

SEIDENSTICKER, T. — Arabische Handschriften Teil 4. Die Arabischen Handschriften Cod Ms. Arab. 136 bis 180 der Niedersächsischen Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen (Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, Band XVII, B 4). Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 2005. (24,5 cm, 197). ISBN 3-515-050159. € 50.-.

The present catalogue describes forty-four Arabic manuscript volumes (containing some eighty texts) in the library of Göttingen, in Germany. Most subjects of Arabic literature are represented, but usually with one or two texts only. Creeds, magic, logic and grammar are available in larger numbers, as they usually are. Seidensticker's catalogue connects, let us hope, the already existing catalogue of the Arabic manuscripts in Göttingen (written by W. Meyer, Berlin 1894) with a future catalogue volume in which the remaining uncatalogued Arabic manuscripts (presently 554 volumes with a much larger number of texts!) will be dealt with. That being said, the relative lack of weight of the book here under review has been sufficiently indicated. To sum up in a negative way: the evident disadvantages of the present book, though not because of faults of the author, are: 1. it is written in German, where many would have preferred the *lingua franca* of modern scholarship: English; 2. it describes only a minute sub-collection of the Göttingen collection of mostly unimportant manuscripts, and 3. it has no illustrations.

The cataloguing of the forty-four manuscripts is done in the exemplary way, that we have learnt to expect from the

cataloguers in the 'Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland' (VOHD), that impressive project of the description of Oriental manuscripts in Germany, which started more than half a century ago but which I hope will not crumble down. However, the insignificance, from the point of view of philology and bibliography, of most of the items in the small collection here described, is conspicuous, as is the contrast between this and the meticulous and first class treatment which the manuscripts get in the present catalogue. In short: What a waste of brilliance on such a mediocre selection! No doubt, there are bureaucratic reasons that explain this, but I do not want to know them.

In his preface the author has singled out a few highlights in the little gathering of books which he describes. No. 138 could be an interesting collection of magical texts from the Horn of Africa. No. 144 is a Naqshbandī text which seems to be absent in other libraries (but how can we know?). No. 179 may contain an unknown text on bookmaking in the hand of Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī, who copied it in Zabīd, the Yemen, and which, being copied in 800/1397, is also the oldest dated manuscript in Seidensticker's catalogue.

If the content of the manuscripts described here is rather run of the mill, is there nothing in the catalogue to compensate for that? What about codicology?, one might ask, that science that tells us everything beyond the content of the book? If the collection described in this volume is relatively unimportant content-wise, the catalogue's physical descriptions should provide us with ample information on all sorts of details of bookmaking and the habits of scholars with books. This is indeed the case. The physical descriptions of the manuscripts are very detailed (even ink blots are occasionally recorded!) and these are witness to the author's sharp eye and keen attention. But he has done next to nothing to systematize his codicological observations, as even the most basic indexes that could provide data for codicologists and paleographers are absent. I offer here (cf. the author on pp. 16-17) the desired presentation of the available data.

AH/AD year	Göttingen	subject	locality
800/1397	179	book making	Zabīd
927/1521	150	lexicography	
935/1529?	147	spirit (<i>rūḥ</i>)	
960/1553	140	Ḥanafī law	
991/1583	154	ethics	
1010/1602	156	style	Qusṭantīniyya
1043/1634	176	ethics	
1048/1538	167	ethics	Bursa
1061/1651	139	Ḥanafī law	
1083/1672	169	Ḥanafī law	
1089/1678	168	Ḥanafī law	
1098/1686	178	Qurʾānic science	
1124/1712	164	grammar, Qurʾān	
1125/1713	143	lexicography	
1133/1721	151	Qurʾānic science	
1136/1724	148	religious poetry	
1141/1729	162	ritual prayer	
1142/1729	155	ritual prayer	
1161/1748	166	style	

1161/1748	172	Ḥanafī law	
1176/1762	177	<i>shamāʿil</i>	
1211/1797	144	mysticism	
1230/1814	180	prophet devotion	Medina
1258/1842	152	Ḥanafī law	
1266/1811	171	grammar	Kayseri
1268/1852	159	mysticism	Zaylā
1287/1870	138	magic	Obok, Djibouti?
1290/1873-4	174	Qurʾānic science	Erzurum?
1317/1899	153	mysticism	

One of the undated manuscripts contains mention of a locality: Aleppo (MS 151), but with that the forty-four volumes seem to contain just nine geographical indications. Interestingly, there is in the Göttingen collection also a Waysī manuscript (No. 147), which is therefore pre-1037 (the author mentions 1013) AH, the year of the former owner's demise. Several European libraries have manuscripts coming from the highly important library of this Ottoman judge, poet, prose-writer and bibliophile, Uways b. Muḡammad (969-1037, Gibb, *HOP*, III, 208 ff.) and it would be an interesting task to try to reconstruct this impressive 17th-century library full of rarities and precious documents, that must have made furore on the antiquarian book market in Istanbul in the second quarter of the seventeenth century, just when European scholars started to discover the treasures which the Ottomans had carried from the conquered territories to their capital, about a century earlier.

It is with mixed feelings that I have read the present catalogue. It gives the impression that it has been slumbering for a long time in the author's desk, a true *rāqīd* therefore! But the *rāqīd* eventually is born in a full-grown shape, which cannot be said of this book. It has been thrown out into the world without any promise to add descriptions of the remaining 554 uncatalogued Arabic manuscripts in the near future. A long time ago, the author has devoted much energy to describe these forty-four volumes, and he has apparently not had the wish to continue to do this, at least, one is left with that impression, since Seidensticker is quite silent on this. It is better than nothing, no doubt about that, but the present catalogue can hardly be called a serious effort to describe the Arabic manuscripts in Göttingen. And the price of the book is absolutely outrageous. Why was this catalogue not simply published as an article in a learned journal? The rigidity of the rules and regulations of the VOHD probably have prevented this.

My advice to the Librarian in Göttingen (since he is the most eligible party to take action in this situation) would be to quickly have the remaining Arabic manuscripts catalogued. It cannot take that long, twelve or eighteen months maybe, to identify the texts and make a succinct description? Or is that equally impossible because of the rules of the VOHD? Once that has been done, all information on the Arabic manuscripts in Göttingen can be put together in a unambitious handlist, showing only the most essential bibliographical details, which should be written in English. Placing descriptions in the library's website, which is now being done by Göttingen's Arabist librarian Dr. Werner Schwartz, is not really an alternative for a catalogue or handlist. Only if such a work comes to exist, good and fruitful use can be made of what is after all a nice collection of Arabic manuscripts. Such a simple handlist could become

Göttingen's contribution to that grand edifice that scholars all over the world are presently constructing: 'The History of Arabic Literature'. But someone has to do it.

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