might pick them up and look at them from other perspectives and with other tools.

A central problem—highlighted at the beginning of this postface—of the book and its chapters consists in the question of where to draw temporal, spatial, intellectual, and material boundaries and whether to draw them at all. Traditionally, and this is often still the case in the history of science, clear boundaries were drawn between the knowledge of classical Greece and Hellenism and its spatial and human localization on the one hand and that of late antiquity on the other. The same applies to boundaries between “Islam,” “medieval and Renaissance Europe” and “late antiquity.” The many years of debate among Byzantinists and Islamic historians about the character of the centuries after the emergence of Christianity, Rabbinic Judaism, Gnosis, Manichaeism, or Islam and the interdependencies both between them and with previous knowledge cultures and neighboring spaces reverberate in the two chapters by Niehoff-Panagiotidis and Akasoy.<sup>1</sup>

Niehoff-Panagiotidis takes up the question as to whether the idea of composing a biography of Muḥammad and the format and focal points of his life story as told by Muslim writers in the second/eighth century stand in the

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<sup>1</sup> Peter R.L. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150–750* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1971); Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

tradition of the Christian and Jewish historical writing of late antiquity. This perspective belongs to the manifold cross-disciplinary debates about where to draw the temporal and spatial boundaries between the various communities, political forms, and spatial distributions in the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries. It situates Muḥammad's biography close to the interpretation of the Qurʾān as a product of late antiquity or—as Neuwirth proposed and as taken up by the Collaborative Research Center “Episteme in Motion” in Berlin—as the result of debates in a late antique epistemic space.<sup>2</sup> From the angle of narrative analysis the same view has been recently argued in a new volume about this interconnection between late antiquity and early Islamic societies.<sup>3</sup>

Akasoy situates her reflections on the mechanisms and manners through which Alexander of Macedonia became identified as a religious figure, available for ritual performances and representations imbued with divine elements, in a *longue durée* Eurasian trajectory, part of which is the early first/seventh century. Ambiguities of images and attributes surrounded the process of apotheosizing Alexander in many Eurasian cultures. The early Muslim *umma* was no exception. Akasoy suggests that three factors are at the heart of the longevity and broad cross-cultural success of such divinized models of man: Alexander's own activities to transform himself into different kinds of the divine, his inclusion in narratives about other men that were undergoing similar processes of transformation into religious role models, and the ambiguities of such stories be they told through words or pictures, which allowed for manifold manipulations. Thus Akasoy and Niehoff-Panagiotidis offer further support for regarding early Islamic history as a history of late antique continuities.

Two questions remain unresolved, however. Do these late antique continuities apply only to the former Byzantine and West Roman territories and their successor states in Syria, Palestine, Egypt, North Africa, Sicily, and the Iberian Peninsula, or does this perspective include the Arabian Peninsula, the territories of the former Sassanian Empire as well as Bactria, Khwarazm, Transoxania, and the Sogdian city-states? Archaeologists, art historians, and political historians of the Arab conquests of the East during the first/seventh and the early second/eighth centuries look skeptically at such an extension of late antique Middle Eastern cultures, economies, and political constitutions. When they discuss these issues, they often focus on the Fertile Crescent with the inclusion of Mesopotamia.<sup>4</sup> Historians of religions are more willing to discover

<sup>2</sup> Angelika Neuwirth, “Locating the Qurʾān in the Epistemic Space of Late Antiquity,” *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 54, no. 2 (2013): 189–203.

<sup>3</sup> Christian C. Sahner, “Islamic Legends about the Birth of Monasticism: A Case Study on the Late Antique Milieu of the Qurʾān and Tafsīr,” in *The Late Antique World of Early Islam: Muslims among Christians and Jews in the East Mediterranean*, ed. Robert G. Hoyland (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, Inc., 2015), pp. 393–435.

<sup>4</sup> Marcus Milwright, “Archaeology and Material Culture,” in *The Formation of the Islamic World, Sixth to Eleventh Centuries*, ed. Chase F. Robinson. (The New Cambridge History of Islam) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 664–82. Following the older interpretations of Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina emphasize the Hellenistic fundament of Islamic art, which they modify a few lines after its pronouncement by pointing to the many other

similarities and parallel developments across this wide expanse of space from the Mediterranean to the South and Central Asian mountain ranges and valleys.<sup>5</sup>

This question is important for discussions about the translations of different literatures into Arabic, for the determination of their mutual relevance for the globalization of theoretical and practical knowledge from the Middle East towards Europe and to the eastern territories of the caliphate, and for the debate as to which knowledge forms belong to this culture of translation, who were its actors, and what were the sociocultural motivations of the different translation activities.

The dominant view for over a century is that this process embraced primarily Greek scientific, medical, and philosophical texts of classical and Hellenistic authors plus a few Neoplatonic and Christian writers of late antiquity. Although the school program of Alexandria is usually seen as the model for the choices of texts and authors, in particular for medicine, but also for philosophy and to a lesser extent for the mathematical sciences (number theory, geometry, astronomy, music) and astrology, it is far from clear how this transfer may have happened beyond medicine, where practicing doctors may have acted as the needed intermediary links.

A new approach was taken in 1998, when Gutas proposed the model of a “two-phase translation movement” into Arabic. He recognizes as a decisive process the translations from Middle Persian into Arabic, in particular in astrology, literature, history, and statecraft, in the second/eighth century, which formed, he believes, the Abbasid knowledge culture and its attitudes towards translation and knowledge from other cultures. The bulk of classical, Hellenistic and late antique Greek texts was translated into Arabic during the third/ninth century. Gutas interprets this shift in cultural activities as closely intertwined with a shift in political outlook and modes of governing under Caliph al-Maʾmūn. He argues for a decisive impact of two factors: (1) an Iranian anti-Arab cultural rebellion against the Umayyad exclusion of non-Arab Muslims from state positions and elite status; (2) the Sassanian imperial narrative of Alexander as the destroyer of Achaemenid religious, philosophical, and further knowledge as a central ideological component of the Abbasid war against the Umayyad dynasty and the basis and justification of their later substantial support for translating Middle Persian, Syriac, Sanskrit, and Greek texts into Arabic.<sup>6</sup> Daniel’s chapter in the *New Cambridge History of Islam* on the conquest of Iran and Central Asia, its local individuality and instability up to the early second/eighth century and the conflicts between Iranian rebels in Khurasan and Abbasid caliphs, in particular al-Manṣūr (ruled 136–158/754–775), poses serious problems that seem to

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traditions that were continued under Muslim rulers and adapted to the new tastes. Richard Ettinghausen, Oleg Grabar, and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture 650–1250*. Pelican History of Art (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Hoyland, “Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 1053–77.

<sup>6</sup> Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Greco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbāsī Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th centuries)* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

unsettle these two parts of Gutas's explanation of al-Manṣūr's promotion of Iranian clients and the incorporation of their knowledge and texts into Muslim Arab culture.<sup>7</sup>

Brentjes and Renn reflect in their chapter on a central feature of the various proposals for interpreting the sociocultural phenomenon called the "translation movement": its unifying character, which conceptually regards all translated texts as belonging to a single type of process, independent of the kind of knowledge these texts embodied and of the contexts of their translation as well as their usage. Methodologically, this macro-historical perspective attracts attention due to its systematizing and overarching narrative. But such advantages are won at the cost of leveling diversity, locality, and specificity. One example has to suffice to illustrate this point. While we know of at least one school in Baghdad in the early ninth century where physicians taught medicine and possibly other topics, we have no evidence for the existence of any institutional form of learning the mathematical sciences. This difference in institutional organization is also reflected in the types of texts translated from Greek into Syriac or Arabic and the formats of the treatises newly composed in Arabic during this century. The field of medicine is represented by numerous compendia, synopses, paraphrases, and commentaries by Galen and Hippocrates or linked to them. In the mathematical sciences, commentaries and editions outweigh all other types of texts reflecting ancient methods of teaching. Thus, it is not surprising, when the styles of composing teaching texts in Arabic differ in the mathematical sciences more clearly from those of their ancient predecessors.<sup>8</sup> But it is not clear why these differences came into being and what they signify both for late antique and early Islamic teaching of the mathematical sciences.

Issues of translating practices are a standard theme of studies of the "translation movement". It is predominantly, explicitly or silently, assumed that translations were made due to an intellectual goal either of the translator himself or of the people for whom he translated. But Brentjes and Renn argue that not all translations followed such a clear program or conscious textual choices. In their view, Thābit ibn Qurra's text on the steelyard can only be understood as the outcome of translations of fragments, not complete texts, since except for the brief references to the Aristotelian *Problemata Mechanica* each of the short pieces in Thābit's text is independent from the other and any other ancient Greek study of the balance. Interpreting the existence of such brief, isolated items as the result of translations of fragments seems to be a reasonable conclusion. But why would anybody translate such highly truncated pieces? Brentjes and Renn propose to view their existence as the result of a practice where translators at least occasionally acted like the stationers

<sup>7</sup> Elton L. Daniel, "The Islamic East," in *The Formation of the Islamic World, Sixth to Eleventh Centuries*, edited by Chase F. Robinson. (The New Cambridge History of Islam) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 448–505.

<sup>8</sup> See Jaap Mansfeld, *Prolegomena Mathematica: from Apollonius of Perga to the Late Neoplatonism. With an Appendix on Pappus and the History of Platonism* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

discussed by Gruendler: in addition to specific texts translators also translated manuscripts in foreign languages from cover to cover.

Another important issue of the standard narrative about the “translation movement” concerns its exclusive focus on the “sciences”: philosophy, medicine, mathematics, astrology, alchemy, and related fields of knowledge. Niehoff-Panagiotidis’s historical survey challenges this line of macro-level narrating the translations under the early Abbasid caliphs. He points to the move in Syriac communities towards Arabic before the late third/ninth century and the subsequent accessibility of Christian histories to Muslim authors. Thus, our century-old predilection for all things Greek, if they are but ancient, did not merely create hierarchies of knowledge in the interpretation of the Abbasid “translation movement” that reproduced the preference for Greek and Roman antiquities to the detriment of the ancient histories of other regions and peoples. It also ignored contemporaneous projects of translation and transformation in non-Muslim communities of the caliphate.

The second unresolved question of the debates on late antiquity concerns the period’s end. Fowden recently chose the fourth/tenth century as the period’s end, because it was then that Islam as a religious system had finalized the three stages leading to what Fowden calls maturity: prophetic, scriptural, and exegetic.<sup>9</sup> Ignoring the renewed focus on religion as the determining element of late antiquity, such a temporal definition of the envisaged rupture between late antiquity and post-antiquity contradicts political, economic, material, and other intellectual trends. The expanse of conquered territory, the number of different peoples, languages, cultures, and modes of living and the natural differences between the geographies of the caliphate and its Islamicate competitors since the third/ninth century make a unique timeline for all of them highly implausible. In the following we mention some examples serving as evidence for our belief that there was no single rupture encompassing the huge territories ruled by Muslim dynasties in the time until the year 1000 proposed as the watershed by Fowden. They concern issues of conquest, administration, conversion, intellectual developments, finances, and regional as well as local particularities.

The membership of various parts of the Sassanian Empire and its adjacent territories to the North in the caliphate, for instance, became only irreversible towards the end of the first/seventh and beginning of the second/eighth centuries, although this does not mean that all territories were equally subdued by Arab forces and joined their administrative policies and religious doctrine to an equal degree. Similar differences between regions and their inhabitants applied to the Maghreb and the Iberian Peninsula. Although the conquest of the Byzantine provinces of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria proceeded faster, Umayyads perpetuated the policies of their predecessors until the early second/eighth century. The shift in currency, administrative language, and architecture in this period might signal the beginning of the rupture we are seeking. This claim is

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<sup>9</sup> Garth Fowden, *Before and after Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

not new, of course. But the local implementation of this shift signals to us that the looked-for rupture was neither spectacularly all-embracing nor a short-term event, but rather an ongoing process of many small steps in many different areas of society, never involving all parts of the huge empire and its people to the same extent, in the same manner, and at the same time.

Ansari's and Schmidtke's chapter on the two Zaydī communities in northern Iran and western Yemen is a further case in point illustrating the problems with assuming a single rupture with late antiquity for all of the caliphate. While both regions and their communities belonged to the caliphate, at the very least nominally, they were situated in two of its peripheries. The communities' origins and their appeal to the local populations are not well understood yet. Hence, Ansari and Schmidtke focus on a much later period, from which texts and historical stories survive and can be analyzed. Presenting a well-structured survey of the current knowledge of the doctrinal, personal, and educational developments in each of the two communities as well as the evolution of contacts, communication, and exchange between them, they highlight issues such as leadership, institutions, boundary drawing, outreach, and intercommunal conflicts as important components for the dissemination of knowledge between the two communities and the differences between their respective reactions to their doctrinal opponents.

Fancy's chapter demonstrates the same basic point that Ansari and Schmidtke make for Iran and Yemen for the western Mediterranean: globalization of knowledge takes place through regional interactions and model building. In his case, the cross-dynastic, cultural, and religious exchange of military units and individual mercenaries in the western Mediterranean could only function with the success it did over several centuries and dynasties due to the formation of shared political, social, and legal conceptual spaces, which stipulated clear boundaries for their usage as well as their protection and rights. Religious affiliations, Fancy argues, were a major feature that permitted the emergence of these shared spaces and determined their local configurations. His second claim goes beyond this re-inclusion of religious identities into such acts of cooperation and the exchange of military skills and knowledge. He argues that the legal and rhetorical presentation of the foreign military units rested on a further process of globalizing knowledge. In this process, sociocultural concepts, rituals, and a specific imagination of familial bonds between foreign military slaves and just rulers as constructed in the centralized power structure of the (almost impotent) Abbasid court of the late third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries were disseminated towards the central and western Mediterranean.

Burnett's chapter re-contextualizes Fancy's point about images of knowledge and social relationships as framing conditions for processes of globalization in the Mediterranean world by reducing it to a comparison of the vitality of a specific kind of knowledge in glossaries: medical and pharmaceutical synonyms. He argues that of the three glossaries studied only one succeeded in globalizing its knowledge since the knowledge was embedded in a living community of medical practitioners, who operated as professionals across language barriers. The second, while leaving its place of assemblage and arriving in a new

geographical and cultural environment, was nonetheless a non-starter, since the secondary compiler lacked the necessary skills and communicative networks.

Akasoy's study of transformations of identity and iconography in the case of Alexander of Macedonia returns us to conceptual and methodological issues of boundaries and modes of narration and analysis. Comparing Alexander's ideological fates in posterity across different cultures and geographies, she highlights in the first part of her chapter the impressive differences between the transformative results. This induces her in the second part to address head-on the debate among sociologists and anthropologists of religion about the history of the term and its conceptual shortcomings. She includes in her survey reflections on concepts of knowledge and definitions of its globalization. Her conclusion is twofold. She sees a need to bring these different debates together for synergetic effects and re-orientations in historical research. Furthermore, she considers geographical, cultural, and social stratification a necessary tool for differentiating within results and processes.

Her reflections bring the book full circle back to late antiquity, and to regional specifications of doctrine, practice, institutionalization, communities, and natural environments. Ansari and Schmidtke asked in their catalog of unanswered questions and future tasks for studies about the construction of libraries, their typology, and the communities of readers who had access to their treasures of knowledge among the Zaydis in western Yemen from the sixth/twelfth century onwards. Such perspectives of research are closely related to positions taken by Renn and colleagues on the mechanisms and conditions of the globalization of knowledge in Eurasia before 1800, when the last forms of antiquity were intellectually laid to rest.<sup>10</sup> They also resemble the list of properties of commentaries composed by Simplicius (died circa 560), as discussed by Hoffmann in d'Ancona's *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists*.<sup>11</sup> Hoffmann concludes from the physical and intellectual properties of these commentaries that their erudition presupposes the existence of a well-endowed library of philosophical and other works, that their final purpose was apologetic and pastoral and that their style was polemically directed against contemporary religious competitors (Christians, Manichaeans). He concludes that producing such collections of knowledge in the observed formats made sense only as long as there was still a reading and talking public that shared the concerns and the education of the author.<sup>12</sup>

One part of the globalization of knowledge thus takes place through audiences initiated in textualized knowledge and its forms of representation. Hence, translation across boundaries necessitates intermediaries on more levels than the philological one alone. Late antiquity in this sense was not perpetuated

<sup>10</sup> Jürgen Renn (ed.), *The Globalization of Knowledge in History*. Max Planck Research Library for the History and Development of Knowledge, Studies 1 (Berlin: Open Access Edition, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Philippe Hoffmann, "Les bibliothèques philosophiques d'après le témoignage de la littérature néoplatonicienne des V<sup>e</sup> et VI<sup>e</sup> siècles," In *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists*, ed. Cristina d'Ancona (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 135–54, particularly p. 144.

<sup>12</sup> Hoffmann 2007, p. 144.

in full until the third/ninth century. Its major components split among the different disciplines produced by their conversion into Muslim concerns and formats. The globalization of knowledge is evidently always incomplete and disfigured. But this is no impediment, since the new communities of practitioners do not imitate foreign knowledge blindly, but appropriate and restructure it according to their own needs and the desires of the day, even if the texts arrive as mere fragments and the shared skills and information are partial, as Brentjes and Renn showed for Thābit ibn Qurra's works on the steelyard.

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