Preserving Yemen’s Cultural Heritage
The Yemen Manuscript Digitization Project

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INTRODUCTION

The size of the Arabic manuscript holdings of the many public and private libraries of Yemen makes it among the most important collections in the world. Estimated at 50,000 manuscripts, the holdings of these libraries rival those of the National Library of Egypt, the Süleimaniye Library of Istanbul, or the Majlis Library of Tehran. Equally intriguing is the character of these libraries’ collections, a product of Yemen’s unique geography and history, and the nature of its scholarly communities. From as early as the 3rd/9th century, traditional scholars in Yemen’s inaccessible northern mountainous highlands (al-Yaman al-‘ālā), particularly in the Zaydi communities, developed lines of intellectual inquiry which had fallen into abeyance in other regions of the Islamic lands. Mostly due to their isolation, these communities preserved extremely ancient materials, including works in every major field of classical and pre-modern Islamic literature – the Qur’anic sciences, history, biographical dictionaries, encyclopaedia, geography, tradition (hadith), legal methodology (usul al-fiqh), theology (kalam/usul al-din), rhetoric, grammar, lexicography, belles-lettres, astronomy, medicine and mathematics. Yemen’s southern and central regions (al-Yaman al-asfali and al-Yaman al-awsaf), by contrast, were predominantly inhabited by Shafi’ites who preserved a very different kind of religious tradition. Moreover, due to the relative accessibility of the southern and central regions of Yemen, these areas were subjected over the centuries to different rulers, in contrast to Yemen’s northern regions that were under continuous Zaydi rule. In addition to these two antagonistic religious strands, Ta’ziyeh Isma’ilis have at times also featured prominently in the history of Yemen and Yemeni libraries have preserved some precious manuscripts of this intellectual tradition (Sayyid 1988).

While economic hardship, social and political instability, poor storage conditions, and the sale of manuscripts to private collectors from the Gulf States put these collections at risk for the past five decades, a new threat has appeared in recent years that makes immediate attention to these collections imperative. As many of these libraries are preserved by families belonging to the Zaydi branch of Islam, Salafi extremists ideologically opposed to Shi’ism have targeted these collections for destruction (von Bruck 2010). In some cases, they have purchased collections from library owners who suffered great economic hardship in the villages in northern Yemen, only to destroy them.

The preservation and dissemination particularly of the mostly unknown Zaydi theological and legal literature that is preserved in Yemen will significantly promote research on an understudied school of Shi’ism, grant access to sources that were not maintained elsewhere, and underscore

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HISTORY OF ZAYDISM

The Zaydi community is a branch of Shi'i Islam and has mainly survived in the modern state of Yemen. The community's historical roots can be traced back to the 2nd/8th century, when Zayd b. 'Ali (d. 122/740) — a great-great-grandson of the prophet Muhammad — was killed during a Shi'i uprising in Kufa in Iraq. By recognizing Zayd b. 'Ali as the fifth Imam (after 'Ali, al-Hasan, al-Husayn and 'Ali Zayn al-Abidin), the Zaydiyya separated from other Shi'i groups.

It was also in Kufa that the community was located during its formative phase and that the earliest scholars laid the foundations for the emerging Zaydi legal tradition. Early Zaydi teachings seem to be reflected in the works attributed to Zayd b. 'Ali (Griffini 1919). Gradually, four legal schools arose within Zaydisms, though historically the school founded by al-Qasim b. Ibrahim al-Rassi (d. 246/860) remained most influential. His theological teachings deviated from earlier Zaydi dogma as he advocated human free will and the absolute otherness of God from his creation as opposed to predeterminism and anthropomorphism (Madelung 1965, 1989, 1991).

In the 3rd/9th century, Zaydi activity shifted to Northern Iran. Still during the lifetime of al-Qasim b. Ibrahim, his legal doctrine was brought to Tabaristan by some of his followers. A first Zaydi state was established in 250/864 in the southern coastal region of the Caspian sea. From the 3rd/9th through the early 7th/13th century, the leading intellectual centres of Zaydisms were located in Tabaristan, Daylam and Gilan in the Caspian region, as well as in Rayy during and after the Buwayhid age and in Bayhaq in Khurasan. Being located in close vicinity of the respective cultural centres of the Muslim world during this period, Zaydi scholarship flourished.

Al-Qasim’s grandson al-Hādī ila l-I‘laqq (d. 298/911) founded a second Zaydi imamate in the northern mountainous highlands of Yemen. He established his capital in Sa‘da. Al-Hādī systematized his grandfather’s legal doctrines in several seminal works. Although he deviated in some respects from al-Qasim’s thought, the Yemeni Zaydis principally identified the Hādawī with the Qasimin legal tradition. Al-Qasim and al-Hādī’s legal thought had a lasting influence on both the Yemenis and the Caspian Zaydis. However, while important legal works by Caspian Zaydis followed the Hādawī tradition, al-Qasim’s and al-Hādī’s school could not gain full predominance in Northern Iran. An influential rival strand arose with the Naṣiriyya, founded by the
Imam al-Nasir al-Utrush (d. 304/917) who emphasized in his teaching the early Kifan tradition.

In his theological teachings, al-Hadi also continued the line that had been taken by his grandfather while opening a new chapter of Zaydi intellectual history. Retrospectively, his legacy turned out to be the beginning of a long-lasting process in Zaydi scholarship: al-Hadi’s writings testify to the first impacts of Muʿtazilaism – to be discussed below – on Zaydi thought. In his Kitab al-Manzila bayna l-manzilatayn he committed himself to the two doctrinal principles of the Muʿtazila. In specific theological questions, his thought shows a particular inclination to the teachings of the Baghdadi school of the Muʿtazila (Madelung 1965).

Soon after al-Hadi’s death, the theological mainstream in both Zaydi states developed in different directions: whereas the majority of Yemeni theologians stuck to the teachings of al-Hadi, the Caspian Zaydis adopted the teachings of the Baghdad school of the Muʿtazila. In the provinces of Gilan and Daylam, Zaydi Muʿtazilaism saw a flowering, with the Imams al-Muʿayyad bi-llah Ahmad b. al-Husayn al-Haruni (d. 411/1020) and al-Natiq bi-l-Haqiq Yabiyā b. al-Husayn b. Harun (d. 424/1033). Both had studied theology in Baghdad with the eminent scholar Abu ʾAbd Allāh al-Bashir (d. 369/980), who was the leading authority on Baghdad Muʿtazilism at the time. When al-Muʿayyad bi-llah and al-Natiq bi-l-Haqiq came to Rayy, they joined the circle of the Qiyam vizier al-Suhay b. Abbâb (d. 385/995). The latter actively promoted Muʿtazila theology and invited and the head of the Baghdad school, Abu al-Jabbar al-Hamadani (d. 415/1025), to become chief qadi of Rayy.

Abu al-Jabbar attracted numerous Zaydi students, such as Ahmad b. Abu l-Husayn al-Qazwini ("Menekidim Sheshwiti", d. ca. 425/1035), author of a famous commentary on his teacher’s Shurt al-qadil al-khamsa. Abu l-Qasim al-Busti, or the less well-known Abu l-Fadl al-Abbas b. Ibn Sharwini. In the following generations, the Baghdad Muʿtazila scholarly tradition continued to be maintained by Zaydis of Rayy, including members of the Fararazadhi family who played a pivotal role in theological scholarship (Ansari/Schmidtke "forthcoming II").

In Yemen, al-Hadi’s thought was systematized by the Muʿtarrifiyya, a pietist movement that had emerged in the 3rd/11th century. In many ways, Mutarrifi teachings were opposed to Caspian Zaydi thought, the Muʿtazila was one of the most important rational schools in the history of Muslim theology. For Muʿtazila theologians, reason provided the epistemological basis to explain the nature of God and of the world. Five doctrinal principles constituted a common doctrinal ground – the belief in God’s unity (tawhid), His justice (qad), the irreversibility of divine promise and threat (al-waḍʿ wa-l-qarad), the duty to advocate good and forbid evil (al-ʿamr bi-l-maʿruf wa-l-nahiy an al-mah functorial). Originally made up of individual thinkers, Muʿtazila theologians formulated systems of thought which led, over the centuries, to the emergence of various schools. In the 3rd/11th century, two main school traditions emerged, that of Baghdad and that of Basra. The followers of Abu Hāshim al-Jubbaʾi (d. 321/933), who had belonged to the Baghdad school tradition, established an important sub-school, known as the Bahshamiyya. The teachings of the Bahshamiyya are well documented by the systematic writings of Abu al-Jabbar al-Hamadani (d. 415/1025) and his students. One of them, Abu l-Husayn al-Bashir (d. 426/1044), formulated his own theological system. His followers constituted the last innovative Muʿtazila school. All of these sub-schools had a significant impact on Zaydi theology. After having enjoyed the status of a nearly official theology under the 3rd/11th century’s “Abbasid caliph, the Muʿtazila faced the reproach of heresy by rival theological movements and was gradually banned from majoritarian Sunni lands. As its texts were often deliberately destroyed and its teachings forgotten, the reception of Muʿtazila by non-Sunni communities played a tremendous role in preserving an otherwise disappeared heritage.
The Zaydi communities in Iran experienced a gradual decline and most of their literary legacy was no longer transmitted (Ansari/Schmidtke [in press II]). Had it not been for the massive transfer of Zaydi religious literature from Iran to Yemen following the political unification of the Caspian and Yemeni Zaydis that began by the end of the 9th/11th century, most of the Iranian Zaydi and Mu'tazili literary heritage would have been lost. Following the death of Imam al-Manṣūr bi-l-lah in 614/1217, this process began on the one hand a cultural revival as a result of which the cultural center of Zaydi Mu'tazilism gradually shifted from the coastal regions south of the Caspian Sea to Yemen, and on the other to a renewed blossoming of Mu'tazilite theology. This process was initiated by the Imam al-Mutawakkil bi-l-lah Ahmad b. Sulayman (r. 522/1127-566/1170) who propagated the unity of the Zaydiyya in and outside Yemen, equally recognizing the Caspian and Yemeni imams. He encouraged the transfer of Caspian Zaydi religious literature to Yemen and furthered the teaching by Caspian Zaydi scholars and by Yemeni scholars who had studied with Zaydi scholars in the Caspian region, in Rayy and in Kufa. His aim was to establish an intellectual counterweight to the Mu'tarrifi community and he therefore began supporting the spread of Baṣran Mu'tazili teachings. The cultural transfer process reached its peak under the reign of al-Manṣūr bi-l-lah who further encouraged the transfer of Caspian Zaydi and Mu'tazilite religious literature to Yemen. At his initiative numerous books, among them many Mu'tazilite texts, were acquired, copied and subsequently incorporated into his library in Zafar, his residential town. He took on a staff of professional scribes—who were often scholars in their own right—in order to copy a wide range of Mu'tazilite texts written by chief representatives of the Baṣran Mu'tazila in its scholastic phase. Many of the texts copied for al-Manṣūr bi-l-lah's library have survived in Yemeni collections as unique manuscripts (Madelung 1965: 201–22; Ansari/Schmidtke 2010).

Among the Mu'tazilite writings that reached Yemen during the 6th/12th and 7th/13th centuries were primarily works of al-Muqaddas Abū al-Jabbār al-Hamadani, the head of the Bahshamuya of his time, as well as of some of his students and companions. From Abū al-Jabbār's pen, the theological summum, Kitāb al-Miṣḥīn fi al-tawḥīd wa-l-'aḍāl, was copied for the library of al-Manṣūr bi-l-lah. In addition, 'Abd al-Jabbār's Shabb al-ʿaṣīl al-khamis in the recension of Manākīm (d. ca. 425/1034) and his summum al-Muḥīṭ fi l-taklīf in the recension of Ibn Matuwayh were well known among the Zaydis of Yemen. The latter's Kitāb al-ṣaḥīḥ, a comprehensive work on natural philosophy, is likewise preserved in several manuscripts of Yemeni provenance, and there is evidence that the Zaydis of Yemen had access to his otherwise unknown paraphrastic commentary (ta'biq) on 'Abd al-Jabbār's al-Jumāl wa-l-'uqād. Of the writings of 'Abd al-Jabbār's student Abū Rashīd al-Nisābūrī, both his Musāʾil al-ḥikāyat bayn al-ṣaḥiḥayn wa-l-Baghdādiyya and his Musāʾil al-ḥikāyat fi l-ʿaṣīl were transcribed for the library of al-
The "Eastern Library" (al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyah) of the Great Mosque in Sarra was one of the numerous places of learning.

Manṣūr b-i-l-lāh (Ansari/Schmidike 2010). Of 'Abd al-Jabbar's student Abu l-Fadl 'Abdās b. Sharvīn, three works reached Yemen: Ḥuḍqā'ī al-ashyā', a concise treatise on kālim terminology, Yūqūt al-imān wa-wuṣāf al-buḥrān fī usūl al-dīn, which is preserved in the recension of al-Ḥasan al-Rašās entitled al-Tibyan lī-Yūqūt al-imān wa-wuṣāf al-buḥrān, and al-Mudkhāl fī usūl al-dīn (Ansari/Schmidike [in press]). The Zaydis of Yemen were also acquainted with some of the theological works of the later representatives of the "School of Rayy", such as Abu Muḥammad Ismā'īl b. 'Ali b. Ismā'īl al-Farrajādī al-Iraqī (fl. late 9th/10th, early 10th/11th century). Manucripts of both his commentaries on 'Abd al-Jabbar's Sharī'a al-usūl al-khamsa (which are heavily dependent on Mānakdim's) and on the Kitāb al-Labsa′a of the Imām al-Mu'aṣṣal b-i-l-lāh Ahmad b. al-Husayn al-Hārīmi al-Buṭḥānī (d. 411/1020) are extant in libraries in Yemen. All these authors were faithful representatives of the Balshamiyya,
as was the case with al-Ḥakim al-Jishmī (d. 494/1101) whose comprehensive theological summa, *Sharḥ 'usūn al-masha'īf*, was among the most influential doctrinal works in Yemen during the following centuries.

During this period the Zaydis of Yemen were also introduced to the teachings of Abu I-Husayn al-Baṣrī, the former student of Ḥāfiz al-Jallānī, who later became known as the founder of the last innovative school within Muʿtazilism. Abu I-Husayn had at the same time been trained in medicine and philosophy. He criticized the principles of the Bahshamiyya in an attempt to correct some of their concepts and arguments in order to defend Muʿtazilī notions more effectively against objections of their opponents. While Abu I-Husayn's *Khitāb al-Muṭṭānūd fi ʾusūl al-fiqh*, a work on legal methodology as its title indicates, was available in numerous copies in Yemen, none of his theological writings ever reached Yemen. His doctrines were exclusively known through the works of his later follower, Rukn al-Dīn ibn al-Malāḥīmi (d. 536/1141), viz. his al-Muṭṭānūd fi ʾusūl al-dīn, his al-Fāʾiq fi ʾusūl al-dīn and his Taḥṣīl al-mutsakallimin fi t-radd ʿalā l-falsafā (Anṣārī 2010).

A pioneer of introducing the works of the Caspian Zaydi literature and establishing their doctrines was Qāḍī Jaʿfar b. Ahmad b. Ḥāfiz b. Abd al-Salām (d. 573/1177-78). Qāḍī Jaʿfar came from a Ḥāfizī family, but then converted to the Mutarrifīyya before finally adopting Baṣrān Muʿtazilī teachings as taught by the theologians from the Caspian region. Seeking profound instruction, he travelled to Mecca, Kūfa and Rayy where he studied with various renowned teachers. Upon his return to Yemen, his teachings laid the basis for an emerging generation of scholars who were instrumental in shaping the community's subsequent development (Schwarz 2011). One of his most outstanding students was al-Ḥasan al-Raṣāsī, who wrote substantial theological works in which he expounded Baṣrān Muʿtazilī teachings. Alongside other students, he taught the later Ḥāfiz al-Manṣūr b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥanẓa (c. 593/1197-614/1217) (Thiele 2010).

The new ideas and manuscripts stimulated the emergence of a Yemeni school tradition committed to Baṣrān Muʿtazilism. Its rise among scholars of the 6th/12th-7th/13th century was, however, accompanied with internal critique. Almost simultaneously with and probably as a reaction against the spread of Baṣrān Muʿtazilī teachings, texts written by followers of Abu I-Husayn al-Baṣrī's school gained popularity as his doctrines were allegedly closer to those of the earlier Imams al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm and al-Hādī bīl-ḥaqq than those of the Bahshamiyya. In the course of the 7th/13th century, the influence of Abu I-Husayn's thought increased. The sources from that time show a tendency to eclecticism, as even scholars who were committed to Baṣrān Muʿtazilī thought incorporated ideas in their texts that originated among the followers of Abu
MODERN RESEARCH OF ZAYDISM

As a result of the geographical isolation of Yemen, the scholarly exploration of its political and intellectual history and of its rich manuscript holdings started later than was the case with most other parts of the Islamic world (Reinhart 1998). It was only during the second half of the 17th century that the first comprehensive biographical works were compiled collecting all known information on the earlier Zaydi imams, sayyids and scholars, one composed by the qiyy of San‘a‘ Ahmad b. Salih b. Muhammad b. Abi I-Ri‘al (d. 1092/1686) (Ibn Abi I-Ri‘al 2001), the other by Ibn Abi I-Ri‘al’s younger contemporary, Yalhib b. al-Husayn b. al-Qajir (d. 1099/1689) (al-Shahri 2001). These constitute until today the most important sources for our knowledge of the earlier Zaydi scholarly tradition of Yemen (and Iran). In 1763, a German-Danish scientific expedition arrived in Yemen, among them Carsten Niebuhr (1733–1815), the only one to survive the expedition, who later published his observations in his Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und andern amfiehrenden Ländern (Niebuhr 1774). Another important study by a Western scholar was published towards the end of the 19th century, viz. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld’s Jemen im XVII. Jahrhundert: Die Kriege der Türken, die Arabischen Inname und die Gelehrten (Wüstenfeld 1885). The beginning of the explorations of the manuscript holdings of the public and private libraries of Yemen dates back to the last decade of the 19th century. Its primary textual foundation was the collection of manuscripts that had been brought together by Eduard Glaser (1855–1906) during his repeated journeys to Yemen in 1882–83, 1885–86, 1887–88 and 1892–94 and consisted mostly of Zaydi works and numerous Mu‘tazilite kalām writings. Glaser had sold the manuscripts collected during his first and second journeys to the Königliche Bibliothek zu Berlin (nowadays Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin) (265 MSS) (Abwardt 1887, 1887–99). During his subsequent trips, he continued to purchase manuscripts offering them again to the Berlin library. After fruitless negotiations between the Königliche Bibliothek and Glaser regarding the sale of the third collection, it was acquired by the British Museum (328 MSS) (Rieu 1884; al-'Amri 1980). Glaser sold the fourth collec-
tion to the Austrian National Library (28 MSS) (Grunert 1894; Ripper 2001). The Lombard merchant Giuseppe Caprotti had assembled over 34 years a collection of some 1,600 codices that were sold in 1909 to the Ambrosiana library in Milan (the so-called “Nuovo Fondo”) through mediation of Senator Luca Belzoni. Five years later, the latter donated 180 additional Yemenite manuscripts to the Ambrosiana. With a total of 1,792 codices, the Ambrosiana library thus houses the largest and most significant collection of Yemenite manuscripts in Europe. Another small portion of the Caprotti collection consisting of 357 manuscripts had already been sold in 1902 through the intermediary of Eduard Glaser to the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich (Sebire 2002), and the remnant of Caprotti’s collection (ca. 280 MSS) was donated in 1922 by Luca Belzoni to the Vatican library (Levi della Vida 1935, 1968). Important Yemeni manuscripts are also to be found in Istanbul (Train 1973; Sâlihiyya 1984), in Cairo and in Leiden—Amin al-Madani (d. 1898) was a scholar from Medina who in 1883 had come to Amsterdam where he and his manuscripts were spotted by scholars from Leiden. His important collection of some 700 codices was first purchased by Mr. E.J. Brill, who had commissioned Carlo de Landberg to prepare a sales catalogue of the manuscripts (Landberg 1883). In the same year the Leiden library purchased the entire collection from Brill’s (Voorhoeve 1988; Wittkam 2006). In Yemen, the holdings of the former library of the Imam al-Manṣūr b.-

Ilāh were transferred in 1929 from Zafār to the newly founded al-Khīzāna al-mutawakkilīya in Śan‘ā’, which had been founded by the Imam al-Mutawakkil ‘alī Ilāh al-Hājī b. Muhammad Hamíd al-Dīn (b. 1285/1869, d. 1367/1948), and a first handful of its holdings was published in 1942 (al-Hājī 1942). The library, which until today is housed on the ground floor of the building complex of the Great Mosque of Śan‘ā’, is also known as al-Maktab al-shārīqiya or Maktabat al-ʾawāqif. Later on, the manuscripts and books of al-Hājī’s al-amma il-lā-lāthār wādī al-kutub were integrated into the newly founded al-Maktabat al-gharbīyya which is likewise housed in a building complex on the premises of the Great Mosque.

On the basis of the European collections of Yemeni manuscripts, a number of Western scholars initiated the scholarly investigation of Zaydiism during the early decades of the 20th century. The German scholar Rudolph Strothmann (1877–1960) published a first survey of Zaydi literature in 1910 and 1911, followed by two groundbreaking studies on the political doctrines (Dahnt 1972) and the dogmatic characteristics (Kultur der Zaiditen) of the Zaydiyya published in 1912 (Strothmann 1910–11, 1912, 1919). His younger Dutch contemporary, Cornelis van Arendonk (1881–1946), devoted his doctoral dissertation to the creator of the Zaydi imamate in Yemen, al-Hādī ilā Iḥṣāq Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn (b. 245/859, d. 298/911), on the basis of the sīra of the Imam composed by

bisher über die Grenzen ihres Heimatlans
des gekommen, die meisten derselben sind
auch dem Namen nach unbekannt. In dem
großen bibliographischen Werke des Ḥājjī
Hafla, der unter ungefähr 15000 Nummern
mehr als doppelt so viel Werke aufführt,
inster von einigen, und auch fast stets nur
ganz kurz, die Bede. In den zahlreichsten bi-
ographischen Werken der arabischen Liter-
atur werden jemenitische Schriftsteller der
mittleren Zeit (des 7. bis 10. Jahrh. [sic] der
Hijra) nur selten erwähnt und es ist daher
sehr schwierig, genauere Zeitangaben über
einen grossen Theil der in diesem Sammlung
vorkommenden Schriftsteller zu geben.”

W. Altwardt, Kurzes Verzeichnis der Glaser’schen
Sammlung arabischer Handschriften, Berlin 1907, p. IV.
the latter’s companion ‘Ali b. Muhammad al-‘Abbâsî al-‘Alâwî. The dissertation was published in 1919, followed by a French translation in 1960 (Arendonk 1919, 1960). The manuscripts of the Caprotti collection in the Ambrosiana were studied during the first two decades of the 20th century by the Milanese Arabist, Eugenio Griffini (1878–1925), who published extensively on various aspects of Zaydism and on the Caprotti collection (Codazzi 1926; Griffini 1913, 1919, 1920). His work was continued by another partial catalogue of the collection by Šâlah al-Dîn al-Munajjîd (al-Munajjîd 1960) and in a more comprehensive manner by the Swedish Arabist Oscar Löffgren (1888–1992) who was later joined by Renato Traini, librarian of the Fondazione Caetani in the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei (Löffgren/Traini 1975–79). During the middle of the 20th century, Egyptian scholars developed an enhanced awareness of the rich and yet unexploited manuscript holdings of Yemen’s public and private libraries. Tâhâ Ḫusayn, Minister of Education of Egypt since 1950, was instrumental in dispatching an expedition of scholars to Yemen to prepare an inventory of the manuscript holdings there and to microfilm the most significant manuscripts. The group of four Egyptian scholars that was led by Khâliî Yâhya Namî, a former professor at the University of Cairo, set out to Yemen on 23 December 1951 and spent the next three months there, until 11 March 1952, cataloguing and filming some 300 manuscripts. The significance of this expedition and its impact cannot be overestimated. Among other precious manuscripts, its members had filmed most of the Mu’tazili works that had been copied during the 6th/12th century for the library of al-Manṣūr bi-l-Ḥâshî and were preserved in the Maktaba al-Sharqiyya (al-Makhtuṭtî; Namî 1952; Qâ’îma). Most of these texts were edited and printed in the next decade and beyond, and these editions prompted a rise in Mu’tazili studies among scholars in the West and the Islamic world. For example, fourteen out of the originally twenty volumes of ‘Abd al-Jabâr al-Hamadânî’s opus magnum, al-Maghâni fi ābdâb al-tawâhid wa-l-‘adl, were discovered in the Maktabah al-awqâf (‘al-Sharqiyya’) of the Great Mosque in Šan‘a’. Five volumes, including two that have no equivalent among the Šan‘a’ manuscripts, were found soon afterwards among the manuscripts of the Dar al-kutub in Cairo. A few years later an edition of all preserved volumes was produced under the supervision of Tâhâ Ḫusayn. The discoveries of the Mu’tazili materials, and of ‘Abd al-Jabâr’s al-Maghâni in particular (Aramiyyat al-Khodâ’irī 1957; al-Khodâ’irī 1958), were a sensation at the time, and the Egyptian scholars involved did the wider scholarly community a great service by making this work available through publication. A second Egyptian expedition to Yemen (1964) was directed by Muhammad Ahmad Ḫusayn, the Vice-Minister of Culture. The two missions limited their activities to the cities of Šan‘a’ and Ta‘izz, and did not include the survey of important manuscript collections in the towns of the North such as Sa‘da, Ḥarth, Khâmir and the South such as Dhamār, Ji-bla, Ḥarrâz, al-Mara‘î. The true founder of Zaydi studies is Wilferd Madelung who in his seminal Der Imam al-Qâsim Ibn Ibrahim und die Claustenleute der Zayditen (published in 1965) provided a still unsurpassed analysis of the doctrinal developments of the Zaydis since the times of the Imam al-Qâsim ibn Ibrahim (d. 246/860) until ‘Abd Allâh b. Zayd al-‘Aṣî (d. 667/1268). He was also the first Western scholar who was able to profit from the Yemeni manuscript collections in Europe, in Egypt and, most importantly, in Yemen itself. Over the decades, Madelung added numerous invaluable editions and studies devoted to the intellectual history and historiography of medieval Zaydism in Yemen and Iran, each one of them breaking entirely new ground and most of them translated entirely into Arabic (Madelung 1965, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1999).

Since the 1970s, numerous scholars particularly from Yemen significantly contributed to advance our knowledge of the intellectual history of Zaydism in Yemen. Special mention should be made of Ismâ‘îl b. ‘Ali al-Akwa‘ (b. 1920, d. 2008; he served for many years as president of the Yemeni Antiquities Authority) and his numerous works, especially his biographical dictionary Hījarîn as-sâhibîn wa-l-‘abîn fî l-’Yaman (al-Akwa‘ 2003). ‘Abd Allâh Muhammad al-Hîshî and particularly his Marrjâ‘i tarîkh al-Yaman (al-Hîshî 1972) and his even more comprehensive volume Masâdir al-‘arabi al-islâmî fî l-’Yaman (first published in 1977, repeatedly republished with revisions and additions), and ‘Abd al-Sâlim b. ‘Abbas al-Wâjîh and his numerous editions and biographical works (e.g., al-Wâjîh 1999). Outside of Yemen, the Egyptian scholar Fu‘âd Sayyîd, who had also participated in the Egyptian expedition to Yemen in 1951–52, has made considerable contributions to the study of the intellectual history of Yemen (Sayyîd 1955), including Zaydism, as has his son, Aymân Fu‘âd Sayyîd, author of the seminal work Masâdir tarîkh al-Yaman fî l-asr al-islâmî (= Sources de l’histoire du Yémen à l’époque musulmane) that was published in 1974 in Cairo (Sayyîd