bookbinders of Kairouan. It is true also that
extract Bolshevik book covers of the later Mid-

tle Ages (fig. 30) resemble those made by
Islamic bookbinders of their time, and it is
true that even in older bookbindings from Cen-

tral Egypt (as in that of the sixth- to seventh-
century manuscript, Chester Beatty Coptic C,
and of the early eighth-century manu-
script, Brit. Mus. Inv. No. 1442 (figs. 13 and
28), plaited-band decorations inlaid upon the
leather coverings suggest a relationship to the
patterns of the Kairouan bookbinders. An
equally close relationship, however, can easily
be discovered also in the interlaced-band orna-
ment of the carved panels of the teakwood
minbar which was made for the Mosque of
Kairouan at Baghdad in 863, on orders of the
Aglabid Emir Abu Ibrahim. From whatever
source the inspirations may have come, it was
most likely the calligrapher and the illu-
minator of manuscripts who edited and recorded
the inspirations and furnished a draft of them
to the binder for his tool ornamentation of
the book covers.

It has been said that "the art of the book
is the basis of all oriental art. The illuminat-
ors of manuscripts exercised their skill in
many other realms of artistic production, just
as in Italy during the Renaissance and it was
there, the illuminators, who furnished the plans
for most of the creations of oriental art."27

27 F. R. Martin, Ministerien und Buchkunst: Die
Ausstellung von Ministerien der Nationalmuseen der
Mittelmeerländer, Kunsthalle in Münster 1910, ed. by F. Salie and F. R.
Martin, München, 1912, vol. 1, p. III.

Not all the Kairouan bindings demanded the
intervention of artists. None of them
compare in excellence of workmanship and
general sumptuousness with the magnificent
books produced in the Islamic East during the
Mamluk period, but they are invaluable in
showing the continuity of technical knowledge
and proficiency in the bookbinders' craft as
they were handed down from the Greek-
Romaic-Coptic world to the Islamic world.

Early Islamic bookbinding in Kairouan in
nearly all its technical particulars resembled
Coptic bookbinding of the eighth and ninth
centuries. Where it deviated from the Coptic
technical tradition, as in the choice of a hori-

tzontal format (which deviation was not so
much that of the bookbinders as of the cal-

ligraphers) and in the adoption of the boxed-

type of bookbinding described by Moser,
Marçais and Poinset (fig. 5, c), it made event-
ual amends by abandoning these innovations
again in favor of the formats of the older

tradition. But where the Islamic binders deviated
from the traditional Coptic patterns of book-

cover decoration and chose to replace these
with weavings of their own taste and fancy,
they had struck out on a new path and a new
adventure which, though at first it led them
only a few steps away from the Coptic herit-
gage, was eventually to lead them to heights of
inventiveness, elegance, and sumptuousness
which has never been excelled before or after
by anything in 'bookbinding art' the world
has ever seen.

[6]

THE HUMAN ELEMENT BETWEEN TEXT
AND READER

THE İJAZA
IN ARABIC MANUSCRIPTS

JAN JUST WITKAM

The ijāza is the certificate of reading or hearing which is
sometimes written on manuscripts, usually near the colophon
or on the title page. It confers upon the recipient the right to transmit
a text, or to teach, or to issue legal opinions. It also bears witness
to attendance at a reading session. The ija'āzat al-tadrīs, the licence
to teach, and the ija'āzat al-samā'ī, the certificate of attendance at
a reading session and hence the licence to transmit the text read,
should not be confused. Our attention here will be focused on the
ijāzat al-samā'ī, the protocols of reading sessions which were
often added to a text, as these in particular provide us with ample
information on the human element in the transmission of texts.

The ija'āza is a conspicuous feature of Arabic manuscripts and it
illustrates how a text functions in an educational, scientific or
cultural environment. Studying ija'āzas increases our knowledge
of the human element in the use of texts and manuscripts. For a
better understanding of the ija'āza it is also important also to be
aware of the individual and personal element in the transmission
of Muslim scholarship: we, therefore, deal with this subject
briefly in the following section. Finally, we suggest a proposal for
collecting and analysing ija'āzat al-samā'ī in Arabic
manuscripts.1

1 There is no monograph devoted to the ija'āza, nor is there a published
corpus of texts. Some useful sources which provide a wealth of material on
the subject are: 'Abd Allâh Fâyûd, al-ija'āzat al-'ilmîyya 'inda al-mu'llimîn
(Baghdad, 1967) (with emphasis on the Shi'a); P.A. MacKay, 'Certificates of
Transmission on a Manuscript of the Maqâmît of Harîrî', MS. Cairo, Adab
105, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, New Series, LXIV
Personal approach and continuity in Islamic scholarship

It has often been stated that in Islam there is no hierarchic structure comparable with the church-like organisation of the Christians. Strictly speaking, this is true. Islam does not have an infallible pope nor does it have a clergy with an intricately differentiated hierarchic structure who claim to occupy a position between God and the believer and dispense sacraments and pretend to possess the monopoly of doctrine. This does not, of course, mean that clerical organisation is totally lacking in Islam. It is only that the dynamics of continuity — since organisation produces continuity — in Islam have developed in a different way. In Islam no intermediary between God and man is necessary. And just as a Muslim's relationship with God is direct and personal, so too is a man's way of procuring religious knowledge. In Islam it is the personal relationship between teacher and pupil that, through the generations of scholars, has produced a powerful driving force that ensures a continuity of its own.

Several genres of Islamic literature have developed in the course of time, which reflect this individual and personal attitude. It started very early indeed, with the emergence of Islamic tradition, hadith. As important as the content of the Tradition is the chain of authorities, the isnād, which precedes each tradition. The early collections are even organised not according to subject matter but to their authorities, and hence referred to by the name Mustad. Half of Islamic Tradition is ‘ilm al-rijāl, the "knowledge of the transmitters". Only an authentic chain of trustworthy authorities validates the text of a hadith. Without it a hadith is suspended in space and is incomplete — at least that is the opinion of the early Muslim scholars. For practical reasons these Tradition texts and chains of authorities were written down but, according to the old ideals, religious knowledge was best disseminated orally. The isnads can thus be read as protocols of successive instances and sessions in which learning was transmitted. The written form of hadith is thus but one dimension of the Tradition: the human factor in the transmission and continuity of knowledge is as important as the recorded message itself. The saying that "knowledge is in the breasts [of men], not in the lines [of books]" (al-‘ilm fi al-sudūr lā fi al-safār) aptly summarises this idea.

The rapid expansion of Islam and the enormous diversification of the different disciplines of learning made it impossible to maintain oral transmission as the only vehicle for passing on knowledge. The Word of God, the divine revelation, had to be written down, since the early carriers of the Holy Word died on the battlefields of the expansion wars. At a later stage, historical and Tradition texts were written down as well, initially in all sorts of personal notebooks of transmitters, later in more organised collections that were intended for a wider audience. Though, in the end, books became accepted as the ordinary medium, the individual and personal approach nevertheless remained intact. Just reading a book in order to grasp its contents, as we do nowadays, was not enough. In the classical period, it was thought, a book should be read with a teacher, preferably the author himself, or else it should be studied with an authoritative and respected professor. Reading, or rather studying, was not a solitary affair. It was also a social event, as we shall see.

Biographical literature emerged in Islam as one of the consequences of this individual and personal approach. The genre was not new around the Mediterranean. In classical antiquity biographical literature such as the "Parallel Lives" of Plutarch served historical, didactic, moralistic and sometimes ideological purposes. Some of the Islamic biographical literature had a similar purpose but there was an extra dimension. The "science of men", or 'ilm al-rijāl, developed into a critical method 2


3 For their use, and the distrust they evoked, see al-Balkhi (d. ca. 319/931), Kitāb Qubil al-akhbār wa-ma‘ṣūfīt al-rījāl, MS Cairo, Dar al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, Mastalih 14M, passim. An edition of this text by myself is in an advanced stage of preparation.
for the assessment of scholarly authority. Many biographical works were concerned with describing networks of scholarship and chains of transmission. A clear example of this is the Tahdhib al-tahdhib by Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852/1449), which is a biographical dictionary of trustworthy transmitters of Islamic Tradition. The usual structure of a biography in this work breaks down into three parts: firstly the full name and some other pertinent life data of the subject are given, then follow enumerations of earlier authorities from whom he transmits Tradition, and then of those later authorities who in turn transmit from him. The biographer is thereby presented in the centre of an activity of transmission of knowledge. This particular work by Ibn Hajar is exclusively concerned with traditionists and this particular approach can, therefore, be observed very clearly. Other biographical works, even those that are not so exclusively concerned with traditionists, often contain similar bits of network information.

**Literary genres of an individual and personal nature**

Other individual and personal genres evolved. The fahraṣa, which developed in al-Andalus and the Maghreb, is one of these. This genre, in which a scholar enumerates his shaykhs and the works he read with them, can be read as a scholarly curriculum vitae. The thabat, which is not confined to the Maghreb, is a list compiled by a retainer of traditions in which he mentions his shaykhs and the scope of his transmissions on their authority. Likewise, in the riḥla, or travel account, attention shifted from geography and ethnography in the classical period to the personal relationships of scholars. Especially in later times it became much more than just a travel account. In it, the itinerant author has ample opportunity to enumerate the scholars he has met, the lessons he has taken and the authorisations he has received during his travels. And the purpose of his travels was, of course, not touristic but of a much more edifying nature, namely the pilgrimage to Makkah. Yet another type of personalised text is the silsila, the spiritual or scholarly genealogy. The barnāmaj and the mashyakhha have a function very similar to that of the fahraṣa, and sometimes contain accounts of travels in search of knowledge, the falaq al-'ilm, just as in the riḥla. One of the most conspicuous types of compilation of biographical data are the works describing the tabaqāt ("the layers") of scholars, which list the successive generations of persons active in a certain field. This treatment "by generation" kept intact both the synchronic and diachronic connections in the history of a field of scholarship.

Especially in later times, such enumerations were compiled as a sort of scholarly autobiography. Sometimes the main attention is directed to the texts which were read with teachers, as in the barnāmāj, and sometimes the shaykhs themselves are the main object of attention, as in the mashyakhha. Often these texts were compiled by the subjects themselves and were written in the first person, although the third person is used in the autobiography as well. When others took care of the compilation of such a list of subjects taught or authorities met by their shaykh, such a survey could simply be called al-Taʾrīf bi-... followed by the name of the shaykh in question. The same applies to works which are entitled Tarjamat ..., followed by the name of the biographer. Titles such as al-Sanad al-muttaṣal lāl ..., followed by the name of an early authority, occur as well. Compilations with the word asānīd in the title serve a similar purpose in describing the chains of authorities by which a certain scholar is connected to the great imams of an earlier period. At a much later stage, probably only as late as the 12th/18th century, separate booklets with titles including the word ijāza began to appear. At first sight these seem to belong to the category of educational ijāza rather than that of readers' certificates but there are also connections between the two types of texts since the later diplomas frequently contain a silsila of learned predecessors, often putting the Prophet Muhammad at the beginning of the silsila and the student to whom the booklet was issued at its end. Elaborately adorned, impressively calligraphed and elegantly worded, these diplomas can be considered to constitute the final stage of the ijāza and its

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4 Published in 12 volumes in Hyderabad, 1325-7 [1907-9].
6 This genre of travel accounts became specially developed in the Western part of the Islamic world. The great distance from the Arabian Peninsula must have contributed to this development.
7 Many silsīlas are known. The Sufis have their own sets of silsīlas. I have published and analysed the silsila of the Bosnian Hanafi scholar Hassan Kaft al-Aḥqāfī (d. 1025/1616) in *Manuscripts of the Middle East* (MMME), IV (1989), 85-114.
finest artistic expression. Because of them, the ḥijāza has become an independent literary genre.9

Yet another special literary genre that developed from this practice is the ḥijāz, a short text usually consisting of not much more than one quire, and often small enough for it to be easily carried. It could happen that only a very small part of a scholar’s work was read and taught in a session in which an ḥijāza was going to be granted. In that case the issuer of the ḥijāza had the choice between two options. He could confer upon his pupil, or a visiting scholar, the right to transmit the whole of a book by him, or his transmissions (marwiyyāt), or his own orally received knowledge (masmū’āt), or the works for which he himself had already acquired certificates (mustaṣjāzāt), or of any other of his works even if they had only been partially read or not read at all. Such ḥijāzāt ‘āmmah abound.

The other option was that the short text or the specific collection of transmissions which had been read could be written out separately. Such shorter collections of parts of the repertoire of a shaykh often bear the title ḥijāz.10 Sometimes these ajza’ are provided with a more detailed specification and a more meaningful title.11

9 Such booklets are available in numerous libraries. The MS Montreal, McGill University Library, No. AC 156 is such a separate diploma. Its content was analysed and published by Adam Gacek, “The Diploma of the Egyptian Calligrapher Hasan al-Rushdi”, MMF, IV (1989), 44–55. Another one is MS Leiden, University Library, Or. 11.121. This thin volume, which probably originates from Istanbul, contains an ḥijāza in the readings of the Qur’an conferred upon Abū Bakr Luṭfī Afandī b. al-Sayyid ‘Umar al-San’ūbī by his teacher Ismā‘īl Ḥaqīq b. ‘All in Muḥarram 1260/1844.

10 It is not impossible that the ḥijāz ‘as an independent genre developed from the old practice of writing ḥijāza, samā‘at and the like, it has become a genre with more or less meaning quire, or gathering, of a manuscript. Such manuscripts are referred to as muṣjāza’i, divided into ajza’. This feature is by no means rare. It can be attested by the Leiden manuscripts Or. 122 (Makkārīm al-Akhītāq) and Or. 12.644 (Tarīkh Madinat Dimashq). These manuscripts contain each gathering a number of almost identical certificates. The gatherings have title pages of their own and break up the text into parts of more or less equal length which have no connection with any division into chapters and sections that the text may also have. This latter characteristic is shared, of course, with the Qur’an, which has a formal division into ajza’ and, at the same time, a division into chapters, or surās.

11 Ajza’ with samā‘at are mentioned by Sa’dī al-Dīn al-Munṣījī, “Ḥijāz al-samā‘a”, nos. 10 and 11.

When a scholar’s trust in his colleague or student was great, it could happen that he conferred upon him the right to transmit all his works, even if they had not been the subject of a teaching session. In such a case the ḥijāza may contain the titles of most or all of the teacher’s works and be, in effect, an autobiography. Such lists of titles of books in the ḥijāza, or elsewhere in a manuscript for that matter, are have hardly been explored as yet.12 There are many more works, often with more flowery titles, which serve the same purpose, namely to record and assess a scholar’s authority. When one starts searching for this type of book the supply is seemingly endless. The common features that may be observed in all of them are the enumerations of scholars visited, of books read, and of authorisations (ḥijāzāt) received. In this context the ḥijāza is the conclusion of a meeting between two scholars who simultaneously contains an account of their scholarly antecedents. By virtue of it, the recipient is invested with the authority to transmit or teach part or whole of the work of the scholar who has issued the ḥijāza. The whole process is not unlike the diplomas which students of present day universities consider as the culmination of their study, the difference being that these ḥijāzāt reflect the relationship between two natural persons, rather than between a student and his institution of education.

Finally, we may note that the alphabetical arrangement of bibliographic material, such as in Ibn Haḍir’s Taḥdīḥ al-taḥdīḥ, encompassed all previous developments. This type of arrangement was, of course, the only organisational answer to an ever increasing corpus of material, although we do also find limitations of a chronological or geographical nature within alphabetically arranged bibliographical dictionaries.

12 See my “Lists of Books in Arabic Manuscripts”, MMF, V (1990–1), 121–36, especially the section on ‘Ḥijāza and autobiography’ on pp. 126–30 where I discuss an 8/14th century document of such a nature. Another autobiography which takes the shape of an ḥijāza, dated Dammam, 1169/1756, is found in MS Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, no. 3488 (cf. Arberry, Handlist, II, plate 63).
Codicology and the ījāza in Arabic manuscripts

What, one might ask, has all this to do with manuscripts and, more particularly, with codicology? The latter science is sometimes described as the specialization that devotes attention to all aspects of a manuscript other than the contents of the text it contains. In more positive wording, it is sometimes designated as the science that focusses exclusively on the physical features of the handwritten book. These are useful definitions but as summarised here they are too simplified. Indeed, there are often more things to be learned from a manuscript volume than the philological aspects of the text which is contained in it. One cannot, however, make such a simple schematic distinction between immaterial text and physical manuscript, between soul and body, so to speak. There is always an interaction between the two aspects, as is illustrated by, for example, the occurrence of a great variety of indications of personal use that can be found in many manuscripts. Each manuscript is, of course, a personally made artefact and contains information — always implicitly and sometimes explicitly — on the maker and sometimes on the users of the manuscript as well. On the whole, features such as the colophon, copyist’s verses, owner’s marks and reader’s certificates enable us to gain an idea of the functioning of a certain text in general and the use of a certain manuscript volume in particular. Therefore, the study of these features, which belongs to the field of codicology in as much as the study of writing materials and script are part of it, gives a text an extra dimension and places it in its cultural context. Only this overall and integrated approach to the manuscript does justice to its features in coherence with one another. It is philology in the widest sense of the word, involving all these aspects and also the interaction between the text and the environment in which it was launched.

One usually finds ījāza, or copies of them, added at the end of a text or written on the title page preceding the text for which the authorisation is granted. Sometimes the ījāza consists of a few lines only but sometimes they can be quite elaborate. They may be combined with readers’ certificates. To add ījāza to texts was a time honoured practice in Arabic manuscripts which remained in use for a number of centuries. By looking at these manuscripts in which they are written, one can gain an idea of how this system of authorisation to teach operated. In addition to this, an ījāza can reveal much about the way a certain text or manuscript was used. Quite surprisingly, as yet very little has been done by way of a systematic collection of the data contained in the ījāza in Arabic manuscripts.14 A corpus of such texts with an analysis of both their formulaic peculiarities and their content would be highly desirable. The fact that such a corpus would indeed be useful is illustrated by the discovery by Ebied and Young of the etymology of the term “baccalaureate” by scrutinising the Arabic wording of the ījāza in a number of manuscripts they found evidence for their thesis that the well known European academic term is in fact derived from the Arabic term bi-ḥaqeq al-riwaya.15

Examples of some important ījāza

The ījāza originated within the Islamic educational system in which the Islamic religious sciences were taught. Its use, however, has by no means remained restricted to that field. Of the 72 manuscripts listed by Vajda, 59 have a “traditional Islamic” content, that is disciplines that are part of the madrasa curriculum, whereas 13 do not have a directly religious content but deal with such topics as medicine, literature and the sciences. This is still a high proportion in view of the fact that there are so many more manuscripts of the first category. Vajda’s geographical register reveals that Damascus and Cairo are the places from where most manuscripts with ījāza were written. Baghdad, Makkah and Aleppo are the runners up as places where ījāza were most frequently issued. Most other places are also situated in the Mashreq. Eighty percent of Vajda’s corpus dates from the 6th/12th-15th centuries, with a more or less even distribution over this period.16

One of the most outstanding sets of ījāza is found not in an Islamic scholarly text, but in what is probably the most prestigious text of Arabic imaginative literature, the Maqāmāt of

14 MacKay’s extensive analysis of the ījāza in MS Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 105 (see n. 1 above), which contains a contemporary copy of the Maqāmāt of al-Hariri (d. 512/1122), makes ample reference to secondary manuscripts and is exemplary both in this respect and from the methodological point of view. Vajda’s collection of certificates (see n. 1 above) also provides a wealth of information.
16 See Vajda, Certificats de lecture, 65-6.

Copies (mithāl or sūrā) are often not recognised as such.
al-Ḥarīrī. This becomes clear from the ījāzāt found on the authoritative manuscript of the text, copied from al-Ḥarīrī’s own copy. In the principal and contemporaneous ījāza on this manuscript the names of some 38 scholars, a number of whom are identified as distinguished notables of Baghdad, are mentioned as having been present at the reading of the entire work, which took more than a month of intermittent sessions to complete. 17 MacKay’s meticulous analysis of the numerous ījāzāt in this manuscript has, in fact, reconstructed a period of almost two centuries of cultural life in Baghdad, Aleppo and Damascus. It all started in Baghdad in the year 504/1111, when the first reading of a copy of the author’s autograph took place. That reading was followed by a number of subsequent readings, all in Baghdad. In the 60 or so years since the first reading, the manuscript had become quite heavy with sama’ notes. After a period of 40 years, which remains unaccounted for, it came into the possession of the Aleppan historian Kamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-A’dīm (d. 660/1262). The manuscript then remained for more than 30 years in Aleppo, and bears numerous names of members of the best Aleppan families as auditors at sessions at which the manuscript was read. Finally, the manuscript bears certificates of reading sessions held in Damascus in the course of the year 683/1284. The manuscript then fades from view until, almost exactly six centuries later, it was acquired in 1875 by Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyya, where it still is.

When one looks at the more than 200 names of those involved in reading and listening to the manuscript, one is struck by the fact that many of them are related by family ties. The history of the transmission of the text in this manuscript often goes hand in hand with the history of generations of scholars and literary men who occupied themselves with it.

One of the earliest known ījāzāt is that found in the unique manuscript of al-Nāsikab wa-l-mansūkh fī al-Qur‘ān by Abū ’ Ubayy al-Qasim b. Sallām (d. 223/837). 18 Here we do indeed have a work which belongs to the core of Islamic sciences, the knowledge of the abrogating and abrogated verses of the Qur’an. The earliest sama’ in it dates from 392/1001-2, while the latest dates from 587/1191. In one of sama’ātī in this manuscript a place is mentioned: al-Jāmī‘ al-ʿAtiq bi-Miṣr. 19 Here, too, several members of the same family are mentioned, including a father, his sons, and several brothers. Just as in the previously mentioned example of al-Ḥarīrī’s Maqāmāt, it becomes clear that transmitting a text was a social event and sometimes also a family affair. In either case the personal element is clearly present. Comparison of the ījāzāt at the end of the Istanbul manuscript of Abū ’ Ubayy’s al-Nāsikab wa-l-mansūkh with the list of riwāyāt on the title page of another Istanbul manuscript, the Kitāb al-Muṣālaa by Abū Bakr al-Dinawari, 20 reveals the occurrence of the same person in both manuscripts, namely, the otherwise unknown scholar Abū ’ Abīd Allāh M. b. Hamd b. Ḥamīd b. Muḥarrāj b. Ghiyāth al-Artājī. In the very old manuscript of Abū ’ Ubayy’s al-Nāsikab wa-l-mansūkh, he is active as muṣnī in 587/1191, while in the copy of al-Dinawari’s Kitāb al-Muṣālaa, copied in 671/1272, he is one of the transmitters of the text preceding the manuscript of this. This shows that it is rewarding to accumulate the data of ījāzāt, sama’āt, riwāyāt and the like, with the present example, for instance, revealing the beginning of a scholarly network.

The ījāzāt given by Ibn al-Jawālīqi (d. 539/1144), one of the foremost philologists in Baghdad, 21 can be found in a number of manuscripts. A manuscript in Dublin contains on its title page a certificate of reading signed by Ibn al-Jawālīqi in 514/1120. 22 A

17 See MacKay, Certificates of Transmission, 9.
19 This must be the manuscript to which Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Manṣūrī refers ("ījāza al-samā’", 233, n. 1). The date which he gives there, 372 AH, is apparently a misunderstanding for the clearly written date of 392 AH.
21 See C. Brockelman, Geschichte der arabischen Literatur, I (Weimar, 1898), 280.
22 Chester Beatty Library, No. 3009 (Arberry, Handlist, I, plate 1). See also S. A. Bonebakker, "Notes on Some Old Manuscripts of the Adab al-kābiṭ of Ibn Qutayba, the Kitāb as-sīnā’atayn of Abū Hilāl al-’Askarī and the Mathal as-sā’ir of Diya’ ad-Dīn ibn al-Athīr", Oriens, XIII-XIV (1960—
Leiden manuscript containing Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī’s Luzūm mā lā yalaẓum was copied by Ibn al-Jawāliqī before 496/1102-3.23 His handwriting is easily identified and the date can be established from an autograph note by his teacher and predecessor at the Nizāmīyya school in Baghdad, al-Khāṭīb al-Ṭabarzī (d. 502/1108).24 Other reading notes in the same manuscript reveal the reading by a pupil, Ibn al-Khashshāb, in the course of the year 519/1125. The manuscript then travelled from Baghdad to Cairo, as is borne out by notes about its new owner, the grammarians Ibn al-Nahlī (d. 698/1299).25 Another Leiden manuscript containing the philological work Kitāb al-Alfāz by ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. ʿĪsā al-Hamadhānī (d. 320/932), was copied in 522/1112.26 It, too, contains an autograph qirāʾa note by Ibn al-Jawāliqī on the title page. The manuscript itself contains notes of bulugh and muqābala at fairly regular intervals and from these the length of the reading sessions can be approximately measured, each probably lasting around one or two hours. A late copy (11th/17th century?) of a qirāʾa note by Ibn al-Jawāliqī, dated 701/1197, is available in MS Leiden Or. 403, f. 430b, which contains the Diwān of Abū Tammām with a commentary by al-Khāṭīb al-Ṭabarzī.27 The impression one gets from Ibn al-Jawāliqī’s notes is that his transmissions were probably not as much of a social event as were the previous cases. It would appear that he had a predilection for a smaller group to whom he taught the important texts of his time. His copy of al-Maʿarrī’s Luzūm mā lā yalaẓum, with only his teacher al-Khāṭīb al-Ṭabarzī between the author and himself, is an eloquent witness of this.

1. 159-94. The note in the Dublin manuscript is edited by Bonebakker on p. 165.
3. The qirāʾa note was published by me in Seven Specimens of Arabic Manuscripts (Leiden, 1976), 11.
5. MS Leiden Or. 1070 (P. Voorhoeve, Handlist of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Leiden and Other Collections in the Netherlands (Leiden, 1957), 10).

Conclusions and perspectives

Two aspects of the jāzāt have been dealt with, one from the point of view of cultural history, the other with codicological considerations taken into account. Both are necessary and the two complement one another by interaction. The jāzāt itself is a good example for proving that these two orientations cannot be isolated from one another. The jāzāt is an important source for the history of scholarly and cultural networks and gives the details by which an entire cultural environment can be reconstructed.

The jāzāt as a mechanism in the distribution of learning deserves to be studied on a much wider scale than has hitherto been the case. Librarians should collect the jāzāt in their manuscripts and publish them. Such publications should not only consist of an analysis of the data of the certificates, as Vajda and MacKay have done, but should also contain as complete a transcript as possible of the Arabic texts themselves. Only then can the most important work begin, namely, the compilation of a cumulative index of all the bio-bibliographical information contained in such certificates, which would be a valuable addition to existing bio-bibliographical reference works. The publication of a large corpus of jāzāt will enable us to make a survey of the technical terminology employed which, in turn, will deepen our knowledge of the function of the jāzāt in Arabic manuscripts.

The minimal requirements for such a corpus are, firstly, the full texts, with good photographs, of a great number of jāzāt. These would constitute the main body of the work. Secondly, such a corpus should also contain a number of research aids: summary descriptions of the manuscripts in question, an index of persons with their functions in the process of the issuing of the jāzāt, an index of the places to where the manuscripts in which the jāzāt is found peregrinated in the course of time, and a glossary of the technical terminology employed.

This is not an easy task to perform, since the scholarly certificates are often written in the least legible of scripts. The study of the jāzāt will only be fruitful if the student of the jāzāt is well acquainted with the formal requirements of these certificates28 and the educational environment from which they stem, and if at the same time he has a wide experience in working with manuscripts. In the ongoing development towards an increased

professionalisation of the science of manuscripts, it is only natural that such a corpus of ijāzāt should be compiled by a professional codicologist.

It is well known that in the early years of Islam, the practice of copying documents was widespread, and it took almost a century before the era of Ijāzāt. The recording of Ijāzāt was an essential component of Islamic scholarship. Even though a large number of manuscripts were lost or destroyed, it is estimated that the original Ijāzāt were kept in the libraries of scholars and transmitted through oral tradition. These Ijāzāt were the primary sources for the transmission of Islamic knowledge, and they were considered to be the most authentic and reliable sources of information.

The importance of Ijāzāt in Islamic scholarship cannot be overstated. They served as a means of transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next, and they were used to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the transmitted texts. Ijāzāt were held in high esteem, and their possession was seen as a mark of prestige and scholarly achievement.

The problem of transmission of knowledge (Ilm al-Usul) became evident from the very beginning of Islamic literature. When the written body of the Prophet’s successors began to grow, it was more than ever necessary to ensure its authenticity. As a result, a new discipline, ‘Ilm al-Ijāzāt, was born. It is from this branch of knowledge that the rules and regulations for the transmission of knowledge were developed, and the term ‘Ilm al-Ijāzāt’ was derived from the Latin word ‘illuminare’, meaning ‘to illuminate’.

The corpus of literature dealing with the transmis-
The History of the Book in the East
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ASHGATE
PART III INTRODUCTION OF PRINTING


PART IV PRINTING DEVELOPMENT AND PRINT CULTURE


18 Orlin Sabei (Orhan Salihi) (2009), ‘Rich Men, Poor Men: Ottoman Printers and Booksellers Making Fortune or Seeking Survival (Eighteenth–Nineteenth Centuries)’, Oriens, 37, pp. 177–90.

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Ashgate would like to thank our researchers and the contributing authors who provided copies, along with the following for their permission to reprint copyright material.


Bodleian Library, Oxford for the images: Fragment of the Hebrew text of the book of Ecclesiastes (ch. 40) from the Cairo Genizah; Rotulus, book roll preceding the codex form. Liturgical text from the Cairo Genizah; Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine (in Arabic); Nahmanides, Torat ha-Adam, a comprehensive monograph on all the laws concerning death and mourning written in cursive Sephardic script (Spain, 1330); Al-Khushani, Book of the Judges of Cordoba; Hebrew Pentateuch written in Italian semi-cursive script (Florence, between 1441–1468); Dinim (ritual decisions) according to Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg; Latin missal written in a Gothic script (Bohemia or Moravia, fourteenth century); Geo-cultural entities of Hebrew medieval manuscripts indicated on a portom chart by Bartholomeo Olives of Majorca (1575); Maimonides’ autograph draft of his legal code, Mishneh Torah, in cursive Sephardic script (Egyp, c. 1180).


Corpus Christi College, Oxford for the image: Records of debts in Judeo-Arabic on the blank pages of as Ashkenazic prayer book (c. 1200).


The Smithsonian Institution for the essay: Theodore C. Petersen (1954), ‘Early Islamic Bookbindings and their Coptic Relations’, Ars Orientalis, 1, pp. 41–64. Copyright © 1954 Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. All rights reserved.


Series Preface

This series on the history of the book in the East focuses attention on three areas of the world which for a long time have been undeservedly left on the margins of the global history of the book: the Middle East, South Asia and East Asia. The importance of these three regions lies not only in the sheer antiquity of printing in East Asia, where both movable type and wood blocks were used centuries before Gutenberg’s invention changed the face of book production in Europe, but also in the manuscript traditions and very different responses to printing technology in the Middle East and South Asia. This series forms an important counterbalance to the Eurocentrism of the history of the book as practised in the West.

The three volumes are edited by renowned experts in the field and each includes an introduction which provides an overview of research. The series offers a significant benefit to students, lecturers and libraries as it brings together articles from disparate journals which are often difficult to locate and of limited access. Students are thus able to study leading articles side by side for comparison whilst lecturers are provided with an invaluable ‘one-stop’ teaching resource.

PETER KORNICKI
Series Editor
University of Cambridge, UK
Introduction

The Origins of Writing and Texts

The area which we call the ‘Middle East’ – essentially West Asia and North Africa – was where the practice of representing human utterances in permanent or semi-permanent form, by making marks on prepared surfaces, first originated. Whereas oral communication was limited to the evanescent here-and-now, and to the vagaries of human memory, writing enabled texts to be transmitted through both time and space, according to the medium employed. Monumental inscriptions dating from the fourth millennium BCE onwards abound in the region: these served to make permanent records, usually of the pretensions of divine and earthly powers, helping to transmit messages of authority and legitimacy down the generations.

But the requirements of administration, everyday devotion and the supply of longer texts for reading led the ancient civilizations to adopt more portable, if less durable, vehicles for writing: clay tablets and cylinders, animal skins, palm-back and papyrus (made from Egyptian reed stems). With these, written messages could be transmitted across space, from person to person, and used as a means of social communication.¹

The writing systems of the ancient Middle East started with pictograms, which then gradually became transmuted into patterns of signs, the meaning of which no longer necessarily bore any relation to the original pictorial representations. The earliest of these seems to have been cuneiform, used in Iraq from the third millennium BCE, consisting of wedge-shaped strokes incised on clay tablets. In Egypt, not much later, a system of hieroglyphic writing developed, which was originally purely pictographic, but became a means of representing different meanings and concepts. The key to the use of both these systems, and others which appeared, as text media was the adoption of the rebus principle, whereby the signs became identified with the sounds of words, not just the depiction of objects. It was this which enabled the development of texts, literature and eventually books.²

The alphabet was the next stage in the history of the book, and it too originated in the Middle East. In Ugarit in Syria in the fourteenth century BCE, a cuneiform system was developed which used only a limited number of signs, each of which represented a unit of sound, not a word or syllable, so that words could be constructed by combining them. This was followed by the Phoenician script, originating in the same area, in which each sound/letter took the form of one of a collection of 22 specific written characters, forming an alphabet as such.

The Phoenician alphabet was subsequently widely adopted, adapted and developed to form the basis of the writing systems of many languages in the Middle East and beyond, including Aramaic, Hebrew and Arabic.

¹ For an extended discussion of the rôle of these material bases of written communications in ancient and modern civilizations, see the two seminal works of Harold A. Innis: Empire and Communications (1972, rep. 2007) and The Bias of Communication (1951, rep. 2008).
² For a clear and concise summary of these developments, see Jeun (1992, rep. 2000).
The Manuscript Tradition in the Middle East

Hebrew

The monotheism of the ancient Israelites became at an early stage a religion of the book. Various materials, including stone, ceramics, wood, metal and animal hides were used to write the Torah in the first millennium BCE, and papyrus was also used for Hebrew letters, documents, official and religious texts. Of particular importance in Judaism is the Torah scroll (sefer Torah), traditionally written on parchment and rolled from both ends: very early on this became a central object of devotion and focus of Jewish ritual. Elaborate rules were developed for the writing of such scrolls, codified in the Talmud and later in twelfth-century Egypt by the great scholar Maimonides in his Mishneh Torah. These covered the nature of the script, the materials and implements used, and the rites to be followed by the scribe.

The earliest Hebrew scrolls to have survived are the famous Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in caves at Qumran in Palestine. Some are of papyrus, but most are parchment, and they contain mainly biblical and other religious texts. They have been dated between the third century BCE and the first century CE. It is thought that some of these caves were used as scriptoria and libraries, and they provide evidence of the extent and diversity of Hebrew scribal culture of that period.

Parchment scrolls have continued to be used for the Torah, but other Hebrew literature, both sacred and secular, adopted the forms and materials subsequently developed in the Middle East: the codex and paper (see further below, and especially the essay by Malachi Beit-Arié reproduced here as Chapter 3). However, hardly any manuscripts survive from before the tenth century CE; this seems to be partly because of the destruction of earlier ones, and partly because of a preference for oral transmission of texts in that period. But in the following centuries there was an efflorescence of Hebrew manuscript production. Although many of the most notable surviving examples were produced in Europe, there is no doubt that Jewish communities in the Middle East were also major producers of texts in the period before printing. Cairo especially was a major centre: a fine gilt illuminated bible, thought to have been written there in the tenth century and now in the British Library, bears witness to this. The quantity as well as the quality of the output is also attested by the large treasure trove of leaves and fragments preserved in the Cairo Genizah, including autographs of the works of Maimonides and others (see Reif, 2000). Iran, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, the Maghrib and Yemen also produced significant Hebrew manuscripts. The layout, illumination and in some areas even the script of these were often influenced by their Islamic contemporaries.

Coptic

In the first century CE, the ancient Egyptian language began to be written in the Greek script, and this became the norm after the widespread adoption of Christianity in the following two centuries. The Greek alphabet was augmented with some letters derived from Demotic Egyptian, and many Greek loanwords entered the vocabulary. This new written language became known as Coptic. The earliest Coptic papyri contain pagan texts, but the great majority of Coptic manuscripts are Christian: biblical and liturgical texts, hagiography, homiletic literature, treatises, and so on.

The Copts seem to have played a crucial part in the transition from scrolls to codices—that is, to books in the modern sense. This development occurred in the first three Christian centuries, when folded and bound leaves of papyrus or parchment were found to be more convenient and suitable for the lengthier Biblical and religious texts (Hussein, 1970; Roberts and Skect, 1987). The remarkable collection of fourth-century Coptic gnostic books discovered at Nag Hammadi in upper Egypt are all papyrus codices. As Theodore Petersen has shown in his essay below (Chapter 5), Coptic binding practices for codices probably later influenced the early forms of the Islamic book.

The Coptic manuscript tradition continued until modern times, but the Coptic language itself gradually fell out of use after the Arab conquest in the seventh century. Later manuscripts contained only scriptural and liturgical texts, accompanied nearly always by the Arabic translations and commentaries necessary for their understanding by the Arabized population.

Syriac

Syriac is the Semitic language used by a number of important Christian communities in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Turkey. It has its own script, used to write a wide range of religious and secular literature from the second century CE onwards, notably an important Syriac translation of the Bible (the Peshitta), homilies, theology, poetry, history and the natural sciences. An important early centre of production was Edessa (now Şanlıurfa in Turkey), but most Syriac manuscripts were written in the numerous monasteries and convents scattered throughout the area, initially on parchment and later on paper.

After the Arab conquests in the seventh and eighth centuries, Arabic gradually displaced Syriac and, after a brief revival in the thirteenth century, the latter eventually ceased to be a literary language. It continued in use, however, as a vehicle for existing sacred and liturgical texts, at least in the Maronite, Syrian Orthodox and Church of the East (‘Nestorian’) communities, and manuscripts continued to be produced.

The Syriac script was also used by members of these communities to write Arabic. Such texts, known as Karshuni, can be found in many manuscripts of the later periods.

Armenian

Another ancient Christian community of the Middle East is the Armenians. The Armenian language acquired its own script in the fifth century CE, and thereafter a vigorous scribal tradition developed. Numerous manuscripts of the Bible, the liturgies, the Church canons, translations of the Greek and Syriac fathers, chronicles, theological and philosophical works, grammars, science (law, poetry and much else were created. Many were richly illustrated and illuminated, and bindings were often finely decorated. The main centres of production were Constantinople (Istanbul), the towns of Cilician Armenia (now south-east Turkey) and Isfahan in Iran, but many were also written in the numerous monasteries throughout the area.

The colophons of Armenian manuscripts are of particular importance as historical sources: as well as recording the circumstances of their creation, they also often provide valuable information on such subjects as natural disasters, wars and other historical events. Many
time, the old Arabic poetic tradition was revived and committed to writing, which in turn stimulated a new Islamic Arabic poetic and literary output, embodied in manuscripts over the following centuries.

The massive expansion of Islam in its first few centuries encompassed large, hitherto non-Arab, populations, which thereby entered this new Arab-Islamic book culture, but at the same time introduced their own literary and intellectual heritage into it. Not only older literary traditions, but also philosophy, science, mathematics, geography, historiography and other disciplines flourished in the Muslim environment, which enthusiastically promoted the acquisition of knowledge and learning as a virtue enjoined by the Prophet. The writing and copying of texts was an essential and integral part of this, and during the eighth–eighteenth centuries in Muslim lands it reached a level unprecedented in the history of book production anywhere.

The number of manuscripts produced is impossible to compute. Today there are more than three million manuscript texts in the Arabic script, preserved in libraries and institutions throughout the world, as well as an unknown but substantial number still in private hands. Most of these copies are no more than 500 years old; this is partly because the scribal tradition lasted until quite recently, but it is also because much of the earlier written output of Muslim civilizations has been destroyed through neglect, decay, natural disasters and the belligerent destruction of significant parts of the written heritage, both by Muslims and by their enemies. This has continued right down to the present day. What remains, however, forms a substantial part of the world’s intellectual and textual heritage.

Although the earliest Arabic and Muslim writings may have been on bones and palm-leaves, the normal materials in the first two centuries were papyrus and parchment. The latter was far more valuable for Qur’ans, for which durability was more important than portability. Some magnificent specimens, usually in oblong shape, have survived.

In the ninth century, paper production was introduced from China, and soon became widely adopted both for fine Qur’ans and for more mundane and secular texts. Many centres of paper production were established throughout the Muslim world. Paper was convenient to use, transport and store, and it was, most importantly, considerably cheaper than papyrus and parchment. This was a major factor in the expansion of book production and the transmission of knowledge. The Medieval Muslim societies from the tenth century onwards. Paper copybooks within reach of a wider class of educated readers. Its availability and use seems also to have been a major factor in the development of more cursive and legible styles of the Arabic script in that period. It provided a more convenient medium for texts other than the Qur’an, in which functional legibility was more important than hieratic presentation.

From the fifteenth century, European (especially Italian) paper rapidly displaced the local product in most Muslim lands. Not only was it of higher quality, but it was also cheaper, being mass-produced in Europe to meet the demands of the new printing presses. This led to a further increase in the production and readership of Arabic manuscripts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The Arabic script, driven by the need to write down the divine text of the Qur’an, quickly developed from its rudimentary beginnings. Through a system of point and diacritics, it remedied its deficiencies and emerged as a functional means of rendering and recording Arabic texts, although it never became fully phonetic. At the same time, as the vehicle of the divine message, it attracted a spiritual veneration that inspired the desire to transform it into an object of sublime beauty. Calligraphy was therefore prized, and a great variety of fine script
styles emerged, used primarily, but not solely, for writing the Qur’anic text. They showed considerable regional variations, reflecting the different civilizations and patrimonies across the Muslim world.

Most Arabic manuscript books, however, are written in smaller and simpler cursive styles, notably naskh (which later became the basis of Arabic typography). Yet, even in mundane manuscripts, aesthetic considerations were rarely abandoned altogether, and writing still had sacred connotations. Nevertheless, the cost of paper often imposed cramped page layouts, with glosses and commentaries flowing into the margins. Punctuation was non-existent. Texts normally started on the verso of the first leaf, and ended with a colophon, usually giving the date (and occasionally also the place) of copying and the copyist’s name.

The illumination and decoration of manuscripts was an important Islamic art form, second only to calligraphy. The finest Qur’ans contain gilt and/or multicoloured abstract, floral and foliate decoration; and many lesser manuscripts were also illuminated, at least at their start. Bookbindings in the Muslim world were also vehicles for artistic fineness. These, and some of the other features already mentioned, underline the important role of the book in the visual, as well as the literary culture of Muslim societies.

The profession of scribe was an established and honourable one in Muslim society, and included people of all levels of education. Scribes sometimes operated in palace workshops, or were secretaries working in court chanceries with an exalted status. At the other end of the scale, they might be market stallholders offering their services to all and sundry. In between, there were many paid copyists working in libraries, colleges, mosques and other religious institutions. Many manuscripts, however, were not written by professionals. Some were written by authors themselves: a number of holograph copies of Muslim writings survive in libraries. Imprecious writers and scholars also often resorted to copying in order to sustain themselves; and students and other readers frequently made copies, in libraries and elsewhere, simply for their own use. Inevitably in traditional society, most scribes, whether professionals or amateurs, were male. Yet, there exist a surprising number of references to women performing this role too.

Scirical activity did not entirely displace oral transmission in the diffusion of texts, however. Written books were often created in the first place by copying from dictation or from memory. The right to transmit the text was frequently granted in the form of a licence (ijaza), on the basis of a satisfactory reading from the copy, which had to conform to the orally transmitted and memorized version. But, whatever the immediate source, the maintenance of accuracy has always been a problem in texts reproduced in Muslim manuscript culture, as elsewhere. Copyists were always fallible, and they could all too easily lapse into unintentional repetitions, omissions and other corruptions of the text. The corruption of texts in this way, an inevitable consequence of scribal culture, was a continual source of anxiety and insecurity in a civilization for which the authenticity and integrity of texts was of paramount importance.

Many books were copied specifically for sale. The occupation of bookseller and stationer (warraq) overlapped with that of scribe. As well as trading in copies made by or for themselves, booksellers dealt in copies bought in from elsewhere; they also acted as purchasing agents, seeking out particular titles or genres on behalf of scholars or collectors. Bookshops tended to cluster in particular streets or quarters of towns, a pattern that can still often be found today. In some cities, a guild structure existed, with the book trade supervised by a shaykh or master.

The high importance attached to books and reading in traditional Muslim societies led to the formation of many large libraries. These belonged to rulers, mosques, educational institutions, and private individuals. The libraries in a major centre, such as Baghdad, Cairo or Cordoba, contained tens of thousands of volumes. Catalogues were compiled, and some libraries provided facilities, and even personnel, for making new copies of texts. Many libraries in the Muslim world were established as inalienable endowments (warg), so that books could not be sold or otherwise dispersed. Yet, borrowing by scholars was generally allowed, and this inevitably led to some losses from the books.

The Qur’an gave the Arabic language and script a central importance in Islam. The areas of western Asia, North Africa and Spain that adopted Arabic became the heartlands of book culture in the heyday or ‘classical’ period of Muslim civilization, from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries. As such, they have been the main focus of studies of that culture. But Islam eventually spread over a huge area from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and in later periods other, non-Arab Muslim peoples and empires became predominant. They created their own literary traditions and produced manuscript books in their own languages; but the powerful influence of Arabic was such that they adopted many Arabic loanwords and, most importantly, the Arabic script, which was adapted to write a variety of other languages. In most of these areas, however, much religious and legal literature was also written in Arabic, and many copies of the Qur’an were made, always in the original.

Iran had a proud ancient literary tradition and, from the tenth century onwards, as well as producing magnificent Qur’ans, created a flourishing Persian manuscript culture. Poetic books were especially noteworthy, and a characteristic oblique and highly artistic form of the Arabic script was developed to write them. Rulers and wealthy patrons often commissioned exquisitely decorated and illustrated manuscripts, and Persian miniatures have become much-treasured objets d’art.

Ottoman Turkey became the centre of a large empire that, by the mid-sixteenth century, included most of the Arab world and much of south-eastern Europe. Having inherited the Arabic manuscript tradition, the Turks both continued it and created a Turkish book culture that also borrowed some elements of the Persian. Ottoman calligraphers became especially celebrated, both for Qur’ans and for more humble manuscripts executed with great elegance. Istanbul became the greatest centre in the world for Islamic books, and remains the largest repository of them to this day.

The writing of books by hand continued as the normal method of textual transmission for far longer in the Muslim world than elsewhere. One reason for this was the extreme reverence felt by Muslims for the handwritten word. Not only was writing regarded as a spiritual activity, but the beauty of the cursive Arabic script aroused an almost physical passion, akin to human love. Given such feelings it is not surprising that Muslims were reluctant to abandon the handwritten book. Another reason was the widespread engagement of large sections of the educated population in book-copying (and associated trades). Many wholly or partly earned their living by it. Thus, there was a substantial vested interest in retaining this method of production, whatever its limitations. A third reason, arising from the other two, was that Muslims felt supremely comfortable with manuscripts, which they regarded as an integral part of their culture and society. Even when economic and other conditions created a substantial rise in demand for books among emerging classes of society—for example, in eighteenth-century Egypt—scribal production was regarded as adequate to cope with this.
At the same time, intellectual and religious authority within Muslim society was closely linked with book production and the limited transmission of texts. Islam has no ecclesiastical organization, and the status of religious leaders, who had great authority but lacked secular power, depended essentially on their role as scholars and producers of texts. This in turn depended on maintaining the sacred character of writing and a degree of exclusiveness in and control over the creation and distribution of books. So Muslims went on writing and copying books by hand until the emergence of new patterns of state authority associated with modernizing influences coming partly from outside the Muslim world.

The Printed Book in the Middle East

Hebrew

The very first book to be printed in the Middle East, and the only incunable from the region, as far as is known, was a Hebrew code of religious laws, the Arba'ah Turim, printed by David ibn Nahmias at Istanbul in 1493. He had come from Spain, apparently bringing a type fount which he had previously used there, together with another from Italy. Further Hebrew works were printed at the same press, and others both there and in other Ottoman cities, including Salonica, Edirne, Izmir, Safad, Damascus and Cairo, during the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries, and in many other centres in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These developments are well surveyed in Yaron Ben Na‘ch’s essay below (Chapter 15).

The transition from manuscript to print does not seem to have been a problem in Jewish communities, which welcomed the opportunity to distribute multiple copies of their religious texts among the faithful. Hebrew types were also used to print secular texts in other languages used by Middle Eastern Jews, notably Judaeo-Spanish (Ladino) and Judaeo-Arabic.

Armenian

Like Hebrew, Armenian typography originated in western Europe, but was adopted in the Ottoman Empire at an early stage. In 1567, encouraged by the Armenian Patriarch, the printer Abgar Toxace’i transferred his activities and his type-founts from Venice to Istanbul. There he printed a grammar and some Christian texts, but closed the press after two years. Armenian printing was established in Istanbul on a more permanent basis at the end of the seventeenth century, but meanwhile another press, run by monks at Isfahan in Iran, produced a number of religious books between 1636 and 1647. This was the first printing of any kind in Iran.

As Meline Pehlivanian’s essay below clearly shows (Chapter 26), Istanbul became in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the main centre of Armenian printing, providing texts both for wealthy local patrons and for churches and schools throughout the Ottoman Empire, including especially the Armenian homeland. There was also a press in Izmir from 1759 to 1765, and in 1771 one was founded in Armenia itself, at Echmiadzin. The nineteenth century also saw the arrival of Armenian printing in Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Lebanon and elsewhere.4

Syria:

Lebanese Maronite Catholics had been involved in printing Syriac texts in Rome from the sixteenth century onwards, and in 1610 they printed a Psalter at the Quzbyay monastery in Lebanon, using a press and types almost certainly brought from Rome. This was in both Syriac and Arabic in Syriac script (Karswun). No further Syriac printing seems to have taken place in the Middle East until 1785, when a Lebanese monk brought another press from Rome and started producing liturgical texts at a different monastery. This was later moved back to Quzbyay, where Syriac printing continued until 1897.

Other Syriac presses also operated in Lebanon in the nineteenth century, but elsewhere Protestant and Catholic missionary presses played the leading role, particularly among the ‘Chaldean’ and ‘Nestorian’ (Church of the East) communities in Iraq and Iran. An account of one missionary typographer who played a significant part is given by James Coakley in his essay below (Chapter 27).

Another Syriac-using church was the Syrian Orthodox, which printed books at a monastic press in southern Turkey, starting in 1890. Middle Eastern printing in Syriac continued throughout the twentieth century, producing both Christian religious texts and secular ones for the use of Syriac-speaking communities.5

Coptic

Before the era of printing, Coptic had already become a dead language, used only for biblical and liturgical texts. Some such texts were printed in Rome in the eighteenth century and sent to Egypt, but local printing of Coptic (apart from one medieval block-print) did not start until the late nineteenth century, at presses established by the Coptic Orthodox and Catholic authorities.

In the 1890s the Coptic philologist Klaudios Labib (1873–1918) sought to revive the language, and acquired a press to print Coptic teaching and reading materials. He published a series of mainly bilingual editions (Coptic and Arabic), including a dictionary, grammar, primer and religious texts, as well as a periodical. But this revival attempt was a failure, and no more such material appeared after his death.

Arabic and Other Muslim languages

To find the origins of Arabic and Muslim printing, we have to go back to the tenth century CE. As in China two or more centuries earlier, it originated in a need to mass produce religious texts, not simply or even primarily to be read, but as objects with their own religious aura, giving benefit and protection to their owners. The production of these block-printed texts, and maybe others for more practical purposes, seems to have continued for about 500 years, and then apparently disappeared at the dawn of the early modern era.

These Arabic block-prints are discussed in Richard Bulliet’s essay below (Chapter 12), and have been further studied, enumerated and deciphered by Karl Schaeper (2006). They raise

4 A useful historical survey of Armenian presses and typography can be found in Lane (2012).

5 For good surveys of the whole field of Syriac printing and typography, see Coakley (2002), pp. 93–115, and (2006).
a number of questions, or clusters of questions which, in the present state of our knowledge, cannot yet be answered definitively:

1. Why was the technique of block-printing texts in multiple copies not developed to produce printed books, as in China? Was it because of an aversion on the part of literate Muslims to any mechanical reproduction of texts containing the name of God (as nearly all of them did)? In that case, why were these block-printed amulets allowed, since they all contain invocations to God, and most of them also include passages from the Qur’an itself? Or was it due to an instinctive reluctance on the part of the ulamâ (the learned classes) and the scribal elite to sanction a method of book production that might undermine their control of knowledge and their exercise of spiritual and intellectual authority?

2. Why did Arabic printing apparently die out just at the moment when economic and social changes, and the increased availability of cheap paper (as mentioned above), were about to usher in a new, broader, book culture, both in the Muslim world and in Europe? Why, in other words, did Arabs and Muslims have printing before print culture, and then at least of the effects of print culture without printing? This paradox, of course, tends to cast doubt on how important the technology of printing, or its absence, really was, at least in Muslim society, and whether transcendent cultural factors did not render the actual methods of textual production and diffusion of lesser significance. This view has been adopted, explicitly or implicitly, by several intellectual historians, and is discussed by Orlin Sabev in his 2010 article reproduced below (Chapter 10). It may not, however, do justice to the full historical effects of printing, in the Muslim world as elsewhere.

Part of the problem has perhaps been an overemphasis on the late arrival of the printing press and movable type in the Muslim world. This question has long intrigued European historians, looking at it from a Eurocentric point of view. Why and how, they wonder, did Muslim society manage for so long without Gutenberg’s invention, on which European modernity relied? The answer, of course, is that they managed as they had always done, throughout all the periods of their flourishing literate civilization, by writing and copying their texts in ever-increasing numbers of manuscript copies. The post-Gutenberg Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal states functioned and flourished for at least three centuries without printing. Not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did European scientific and technical superiority, and the threat which it posed, cause them to reconsider the matter and introduce presses. What really matters is what happened after that point, rather than what did not happen before.

In 1979, the historian Elizabeth Eisenstein published her seminal study of the effects of printing in early modern Europe, titled The Printing Press as an Agent of Change. As her title suggests, she assigned a crucial role in the development of modernity. This has caused some other historians to accuse her of fallacious technological determinism—not least because of the different experience of non-European societies such as that of the Muslim world, where printing did not bring about such change in the same period.

This may be a sterile argument about causes versus consequences, the classic conundrum of the chicken and the egg. Did Gutenberg’s invention in the fifteenth century bring about the ensuing cultural and intellectual changes? Or did Europe’s cultural readiness for these changes lead to the invention, and its subsequent widespread adoption? Rather than endlessly debating such enigmas, it makes more sense to regard them as reciprocal effects, or as a continuum of cause and effect. The same applies in the Muslim world: the timing and circumstances of the arrival there of the printing press were of course contingent on the interrelationship of cultural patterns and outside stimuli. But once it had arrived, its effects came into operation—although not necessarily in quite the same way, or at the same rate—as they had previously done in Europe.

Eisenstein’s analytical framework is a valuable and useful tool, when considering these effects. She identified three principal changes, or clusters of changes, associated with the use of printing. What follows is a brief sketch of how these operated in the Arab and Muslim context.

The first is the increased dissemination of texts. This is a fairly obvious point, but it is surprisingly often overlooked. As early as the eighteenth century, Mûüzferîka’s press in Istanbul produced ten or eleven thousand books in the twenty or so years of its existence, and, contrary to what is sometimes asserted, the great majority of them were sold and reached local readers (as Sabev has demonstrated in Chapters 10 and 18, and in an important (2001) monograph). After the print revolution reached the Arab world in the nineteenth century, hundreds of thousands of copies of old and new texts came into the hands of readers on a scale well beyond what had ever been achieved in the manuscript era. This both stimulated, and was stimulated by, the growth of education and literacy in that period.

The proliferation of printed books also enabled them to cross borders to unprecedented extent. Not only was there an international trade in Arabic books, for example, both within the Ottoman sphere and beyond, but printing greatly increased the viability of translations and the demand for them. There was therefore a new spread of ideas from outside the Muslim world, and an increased possibility of what has been called ‘cognitive contamination’ of the ideas and belief systems of what had been previously a relatively enclosed and inward-looking intellectual arena. This in turn gave rise to the idea of knowledge as a boundless and infinitely extendable, rather than a circumscribed, domain.

The trajectory of all this, however, was not only in the direction of humanism and liberalism. Printing was also used to increase the circulation of traditional texts and old ideas, including narrow doctrinal and dogmatic ones, which were also brought to a new mass readership. This tended towards a new fundamentalism, partly in reaction against the modernizing tendencies already mentioned.

The printing of the Qur’an itself was for a long time resisted, but this too eventually entered fully into the domain of print culture, after the publication of the standard Al-Azhâr edition in Cairo in 1924. This, and its numerous subsequent reprints throughout the Muslim world, had the effect of bringing it into the everyday lives and households of many ordinary Muslims. Its use thereby changed: no longer was it mainly a source of memorized ritual—instead it became a direct source of guidance and doctrine. For some, this meant a new freedom of interpretation and action; for others, it brought a more rigid obedience to perceptions of the divine will.

The second of Eisenstein’s clusters of changes is the standardization of texts and their presentation through typography. I emphasize the word typography here, rather than printing, because in the nineteenth-century Muslim world, many texts, especially traditional ones, first appeared in print not by typesetting, but by lithography, which enabled as it were the mechanical multiplication of manuscript texts. This effectively bypassed the typographical standardization identified by Eisenstein, in a manner which had no precedent in Europe.
Nevertheless, this was only a partial and temporary phenomenon. Typographic standardization did affect most texts published in Turkey and the Arab world.

This applied to the content of the texts themselves. Although many early editions were not based on thorough editing processes, eventually the practice grew of collating different manuscripts and establishing authoritative editions of classical texts in a manner quite different from the copying which took place in the scribal era.

There was also a re-standardization of the Arabic language. The development of written vernacular texts (in manuscript) which had taken place in the preceding centuries was largely halted. What was regarded as rukaka – feeble and insipid style – was also rejected and classical norms were reimposed in response to the challenge of creating printed texts aimed at a large educated readership. At the same time, in original writing, a new simplicity and directness was adopted, and there was a decline in what has been called the ‘magic garden’ mentality of obscure literary verbiage.

After an initial period when, as with Gutenberg, printed books imitated the appearance of manuscripts, texts were also eventually clearer and more readable by more spacious book designs and page layouts, the use of title and contents pages, and the elimination of marginal glosses and commentaries. This created a new ‘esprit de systéme’, as Eisenstein calls it, which undoubtedly changed reading habits and catered for new classes of readers, as well as engendering different approaches to accessing knowledge.

Eisenstein’s third ‘cluster of changes’ concerns printing’s role in the preservation of texts. As mentioned earlier, large numbers of Islamic manuscripts, and the texts which they contained, have perished down the ages, through both neglect and malicious destruction. But once texts were printed in thousands of copies, the likelihood of their loss was, if not eliminated, then at least greatly reduced. Even texts which were not lost, but survived in only one or a few copies, could thereby be restored to a wide readership which had no access to them previously.

This also means that the time and energies of the literate and scholarly classes could be redirected to new avenues of thought, research and creative writing, instead of copying the old texts which could now be consulted in printed editions. Such new literature and thought could also be made widely available, and preserved for posterity.

The new availability of classical Arabic literature in printed editions in the nineteenth century, together with the diffusion of new writing, almost certainly helped to create the new self-awareness and perhaps even national consciousness which gave rise to the Arab renaissance of that period, which is called the Nahda. Similar changes occurred in Turkey, Iran and other areas of the Muslim world.

References

