

Arabic Manuscripts of the Tunisian teacher of Clenardus in Leiden, Vienna and Uppsala

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Theodor Dunkelgrün recently suggested the possibility that an Arabic Koran manuscript in the collection of the Leiden University Library (Codex Or. 241) had once belonged to the Classicist and Hebraist from Louvain, Nicolaas Cleynaerts (1493-1542), who at the same time was a pioneer in the fields of Arabic and Islamic studies. (See: *Omslag* 2009/3, p. 7-8). In order to study Arabic and Islam, Cleynaerts travelled to Spain, where, on the slave market of Malaga, he bought a young scholar from among the Tunisian prisoners of war by the name of Muhammad ibn Abî al-Fadl Kharûf. Under his guidance he studied Arabic grammar as well as the Koran.

In the Scaliger collection of Leiden University Library I found an Arabic manuscript (Codex Or. 234) copied by this Tunisian scholar when he was a student at Al-Azhar in Cairo. It is a collective volume with 5 small texts on astronomy and prosody. Four of these were dated in Cairo, in the year 935/1529, which was approximately 6 years before the siege of Tunis by Charles v, when Kharûf must have been taken prisoner and transported to Spain.



Kharûf's colophon in red ink at the end of a little text on poetry, dated 1529 CE. [UBL Or. 234 (2), f. 19b].

The colophon in red ink at the end of the second text, on f. 19b reads as follows:

‘Completed for himself by its scribe who is in need of the mercy of his Self-sufficient Lord, Muhammad ibn Abî al-Fadl Kharûf al-Ansarî al-Tûnisî, – may God the Exalted inspire him with uprightness, grant him success and guide him! – briefly before the noon of Sunday, corresponding to the Day of Sacrifice (*i.e.* 10 Dhû al-Hijja) of the year 935 (= 25 August 1529), – may God make its [as yet hidden] blessings known to us! – in the College of the Maghribis of Al-Azhar in the protected [city of] Cairo’.

Kharûf was copying his texts in different places in Cairo, as appears from the colophon of text nr. 5, in the last five lines of f. 138b:

‘The scribe who copied this writing for himself and for whomever God wishes after him, Muhammad ibn Abî al-Fadl Kharûf, the Tunisian by origin, birth and upbringing, the Malikiite by school of law, the Sunnite by creed, the Shabite by mystical lodge, – may God inspire him with uprightness! – says: It was completed in the morning of the blessed Sunday in the Recess of Bistam of the Mosque of Al-Hâkim of the protected city of Cairo on the thirteenth day of the blessed month of Shawwâl of the year 935 (= 30 June 1529), may God make its [as yet hidden] blessings known to us, as well as those of the year following it!’

Vienna

In the old collection of the National Library of Austria in Vienna, a few Arabic manuscripts copied by the same Kharûf are preserved as well. (They can easily be traced

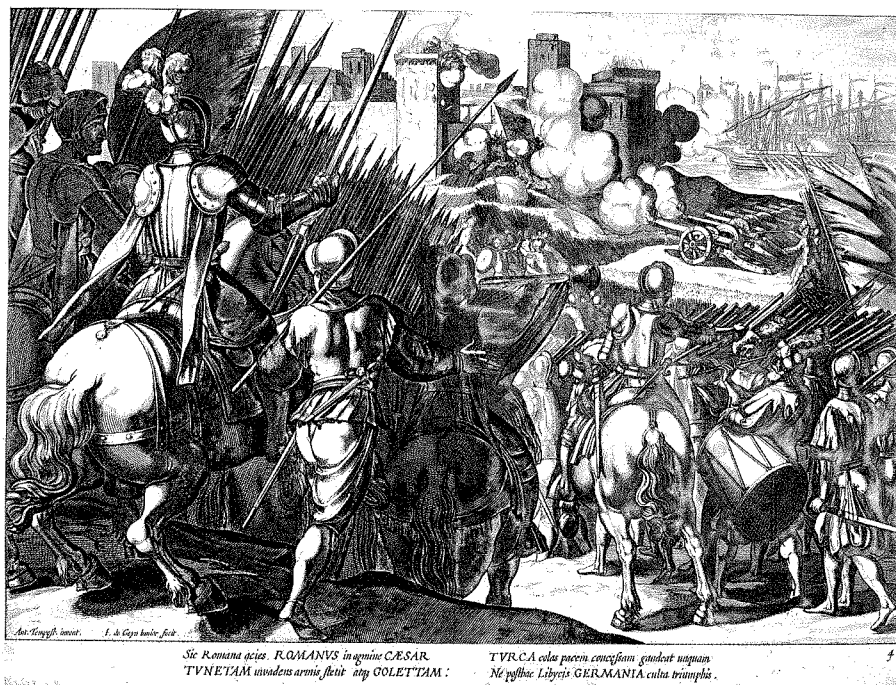
through the alphabetical index of Arabic names in the catalogue of Flügel). One of these, MS A.F. 177, a collective volume with grammatical texts (catalogue of Flügel , No 182) had been copied by Kharûf after having returned to Tunis, between 9 Dhû al-Hijja 940 (= 1 July 1534; see f. 2a) and 15 Jumâdâ II 941 (= 1 January 1535; see f. 129a). This period coincided with the conquest of Tunis by the Ottoman admiral Hayreddin Barbarossa which took place on 16 August 1534. One year later the fleet of Emperor Charles v destroyed the Ottoman fleet, took the city and brought back a rich booty (including numerous Arabic manuscripts) and many prisoners of war (including Kharûf himself). Kharûf concludes the colophon of this manuscript with a moving prayer for protection of his family and children against the enemies (on f. 129a).

Uppsala

But the survey of Kharûf’s manuscripts in European libraries is not yet complete. We also find his handwriting in a manuscript of the National Library of Sweden, in Uppsala. This is a particularly valuable text, containing the auto-bio-bibliography (*Fihrist*) of the Moroccan scholar Ibn Ghâzî containing a survey of his teachers and writings (Cod. Sparwenf. 36). The copying of this manuscript was completed by Kharûf in the year 954 (= 1547; see the colophon in the last five lines of f. 75a), when he had settled in the Moroccan city of Fès, some five years after his student from the Southern Netherlands, Nicolaas Cleynaerts, had suddenly died in the city of Granada.

How Kharûf’s manuscripts were spread over Europe is not known. The manuscripts copied by him before the conquest of Tunis in 1535 probably belonged to the booty made by the army of Charles v (including the manuscript of the Leiden Scaliger collection). This may also hold true for the Koran manuscript discussed by Dunkelgrün, which has a note informing us that it belonged to a mosque library in the Tunisian place Bizert, in the early 16th century. However, this was certainly not the case of the manuscript in Uppsala, which dates from the period following Kharûf’s liberation from captivity and was copied in Morocco. From an owner’s note in this manuscript (on f. 3a) we learn that it once belonged to the library of the Moroccan ruler Sultan Ahmad Al-Mansûr (ruled from 1578-1603). It entered the library in Uppsala as part of the collection of the Swedish scholar Johan Gabriel Sparwenfeld, who had acquired it in Madrid in 1690 (owner’s note on fl. 1b).

We know from Cleynaerts’ published letters to his friends in Louvain that Kharûf was copying Arabic texts for him in the time they were working together in Granada. But none of *those* manuscripts have been traced, so far!



Sic Romanae caes. ROMANVS in agmine CAESAR TVRCA colas pacem confectionem gaudet uictoria
TVNETAM inuictis armis fletis atq. GOLETTAM. Né puthic Libya: GERMANIA culta triumphat.

Jacques de Gheyn III (c.1596-c.1644), *Emperor Charles v laying siege to the city of Tunis, 1535*. Etching and engraving after Antonio Tempesta.

[UBL PK-P-102,688].