

And at a few points, the book's data, arguments, and interpretations could have been presented more clearly. But as a whole, this is a monumental contribution to the archaeological study of Sasanian Iran. The authors can be proud of their work.

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Die Rifāʿiyya aus Damaskus: Eine Privatbibliothek im osmanischen Syrien und ihr kulturelles Umfeld.

By BORIS LIEBRENZ. *Islamic Manuscripts and Books*, vol. 10. Leiden: BRILL, 2016. Pp. xvi + 421, illus. \$181, €140.

Middle Eastern history is currently experiencing a major shift toward a greater interest in identifying documentary material, in addition to the standard canon of normative and narrative texts. The field of reading and library history is particularly blessed by this documentary turn as it had reached virtual stagnation, doling out similar or even the same anecdotes. In recent years this has dramatically changed, in particular for the early modern and Ottoman period: a collaborative research group headed by Gülru Necipoğlu, Cemal Kafadar, and Cornell Fleischer is working on the catalogue of Sultan Bayezid II's royal library catalogue from 909 (1502f.); François Déroche has been awarded an ERC grant for his project "Saadian Intellectual and Cultural Life" (1554–1660) focused on the sultans' library preserved as a "time capsule" in the El Escorial monastery; Henning Sievert has used various documents to retrace the literary life of an eighteenth-century bureaucrat; and Tobias Heinzelmann has shrewdly employed manuscript evidence to bring to light the usage of popular religious literature—to name but a few.

Boris Liebrezn's book under review lies fully in this trend and it brings to light a particularly elusive form of book collection, that of "private" collections. Whereas we have some good case studies of collections in institutional contexts, such as the *madrasa*, and court contexts, private book collections have remained among the field's known unknowns. The case study presented here is the so-called Rifāʿiyya collection from Damascus currently held in Leipzig. The elusiveness of private collections is no better illustrated than by the fact that this collection only gained its current name in Leipzig and that we are not even sure who its owner (al-Rifāʿī ?) actually was—Liebrezn is justifiably very cautious in his hypothesis as to this owner's identity. The collection was acquired in the mid-nineteenth century by the Saxonian authorities via the Damascus-based jack-of-all-trades Gottfried Wetzstein, Prussian consul, Arabist, and entrepreneur. The Leipzig University Library preserved the collection's distinctive identity, not merging it with other manuscripts—a stroke of luck that so many other historical collections, merged without further ado into the large European or Middle Eastern collections that developed from the late nineteenth century onward, did not escape. As the Rifāʿiyya collection is not mentioned in any contemporaneous source and not a single manuscript note has ever cited it, this decision was crucial. Had the manuscripts in this collection been merged into the larger Leipzig collection, its existence would have been irretrievably lost.

Liebrezn was thus presented with the daunting task of writing a book on a non-documented library. And he has done a brilliant job in the face of this challenge by giving us a book that is not only a pleasure to read, but, more importantly, is the first full-scale study to rely on manuscript notes (*Sekundäreinträge* in this book's terminology). While manuscript notes have been acknowledged for quite a while, no monograph has as yet fully engaged with this important documentary source. There are hardly any easily accessible research tools for this line of work: manuscript catalogues mention them too infrequently to yield a critical mass and an editorial compendium of a corpus has only been undertaken for a selection of *samāʿāt* from medieval Damascus. Research based on these notes thus requires scouting large numbers of manuscripts and deciphering often hideously written scribbles to get more often than not frustratingly fragmentary information. Liebrezn has advanced this line of research by not only documenting all of the notes on the Rifāʿiyya manuscripts, but also those on other Damascene

manuscripts in additional relevant collections, such as Staatsbibliothek Berlin (where Wetzstein's own collections of manuscripts are held), American University Beirut, and Tübingen. This has allowed him to assemble sufficiently dense material (the Rifā'iyya manuscripts alone account for some one thousand notes) to offer the first convincing broad analysis of a specific manuscript culture on the basis of such material. The fruits of this painstaking work are not only evident in this book, but have been made available for future research in online databases.

The book is divided into three main chapters, discussing respectively the history of the Rifā'iyya, libraries in late Ottoman Damascus, and users of the Rifā'iyya. Most of Wetzstein's personal papers are lost, but Liebrez does a splendid job in chapter one reconstituting the story of the Rifā'iyya and its way to Leipzig by employing other archival material such as letters to and from Wetzstein's teacher and mentor Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer. What emerges is a fascinating story of mid-nineteenth-century wheeling and dealing to buy manuscripts in the Middle East and ship them to Europe—a story that shows how much more work needs to be done to historicize European manuscript collections that are so often approached as decontextualized depositories. On the basis of the Leipzig manuscripts and manuscript notes Liebrez makes four main arguments: (1) the Rifā'iyya was a universal library with no branch of knowledge excluded; (2) works from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries are best represented, whereas the “classical” period (to the year 1000) and the one hundred years before its sale played only a minor role; (3) the Rifā'iyya was a very local library with a distinctive Syro-Egyptian profile, holding almost exclusively works in Arabic; and (4) even though the Rifā'iyya was a (family) endowment established in the late eighteenth century, its stock remained subject to constant and very considerable changes right up to when it was sold.

Chapter two on late Ottoman libraries is meant to compensate for the scarce knowledge we have on the Rifā'iyya itself. This is by far the longest chapter and occasionally one is led down paths that do not seem entirely self-evident for understanding the Rifā'iyya. After a thematic section on the logic of book endowments from a legal perspective, the chapter discusses contemporaneous libraries, moving from Istanbul and Cairo via Aleppo and Acre to Damascus. The chapter's large purview prevents the development of clear overall arguments, but it does offer numerous gems, especially when Liebrez hones in on specific manuscripts or small-scale book collections. The section on book lending is a wonderful example of how the author's deft combination of normative, narrative, and documentary sources allows new insights into specific aspects of library practices in Damascus during the late Ottoman period. The appearance of commercial lending libraries is particularly fascinating for Middle Eastern book history, as it seems to be one of the few, very major diachronic developments that we can confidently nail down.

In chapter three Liebrez discusses the Rifā'iyya readers and again the focus of the book must branch out. Since it is impossible to securely connect readers' notes on a Rifā'iyya manuscript with the library itself—we do not know when a manuscript entered the collection so that none of these notes can be taken as a specific “Rifā'iyya reading”—what we get is again a much wider discussion of reading in late Ottoman Damascus. With his focus on manuscript notes Liebrez is able to show in this chapter how various groups not traditionally associated with book consumption engaged with the written word. These groups include individuals from the military and administration, physicians, religious minorities, and women. Liebrez's main argument is that there were no social barriers as to who may have read, but there were very substantial differences as to what was read. With regard to religious minorities and women, however, it is evident that there were distinctive religious and gender borders and that we have very few readers from these two groups appearing in what was a predominantly Sunni Muslim and male world.

There are some minor downsides to the book—for instance, the exact corpus referred to in the course of discussing a specific point repeatedly remains unclear; while the Rifā'iyya notes are often used as the jumping-off point, the discussion then moves on to the author's larger corpus, which is not satisfyingly quantified. In the same vein, narrative sources could sometimes have profited from better contextualization. Liebrez uses the (rather late) work by Ḥabīb al-Zayyāt on the stock of the new Zāhriyya library to make quite crucial statements on the size of libraries, but sadly these are not compared with the earlier *Sijill kutub al-maktaba al-ʿumūmiyya*. More importantly, this work would have benefited from a more critical reading as to the structure of al-Zayyāt's book and his criteria of

exclusion and inclusion. Some factual mistakes (e.g., reading the term “al-Kallāsa” as referring to the actual madrasa whereas in most sources the quarter to the north of the Umayyad Mosque is meant) do not distract from the book’s overall arguments.

Despite these few cavils, this book is a milestone in the field. Its main contribution is in methodological terms, as we now have a much better conceptualized starting point when engaging with manuscript notes. In addition, the author breaks with several established conventions that have limited the field to date, such as, to name only one, the particularly laudable inclusion of non-Muslim collections and book consumers into the discussion whereas most research has comfortably focused on only one religious community. If Liebrecht is sometimes very cautious in his arguments and the odd point could have been pushed more forcefully, the book is nonetheless full of tantalizing lines for future research and is sure to be read for some time to come. In the end, the Rifāʿiyya still remains elusive, but we are left with much more—a methodologically fascinating account of book culture in late Ottoman Damascus.

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Medieval Damascus: Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library. The Ashrafiyya Library Catalogue.

By KONRAD HIRSCHLER. Edinburgh Studies in Classical Islamic History and Culture. Edinburgh: EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016. Pp. x + 525. \$140, £85.

In some ways, this fascinating book is a sequel to the same author’s *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands* from 2012 (reviewed in *JAOS* 135.2 [2015]: 391–93), which explored the growth of reading practices in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt and Syria by using documents such as endowment records, manuscript notes, and reading certificates (*samāʿāt*), in addition to the standard biographical and historical sources. *Medieval Damascus* takes the process of using “crucial documents [that] remain on the margins of scholarship” to supplement “the depleted soil of a narrow band of narrative sources” (p. 4) further by framing an entire monograph around just a single hitherto ignored document—the manuscript catalogue of a little known library in medieval Damascus, the Ashrafiyya.

While catalogues of medieval libraries are not uncommon in Britain—several hundred have been published in the series “Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues” (1990–)—only two have been preserved to date from the medieval Arab world, a short alphabetical list of titles belonging to the mosque library in Kairouan and the much more substantial and complex catalogue of the Ashrafiyya. Konrad Hirschler provides photographs of the Arabic manuscript of the Ashrafiyya catalogue, an edition in a modern Arabic typeface, and a very well-annotated translation of the catalogue. The expertise that has gone into identifying the books in the catalogue is remarkable, since the library’s collection covered a wide range of subjects, with many locally produced books, some of which appear to have been unique, and the title entries themselves are often heavily abbreviated, with no indication of authorship. Hirschler quotes Richard Sharpe, who stated that “entries in medieval book lists can sometimes seem like a fiendish species of crossword, demanding to be solved but providing incomplete or otherwise inadequate clues” (p. 9). Hirschler, however, goes far beyond just demonstrating his extensive bio-bibliographical knowledge through the edition of this document—see chapter four on title identification, and especially his dissection of Paul Sneath’s *Choix de livres qui se trouvaient dans les bibliothèques d’Alep (au XIIIe siècle)* (Cairo, 1946)—and explores in three introductory chapters what can be gleaned from the Ashrafiyya catalogue about what people read, how libraries were organized, and the quality of the intellectual and literary culture of medieval Syria in what the author calls the Middle Period (roughly from the sixth/twelfth to the tenth/sixteenth centuries). He is thus able to correct many of the misapprehensions of earlier scholars of medieval Arab library history, even those of Youssef Eche in his seminal work, *Les bibliothèques arabes publiques et semi-publiques en Mésopotamie, en Syrie et en Egypte au Moyen Âge* (Damascus, 1967).