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 Liebrenz 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 Ashrafīya 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 of 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 Sbath'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).

Damascus in the sixth to seventh/twelfth to thirteenth centuries was relatively stable, free from external control, and economically thriving, so much so that during the eighty-five years of Ayyubid rule, seventy-four mausolea and seventy-six teaching institutions were founded, many of which had libraries attached. The Ashrafiyya was a typical creation of its time, having been founded by the ruler of Damascus, al-Malik al-Ashraf (d. 635/1237), who held lands also in northern Mesopotamia. Hirschler describes the Ashrafiyya as "a commemorative mausoleum with some additional educational activities" and a "rather marginal run-of-the-mill endowment with a single professorship for teaching Koran recitation" (p. 22). He notes that "secondary literature has repeatedly assumed that a library's stock was provided by the endowment's founder" (p. 14), and the Ashrafiyya did indeed contain a considerable portion of the royal or sultanic collection of al-Malik al-Ashraf, but it was supplemented by the substantial collection of al-Ashraf Aḥmad (d. 643/1245f.), who was a member of the Syrian civilian elite and the son of the well-known administrator, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil (d. 596/1200). In *Written Word* (chap. four) Hirschler already explored how books in an endowed library were often not *mawqūf* (given a "theoretical" translation of "immobilised" by Hirschler, p. 24) but moved between libraries, and the complex perambulations of al-Ashraf Aḥmad's library before much of it ended up in the Ashrafiyya provide Hirschler here with yet more concrete evidence of how mobile books could be, as they oscillated between private and endowed collections. There do not seem to have been many, if any, additions to the library after about the 1280s, which is the probable date of the catalogue's compilation, which contains references to 2,096 identifiable titles (as a comparison, the sum total of all the books in the University of Cambridge in the fifteenth century was no more than 2,000).

The Ashrafiyya is mentioned in several texts written after the 1280s, and at least thirteen of the professors of Quran recitation are known by name, but Hirschler is able to discover no information about the Ashrafiyya after the first half of the tenth/sixteenth century, and the building itself was demolished sometime between 1917 and 1927. This is not the end of the story, however, as at least 143 manuscripts have been identified as now being part of the Süleymaniye library in Istanbul (including the catalogue of the collection). Hirschler does not speculate as to why particular manuscripts were taken to Turkey and others not, suggesting that the "Ottoman elite in search of books turned to a library that had lost its educational function, rather than taking books from the educational heavyweights of the scholarly landscape" (p. 45), but his discovery of the transfer of some of the manuscripts from Damascus to Istanbul is important evidence that argues against the wholesale "plundering" (ibid.) of Arab collections after the Ottoman conquest, while showing that transfers from Syria to Ottoman libraries still took place.

One of the striking insights offered in the book is the analysis of the contents of the Ashrafiyya collection, which are much wider than earlier scholarship had predicted. There were certainly many books on the religious sciences (Quran, hadith, law, Sufism, prayer books, theology, etc.) as well as substantial numbers of books in the ancillary sciences of philology and history, but these did not constitute more than one-third of the stock (there were only two copies of the Quran, which presumes that readers and students would have brought their own for study in the building). Almost fifty percent of the collection was devoted to poetry and *adab*, while the remaining books were divided among medicine (5%), political thought (2.5%), and astronomy (1%), with a few examples of other subjects, such as falconry, geography, warfare, agriculture, geomancy, and chess. The most popular authors were al-Thaʿālibī (d. 429/1028) and al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868f.), while the works with the most copies were the *Maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122) and the *Dīwān* of Salāma b. Jandal (pre-Islamic)—indeed, the Ashrafiyya possessed more copies of Salāma b. Jandal's verse than appear to be extant today, if the evidence of volume two on poetry of Fuat Sezgin's *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (Leiden, 1975) is anything to go by. The predominance of works of pre-Islamic poetry is perhaps unexpected, as is the presence of heterodox thinkers such as Ibn al-Rīwandī (d. ca. 298/912) and Abū l-Aʿlāʾ al-Maʿarrī (d. 449/1059), Shiʿi notables such as Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), Ibn ʿAyyāsh al-Jawharī (d. 401/1010f.), and al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1016), Muʿtazilī philosophers such as al-Nāshiʾ al-Akbar (d. 293/906) and Jaʿfar b. Ḥarb (d. 236/850), and even the prince of obscene poets, Ibn al-Ḥajjāj (d. 391/1001). Hirschler contends that "the Ashrafīya arguably provides strong documentary evidence for the impact that the adabisation of ʿulamāʾ had on libraries" (p. 119), and he explains the specific salience of poetry and *adab* in the collection as being the result of a process that had begun in the fifth/eleventh century,

whereby "functions in the administration that had hitherto been dominated by a distinct group of secretaries were increasingly taken over by religious scholars" so that certain aspects of secretarial training, such as a thorough knowledge of poetry and *adab*, "became unequivocally part of the literary corpus of 'religious' scholars" (p. 118). Another conclusion that Hirschler is able to draw from the catalogue is to show the "solidly Damascene character of the recent works in the Ashrafīya collection" (p. 36), and that this, along with the works representative of northern Mesopotamia and Egypt (with which al-Malik al-Ashraf and al-Ashraf Aḥmad, respectively, had strong links), "contradicts the hackneyed image of innumerable Muslim scholars constantly on the move seeking knowledge and thus creating tightly-knit long-distance networks of knowledge exchange" (ibid.).

Having analyzed the history and content of the collection, Hirschler devotes a considerable amount of time and scholarship to evaluating the technical aspects of the catalogue, which he ascribes to one of its librarians, Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad al-Anṣārī (d. 683/1284). The structure of the catalogue is complex, involving an alphabetical sequence by title, then by format (normal size or small), then by category (a fifteen-fold division into subjects), although the categorization is partially abandoned when dealing with the multititle works (*majāmīʿ*) and incomplete works, which form separate sequences at the end of the forty-nine-page manuscript. Classification schemes are always difficult to create when the collection is already in place—it is so much easier to theorize about the division of knowledge and then fit books into one's scheme than to fit existing books into a classification scheme that one has to keep adapting to cover anomalies and exceptions as one goes along. Al-Anṣārī's scheme has all the hallmarks of a librarian who begins with much enthusiasm and then runs out of steam. To explain the decline in quality of handwriting and detail as the catalogue progresses, Hirschler suggests that al-Anṣārī may have become ill, but it is also possible that he just realized that he had taken on too great a task and dropped some of the sophisticated markers (e.g., numbers of volumes and quires) as he came to the final shelves. Hirschler does offer some contradictory conclusions about the catalogue, namely, that it "is in such pristine condition that it cannot have served as a working tool" (p. 63), but that the catalogue was designed to "allow reasonably easy access to those titles held in complete single-text manuscripts even to a reader visiting for the first time" (p. 85), in which case the catalogue would presumably have shown signs of use. It seems likely to me that al-Anṣārī compiled the catalogue either as a vade mecum for himself so that he could assist readers, or, more likely, as a way of undertaking a stock check—since the Ashrafiyya was a lending library open to the public, with limited space for readers, volumes must have been lost, misplaced, or stolen from time to time. Whatever its ultimate purpose, the Ashrafiyya catalogue is a fascinating document that allows us to see, for the first time, how a medieval Arab library was conceived, and, by some very ingenious reasoning involving a comparison of errors in the catalogue with illustrations found in copies of the *Maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī, how the library was physically organized and how many books were shelved in each bookcase.

Hirschler outlines the aims of his excellent monograph on the first page of the introduction, namely, to understand what sort of books were held in a medieval Arabic library, what its intellectual profile was, how books were organized on its shelves, and what were its spatial dimensions. He argues against essentialism (not all libraries were going to be organized like the Ashrafiyya), but is still able to make a number of very telling points not just about this library but more generally about how it reflected the culture of Ayyubid Damascus—the unexpected breadth of the founders' (and presumably also the readers') interests, the strongly local flavor of the most recent material, and significant evidence of the effect the Ottoman conquest had on intellectual capital in Syria. This is all in addition to his meticulous and imaginative dissection of a medieval Arab librarian's mind. Hirschler has made his documents available online for other researchers through the Ashrafiya Library Database (http://krcfm.orient.ox.ac.uk/fmi/webd#ashrafiya), so it will be interesting to see whether other scholars can use these data to develop new theories regarding the history of Arab libraries and, more broadly, medieval Arabic literary culture. Who ever said library catalogues were boring?

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