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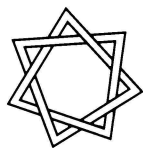
IDENTIFYING "ACEPHALOUS" MANUSCRIPTS

Since Arabic manuscripts began to be collected over the last five centuries in Europe, European librarians seem to have come to distinguish between "good" and "bad" manuscripts. A "good" manuscript is a complete manuscript, with the beginning and the end, written in clear handwriting, and preferably a holograph copy. A "good" manuscript traditionally must have a beginning containing information on its provenance and authorship. Such information includes an *invocatio* (or in Arabic *basmala*), followed by the name of the author (or his pen-name) introduced by the word *qāla* ("said"), definition of the subject of the book, and its title after the words *wa-samaituhu* ("...and I called it..."). All manuscripts lacking these features are automatically considered deficient or "bad", since the lack of the indications enumerated above for a "good" manuscript impedes unambiguous identification of manuscripts and their classification. In other words, such "bad" manuscripts cannot be easily catalogued because of the lack of necessary data about their authors, scribes, and exact titles.

However, in contrast to a modern researcher, the presence or lack of this information has never been terribly important to an Arab reader. Unlike a European collector, the most important thing to him was the text itself, and only after that the name of the author and the title. That often the name of the author was not so important is seen from an example of the tenth-century Arab geographer al-Muqaddasī. In the introduction to his *Aḥsan at-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm* ("The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions"), he made an interesting observation about this particular feature:

> "Also I saw a book in the library of *al-ṣāhib*, [whose] authorship was ascribed to Abū Zayd al-Balḥī, and with maps. I also saw a copy of exactly the same book in Naysābūr, ... the name of the author was not given, though some credit its authorship to Ibn al-Marzubān al-Karḥī. I saw a copy of the same book in Buḥārā [too], [and its] authorship was ascribed to Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Fārisī. This latter ascription is most correct, for I have met with a number of persons who were acquainted with him and actually saw him composing [the book]..." [1].

Second, the fact that Arab readers were primarily interested in the texts themselves and only after that in their proper attribution is attested by a great number of convolutes kept in various libraries. These convolutes usually consist of fragments of various works written on a particular subject, sewn together. The same holds true for manuscripts which lack the first and the last page. Anonymous or "acephalous" for a modern European reader, these manuscripts were regarded by the Arabs themselves exactly like those including information on their titles and authorship. Because of the specific nature of Arabic learning the lack of the title or the name of the author was not a crucial matter. In the course of learning, Arab students usually mastered texts by heart. For this reason, for the readers who were familiar with a particular subject, the "acephalous" books or convolutes were not at all anonymous. Knowing by heart a number of books on a particular subject, they usually were able to identify a "bad" copy, while for a modern European cataloguer or researcher, this sort of manuscripts is among the most difficult to identify, since he/she usually is not so well-versed in Arabic texts. Even if the authorship of a particular passage is established, uncertainty still remains concerning whether the whole work may be unambiguously identified on the basis of the passage. It was quite a common practice for Arab scholars to compile their sources *in extenso*, including large parts of works which belonged to other authors; thereby they composed new writings of their own. Such a method of compilation, in their view, had nothing to do with plagiarism, which can be confirmed by another quotation from al-Muqaddasī:

> "I saw his (al-Ghayhānī's — *N. S.*) work in seven volumes in the libraries of 'Aḍud al-Dawla, though not ascribed to him. True, some ascribe the authorship to Ibn Khurradāḍbih. Also I have seen in Naysābūr, two succinct works, of which one is ascribed to al-Ghayhānī [and] the other bears the name of Ibn Khurradāḍbih as the author. They agree with each other in substance, except that al-Ghayhānī has provided some additional matter [2].

This specific method of compilation, along with missing beginnings and endings, makes the cataloguing of the "acephalous" manuscripts an incredibly difficult task for a modern scholar. Often such manuscripts are not even included in published catalogues. However, this is far from reflecting the genuine Arabic manuscript tradition, for it does not in fact take into consideration numerous manuscripts which were read and known. Therefore, the aim of the present article is to suggest some methods of cataloguing "acephalous" manuscripts. These methods have been worked out and used in the course of preparing the "Wellcome Catalogue of the Arabic Medical Manuscripts". If applied consistently, it can facilitate the identification of such difficult manuscripts and consequently to include

الفصل الاول مضمونه الزهد في الدنيا واظهار عيوبها

الفصل الثاني في ان الدهر واعظ بليغ والعالم مصحف كبير

وان العاقل وحده يفهم ما يقولانه لا سيما الطويل العمر

الفصل الثالث في قصر حياتنا وحساستها وباي شي تشبه

الفصل الرابع في الموت مطلقا

الفصل الخامس في عذوبة الموت وان كثيرين تمنوا المنية

الفصل السادس في قطع العوايد الردية وبيان الطبيعة

المفسورة بالخطية

الفصل السابع في الشدايد والبلايا التي تعتري البشر في الدنيا

الفصل الثامن في منفعة التجارب وان كل شر لا بد من ان يوجد فيه   خير ما

الفصل التاسع مضمونه الزهد في صحبة بني البشر وايضاح

غدرهم وظلمهم

الفصل العاشر في انه لا باس بمعاشرة العلا والعقلا ومباشرة

بعض اناس للافادة

الفصل الحادي عشر مضمونه الزهد في الاولاد

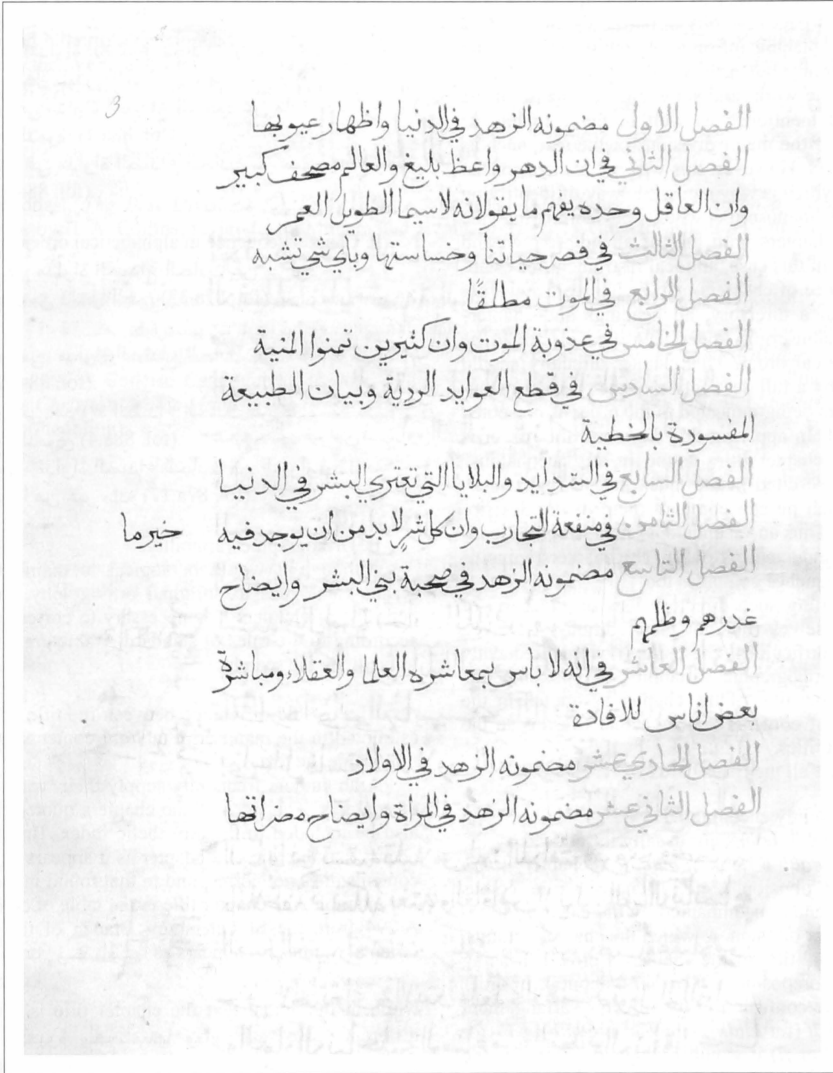الفصل الثاني عشر مضمونه الزهد في المراة وايضاح مضراتها

Fig. 1

them in the existing *corpus* of identified Arabic manuscripts in Europe. Such identification is highly desirable since it enables one to introduce a considerable number of hitherto neglected Arabic manuscripts for the first time. It may also help to cast more light on the Arabic manuscript tradition as well as to elucidate the real use of manuscripts in the Arab world.

The method suggested here can be called chapter directory. It should be noted that Arab scribes and authors who took care of possible damage to a manuscript — the loss of the beginning or pages (wholly or partially), etc. — tried to "defend" it by placing information about the work not only at the beginning but also in other parts of the text. Thus the title of the work, and sometimes the name of the author, might be mentioned as well in the colophon or at the beginning of the major divisions of the text, such as sections or chapters. However, this was not always consistently practiced, which is why a possible way of identifying an "acephalous" manuscript would be comparing the **sequence** of its chapters with that of already known and identified works. In this case, an ideal instrument for establishing the sequence of chapters may be to create a chapter directory. In such a directory, all headings and chapters *incipits* of the manuscripts under identification are to be listed in alphabetical order. This chapter directory should be accompanied by a full description of the relevant manuscript, the chapters being indicated in the order as presented in the manuscript. In applying this directory, the reader is able to compare chapter titles found in an "acephalous" manuscript to those cited in the index and to find coincidences, after which he can compare them to the descriptions themselves. Thus an "acephalous" manuscript's identification can be conducted not only if the chapters coincide but also if their sequence coincides too.

Surely, compiling such directory lists on the basis of manuscripts themselves (but not their editions) is linked with a number of difficulties. These are: (i) words frequently encountered; (ii) orthographic variability; (iii) possible difference between the title of the chapter as quoted in the manuscript table of contents and its actual title inside the text; (iv) deficient titles.

Let us consider all the cases here.

I. Words frequently encountered.

Chapters in Arabic books are usually introduced by the following words: *kitāb* ("book"), *maqāla* ("chapter"), *bāb* ("chapter"), *faṣl* ("division"), etc. Then, as a rule, comes the number, frequently accompanied by the exact information about the larger division, to which the chapter belongs. After that the actual title of the chapter is provided, being introduced by the prepositions *fī* or *'an* ("about"). In order to avoid a possible confusion in the directory arrangement under the letters *kāf* (for *kitāb*), *mīm* (for *maqāla*), *bā'* (for *bāb*), *fā'* (for *faṣl* or *fī*) it would be logical to arrange the alphabetical list of the chapters under the first contents-communicative word. For example, a chapter entitled —

الباب ال خامس والعشرون فى مداواة العشق

(*Al-bāb al-khāmis wa-l-'ashrūna fī Madāwāt al-'Ishq*) — "Chapter twenty-five. About treatment of love" — should not be placed in the directory list under the letter *alīf*, but under the letter *mīm*, with which the word *madāwā* ("treatment") begins. Consequently, the original sequence of chapters, as given in the manuscript, needs to be altered.

For example:

Al-Maghūsī, *Kāmil al-Ṣinā'at al-Ṭibbiyya al-ma'rūf bi-l-Malakī* [3].

1. An original sequence:

الباب الثانى فى مداواة الصداع الحادث من الحرارة اذا كان
ذلك مفردا من غير مادة (fol. 87a.17).

الباب الثالث فى مداواة الصداع الحادث عن حرارة الثمس
(fol. 87a.32).
الباب الرابع فى مداواة الصداع الحادث عن حرارة مفردة
تحر كت من داخل البدن (fol. 87b.10).
الباب الخامس فى مداواة الصداع الحادث عن مادة
واولا الصداع الدموىّ (fol. 88a.4).
الباب السادس فى مداواة الصداع الحادث عن سوء مزاج
بارد مفرد (fol. 88a.22).

2. Chapter sequence in alphabetical order in the index:

الباب الرابع فى مداواة الصداع الحادث عن حرارة
مفردة تحر كت من داخل البدن (fol. 87a.32).

الباب السادس فى مداواة الصداع الحادث عن سوء مزاج
بارد مفرد (fol. 88a.22).
الباب الخامس فى مداواة الصداع الحادث عن مادة
واولا الصداع الدموىّ (fol. 88a.4).
الباب الثانى فى مداواة الصداع الحادث من الحرارة اذا
كان ذلك مفردا من غير مادة (fol. 87a.17).

II. Orthographic variability.

Although it would be logical to maintain in manuscripts catalogues the original orthography, in the alphabetic list of chapters it is necessary to correct orthography according to the rules of standard Arabic grammar in order to facilitate the search.

III. Possible difference between the title of the chapter as quoted in the manuscript table of contents and its actual title inside the text.

Arab authors frequently supply their works with tables of contents. The titles of the chapters quoted there should also be included in the alphabetic index. But it frequently occurs that the title of a chapter as it appears in the table of contents does not correspond to that found in the text itself. For example, the chapter title in the table of contents in MS A 294 from the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies [4] appears as فى قصر حيتا وخساستها
وباى شى تشبه
while in the actual text the chapter title is given slightly different: فى قصر الحيوة وخساستها وباى شى تشبه.
In this case, the alphabetic list should contain the title of the chapter as it is present in the table of contents, with a variant from the main body of the text in square brackets: فى
قصر حيتا [الحيوة] وخساستها وباى شى تشبه.

To cite only two examples [5]:

فى عذوية الموت وان كثيرين تمنوا المنية [الموت]:
فى الشدايد والبلايا التي تعترى البشر فى الدنيا
[البلايا الشاملة جميع النّاس].

IV. Deficient titles.

It occurs sometimes that there is no special title of a chapter available, and the title is denoted only by the words like *al-bāb al-awwal* ("Chapter one"), and so on. In this particular case, the chapter title should be invented artificially by adding some words from the beginning of the chapter, which could be called "an artificial *incipit*".

Concerning the preliminary results of the manuscript identification method suggested I must say that at present I have compiled an alphabetical list of chapters for more than one hundred hitherto uncatalogued manuscripts which are preserved at the Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Medicine. The method has enabled me to establish the correct titles of the following works, represented by manuscripts with neither beginnings nor ends:

1. WMS AR 191, al-Shaizarī, *Kitāb mihāyat al-rutba fī ṭalab al-ḥisba* (Ullmann, *Die Medizin im Islam*, Leiden—Köln, p. 196).

2. WMS AR 219, Naghīb al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, *Kitāb al-asbāb wa-l-'alāmāt* (*ibid.*, p. 170).

3. WMS AR 221, Abū Sahl Sa'īd b. 'Abd al-'Azīz an-Nīlī, A recension of *Kitāb al-'ashr maqālāt fī l-'ayn* (*ibid.*, p. 206).

4. WMS AR 222, Abū'l-Munā b. Abī Naṣr al-Kūhīn al-'Aṭṭār al-Isra'īlī, *Kitāb minhāgh al-dukkān* (*ibid.*, p. 309).

5. WMS AR 225, Muḥammad Akhbar 'Araf Muḥammad Arzānī, *Kitāb ḥudūd al-Amrāḍ*.

Notes

1. Al-Muqaddasī, *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions*. A translation of *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī Ma'rifat al-Aqālīm*, trans. by B. A. Collins, reviewed by Muḥammad Ḥamīd al-Ṭayyi', Centre for Muslim Contributions to Civilizations, 1998, p. 5.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

3. Al-Maghūsī, *Kāmil al-ṣinā'at al-ṭibbiyya al-ma'rūf bi-l-malakī*, WMS AR (Haddād 9.2). Cf. فهرست المخطوطات الطبية العربية في مكتبة الد كتور سامي ابراهيم حداد. وضعه فريد سامي حدّاد بالاشتراك مع هانس هينرش بيسترفيلد حلب ١٤٠٤ / ١٩٨٤ رقم ١٩.

4. *Rayḥānat al-arwāḥ wa-sullam al-adab wa-l-ṣalāḥ* by Mkrdīgh al-Kasīḥ. See *Arabskie Rukopisi. Kratkiĭ Katalog* (Arabic manuscripts. A Concise Catalogue) (Moscow, 1988), No. 10510; see also Val. Polosin, V. Polosin, N. Serikoff, *Catalogue of the Christian Arabic Manuscripts Preserved at the St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Studies*, eds. N. Serikoff and H. Teule (forthcoming).

5. *Ibid.*

Illustrations

Fig. 1. *Rayḥānat al-arwāḥ wa-sullam al-adab wa-l-ṣalāḥ*, manuscript A 294 in the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, 18th century, Syria, *fihrist*, fol. 3 a, 15.6×20.1 cm.