

### MANUSCRIPTS III: SHINQĪṬ AND WĀDĀN

*Fihris makḥṭūṭāt Shinqīṭ wa-Wādān / Handlist of Manuscripts in Shinqīṭ and Wādān*, compiled by Aḥmad Wuld Muḥammad Yaḥyā, ed. by Ulrich Rebstock. London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation 1417/1997. 497 pp.

A total of 1,106 items are listed from twelve private collections—six in Wādān, and six in Shinqīṭ. The format for entries follows approximately the format of other Furqān Foundation Africa handlists—a format built into the computer software set up by Knut Vikør. The physical condition is generally noted, but ‘remarks’ are few and far between and usually also refer to a feature of the manuscript rather than to the work itself. The box ‘script’ (*al-khatt*) has been faithfully filled in; it is almost invariably ‘Maghribī’. Copyists names are given, but there is no collective index of copyists. References to standard bibliographical and biographical tools are given at the end of each entry. There seems to be a problem with the computer software, or with the way it is being handled, when it comes to writing dates running over two years. The years are reversed, so that the corresponding years for 1297 (*hijra*) are given as 1880-79 (item. 288), and for 1270, the years are given as 1804-3 (item 289), and so on.

A curious feature of these libraries is the paucity of works of local authorship in them. A glance through the *Handlist* reveals that only about 10 per cent of the works are apparently of Mauritanian or West African origin. The vast bulk of the items are from the wide repertoire of works of North African or Middle Eastern origin in the fields of *adab*, *fiqh*, *tawḥīd*, *taṣawwuf*, and *naḥw*. The most popular works are the *Mukhtaṣar* of Khalīl, the *Risāla* of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī, the *Alfiyya* of Ibn Mālik, and the *Qāmūs* of al-Fayrūzābādī. The most popular author is (as

usual) 'Majhūl'.

Again, as usual, there are some problems with the indexes. Authors are listed both by their personal/father's/grandfather's names, by filiation (*ibn*) when appropriate, and—*al-ḥamdu li'llāh*—by *nisbas*. But these give a bit of trouble in the early pages. Thus we have the following sequence of entries of words beginning with *hamza*: after al-Imām b. Abī Ḥātim comes al-Ḥasan, then al-Ḥusayn, then al-Khaṭāʾ, etc. where the *lām* of the definite article is being treated as an indexable letter. This continues through until we arrive at al-Shaykh al-Sayyid al-Mukhtār [al-Kuntī], where the titles 'shaykh' and 'sayyid' are also being taken into consideration in alphabetization. Then suddenly after al-Qaṣrī we have al-Mukhtār and then al-Amīr, al-Anbārī and al-Andalusī. Fortunately the problem stops there. There are indexes of authors, titles and subjects (broad fields, not sub-classified), but no index of first lines of poetry, since none are given in the analyses of works, nor are any opening phrases given. In fact, there would scarcely be any need for such an index, even if first lines had been recorded. Quite surprisingly, there are only six items called *qaṣīda* and twenty-five called *naẓm*. A marked contrast with other collections examined.

Technically, this *Handlist* is of a high level of competence, if we overlook the small alphabetization problem mentioned above. Its interest for students of local scholarly production, however, is small. Nevertheless, it sheds light on the composition of private libraries of the region. From it we can gain an idea of which works were read in the region, and these may be compared to other regions of western Africa where the content of private libraries is known. It is also useful to be able to see how wide a spread of works found their way into private libraries, beyond the common teaching texts.

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