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## **Pre-History of a Collection: Owners' Marks in the Manuscripts of Muḥammad 'Ayyād al-Ṭanṭāwī<sup>1</sup>**

DOI: 10.55512/wmo642235

Submitted: November 01, 2024.

Accepted: January 15, 2025.

*Abstract:* The history and sources of the manuscript collection of Muḥammad 'Ayyād al-Ṭanṭāwī (1810–1861), an Egypt-born professor at the St. Petersburg University, are studied in this article through ownership statements and other notes found on the pages of the books. They demonstrate numerous ties that link the manuscripts with the historical, educational and cultural landscape of the 16th–19th cc. Egypt and contribute to our understanding of the importance of this collection as a whole entity. It does not just reflect Ṭanṭāwī's personal scholarly interests, but rather provides a wider scope of vision encompassing the intellectual background that formed the Sheikh's personality.

*Key words:* Arabic manuscripts, codicology, Muḥammad 'Ayyād al-Ṭanṭāwī, history of manuscript collections

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In 1871 the St. Petersburg University acquired manuscripts that had belonged to Muḥammad b. Sa'd b. Sulaymān 'Ayyād al-Ṭanṭāwī al-Shāfi'ī (1810–1861), a collection of unique character in Russia, created by a man of unusual destiny. Born in Nijrid near the town of Tanta in the Nile Delta, Ṭanṭāwī received his education at the famous Cairo University of al-Azhar and began his teaching career there. In 1840 he came to St. Petersburg “with

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<sup>1</sup> Supported by the research grant from the Russian Scientific Foundation, project No. 23-28-01748 “On-line Manuscript Database as a Research Tool: Electronic Publication and Study of the Arabic Manuscripts Collection of the St. Petersburg University Professor Sheikh Muhammad al-Tantawi (1810–1861) at the Oriental Department of the SPbU Scientific Library”.

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the highest permission... for teaching Arabic literature at the Educational Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs”,<sup>2</sup> and in 1847 started teaching at the University as an extraordinary professor.

The Ṭaṇṭāwī collection was formed predominantly in Egypt, most of its manuscripts the sheikh brought with him to Russia in 1840, adding some books in 1844 during his only voyage to his homeland after the relocation. Both their appearance and content reflect the peculiarities of the region’s book culture in the early 19th c. The overwhelming majority of the collection consists of books copied in Egypt, in the Syro-Palestinian region and North Africa. This is indeed the feature that distinguishes the Ṭaṇṭāwī collection from those formed on the territory of Russia, which consisted of Islamic manuscripts produced and circulated in the Middle East, Central Asia, the Caucasus and the region of Volga and Western Siberia. The collection of the first dean of the Oriental Faculty of the St. Petersburg University, Alexander Kazembek, kept at the University library and acquired in the same year 1871 is a good example. The repertory of the works collected by Ṭaṇṭāwī is obviously dictated not only by the tastes and interests of the owner, but reflects the range of texts that were studied and circulated in the scholarly environment of Egypt in the early 19th c. Many of the authors are from Egypt and North Africa, and several manuscripts are copied in the characteristic Maghribi handwriting.

Notes left on the pages of these manuscripts by the Sheikh himself became one of the sources for writing his biography, which was compiled by I.Iu. Krachkovskii.<sup>3</sup> Before the books entered Ṭaṇṭāwī’s possession, however, most of them had changed many owners, some of whom left traces of their ownership on their pages. In this article, we focus on such earlier notes, among which we found some left by rather famous people.

### **Ms. O. 737 — Abū Bakr b. Rustam b. Aḥmad al-Shirwānī and ‘Azmī-zāda Ḥālātī (Azmizade Haleti)**

This manuscript, Ms. O. 737, was previously described in detail in an article on the attribution and dating of its binding<sup>4</sup>. Its most interesting feature is that the body of the manuscript, containing the text of a *Qaṣīda* by the fa-

<sup>2</sup> KRACHKOVSKII 1958: 256.

<sup>3</sup> KRACHKOVSKII 1929 (reprinted 1958).

<sup>4</sup> YASTREBOVA 2024.

mous philologist Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Azdī known as Ibn Durayd (c. 837–933), was copied 10 *Shaʿbān* 945 / 8 February 1539, whereas the binding is much older and once belonged to a multi-volume manuscript, most probably of the Qurʾan. Two other book-covers from the same set are now in the possession of the Khalili collection<sup>5</sup> and the Berlin State Library (Wetzstein II 423).<sup>6</sup> The first page (Pl. 1) of this small manuscript (18.0×13.5 cm, 17 ff.) bears two interesting inscriptions. The one in the upper left corner of the page is the statement of ownership written by the Ottoman learned bibliophile, calligrapher and statesman Abū Bakr b. Rustam b. Aḥmad al-Shirwānī (d. 1135/1722):<sup>7</sup> *حسبى الله من كتب ابى بكر بن رستم بن احمد*: “God is sufficient for me! From the books of Abū Bakr b. Rustam b. Aḥmad al-Shirwānī”. A number of manuscripts that once belonged to his very important and rich collection have been detected in the National Library of France<sup>8</sup> and in other places.

A philological remark in the upper central part is accompanied with an inscription that attributes it to the hand of ʿAzmi-zāda (هذا بخط عظمي زاده), who can be identified with the Ottoman scholar, statesman and poet who used the pen-name Ḥālātī (1570–1631). Coincidentally, his life at the early stage of his career was for a while connected with Egypt, where he occupied the position of *qāḍī* of Cairo and district governor (kaymakam, *qāʾim-maqām*). Later, in 1621, after performing judicial duties in Bursa, Edirne, Sam and Istanbul he returned to Cairo as a judge for some time, but did not stay there long. His private library reportedly consisted of 4000 volumes of books and 100 collected manuscripts, and it is also known that he often wrote marginal notes.<sup>9</sup>

### Ms. O. 685 — Muḥammad al-Shurunbābī

The manuscript (21.0×15.0 cm, 243 ff.) (Pl. 2), written on white laid paper with chain-lines, watermarked with a six-pointed star (which can be seen on ff. 123–130, 122–131, 164 and some others), contains a number of colophons, although none of them mention the date of copying. It is a collection

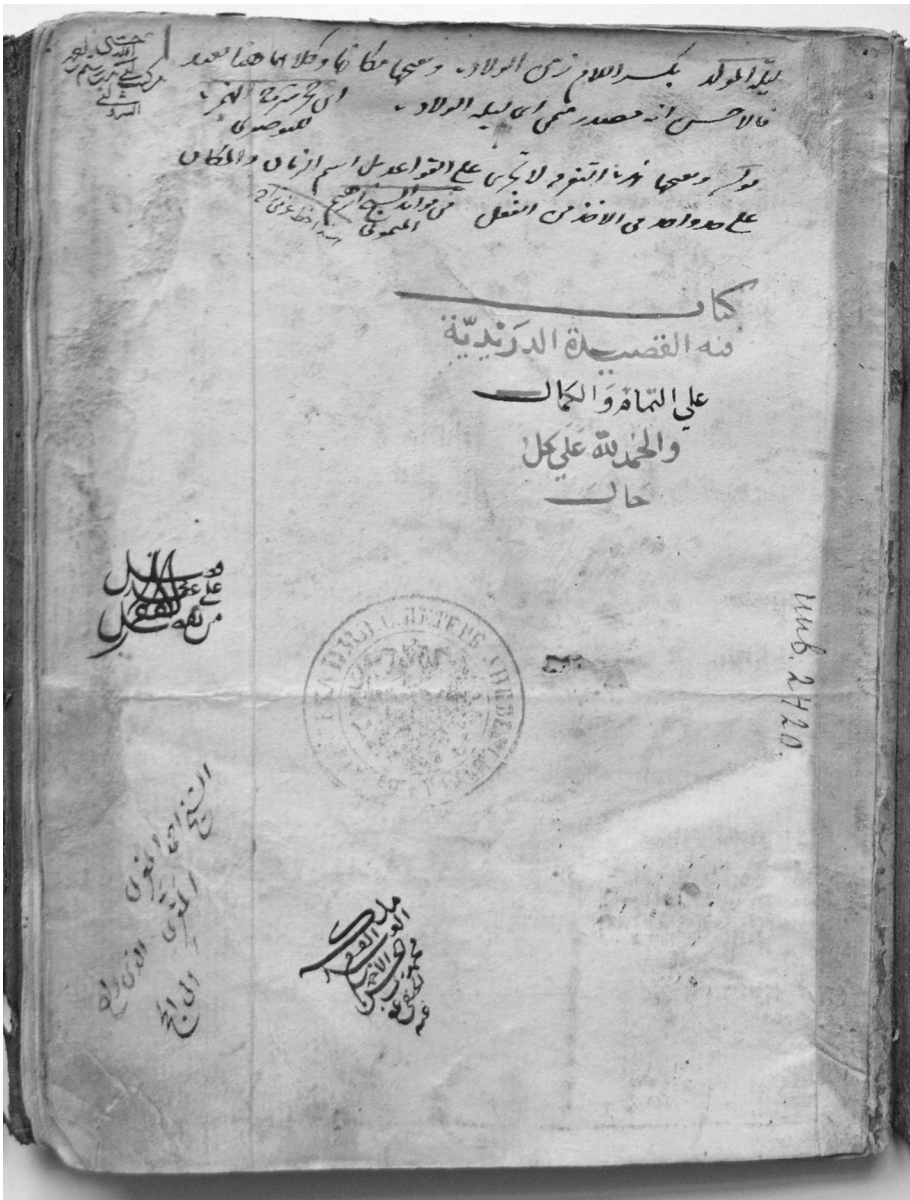
<sup>5</sup> James 1992: 30, 31–32

<sup>6</sup> AHLWART 1894, no. 8347: 331; WEISSWEILER 1962, no. 133, 117, Abb. 17.

<sup>7</sup> RICHARD 1999; FUʾAD SAYYID 2003: 21–22.

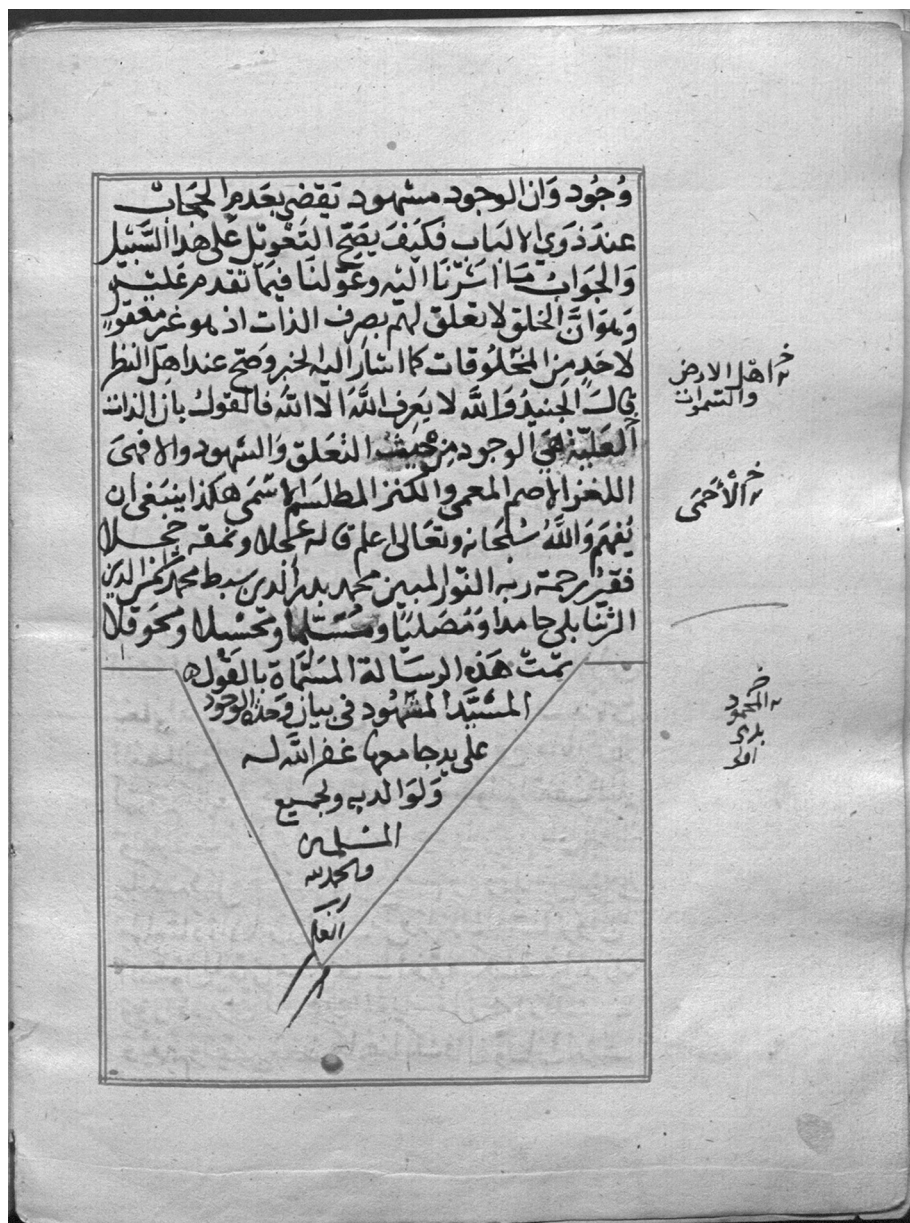
<sup>8</sup> RICHARD 1999: 81.

<sup>9</sup> AÇIL 2019: 432–433.



Pl. 1.

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Azdī, *al-Qaṣīda al-Duraydiyya*. Egypt or Syria,  
10 Sha'ban 945 / 8 February 1539. M. Gorky Scientific Library of SPbU,  
Call No. Ms. O. 737, f. 1r. Courtesy of the Library.



Pl. 2.

Collected manuscript. Egypt, before 1768. M. Gorky Scientific Library of SPbU,  
Call No. Ms. O. 685, f. 234v, colophon. Courtesy of the Library.



Pl. 3.

Abū'l-Thanā' Maḥmūd ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iṣfahānī,  
*Maṭālī 'al-anzār fī sharḥ ṭawālī 'al-anwār*. MENA region, 15th c.

M. Gorky Scientific Library of SPbU, Call No. Ms. O. 688, fol. 1r. Courtesy of the Library.

of 27 texts, mostly connected with different aspects of Sufism, transcribed by its owner, compiler and copyist who mentions his name in a number of colophons as Muḥammad b. Badr al-Dīn al-Shāfi'ī b. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shurunbābilī, or Sibṭ al-Shams (i.e. the grandson of Shams al-Dīn). Its contents was studied by O.B. Frolova<sup>10</sup> who stressed the fact that the compiler of the book, who happens to be also the author of some texts included in the collection, had strong interest in mysticism and the philosophy of *taṣawwuf*, as well as an inclination to occult sciences.

Information about the compiler's background and biography can be found in the work *ʿAdjāʾib al-āthār fī l-tarādjim wa l-akhbār* by the famous Egyptian historian ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Djabartī (1753–1825). He reports that Sibṭ al-Shams was a scholar, *imām*, writer and poet, the grandson and son of the authoritative Egyptian theologians Shams al-Shurunbābilī and Badr ad-Dīn al-Shāfi'ī. The family apparently came from a settlement located northeast of Tanta (modern name Shubra Babil). He studied with prominent sheikhs of his era, and his works were widely disseminated. He was especially interested in linguistics and genealogy, and in addition, wrote treatises refuting the views of Ibn ʿArabī. Djabartī mentions that one of these texts was burnt, together with other books, right after its composition when al-Shurunbābilī's house caught fire in the middle of the night, but the author would not take it as a warning and did not change his views. He died in Muharram 1182 / May-June 1768 and was buried next to his grandfather, Shams al-Shurunbābilī.<sup>11</sup>

### Ms. 688 — Ibn ʿIrāq

A copy of *Maṭāliʿ al-anzār fī sharḥ ṭawāliʿ al-anwār* by the 14th c. theologian and philologist Abū l-Thanaʾ Maḥmūd ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Iṣfahānī lacks a colophon and thus its exact date of copying is unknown. The manuscript (27.3×9.0 cm, 168 ff.), written on Oriental laid paper with groups of three chain-lines, can be dated by its codicological features to the 15th c. On the first page (Pl. 3) there are several inscriptions related to the history of the manuscript and its owners, from which we can draw the conclusion that the book could be copied in Syria, or at least was circulating there for some time. The most striking inscription, written in bold calligraphic *thuluth* script, is accompanied with a lobed hexagonal stamp. Unfortunately, both

<sup>10</sup> FROLOVA 1987.

<sup>11</sup> DJABARTI 1997: II, 496.

the stamp and the name in the inscription are erased, but what remains of the note reads as follows: ملكه العبد الفقير... الكافل بدمشق الشام رحمه الله تعالى امين — “The property of the poor servant... the protector in Damascus, Syria, may God Almighty have mercy on him. Amen!” The title *al-kāfil* — “protector” may indicate that the owner of the manuscript was one of the Mamluk governors of Damascus.

Of the other three possession notes one bears the name of certain Muḥammad al-Dāwudī (في نوبة العبد الفقير الى الله تعالى محمد الداودي عفى عنه وغفر له) — “In the turn of the poor servant of God Almighty, Muḥammad al-Dāwudī, may God forgive him and pardon him. Amen!”); in another the owner’s name is blacked out (... الحمد له تعالى من من ذي البقاء والوجود على محمد (?) — “Praise be to God Almighty! From the bounty of the One who is Eternal and Everlasting, upon Muḥammad(?)...”).

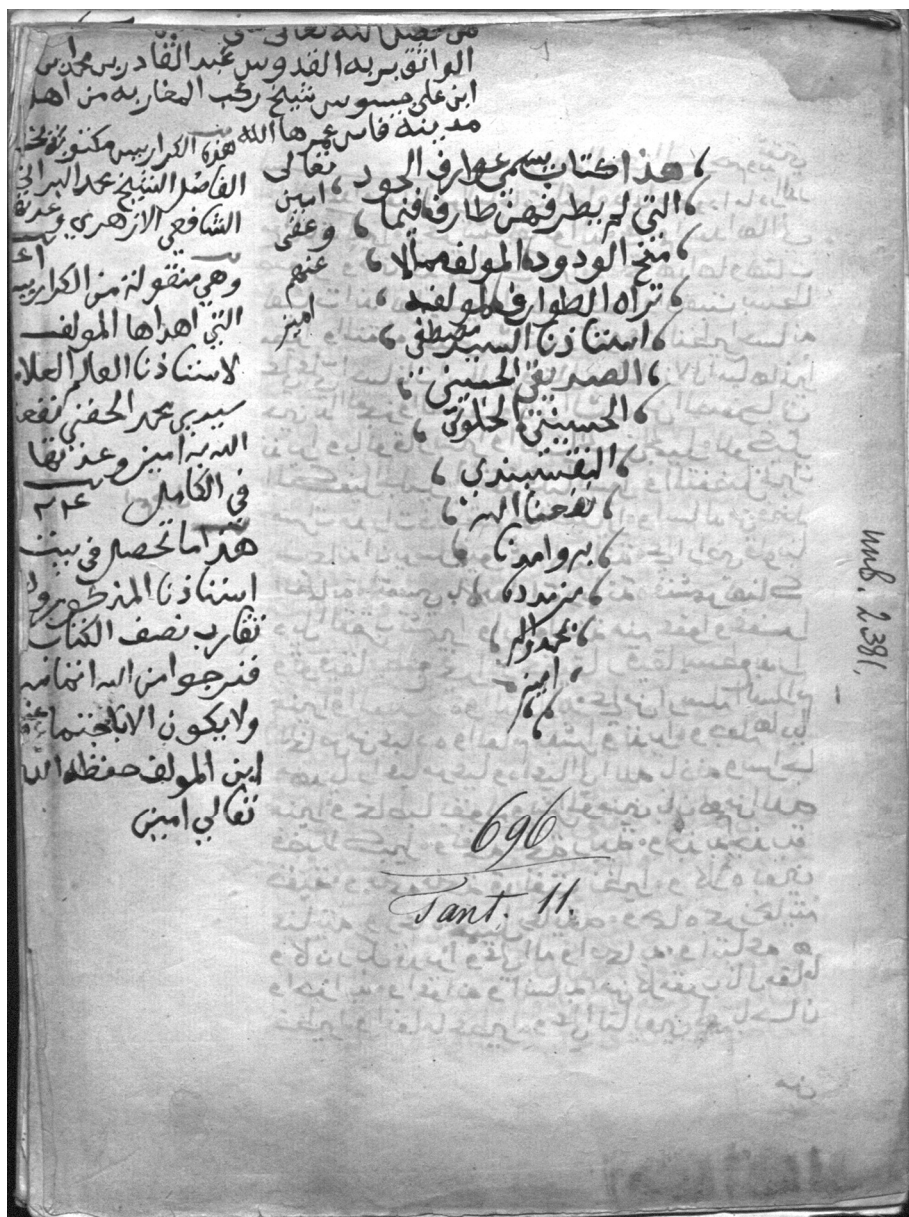
Finally, the most interesting inscription says: في نوبة الفقير شمس الدين بن عراق — المدرس بخاتونية حماء — “In the turn of the poor Shams al-Dīn b. ‘Irāq, the teacher at [madrasah] Khātūniyya, Hama”. The person who wrote it was obviously Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn ‘Irāq (sometimes also called Ibn ‘Arrāq), who had the *laqab* Shams al-Dīn (878–933/1473–1526).

He was born in Damascus into a family of a Circassian princess. After marrying and his father’s death, he moved to Beirut. Being a wealthy man, he was engaged in trade and agriculture, and enjoyed horse riding, archery, chess, and other entertainments. In Damascus, he met Sheikh Ibrāhīm al-Nādjī, joined the circle of his students, and became a Sufi. In 905/1499–1500, he went to Egypt, where he continued his education with eminent scholars of the time. Upon returning to Damascus, he asked his mother’s permission to perform the Hajj. Upon returning from the Hajj, he lived in Beirut until 910/1504–1505, then moved with his family to Damascus. In 911/1505–1506, one of his Sufi mentors, ‘Alī b. Maymūn, who had traveled to preach in Anatolia, returned and summoned Ibn ‘Irāq to Hama, where he stayed for four months. During the following years, he lived in Beirut, Damascus, Majd al-Maush, Ghouta, and Safad. He then again went on Hajj and from 924/1518–1519 lived in Medina and Mecca, where he died and was buried. He left behind a number of works on mysticism, and two of his children, Shaykh ‘Alī and Shayikh ‘Abd al-Nāfi’, were also scholars and literati.<sup>12</sup>

In the owner’s note Ibn ‘Irāq calls himself a *mudarris* in the *madrasa al-Khātūniyya* in Hama; apparently, the note dates back to his stay in that city in 911/1505–1506.

<sup>12</sup> ZIRIKLI 2002: VI, 290; “Ibn ‘Irāq”.

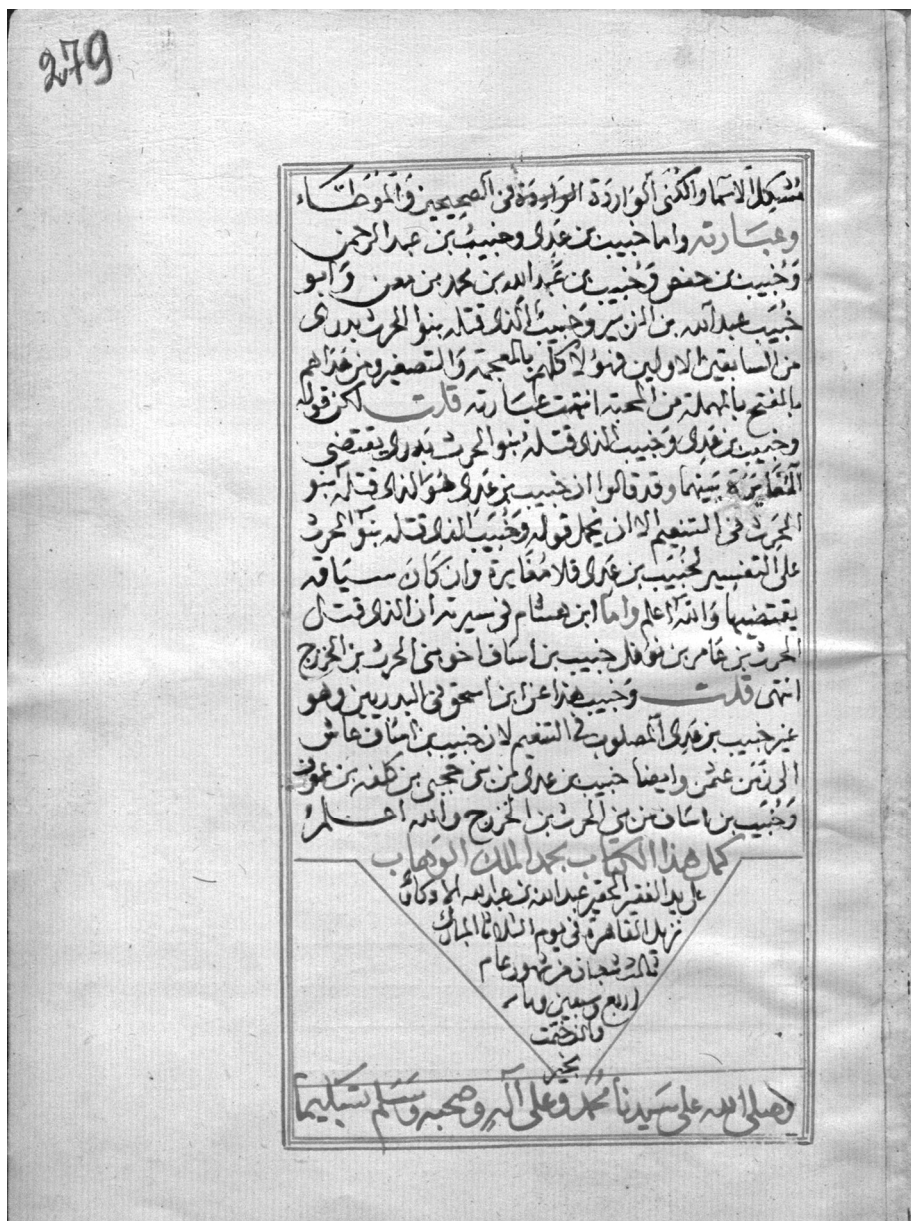




Pl. 4.

Muṣṭafā b. Kamāl al-Dīn b. 'Alī al-Bakrī, 'Awārīf al-jūd allatī lam yaṭraqahunna tāriq fī-mā manaḥa l-wadūd. Egypt, 18th c.

M. Gorky Scientific Library of SPbU, Call No. Ms. O. 696, f. 1r. Courtesy of the Library.



Pl. 5.

Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Āmir al-Shāfi'ī Ḥiṣn al-Sa'dī al-Ḥaḍramī, *Sharḥ al-ṣadr fī asmā' ahl Badr*. Cairo, 8 Sha'bān 1174 / 14 March 1761. M. Gorky Scientific Library of SPbU, Call No. Ms. O. 704, f. 279r, colophon. Courtesy of the Library.

**Ms. O. 696**

A text's quality based on reliable protographs has always been an important issue for learned men. Books containing evidence that their text goes back directly or indirectly to the author's autograph are quite rare and were undoubtedly valuable to scholars such as Ṭaṭṭāwī. An example is the manuscript of *ʿAwārif al-jūd allatī lam yaṭraqahunna ṭāriq fī-mā manaḥa al-wadūd*, by Muṣṭafā b. Kamāl al-Dīn b. ʿAlī al-Bakrī (1099–1162/1688–1749). The note on the first page of the book states as follows:

من تحصيل الله تعالى علي الواثق بربه القدوس عبد القادر بن محمد ابن ... ابن علي جسوس شيخ ركب المغاربة من اهل مجينة فاس عمرها الله تعالى امين وغفر عنهم امين هذه الكراريس مكتوبة بخط الفاضل الشيخ محمد البراني الشافعي الازهري وعدده ٤١ وهي منقولة من الكراريس التي اهداها المؤلف لاستادنا العالم العلامة سيدي محمد الحفني نفعه الله به امين وعدتها في الكامل ٢٤ هذا ما تحصل في بيت استاذنا المذكور ... تقارب نصف الكتاب فارجوا من الله اتمامه ولا يكون الا باجتماع عن ابن المؤلف حفظه الله تعالى امين

“From whatever God Almighty has bestowed on the one who is confident in his Holy Lord, ʿAbd al Qādir b. Muḥammad b. ...Ibn ʿAlī Djasūs, the Sheikh of the Moroccans’ caravan, from the people of the city of Fez, may God Almighty make it prosperous, amen! And forgive them, amen! These quires are written in the handwriting of the virtuous Sheikh Muḥammad al-Barānī al-Shāfiʿī al-Azharī, and their number is 41. They are copied from the quires that the author presented to our master, the scholar, the eminent Sīdī Muḥammad al-Ḥafnī, may God benefit him through it, amen! Their number in total is 24. This is what was collected in the house of our aforementioned teacher, and... it is close to half of the book, so we ask God for its completion, and it will not be except by a joint effort from the author’s son, may God Almighty protect him, amen!” (Pl. 4)

The text in the manuscript consisting of 409 ff. (in fact, constituting 41 quires) is incomplete. The work was transcribed from the copy given by the author to Muḥammad al-Ḥafnī who was the sheikh of al-Azhar between the years 1171–1181/1757–1767.

**Ms. O. 704, 765 and 798 — ʿAbd Allāh al-Idkāwī  
and Aḥmad al-Idkāwī**

There are at least three manuscripts connected with Djamāl al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh al-Idkāwī, known as al-Muʿadhdhin (1104–1184/

1692–1770), Egyptian poet from Idku village near Rosetta who lived most of his life in Cairo.<sup>13</sup> Being a part of intellectual elite of the time, he praised contemporary scholars and theologians under whom he studied. Among those to whom he dedicated his poems, Djabartī names the same sheikh Muḥammad al-Ḥafnī who was mentioned in connection with the preceding manuscript.

The first of the three books, Ms. O. 704 (21.3×14.8 cm, 280 ff.) (Pl. 5), is copied in his own hand and contains *Sharḥ al-ṣadr fī asmā' ahl Badr*, a work on hadith by Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Āmir al-Shāfi'ī Ḥiṣn al-Sa'dī al-Ḥaḍramī (d. ca. 1666) copied 8 *Sha'bān* 1174 / 14 March 1761 in Cairo. Another one, Ms. O. 765 (23.8×14.7 cm, 216 ff.), copied by al-Idkāwī in 1165/1752, contains the poetic anthology *Dumyat al-qasr wa 'uṣrat ahl al-aṣr* by 'Alī ibn al-Ḥasan al-Bākharzī (d. 467/1075).

The third book, Ms. O. 798 (18.0×10.7 cm, 14 ff.) (Pl. 6), is a copy of extracts from al-Zamakhsharī's commentary on the *urđjūza* by 'Abd Allāh Ru'ba b. al-'Adjdjād, compiled by 'Abd Allāh al-Idkāwī and written down by his son Aḥmad, who mentioned his name in the colophon, but not the date of copying.

### Ms. O. 721 — Ibn al-Akfānī, Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Awḥadī

The manuscript of the *Irshād al-qāṣid ilā asnā al-maqāṣid* (18.3×13.0 cm, 64 ff.), an encyclopedic essay containing an overview of 60 different sciences, according to the undated colophon was copied for its author: كتبه نور الدين علي البنهاوي كان ناسخا لمصنفه رحمه الله تعالى – “Written by Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī al-Banhāwī, who was copying the book for its compiler, may God Almighty have mercy on him!” (f. 63v).

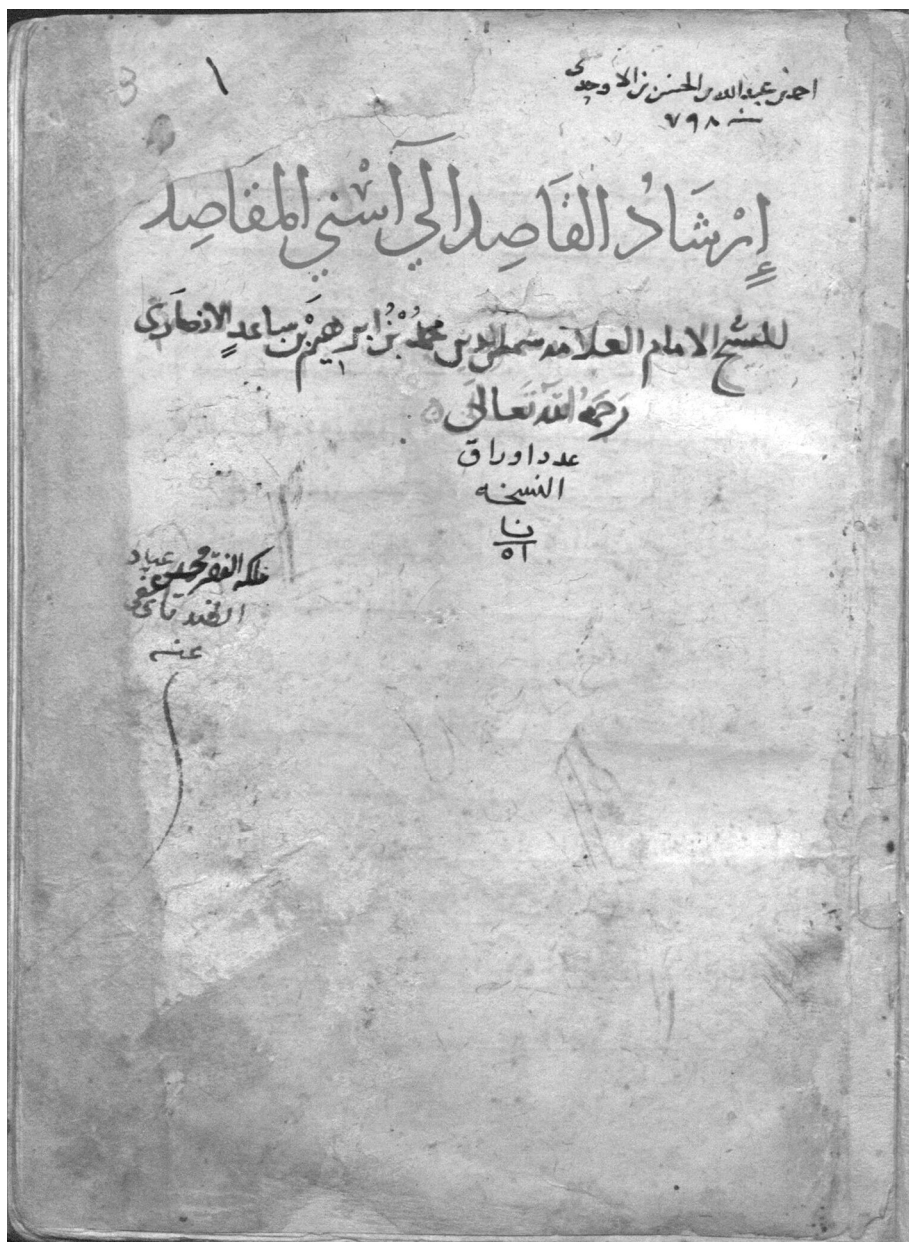
The compiler, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Sā'd al-Anṣārī known as Ibn al-Akfānī, was an Egyptian physician and encyclopedist who wrote about 22 books, about half of which are devoted to medicine, while others are on logic, *tafsīr*, astrology, mathematics, etc. He was born in Sinjar and died in Egypt during the plague in 1348. This should also be the year around which the manuscript was copied, as the praising formula “رحمه الله تعالى” in the colophon usually accompanies the names of deceased persons.

<sup>13</sup> DJABARTI 1997: I, 552 ff.

14  
 9  
 11  
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لَمَّا مَوْتَ عَطَّ عَظَا  
 مَوْضِعَ بِالْبَصَرِ لِأَجْعَاطِ شِدَّةِ الْعَذِّ وَعَطَّ عَظَا  
 أَضْطَرَّتْ نَبْلُهُمْ  
 نَبْلُهُمْ وَفَقْدَ قَوْلِ الْوَعْدِ عَظَا  
 وَفَقْدَ الْخَوْتِ مَرَأَيْتَ عَظَا  
 أَيُّ وَعْظٍ لِرَجُلٍ فَقَالَ إِنَّ دَهْنَهُ هَلَكْتُمْ فَكَانَ كَذَلِكَ  
 وَالْإِبْقَاطُ يَقِظُ  
 مَرَأَيْتَ مَنَعَهُ مَعْتَظَا  
 تَعْرِفُ رِيَّةَ الْوَقْرِ وَالْفِظَاطِ  
 مِنَ الْغَيْطِ  
 حَبِيبِي عَظَّ الْفَرْيَ مَرَأَيْتَ عَظَا  
 إِذَا الصَّمِيمُ سَاقَطَ الْأَوْشَاطُ  
 حَبِيبِي دَعُوتُهُ لَوْ كُنَّا نَحْنُ أَيْ لَمْ يَكُنْ هَذَا الطَّهْنُ  
 قَدْ رَمَى بِتَلْمِظِهِ بِكَانَ طَهْنًا تَامًا الصَّمِيمُ الْكَدِيمُ  
 الْأَوْشَاطُ جَمْعُ وَشَيْطَانٍ وَخَسْبِيسٍ كَلَامُ بَحْرَانِ  
 تَعَالَى عَلَى يَدِ الْفَقِيرِ جَامِعُ  
 لَفَاتِحُهَا أَحَدُ الْأَدَلَّةِ وَغَرِّهَ  
 لَهُ وَلَوْلَا الدِّينُ وَجَمْعُ الْمُتَسَلِّينَ  
 أَحْمَدُ بْنُ وَاحِدٍ رَسَمَهُ  
 رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ  
 آمِينَ





Pl. 7.

Ibn al-Akfānī, *Irshād al-qāṣid ilā asnā al-maqāṣid*. Egypt, ca. 1348. M. Gorky Scientific Library of SPbU, Call No. Ms. O. 721, f. 3r. Courtesy of the Library.

The ownership statement in f. 3r (Pl. 7) supports the early dating of the manuscript, saying: أحمد بن عبد الله بن الحسن بن الاوحدي سنة ٧٩٨ — “Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Ḥasan Ibn al-Awḥadī, 798 AH (1395–1396 AD)”. He can be identified as Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Awḥadī (761–811/1360–1408), who wrote a historical topography of Cairo that then served as a basis for the famous book *al-Mawā‘iz wa’l-i’tibār fī-dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa’l-āthār* by his famous contemporary Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī,<sup>14</sup> who was even sometimes accused of plagiarism for this.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the handwriting of the short note looks quite similar to the writing on certain pages of the Topkapı manuscript (MS E. Hazinesi 1405) of al-Maqrizi’s holograph, which had been identified as the hand of al-Awḥadī, and to the specimens of al-Awḥadī’s signatures on several other manuscripts.<sup>16</sup>

### Ms. O. 722, 754 and 758 — Ḥasan al-Djabartī

These three manuscripts have possession notes of Ḥasan al-Djabartī, the father of the historian ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Djabartī. His full name was Ḥasan b. Ibrāhīm b. Ḥasan al-Zīlī al-Djabartī, and similar to many persons mentioned in this article, he was a scholar whose interests were not limited to theology, and he taught at al-Azhar. His family was of Somalian origin, and he is mostly remembered in connection with his famous son, the chronicler of Egypt of the late 18th — early 19th cc.

The first manuscript, Ms. O. 722 (24.0×15.8 cm, 325 ff.) (Pl. 8), is a copy of al-Djawharī’s Arabic lexicon *al-Ṣiḥāḥ fī’l-lughā*, not dated, copied in the 16th c. or earlier. The note on f. 2r says: في ملك الفقير اليه تعالى حسن الجبرتي الحنفي — “In the possession of the poor one before Him, Who is the Most High, Ḥasan al-Djabartī al-Ḥanafī, may God forgive him by His grace!” It is accompanied with a print of an oval-shaped stamp, which is illegible.

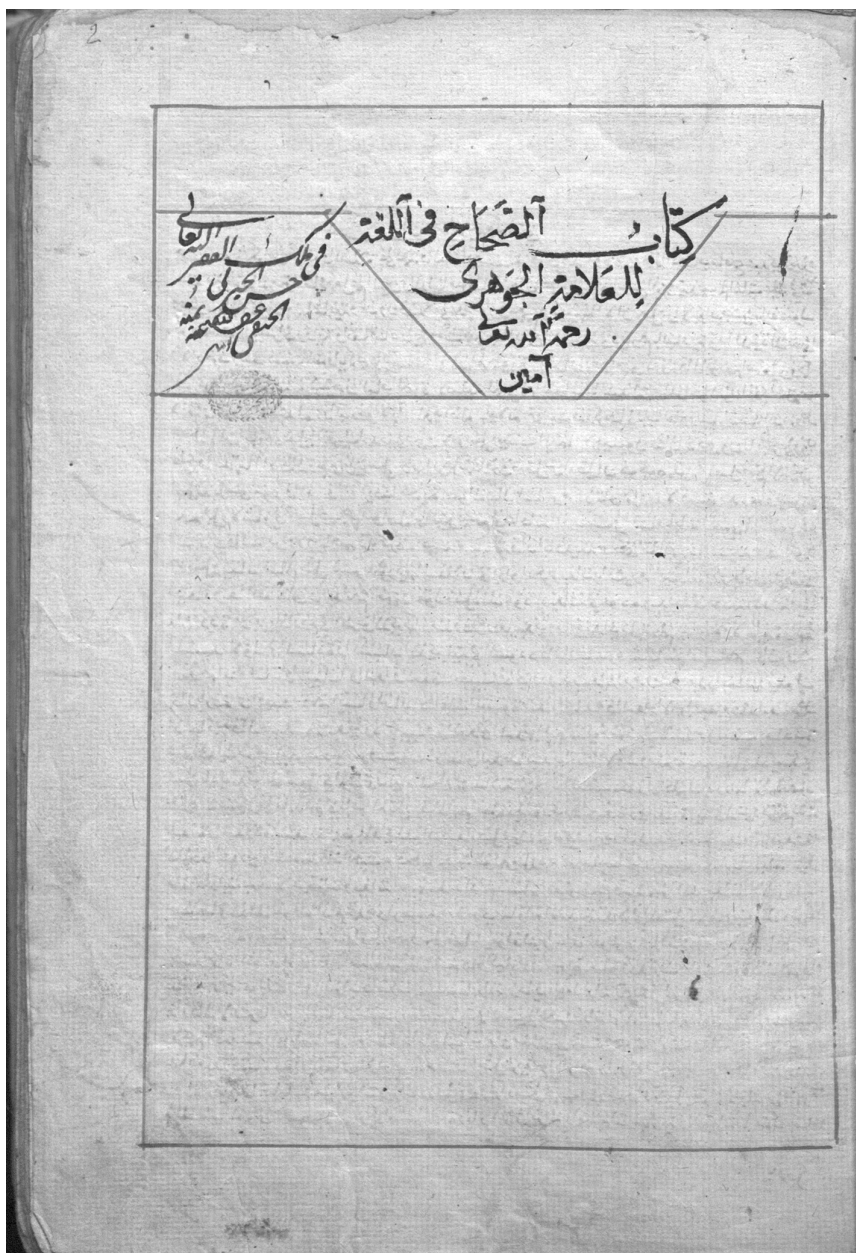
The second manuscript, Ms. O. 754 (20.3×15.3 cm, 20 ff.), is a 1115/1703 copy of the popular poetic anthology *Aṭbāq al-dhahab* by ‘Abd al-Mu’min b. Hibat Allāh al-Iṣfahānī. The note of al-Djabartī on f. 1r is identical to the previous one, although there is no seal imprint.

<sup>14</sup> BAUDEN 2014: 169.

<sup>15</sup> KRACHKOVSKIJ 1957: 476–477; BAUDEN 2010.

<sup>16</sup> BAUDEN 2010: 176, 179.





Pl. 8.

al-Djawharī, *al-Ṣiḥāḥ fī al-luġa*. Egypt, 16th c. or earlier. M. Gorky Scientific Library of SPbU, Call No. Ms. O. 722, f. 2r. Courtesy of the Library.

Ms. O. 758 (20.7×14.2 cm, 48 ff.), apart from being the oldest dated manuscript in the Ṭantāwī collection (copied 4 *Ramaḍān* 712 / 10 January 1313), contains the text that seems to be unique. It is a treatise on logic by an unknown author who states in the preface that it was dedicated to one of the emperors of Rum and entitled *Kitāb al-laṭāʾif al-malakiyya al-inbiraṭūriyya*. Ḥasan al-Djabartī's signature is in f. 1r.

These are just several examples of manuscripts from the collection that contain information on their history linking them with personalities that played notable roles in the cultural and political life of Egypt. We have not tried to cover all the notes, many of which are either fully or partly erased, or smudged, which makes their reading a difficult or even impossible task. Some of the legible names, not included here, may also be of interest to historians who specialize in the area. They, however, will become available for study and interpretation through an online catalogue of the collection that has been prepared within the framework of the project supported by the Russian Scientific Foundation and contains full copies of manuscripts that can be consulted online.

These notes and inscriptions, however inconspicuous they may seem, in fact demonstrate how these handwritten texts, through their owners, are woven into the historical fabric of the era. Not only does the Ṭantāwī collection contain many works created in the 18th c. Egypt and North Africa by the personalities who were part of Egyptian intellectual landscape, it holds manuscripts that went through their hands, were copied or owned by them. This likely increased the value of the manuscripts in the eyes of the collector even more, as they are the material embodiment of his spiritual ties with the generations of scholars, mystics and literati who created the intellectual environment in which he was raised and which shaped him intellectually. Evidence suggesting eventful past of manuscripts was probably yet another reason to include them in the scholar's personal library, and this constitutes an additional important aspect of the collection.

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