
BOOK REVIEWS

Scribes et manuscrits du Moyen-Orient, sous la direction de François Déroche et Francis Richard. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1997, 399 pp.

In June 1994, the Bibliothèque nationale de France (henceforth — BNF), known for its stimulating initiatives in the field of codicology, organised an international colloquium on manuscripts of the Near East. The publication under review here was prepared on the basis of papers delivered at the colloquium. The materials, in both French and English, each introduced by a short summary in the second language, are grouped in four thematic sections. Most of the papers are characterised by a striving to diversify and perfect methods of manuscript study. This finds its reflection in stressed attention to detail in the examination of individual manuscripts and in the compilation of information about large numbers of manuscripts into tables and diagrams. The book is notable for its high standard of typography, and photographic plates presenting manuscripts from various collections, mostly from the BNF, are well reproduced (the list of illustrations at the end runs to more than 130 items).

Six papers make up the first group of contributions under the heading “Les matériaux du livre”. When reports circulated that fragments of ancient books and bindings had been discovered between the ceiling and roof of the Great Mosque in Ṣan‘ā’ (Yemen), they sparked a sensation. Now Ursula Dreiholz reports on the results of her long years of research of the finds and provides a detailed description of the surviving parts of three wooden bindings or, more accurately, cases for books. Fragments of inscriptions in Kufic script on the back covers were discovered and deciphered by her. The author advances a hypothesis that the bindings date to the ninth century A.D.

“Les codex de la bible hébraïque en pays d’islam jusqu’à 1200: formes et formats” by Michèle Ducan and Colette Sirat (Paris) presents in table form data on the dimensions of a large number of manuscripts from the Cairo *genizah*, which date from the tenth to twelfth centuries. The manuscripts are currently stored in the National Library of Russia (St. Petersburg) and Cambridge.

Adam Gacek’s (Montreal) contribution deals with the contents of a section on the art of book-binding from a manuscript on art and crafts which is ascribed to al-Malik al-Muzaffar (d. 694/1294), a Yemeni ruler of the Rasūlid dynasty. The author studied the text on the basis of three

manuscripts and, as in his other works, devotes special attention to issues of terminology.

Marie-Geneviève Guesdon (Paris, BNF) dedicated her paper to methods of folios numbering used in Arabic manuscripts. Her foremost attention is paid to a special system of pagination by recording the first words of a new folio on the reverse side of the preceding folio in the lower left corner, beneath the final line of text. The material for her study was provided by manuscripts in the BNF which date from A.D. 1150 to 1450. The author notes how these designations (custodes) are distributed on the folios forming quires, how they are positioned in relation to the final line of text, and how they differ in manuscripts copied at various times. Quantitative results are given in table form.

Geneviève Humber (Paris) shows that in Arab manuscripts of the ninth to twelfth centuries A.D. one can find evidence of a codicological unit (*juz’*) unrelated to the logical division of the text. The *juz’* may be a large quire or small volume, most likely something in between a quire and a volume, neither wholly one nor the other. It is equipped with a title page which indicates its number, the title of the work, and the name of the author. The text begins on the reverse side of the title page with the *basmala* and breaks off on the final page with the colophon, after which, in most cases, the contents of the following *juz’* are listed. A *juz’* was usually stored without a binding. Apparently, it was convenient for copying and practical use for a limited time.

In “Illumination and its functions in Islamic manuscripts”, Muhammad Isa Waley of the British National Library surveys types of adornment and methods of adorning ordinary manuscripts. The author bases his analysis on the culture of “manuscript producing” rather than art history.

The second group of contributions, entitled “Copistes et écritures”, comprises seven papers.

In her “L’onciale penchée en copte et sa survie jusqu’au XV^e siècle en Haute-Égypte”, Anne Boud’hors (Paris) surveys seventeen philological manuscripts of the Sa’īdic tradition from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries.

Two papers discuss the origins of Arabic writing and defend contrary opinions. François Briquel-Chatonnet (Paris) analyses the particular features of Aramaic and early-Arabic writing, taking into consideration the latest epigraphic discoveries and paying special attention to the general form and system of writing. She is inclined to sup-