



A Path with Many Crossroads: The Saadian Manuscripts in the Escorial and Their Notes*

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Abstract

The manuscripts in the library of the Saadian sultan Mulây Zaydân offer an exceptional case study of what can be achieved through the examination of paratexts. A systematic collection of notes found in these manuscripts has made it possible to identify series that illuminate not only the history of the library itself, but also the smaller libraries later incorporated into it, as well as the broader historical and intellectual context of the period. Five main areas emerge from this research: the library of Mulây Zaydân, the broader Saadian libraries, the contribution of Morocco, the role of Near Eastern book markets (particularly Cairo), and the pricing of books.

Keywords

Morocco, Escorial Library, Saadian dynasty, Mulây Zaydân, Ownership statements, Book prices

Çok Kavşaklı Bir Yol: Escorial'deki Sa'î Yazmaları ve Notları

Özet

Sa'î sultanı Mulây Zeydân'ın kütüphanesinde yer alan yazmalar, metindışı notların incelenmesi yoluyla elde edilebilecek sonuçlara dair istisnai bir örnek sunmaktadır. Bu yazmalarda tespit edilen kayıtların sistematik biçimde derlenmesi, yalnızca kütüphanenin kendi tarihini değil, sonradan bünyesine katılan küçük kütüphaneleri ve dönemin daha geniş tarihî ve entelektüel bağlamını da aydınlatma imkânı vermektedir. Bu araştırma beş ana ekseninde şekillenmektedir: Mulây Zeydân'ın kütüphanesi, genel olarak Sa'î hanedanına ait kütüphaneler, Fas'ın katkısı, Yakındoğu kitap piyasalarının (özellikle Kahire) rolü ve kitapların fiyatlandırılması.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Fas, Escorial Kütüphanesi, Sa'î Hanedanı, Mulây Zeydân, Temellük kayıtları, Kitap fiyatları

ملتقى الطرق: مخطوطات مكتبة الإسكوريال وما عليها من القيود

الموجز

تمثل مخطوطات خزانة المولى زيدان السعدي نموذجاً فريداً يظهر ما يمكن إنجازه من خلال دراسة النصوص الموازية (الهوامش والقيود) فيها. فقد أتاح الجمع المنهجي للقيود الواردة في هذه المخطوطات إلقاء الضوء على تاريخ المكتبة بحد ذاتها فحسب، بل يتيح أيضاً تسليط الضوء على المكتبات الصغرى التي ألحقت بها فيما بعد، فضلاً عن السياق التاريخي والفكري الأوسع لتلك الحقبة. ومن هذا البحث انبثقت خمسة مجالات رئيسة: خزانة المولى زيدان، والمكتبات السعدية الكبرى، وإسهام المغرب، ودور أسواق الكتب في المشرق (ولا سيما القاهرة)، وقضية تسعير الكتب.

الكلمات المفتاحية

المغرب، مكتبة الإسكوريال، السعديون، المولى زيدان، قيود التملك، أسعار الكتب

Introduction

The El Escorial Library has been an privileged place for studying the notes found in its manuscripts. Located just north of Madrid, it was founded by King Philip II of Spain as part of the monastery and palace complex built between 1563 and 1583. From the outset, in keeping with the spirit of the time, Philip II began collecting Arabic manuscripts, which would form the core of the library's holdings.¹ However, what interests me here is the substantial and sudden enrichment of the collection in 1614, when the library of the Sultan of Morocco, Muḥay Zaydān (r. 1012/1603–1036/1627), was incorporated into the royal library during the reign of Philip III, son of Philip II.² Although the Sultan's library, like the rest of the Escorial collection, suffered losses in the devastating fire of 1672, it remains a privileged field of research. This is because after 1614, only a handful of Arabic manuscripts were added, and the existing volumes underwent only minimal alteration by bookbinders.

The collection thus functions as a kind of time capsule, remaining virtually untouched after 1614, or more precisely after 1612, when the ship carrying it was seized. This provides a *terminus ante quem*, allowing us to determine that all, or nearly all, of these manuscripts were produced before that date. For sixteenth-century manuscripts in particular, this is particularly interesting, as all their features can be attributed to a clearly defined historical moment, free from later "contamination."

In 2017, with funding from the ERC project SICLe, a systematic study of the Sultanic collection was undertaken. The project excluded materials from Philip II's original collection as well as later additions. Each manuscript was examined individually to produce a concise material description and to identify any leaves bearing notes. Photographs of these leaves were commissioned, and the reading and analysis began promptly. For each manuscript, there was a systematic attempt to trace its trajectory and to identify, as comprehensively as possible, the "crossroads"—that is, the connections to other manuscripts within and beyond the collection—made visible through these notes. Much of this work was published in 2022 in a two-volume study, *Les livres du sultan. Matériaux pour une histoire et de la vie intellectuelle du Maroc saadien (XVI^e siècle)*, which presents the main findings of the project.³

¹ On the history of the library and more precisely its Arabic collection, see B. Justel Calabozo, *La Biblioteca Real de El Escorial y sus manuscritos árabes. Sinopsis histórico-descriptiva* (Madrid, Patrimonio Nacional-Instituto hispano-árabe de cultura, 2nd ed., 1987).

² In addition to what E. Lévi-Provençal wrote about this (*Les manuscrits arabes de l'Escurial décrits d'après les notes de Hartwig Derenbourg, membre de l'Institut, revues et mises à jour...*, t. III [Paris, Librairie orientale Paul Geuthner, 1928], VIII-IX) or what can be found in the book quoted in n. 4, new elements have been published by J. Sepulcre Samper ("Un dossier novateur: sources espagnoles inédites sur les origines du fonds saadien de l'Escorial", *Académie des inscriptions et Belles-lettres, Comptes rendus des séances de l'année 2022*, novembre-décembre, 2022, 1421-1446).

³ F. Déroche, N. de Castilla and L. Tahali, *Les livres du sultan. Matériaux pour une histoire et de la vie intellectuelle du Maroc saadien (XVI^e siècle)*, 2 vol. (Paris : AIBL, 2022). The theme of the conference, "Kuyûdât: Reflections of Personal and Social Memory on Manuscripts," prompted me set other "crossroads" related to the materiality of the manuscripts.

I. Mulāy Zaydān's notes

It is unsurprising that the bulk of our information on the library's history relates to Mulāy Zaydān, who thus inevitably takes center stage. Remarkably, however, only 274 of the approximately 1,740 manuscripts that once belonged to him-around 15%-bear his *ex libris*. Like his brother Abū Fāris, he began collecting books while still a prince. Yet only about thirty manuscripts in the collection contain marks whose wording confirms that they were his property before he became sultan. This is a small number compared to the 241 manuscripts in which Mulāy Zaydān is styled *amīr al-mu'minīn* in an ownership mark. The script of these marks is notably consistent, with only three clear departures from the norm. In Ms RBME 41 (fol. 2r), the *ex libris* appears, unexpectedly, in *nasta'liq* script.⁴ By contrast, folio 2r of Ms RBME 750 features a pastiche of paternal marks, similar to that found in Ms RBME 48⁵, arranged vertically and written in an oriental style-resembling Aḥmad al-Manṣūr's *ex libris* on the Cambridge manuscript, which I shall discuss below. A third example, Ms RBME 1215, will be discussed later.

In matters of filiation, Mulāy Zaydān employed a somewhat broader range of formulations than Abū Fāris. He referred to his father by name-most often as Aḥmad al-Manṣūr (eleven instances),⁶ but also simply as Aḥmad, with the title following immediately (four instances).⁷ More commonly, however, he used the more abstract titles *amīr al-mu'minīn* and *al-khulafā'*, which occur eighteen and two times, respectively.⁸ A notable exception is found in Ms RBME 1215 (fol. 1r). The hand responsible-possibly the prince himself-does not describe him as the "servant of God," a common formula in our corpus, but instead as "Zaydān, son of Aḥmad, son of Muḥammad, son of Muḥammad, the Ḥasanid." The script here departs from the style of the other ownership marks, and the second line, containing the *nisba al-Ḥasanī* and the eulogy, appears to have been added later.

After ascending the throne, Mulāy Zaydān maintained this diversity in the formulation of his *ex libris*, which can be partly accounted for by the sheer number of examples.⁹ Typically, the simple epithet *'abd Allāh* follows the initial formula and precedes the sultan's name, which, unless it appears alone, is accompanied by the title *amīr al-mu'minīn*. This formulation occurs in 127 instances, representing 61.5% of the total. A substantial proportion of ownership marks, however-thirty cases, or 14%-omit the epithet *'abd*

⁴ Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du sultan*, fig. 11.

⁵ Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du sultan*, fig. 6.

⁶ Ms RBME 788, fol. 2r, for example; together with the ones previously mentioned, these marks account for 42% of the total.

⁷ See, for example, Ms RBME 181, fol. 1r and 533, fol. 1r for the first, Ms RBME 750, fol. 2r for the second; together, they constitute 57.5% of the sample.

⁸ This discussion excludes the few marks that record a transfer of ownership.

⁹ See Mss RBME 293, fol. 1r and 1600, fol. 2r for example.

Allāh. Other formulations are less frequent, with some appearing only once. One group begins with the combination ‘*abd Allāh* and *walī*, either standing alone (nine instances, or 4%)¹⁰ or completed by *mutawakkil* (two instances)¹¹ or *mu‘tamid* (three instances).¹² In this case, as with Mulāy Zaydān’s father and brother, the notes attest to the dynasty’s intention to evoke connections with a glorious past.

II. Saadi ownership statements

On the first folio of a copy of al-Zamakhsharī’s *tafsīr*, now part of the Cambridge University Library collection (MS Add. 815), there appears an ownership statement in large calligraphic letters. In his 1900 *Handlist*, Edward Browne makes no mention of it, despite its perfect legibility.¹³ Identifying the author of this mark would no doubt have required research that Browne was unsure he could complete and did not consider a priority. Within the framework of research on the Saadian library, however, the statement was immediately recognizable as part of a series: the *ex libris* of Mulāy Zaydān’s father, Aḥmad al-Manṣūr, representing the second intersection in the journey of some of these manuscripts.

Across the collection as a whole, the handwritten marks exhibit a certain diversity. While the formulas occur with variable frequency, the calligraphic style remains relatively consistent. From the surviving material associated with Aḥmad al-Manṣūr, four distinct formula types can be identified, all containing the epithet ‘*abd Allāh*—a common element in the notes penned by Aḥmad al-Manṣūr and his two sons. The most frequent formula presents ‘*abd Allāh* alone (twelve instances)¹⁴, followed closely by a formula pairing ‘*abd Allāh* with *walī* (eleven instances).¹⁵ One also encounters two small groups of notes in which the titles borne by Aḥmad al-Manṣūr are somewhat more elaborate. In one, ‘*abd Allāh* is followed by *al-mutawakkil* ‘*alay-hi* and then *al-mufawwiḍ amra-hu ilay-hi*;¹⁶ in the other, ‘*abd Allāh* is followed by *al-mu‘tamid* ‘*alay-hi* and, as before, *mufawwiḍ*.¹⁷ It is worth emphasizing that, of the three principal figures in the history of the library, Aḥmad al-Manṣūr is most frequently described, after the mention of his lineage, as *al-sharīf al-ḥasanī*.¹⁸

¹⁰ See Ms RBME 1190, fol. 1r.

¹¹ See, for example, Ms RBME 676, fol. 1r.

¹² See, for example, Mss RBME 916, fol. 1r and 1447, fol. 4r.

¹³ E. G. Browne, *A hand-list of the Muhammadan manuscripts, including all those written in the Arabic character, preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1900), 178.

¹⁴ See, for example, Mss RBME 5, fol. 1r; 281, fol. 1r; 356, fol. 1r; 1381, fol. 242; and 1892-14, fol. 1r.

¹⁵ See, for example, Mss RBME 96, fol. 1r; 591, fol. 1r; 864, fol. 1r; 1381, fol. 1; and 1763, fol. 1r.

¹⁶ Five instances: Mss RBME 211, fol. 2r; 455, fol. 3r; 579, fol. 1r; 1282, fol. 1r; and 1772, fol. 3r.

¹⁷ Two instances: Mss RBME 144, fol. 1r; and 1022, fol. 1r.

¹⁸ See, for example, Mss RBME 82, fol. 1r; 211, fol. 2r; 266, fol. 1r; 356, fol. 1r; etc.

Another prominent member of the Saadian dynasty who left ownership statements on manuscripts in Mulāy Zaydān's library was his brother, Abū Fāris. We have identified 61 such marks attributable to him. Like Mulāy Zaydān, Abū Fāris began collecting books for his personal library while still a prince; one example is even dated 999/1591, providing a rough indication of the early history of his collection.¹⁹ Upon the death of Aḥmad al-Manṣūr in 1012/1603, Abū Fāris, then serving as his father's representative in the capital, Marrakesh, assumed the title *amīr al-mu'minīn* in opposition to his brother, who was based in Fez, where their father had died. This rivalry sparked a civil war that also drew in another son of Aḥmad al-Manṣūr. During this turbulent period, Abū Fāris continued to collect books, marking them with his name now followed by his caliphal title. It is interesting to note that the epithets he employed differed from those used by his brother.

The war between the brothers over their father's succession was complex and marked by numerous twists. In 1018/1610, Abū Fāris was killed by one of his nephews, who had seized control of Marrakesh in 1014/1605 but was later ousted by Mulāy Zaydān. The fate of the two libraries—those of Aḥmad al-Manṣūr and Abū Fāris—during the hostilities remains uncertain. The relatively small number of books bearing Aḥmad al-Manṣūr's mark in Mulāy Zaydān's library, despite contemporary praise for the richness of his collection, suggests that part of it was dispersed during the unrest in Marrakesh.²⁰ Ultimately, Mulāy Zaydān recovered some of these manuscripts and also appropriated books from his brother's collection. Interestingly, contrary to what one might expect, he did not systematically erase Abū Fāris's name; only six ownership marks were altered, and in these cases the name was awkwardly replaced with that of Mulāy Zaydān.²¹ These altered marks provide yet another example of the "crossroads" through which the manuscripts passed.

On the other hand, it happened that, when coming across one of Abū Fāris's *ex libris*, Mulāy Zaydān expressed his resentment toward his brother. Three notes, in particular, convey his feelings with striking clarity. One such example is found in Ms RBME 564:²²

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ.
فَصَارَ مِنْ يَدِ الْمَذْكُورِ أَغْلَاهُ بِالسَّيْفِ وَالرُّمَحِ
وَلَمَّا ضَيَّعَ الْخِلَافَةَ أَخَذَهَا مِنْهُ مَنْ يَسْتَحِقُّهَا شَرْعاً وَطَبْعاً.
زَيْدَانِ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ خَارَ اللَّهُ لَهُ.

¹⁹ Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du sultan*, fig. 7.

²⁰ Al-Ifrānī, *Nuhzat al-ḥādī bi-aḥbār mulūk al-qarn al-ḥādī*, ed. A. Šāḍilī (Casablanca, Matba'at al-najāḥ al-jadīda 1998), al-Faṣṭālī, *Manāhil al-ṣafā*, 'A.K. Kurayyim ed. (Rabat, Maṭbū'at wazārat al-awqāf wa-l-šū'ūn al-islāmiyya wa-l-ṭaqāfa, 1972).

²¹ Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du sultan*, fig. 18.

²² Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du sultan*, fig. 19.

Praise be unto God!
Then [the book] passed, by means of sword and lance,
from the hands of the one whose name is cited above
when he failed in his duty to preserve the caliphate,
into the hands of Zaydān, *amīr al-mu'minīn*--may God
bestow upon him His grace--in the sight of the law
and owing to his character, this latter one having
deserved to be caliph.

One might assume that the manuscripts in the princely collection lay outside the usual circulation of scholarly manuscripts. This was not the case: the Saadians adopted the posture of traditional scholars and sought to situate themselves within a lineage of erudite readers. Evidence of this can be seen, for example, in a mark by Mulāy Zaydān, modestly inserted at the bottom of a list of previous owners.²³ Further confirmation comes from the *ijāzas* issued by Aḥmad al-Manjūr—whom we will encounter shortly—to Sultan Aḥmad al-Manṣūr in Rajab 989/August 1581 (e.g., Ms RBME 267).²⁴ This series of notes offers a rare glimpse of history written “in the first person.”

III. Libraries of Moroccan scholars

Some books in Mulāy Zaydān's library had predominantly Moroccan histories, during which they became part of collections of varying sizes that I have proposed calling “micro-libraries,” belonging to members of the Moroccan scholarly elite. Even when these figures are unknown to biographical dictionaries, the inclusion of their marks within a series can make it possible to tentatively establish a profile of the owner. In isolated cases within the Saadian library, however, such information is often insufficient to draw meaningful conclusions.

These local acquisitions, often involving prominent figures in Morocco's intellectual and political life, allow us to trace the growth of the collection. They also offer, albeit partially, a glimpse into the kinds of small private libraries that were assembled before the bibliophilic activity initiated by Aḥmad al-Manṣūr and his sons. Moroccan (and more generally Maghrebi) ownership marks found in these books present particular challenges, as they often take a form resembling the official sultanic signatures (*'alāmas*) commonly found on state documents.²⁵ While some of these personal signatures are relatively

²³ Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du sultan*, fig. 20.

²⁴ F. Déroche, “Le sultan à l'école. A propos d'une licence délivrée au sultan saadien Aḥmad al-Manṣūr”, *Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, Comptes rendus des séances de l'année 2012* [2013]: 1217-1228.

²⁵ Cf. S. Carro Martín's commentary on signatures in Granada, “*Kātib or muwattiq?* New approaches to the writing of private Arabic documents in Granada”, *Arabica* 66 (2019): 376-378.

legible, many are not. In the absence of a comprehensive corpus that would allow for their identification, we have done our best to decipher them, though some owners remain unidentified.

In the manuscripts, we found evidence relating to Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad al-Wanṣharīsī (d. 914/1508), the eminent jurist of the late ninth/fifteenth and early tenth/sixteenth centuries, who spent his final years in Fez.²⁶ His library, or at least part of it, was dispersed after his death, with ten volumes eventually making their way to El Escorial. These did not all arrive by the same route; nevertheless, scholars in Fez succeeded in limiting the scale of dispersal by getting hold of at least a few copies. For instance, the mark of Aḥmad al-Manjūr (d. 995/1587) appears in at least two, and possibly three, of the volumes that had previously belonged to the author of the *Mi'yār*.²⁷ From al-Manjūr's own library, thirteen volumes remain preserved among those of Mulāy Zaydān, in addition to two copies in his own hand.²⁸ The Fāsī scholar had established a family *waqf* to preserve his library for his children, but they ultimately relinquished the books to one sultan or another.

The largest of the Moroccan micro-libraries incorporated into the Saadian library comprises fifteen volumes once owned by Abū 'Imrān Mūsā b. Abī Bakr b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Ḥāmidī al-Jazūlī. In this case, the notes bring to light a figure absent from the biographical dictionaries. The contents of his manuscripts indicate a marked interest in legal matters, and in one note he describes himself as a *faqīh*.²⁹ Several of his books originated from the collection of a certain Ḥasan al-Rasmūkī, whose identity likewise remains undetermined.³⁰

Minor members of the Saadian family also appear in this context. The name of some of them appears on only a single manuscript, which limits the significance of such "crossroads." One notable figure is Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Qādir al-Ḥasanī, three manuscripts of whom are preserved in Mulāy Zaydān's library, most notably the intriguing Ms RBME 248, a kind of compendium prepared specifically for him.³¹ Particular attention should also be given to 'Abd Allāh b. 'Alī b. Ṭāhir al-Ḥasanī (d. 1045/1635), who hailed from a family of intellectual distinction and, according to documents in the collection, appears to have been an associate

²⁶ V. Lagardère, art. "al-Wanṣharīsī", *EP*, t. XI.

²⁷ Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du sultan*, fig. 27.

²⁸ To this number it may be necessary to add Ms RBME 1125, whose owner is identified by a signature: one reads Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān; the final element is Manjūr (with no al-).

²⁹ See for instance Ms RBME 1049, fol. 1r (also Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du Sultan*, 79-80).

³⁰ Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du Sultan*, fig. 30.

³¹ F. Déroche, "The prince and the scholar. A study of two multiple-text manuscripts from fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Morocco", in *Multiple Text Manuscripts*, A. Bausi, M. Friedrich et M. Maniaci éd. (Berlin: De Gruyter), 2019, 165-191.

of Abū Fāris.³² His name recurs several times, inviting speculation. On three occasions, he is mentioned in connection with Abū Fāris, on whose behalf he witnessed the endowment (*waqf*) of manuscripts to the mosque the prince founded in Marrakech on the site of the *ribāt* of the Sufi Abū al-‘Abbās al-Sabtī (d. 601/1204–1205).³³ Three manuscripts in the Saadian collection belonged to ‘Abd Allāh but appear to have been confiscated by Mulāy Zaydān in retaliation against Abū Fāris’s supporters. On Ms RBME 1128, beneath his *ex libris*, ‘Abd Allāh inscribed two verses of religious inspiration in his own hand.³⁴ Below this, also in his own hand, Mulāy Zaydān penned a sharp rejoinder, disputing what he considered an entirely dishonest implication. He pointed to the circumstances under which, in his view, ‘Abd Allāh had unlawfully acquired the manuscript—namely, during the conflict between Abū Fāris and himself that followed their father’s death and Zaydān’s flight to Tlemcen. If any doubt remained as to Zaydān’s feelings about the loss of his books, this note dispels it completely: he was furious. When the chance for retribution arose, Zaydān did not forget the wrongs he believed he had suffered. This exchange thus strongly suggests that ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alī b. Ṭāhir’s books ultimately came into Zaydān’s possession.

The conquest of Bilād al-Sūdān by Aḥmad al-Manṣūr brought the region directly into Morocco’s sphere of influence, and with it, books from the libraries of Timbuktu.³⁵ Within the Saadian collection, such works are few and, for the most part, are oriental copies likely acquired initially during a pilgrimage. Two are of particular interest for their association with Aḥmad Bābā al-Timbuktī, who lived in Marrakech after the conquest under al-Manṣūr and returned to his birthplace following the sultan’s death. The first, Ms RBME 1057, written in an oriental hand, bears the ownership mark of Aḥmad Bābā’s father, Aḥmad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Umar b. Muḥammad Aqīt³⁶; the second, Ms RBME 1673, carries the mark of his grandfather, Aḥmad b. ‘Umar b. Muḥammad Aqīt.

IV. Beyond Morocco

One of the more unexpected findings in our study of the Saadian collection was that most of the manuscripts had been produced in the East and, in many cases, had only recently arrived in Morocco. The Saadians’ correspondence had already hinted at the

³² See M. Ḥajjī, *L’activité intellectuelle au Maroc à l’époque sa‘dide* (Rabat: Dar El Maghrib, 1976), 225; also what is said there (239–242) of another member of this family, ‘Abd al-Hādī, and of the work he devoted to *jihād*. On ‘Abd Allāh, see al-Ḥuḍaygī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥuḍaygī*, éd. Aḥmad Būmgū (Casablanca: Maṭba‘at al-Najāh al-Jadīda, 2006): 2:455, and al-Ifṛānī, *Ṣafwat man intashar min akhbār ṣulahā’ al-qarn al-ḥādī ‘ashar*, éd. ‘Abd al-Majīd Khayālī (Casablanca: Markaz al-Turāth al-Thaqāfi al-Maghribī, 2004), 40.

³³ Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du Sultan*, fig. 8.

³⁴ Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du Sultan*, fig. 33.

³⁵ See N. Mouline, *Le califat imaginaire: Pouvoir et diplomatie au Maroc au XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2009), 338–354.

³⁶ Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du Sultan*, fig. 35.

East's importance; for instance, it records Aḥmad al-Manṣūr seeking the best means of acquiring books in Cairo, contacting al-Ḥumaydī, the syndic of the city's booksellers, and sending him a list of desired works.³⁷ It is therefore unsurprising to find al-Ḥumaydī's name on several manuscripts. Interestingly, he sold a total of four copies of one of his own compositions—one of them dedicated to Aḥmad al-Manṣūr.³⁸

He was not the only supplier to the Saadians. Two brothers, Yaḥyā al-Mallāḥ and 'Alī al-Mallāḥ, also provided books to the library from Cairo. The notes they left are terse but, fortunately, occasionally dated.³⁹ These annotations offer a clearer picture of how Saadian bibliophilia benefited, albeit for a price, from the services of individuals belonging to Cairo's scholarly circles. This appears to have been the case with the "gift" made to Abū Fāris by al-Buhūtī, as recorded in a note on Ms RBME 1225.⁴⁰ It is reasonable to assume that the Saadians' collecting activities were well known in Cairo and that they had a reputation as reliable and generous patrons.

V. The price of the books

This brings me to the final category of notes we encountered in the manuscripts: prices. Such notations appear frequently, yet they are often unusable, as the currency is rarely specified and/or the date is absent—both essential for determining their exact value.

In this respect, as in others, the Saadian collection preserved at El Escorial is particularly valuable, because it functions, as I suggested earlier, as a kind of "time capsule." We have identified another "crossroad" in the history of the manuscripts: a series of price notes that can be dated with relative precision. One of the manuscripts in the largest group concerned was copied in 1004/1595, allowing us to hypothesize that these prices date from at least between 1004/1595 and the capture of the library in 1612. Even if this range is extended, the currency itself remained remarkably stable.

All the manuscripts in question are written in an oriental script. Their prices fall into two categories: a smaller group recorded in *dīnār* and a larger one in *sulṭānī*. Within each category, it is possible to mark off further subdivisions.⁴¹ The most recent manuscripts in each category, which serve only to set an end-point for the subgroup concerned, are Ms RBME 561 (priced in *dīnār*, dated 993/1585) and Ms RBME 1751 (priced in *sulṭānī*, dated 1004/1595).

³⁷ 'A. Gannūn ed., *Rasā'il sa'diyya* (Tiṭwān : Dār al-Ṭibā'a al-Maghribiyya, 1954), 78-81. On Ḥumaydī, see al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar fī a'yān al-qarn al-ḥādī 'ashar* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-wahība, 1284/1867-1868 [repr. Bayrout: Dār ṣādir, s.d.]), t. 2, 376; A. Masarwa, "al-Ḥumaydī", 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *EF*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_30556.

³⁸ Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du Sultan*, fig. 24.

³⁹ Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du Sultan*, fig. 22.

⁴⁰ Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du Sultan*, fig. 25. On Buhūtī, see al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar*, t. 2, 405.

⁴¹ The findings are summarized in Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du Sultan*, Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4.

The first group comprises twenty-two manuscripts priced in *dīnār*. This group is more heterogeneous than the second, as it includes five manuscripts that cannot be considered part of a unified set; for now, I will set these aside. The remaining copies, all written in an oriental script, fall into two subgroups distinguished by the script in which the price is recorded: eight notes are by the same oriental hand⁴², while nine are in the Maghrebi style but by two different hands.⁴³ A common feature of this group is the absence of fractional currency, except in one case, Ms RBME 545, where the price in *dīnār* is accompanied by an equivalent in a currency known as *‘uthmānī* (to be discussed later). Notably, the first price series in Maghrebi script is associated with two manuscripts, Mss RBME 438 and 1707, both bearing the sultanic *ex libris* of Abū Fāris. This detail may suggest that this group was purchased in accordance with his wishes during his reign.

A second, much larger group comprises forty-nine manuscripts, whose prices are almost invariably expressed in *sulṭānī*.⁴⁴ The use of this Ottoman gold currency is unsurprising: equal in value to the Venetian ducat, it served as a stable and widely recognized standard for commercial transactions. Once again, all the manuscripts are written in the oriental style. In contrast, however, the price notes are uniformly penned in a Maghrebi hand. Taken together, these two groups of notes suggest that the prices reflect purchase values from the Eastern market, most likely Egypt.⁴⁵

Fractional currency appears relatively frequently within the second group. While halves and quarters of the *dīnār* were noted in the first series, here the *sulṭānī* is only ever divided into halves. To express intermediate values, the author (or authors) of the notes generally employed one of three other currencies—most commonly the *‘uthmānī*, followed by the *riyāl*, and finally the *nişf*.

The *‘uthmānī* refers to an Ottoman silver coin, the *akçe*.⁴⁶ R. Bowen notes that “in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Ottoman coin was commonly called simply *‘othmānī*.”⁴⁷ According to Şevket Pamuk, this term was in use in Syria, Palestine, and, to a lesser extent, southeastern Anatolia and Iraq. Pamuk does not list Egypt or the Maghreb among the provinces where the name was employed, likely because other silver coins circulated there—namely, the *nişf* (also known as *medin* or *para*) in Egypt, and the *naşrī*

⁴² Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du Sultan*, Table 3.

⁴³ Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du Sultan*, Tables 1 and 2.

⁴⁴ The actual number is slightly higher, but we have excluded manuscripts whose prices are illegible. On the *sulṭānī*, see R. E. Darley Doran, “‘Othmānī, 9: Numismatics,” *EP*, 8:233-234.

⁴⁵ Déroche, de Castilla and Tahali, *Les livres du Sultan*, Table 4.

⁴⁶ See H. Bowman, “*Akçe*,” *EP*, 1:327-328.

⁴⁷ See Bowman, “*Akçe*,” *EP*, 1:327.

(in Tunisia) and the *aspre* (in Algeria).⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the name *‘uthmānī* appears to have been familiar not only to the Arab subjects of the empire but also to other Arabic-speaking contemporaries, including Moroccans.⁴⁹

The *riyāl* is sufficiently well known that its origins and diffusion need no further discussion here. The origins of the *niṣf*, by contrast, can be traced to the reign of the Mamluk sultan al-Mu’ayyad Shaykh (r. 815–824/1412–1421). In response to the economic instability that marked his rule, the sultan issued coins of genuine silver, including half-*dirhams*, which became known by various names—among them *medin* and *niṣf*.⁵⁰ The Ottomans continued to mint these coins at a fixed rate of one *niṣf* to one and a half *akçe*.⁵¹ Over time, they lost less value than the *akçe*: the exchange rate rose from between forty-one and forty-three to the ducat in 1570, to between forty-five and possibly as high as forty-eight by 1600.⁵²

The manner of indicating the price varies across the manuscripts. The gold coin is typically referred to as *sulṭānī*, though a feminine form, *sulṭāniyya*, also appears—for instance, in Mss RBME 113 and 1304. Paleographic analysis offers a more reliable means of distinguishing between different groups. First, it allows us to identify a set of manuscripts characterized by a distinctive heart-shaped form for the *ṭā*’ in *sulṭānī*.⁵³ Ms RBME 1306 can also be included in this group, despite employing the form *sulṭāniyya*. A second, much larger set of price markings is notable for its abundant vocalic and orthoepic signs. This set is divided into two subsets, based on whether the term *sulṭānī* or *sulṭāniyya* is used. The first subset comprises a series identifiable by its relatively slender script, marked spacing between the *lām* and *ṭā*’ in *sulṭānī*, and a distinctive final *yā*’.⁵⁴ This group also contains examples with a thicker stroke and a final paraph;⁵⁵ two manuscripts with price notes sharing certain traits, including a distinctive rendering of the *-nī* in *sulṭānī*, can be associated with this subset.⁵⁶ The second subset, defined by the use of *sulṭāniyya*, appears in two hands: the first likely belongs to the same scribe as in the preceding subset,⁵⁷ while the second is clearly the work of another.⁵⁸

⁴⁸ See Ş. Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 95.

⁴⁹ See Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire*, 99–100.

⁵⁰ See P. Balog, “History of the *dirhem* in Egypt from the Fatimid conquest until the collapse of the Mamluk Empire (358H–922H/968AD–1517AD),” *Revue Numismatique* 6 (1961): 142; also P. M. Holt, “Al-Mu’ayyad Shaykh,” *EP*, 7:273–274.

⁵¹ See Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire*, 96.

⁵² See Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire*, 97, Table 6.2.

⁵³ Mss RBME 247, 533, 661, 714, 1204, 1245, and 1379; perhaps also Mss RBME 901, 1220, and 1511.

⁵⁴ Mss RBME 84, 101, 644, 648, 959, 1000, 1605, and 1701.

⁵⁵ Mss RBME 184, 1327, 1383, and 1418.

⁵⁶ Mss RBME 179 and 685.

⁵⁷ Mss RBME 159, 220, 1219, 1589.

⁵⁸ Mss RBME 51, 113, 213, 284, 1048, 1304, 1355, 1427, and 1469.

The price recorded on Ms RBME 1751 is particularly noteworthy: three *dīnār sulṭānī*. From this we may conclude that the traditional name for the gold coin, *dīnār*, was also used to designate the Ottoman *sulṭānī*. Consequently, the prices expressed in *dīnār* (see above) can be treated placed on a equal footing with those in *sulṭānī*. Similarly, in Ms RBME 63, the price is given as *sabʿa mathāqīl sulṭāniyya wa-niṣf mithqāl sulṭānī* (7.5 *sulṭānī*). This formulation suggests that another equivalence—between *mithqāl* and *sulṭānī*—was commonly recognized. The handwriting in this note belongs to the second subset described earlier. At the conclusion of our investigation into the Saadian collection, we were able to compile a list of sixty-six manuscripts with prices recorded in a specific currency and within a defined time frame. Analyzing this data will provide a more detailed picture of the book economy in the Muslim world, especially in Egypt toward the end of the tenth/sixteenth century. Moreover, we will be able to draw comparisons with printed books prices in contemporary Europe thanks to the equivalence between the Ottoman *sulṭānī* and the Venetian ducat.

Conclusion

The notes tell us not only the history of the manuscript itself, but also, at the various “crossroads” I have outlined, multiple interconnected stories. The implications are wide-ranging and touch on several fields. First, there is the realm of “grand history”: the broader historical context of the period in which these notes were added to the manuscripts. In this case, it is the history of the Saadian dynasty, its ideological choices, and its conflicts. In some instances, the notes also shed light on the sentiments of the key actors and their perceptions of contemporary events. Intellectual history is equally at stake: the “path” of these manuscripts crossed that of scholars and students, revealing their interests. In the case of the Saadians, the books they ordered to be copied for themselves, and those they actively sought, illuminate their intellectual orientations and projects. Finally, and importantly, the notes provide new, concrete evidence for the economic history of books towards the end of the late tenth/sixteenth century, evidence that, by fortunate circumstance, we have the keys to decipher the meaning.

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