

ISLAMIC MANUSCRIPTS IN THE WORLD, PT. II

World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts. Volume II. General editor: Geoffrey Roper. London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation 1993, pp. vi + 724. \$143

As in my review of vol. I of the *World Survey* (*SAJHS*, 3, 1992, 187-9), I shall concentrate on volume II's value to the study of Islamic Africa. As one might expect, the country studies vary greatly in quality, reflecting both the research that has been done and the skill of the individual compilers. Thus, to choose only two, the surveys of manuscripts in the Netherlands (pp. 357-83) by Jan Just Witkam and of Morocco (301-44) by Al-Mustafa Ben AbdAllah Boushouk are models of their kind.

The African countries surveyed in volume II are the Ivory Coast (119-32; Baba Yunus Muhammad), Kenya (153-62: Ahmad Shaykh Nabhany, Yahya Ali Omar and D.C. Sperling), Madagascar (229-37; Hamid Haji), Malawi (241-57; Augustine Misiska), Mali (275-88; Baba Yunus Muhammad), Morocco, Niger (391-405; Djibrill Abu Bakr) and Nigeria (409-30; Abdur Rahman I. Doi). In other words, the volume includes some of the most important African countries in terms of their Islamic scholarly traditions.

The Mali and Nigeria surveys represent a kind of 'halfway' house. When the catalogue of the materials at the Centre Aḥmad Baba in Timbuktu and volume II of the *Arabic Literature of Africa* (covering Northern Nigeria) are published, we shall know much more. However, referring the reader to Sir Charles Orr, *The Making of Northern [sic for Modern] Nigeria* (London 1965) as an introduction to the history Muslim Nigeria is hardly adequate in 1994.

Large numbers of manuscripts turn up in some surprising places, for example in Malawi (including some in Chichewa), and surprisingly few elsewhere, for example in Kenya, but here the reasons for the unexpected paucity are well explained by the compilers—in essence the demise of the old generation who knew, valued and used what they had and the ignorance of the

young—reasons that will be familiar to researchers in other parts of Muslim Africa. The surveys of Malawi, Mali, the Ivory Coast and Niger especially raise the question of what constitutes a manuscript collection and whether it is a public collection or not. Descriptions of what are essentially teaching libraries of manuscripts, many of which will undoubtedly turn out to be handwritten copies of printed works, given under the name of a *mallam* or shaykh, followed by a P.O. Box number in up-country Malawi and Mali may have very little real utility. There is also the problem of imprecision, ‘old paper’ versus ‘very old paper’ (Niger, *passim*), or spurious precision; 40 per cent of 960 manuscripts in a private Tijāni collection in Boundiali (Ivory Coast) are said to date from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. *A priori* this seems unlikely.

Another quibble is a lack of tight editing—^oUthmān Dan Fodio and ^oUthmān b. Fūdī are separately indexed. I was somewhat bemused by the description of a manuscript from Mangochi (Malawi) which ‘comprises songs in praise of Allah during the time of Abdul Kadar Jilan’ (p. 249), that is Qādirī *awrād* and *aḥzāb*, but presumably not written in the time of al-Jilānī as the description implies. Nor is Trinity College (Dublin) in Britain (p. 62).

A number of African manuscripts turn up in relatively unlikely places. Trinity College possesses a manuscript of a prayer, ‘partly in Arabic and partly in an unidentified African language. According to a note in English it was written by a Muslim ‘priest’ [i.e., an *imām*], who was a freed slave in a British regiment in Jamaica in 1817, for the colonel of the regiment. It is thus one of the earliest examples of written Arabic in the New World’ (p. 62–63). Swahili manuscripts are noted at Trinity (p. 62), Naples (p. 93), and Rabat (p. 317); Hausa and Fulfulde are found in Rome (p. 100), Leiden (p. 366) and possibly Warsaw (p. 615).

The *World Survey* is a useful work. For Africanists it is frustrating to be given a glimpse, but no more, of what remains to be done.

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