

David Hollenberg, Christoph Rauch, and Sabine Schmidtke, eds, *The Yemeni Manuscript Tradition* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015). Hardcover. XII + 305 pp. ISBN-13: 9789004288256. € 114.00 | \$ 145.00.

Throughout the Islamic world and in European and American collections, immense Islamic manuscript resources remain unexplored.¹ Yet, the study of this material is a rapidly developing research field, which is reflected e.g. in the establishment of journals and professional organizations, and in the increased publication of articles and monographs, as emphasized by the editors of the volume under review (Introduction, p. 1). Sustaining the growing effort clearly requires the work of more scholars, and in recent years access to this complicated field has fortunately been facilitated with the publication of valuable introductions and reference works such as those of F. Déroche and A. Gacek.² Yemeni libraries, too, hold major collections, and the editors point out that ‘the scholars of Yemen in general, and those of the *Zaydī madhhab* in particular, preserved sources and developed lines of intellectual inquiry not extant elsewhere’ (p. 2). This heritage has already received considerable attention from Western and Middle Eastern scholars. Important collections were established in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (the largest being in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan). From the 1950s onward, Egyptian and Iranian scholars have secured microfilms of extensive material.³ The *Yemeni Manuscript Tradition* is a very welcome addition to these studies.

The volume under review deals with various aspects of Yemeni manuscript culture from the seventh to the twentieth century CE. Beyond the ‘main texts’ documented in manuscripts, it illustrates a growing interest in commentaries and in the entire range of ‘metatexts’ they contain. The subjects covered include methodological issues in regard to the study of early Qur’āns (ch. 1), new manuscript evidence relevant for *Zaydī* and broader Mu‘tazilite theology (ch. 2–3), the use of metatexts such as scribal dicta and *iğāzas* (i.e. ‘licenses’ for transmission; ch. 4), the intellectual outlook of *Zaydī* scholars as reflected in *iğāzas* and marginal notes (ch. 5–6), the travel activity of scholars (ch. 7), trade routes evidenced by the paper used for manuscripts (ch. 8), and Yemeni policies toward the use of Hebrew script for official purposes in the 1920s and 1930s (ch. 9).

Ch. 1, A. Hilali’s ‘Was the *Ṣan‘ā* Qur‘ān Palimpsest a Work in Progress?’ (pp. 12–27), springs from the author’s work on preparing an edition

1 For a brief survey of material in Arabic script (which of course constitutes the bulk of Islamic manuscripts), see Sagaria Rossi 2015.

2 See Déroche 2006 (English tr. of Déroche 2000); Gacek 2001, 2008, 2009.

3 See Schmidtke 2012, which also serves as an introduction to a special issue of that journal, dedicated to articles on Zaydism.

of this famous early source and addresses two main issues related to the interpretation of the lower text layer.⁴ Firstly, Hilali criticizes an earlier edition of the palimpsest⁵ for relying on the *qirā'āt* (i.e. the variant 'readings') recorded in Islamic scholarly literature for the reconstruction of parts of the text, and she gives some examples of readings where she believes the authors have been misled by the variant literature against the evidence of the palimpsest itself (pp. 16–17). Secondly, Hilali presents a number of arguments that the lower text was likely a scholarly exercise rather than being part of a 'complete Qur'ān'. Certainly, a striking example is found on a folio containing the beginning of sūra 9 which in Hilali's reading is introduced by the *basmala* formula;⁶ in the next line she now reads *lā taqul bi-smi llāh*, 'Do not say: in the name of God', which would indeed suggest 'the presence of a correcting authority' (pp. 24–25).

Ch. 2, 'Yūsuf al-Baṣīr's Rebuttal of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī in a Yemeni Zaydī Manuscript of the 7th/13th Century' (pp. 28–65) by H. Ansari, W. Madelung, and S. Schmidtke introduces new source material for the debates conducted within Mu'tazilite theology. In 2007 Madelung and Schmidtke published fragments of two treatises by the Jewish Karaite scholar Abū Yaq'ūb Yūsuf al-Baṣīr (d. between 1037 and 1039) directed against some of the theological views of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 1045), a student of the leading Bahṣamī theologian 'Abd al-Ġabbār al-Hamaḍānī (d. 1025).⁷ This chapter includes the edition (pp. 38–54) of an additional fragment of one of Abū Yaq'ūb's treatises housed in the Dār al-maḥṭūṭāt in Ṣan'ā', containing 'the complete introduction to the treatise (...) as well as considerable parts of a first chapter' (p. 29).

In Ch. 3, H. Ansari and J. Thiele treat the 'MS Berlin, State Library, Glaser 51: A Unique Manuscript from the Early 7th/13th-Century Bahṣamite Milieu in Yemen' (pp. 66–81), which contains the third volume of the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl li-ḡumal al-Taḥṣīl* by Sulaymān b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥuraṣī (alive in 1214 when it was copied) and is the only known manuscript of this work, a commentary on a twelfth-century work on Zaydī theology. Over time, however, the text 'appears to have been forgotten by Zaydī scholars', even though it was a sophisticated work and 'likely the most extensive Bahṣamī compendium of al-Ḥuraṣī's time composed in Yemen' (p. 72). The manuscript re-

4 Hilali's edition is announced by Oxford University Press as forthcoming this year.

5 Sadeghi and Goudarzi 2010.

6 I.e., *bi-smi llāhi l-rahmāni l-rahīm*, 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate'. Sūra 9 is the only one of the 114 sūras in the Qur'ān which should not be introduced by this formula.

7 For the Bahṣamī branch of the Mu'tazila (taking its name from Abū Hāšim 'Abd al-Salām al-Ġubbā'ī, d. 933), see Schmidtke 2008.

mains unedited, but in 2013 the authors published a facsimile edition, and the chapter contains an appendix with a table of contents in Arabic (pp. 75–77).

In Ch. 4, ‘The Pearl and the Ruby: Scribal Dicta and Other Metatextual Notes in Yemeni Mediaeval Manuscripts’ (pp. 82–100), A. D’Ottone offers a somewhat eclectic selection of metatexts: seven versified scribal dicta from manuscripts dating from 1214 to 1478; *qirā’as* (i.e. ‘audition certificates’) and an *iğāza* issued for two grammatical texts in 1273;⁸ and two authorial notes added to an autograph manuscript from 1314 containing ‘some information on the process of editing and the future transmission of his work’ (p. 95). The author notes that the study of such metatexts is a developing field of research but much work remains to be done to gather a material ‘large enough to be useful in the study of Yemeni cultural history’ (p. 97).

Ch. 5, Ansari and Schmidtke’s ‘The Literary-Religious Tradition among 7th/13th-Century Yemeni Zaydīs (II): The Case of ‘Abd Allāh b. Zayd al-‘Ansī (d. 667/1269)’ (pp. 101–154), continues ‘the authors’ series of studies dealing with the transmission of knowledge from Iran to Yemen in the 6th/12th and 7th/13th centuries’ (p. 101, n. 1). In his *Mağmū‘ al-iğāzāt*, Aḥmad b. Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Miswarī (d. 1668) includes an *iğāza* issued to al-‘Ansī by Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim al-Akwa‘ in 1246.⁹ This *iğāza* (edited on pp. 109–115) provides a detailed look at the wide-ranging intellectual interests of Zaydīs in this period. It is of particular interest due the works by Iranian Zaydīs mentioned (a confirmation of Iranian-Yemeni connections), but is also noteworthy for the many central Sunnī Muslim texts included. The appendices list the persons and places mentioned (149 in all) and the channels of transmission of al-Šarīf al-Raḍī’s *Nahğ al-balāğa* (the famous Shiite collection of letters, speeches etc. traditionally ascribed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib) to Yemen based on *iğāzas* by al-Akwa‘ and others (pp. 116–147).

Ch. 6, G. Schwarb’s ‘MS Munich, Bavarian State Library, Cod. arab. 1294: A Guide to Zaydī Kalām-Studies during the Ṭāhirid and Early Qāsimite Periods (Mid-15th to Early 18th Centuries)’ (pp. 155–202), deals with a period for which Zaydī *kalām* has received only limited scholarly attention even though important developments took place. While there are many examples of an interest in Sunnī *ḥadīṯ* and *fiqh* already from the twelfth century (pp. 157–158; cf. also the preceding chapter), it is in the period studied here that the scope widened considerably. Schwarb introduces the *Mirqāt al-anzār* by ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Nağrī (d. 1472–1473), an unedited work ‘which

8 For these types of metatexts, see inter alia Déroche 2005, 332–334; Gacek 2009, 52–56.

9 For a discussion of *iğāzas* and their development into various scholarly genres, see Witkam 1995.

for almost three centuries constituted the backbone of Zaydī *kalām*-studies' (p. 155). While this work, itself a commentary on a part of the *Kitāb al-Baḥr al-zahḥār* by Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Murtaḍā (d. 1436–1437), is extant in numerous manuscripts (listed 169–174), the Munich codex (completed in 1696) 'appears to be the most lavishly annotated' of all the manuscripts (p. 186). Schwarb provides an extensive list of works used for the marginal annotations in the manuscript (pp. 187–202), divided into 'Zaydī Authors' (47 items), 'Non-Šī'ī Mu'tazilī Authors' (three items), and 'Mu'tazilī Sunnī Authors' (26 items).

The manuscript explored in Ch. 7, C. Rauch's 'Zaydī Scholars on the Move: A Multitext Manuscript by Yaḥyā Ibn Ḥumayd al-Miqrā'ī (b. 908/1503, d. 990/1582) and Other Contemporary Sources' (pp. 203–226), was copied in 1562–1563 and contains five works on theology and *fiqh* by al-Miqrā'ī. On the basis of the metatexts in this and other manuscripts, Rauch establishes a chronology of al-Miqrā'ī's travel activities (much of it in the company of the Imām, the scholar Šaraf al-Dīn Yaḥyā b. Šams al-Dīn, d. 1557) both to centres such as Ša'da and to 'scholarly villages' (*hiḡar*) such as al-Abnā'. The article also includes a description of these villages in the Wādī al-Sirr, villages which functioned as secured places 'in a tribe's territory where non-tribal people (...) live under the protection of the tribe' (p. 210).

Ch. 8, A. Regourd's 'Papiers filigranés de manuscrits de Zabīd, premiers tiers du XVIIIe jusqu'au milieu du XXe siècle: papiers importés et 'locaux'' (pp. 227–251), springs from the author's work on the rich manuscript collections in the historically important centre of Sunnī learning, Zabīd on the coastal plain of the Tihāma. So far this has inter alia resulted in the publication of three fascicules of the *Catalogue cumulé des manuscrits de bibliothèques privées de Zabīd*. The specific focus in this chapter is the use of watermarked paper. Knowing the provenance of this kind of writing material, it becomes possible to establish likely trade routes.

Ch. 9, 'Šan'ā', Jerusalem, New York: Imām Yaḥyā Ḥamīd al-Dīn (1869–1948) and Yemeni-Jewish Migration from Palestine to the United States' (pp. 252–280) by M. Anzi and K. Hünefeld, deals with a change in the administrative procedure of Yemeni authorities in regard to Jews of Yemeni origin. From the 1920s on, some of the Yemeni Jews who had immigrated to Palestine wanted to relocate to the United States, and the American Consulate allowed them to do so under the Yemeni immigration quota, provided they could prove their origin by means of birth certificates. The usual procedure for obtaining this documentation was to have letters written in Judaeo-Arabic, signed by witnesses, and sent to Yemen where local Jews would add an Arabic transcription and deliver them to the authorities for confirmation. In 1937, however,

Imām Yaḥyā's policy changed, and judges were required 'to reject documents that include Hebrew script and refuse their confirmation' (p. 261). Anzi and Hünefeld include specimens of the request letters and consider the possible political reasons for this reversal of policy.

Four indices facilitate the use of the volume: 'Persons and Groups', 'Places and Institutions', 'Books', and 'Manuscripts' (pp. 281–305).

The Yemeni Manuscript Tradition is certainly an important addition to the study of 'manuscript culture', a field of research which the editors expect 'to grow exponentially in the coming years', due inter alia to the increased availability of digitized manuscripts and catalogues on the Internet (p. 2). The volume will be of particular value for those interested in Zaydī Islam in the medieval period and in the study of the metatextual evidence of manuscripts, and it clearly shows how much there is to be learned from these types of text which have all too often been regarded as completely peripheral to the 'main texts'.

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