The Intricacies of Capturing the Holdings of a Mosque Library in Yemen

The Library of the Shrine of Imām al-Hādí, Ša'da

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Heritage Under Threat

The libraries of Yemen are well known to be treasure troves not only for the rich and still largely unexplored literary tradition of the Zaydi branch of Shi‘ism but also for a much wider spectrum of Islamic intellectual history, beyond Zaydist. The history of Zaydist in Yemen dates back to the ninth century CE when Imām al-Hādí Yahyā b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 298/911) founded a Zaydi state with Ša’d as its capital. When in the sixth/twelfth century the Zaydis of Yemen became politically unified with their coreligionists in the Caspian region of northern Iran, where a second Zaydi state had been established during the ninth century, a transfer of scholars and books set in from northern Iran, a leading intellectual center at the time, to Yemen.

Some of the libraries in Yemen that were founded during this period still exist today. This is the case, by way of example, for the library that was founded by Imām al-Mansūr bi-llāh ‘Abd Allāh b. Ḥamza (r. 593/1197–614/1217) in his capital Zafār. The library grew steadily over the centuries and was transferred during the early twentieth century to the newly founded al-Khizāna al-mutawakkiliyya, nowadays the Makkatab al-Awqāf or al-Maktab al-Sharqiyya, located on the premises of the Great Mosque in Sanas in an annex building that had been constructed for this purpose by order of Imām Yahyā b. Muḥammad Ḥamid al-Dīn (r. 1904–48).¹

On the other hand, many of the libraries of Yemen were time and again affected by instances of loss of books through theft, confiscations, and even destruction of entire collections. In the course of Imām al-Mansūr’s all-out war against the Muṣarrifiyya sect during the thirteenth century, for example, nearly the entire literary legacy of the Muṣarrifis was destroyed. Incidents of destruction of private book collections also occurred during the Ottoman occupation of major parts of Yemen, between 1547 and 1629 and again between 1872 and 1878.² Moreover, from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, manuscripts became a highly valuable commodity when European, Ottoman-Turkish, and Saudi merchants and travelers to Yemen began to purchase thousands of manuscripts that are nowadays housed by libraries outside of the country. In fact, one of the principal purposes behind Imām Yahyā Ḥamid al-Dīn’s previously mentioned founding in 1925 of the Khizāna al-mutawakkiliyya in Sanas, where he had the remains of the former ruler’s library in Zafār transferred, together with the holdings of many other historical libraries, was to put a stop to theft and other losses. The


I wish to thank Camilla Adang and Hassan Ansari for their comments on an earlier draft of this contribution, and Gabriele vom Bruck for confirmation that the library of al-Imām al-Hādí is still intact, while the sana‘at al-Hādí has been destroyed (personal communication, 9 September 2017), most likely as a result of the bombing of Ša’d on 9 May 2015.
numerous codices that had originally been produced for the library of Imām al-Manṣūr bi-llāh and were sold at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries to various libraries in the Middle East and Europe indicate that this was indeed a serious concern. Confiscations of private libraries also frequently occurred over the course of the twentieth century. In 1948, when Imām Ahmad b. Yahyā Ḥamīd al-Dīn (r. 1948–62) ordered the execution of Ali b. Muḥammad al-Wazīr, who served at the time as president of the parliament, and had some of the houses of the Bayt al-Wazīr demolished, the library of the Bayt al-Wazīr was confiscated and taken to the Great Mosque in Sanaa. Following the coup d’etat of 1962, the former palace library and the personal collections of the members of the royal family, as well as the collections of former ministers and other government officials, were confiscated and eventually transferred to the Maktaba al-ğarbiyya and later on to the newly founded Dār al-makhṭūṭāt.

Over the second half of the twentieth and the first decades of the twenty-first century, Yemeni authorities have been constantly fighting manuscript dealers, trying to prevent them from smuggling manuscripts out of the country. Moreover, many of the libraries of Yemen have been severely damaged, looted, or even destroyed over the past few decades as a result of the political turmoil and wars that Yemen has witnessed, and the continuing war in the country, with daily bombardments, constitutes an imminent threat not only to the local population but also to the cultural heritage of the country, including its many libraries.

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Salvaging the Zaydi/Yemeni Manuscript Tradition, 1951–2017

In view of the richness and the uniqueness of the manuscript holdings of the many public and private libraries in Yemen, various international projects have been launched since the early 1950s to salvage some of these treasures. In 1951–52, in 1964, and again in 1974, scholarly expeditions from Egypt were dispatched to Yemen. They explored the holdings of the various public libraries in Sanaa as well as those of some of the smaller libraries in Sanaa and other cities, and produced microfilms of selected manuscripts, which they brought back to Cairo. In 1982, a delegation from Kuwait assessed and partly microfilmed the manuscripts of the Maktabat al-āhqāf in Tarīm in Hadhramaut, and in 1985 a Kuwaiti team engaged in filming and cataloging some 308 manuscripts held by the Dār al-makhṭūṭāt in Sanaa. Iranian governmental and private institutions also engaged in filming significant numbers of Yemeni manuscripts at the turn of the millennium.

The various initiatives to produce surrogates of manuscripts, be it in microform or digitally, did not aim at preserving the manuscripts—the intention was rather to make them accessible to the respective local scholarly community in Egypt, Kuwait, or Iran, hence the selective approach in all those endeavors. Characteristically, the surrogates are housed in the relevant institution that was in charge of filming them in the first place, with no attempt to make them available to a larger audience. It is only in the case of Iran that the digital surrogates prepared were also made available to the Mu‘assasat al-Imām Zayd b. ‘Ali al-thaqāfīyya (Imam Zayd bin Ali Cultural Foundation = IZbACF) in Sanaa, whose personnel continued to digitize the holdings of additional private libraries. The various recent digitization efforts supported
by the German Foreign Office and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Humanities also aimed at capturing a select number of private collections. The holdings of seven personal libraries in Sanaa and Kawkaban were digitized in the course of the two projects, some three hundred manuscripts in total. Again, only a fraction of these digitized materials are available through open access to date.

The Zaydi Manuscript Tradition (ZMT) aims at salvaging the Zaydi literary tradition by gathering digital surrogates of as many Zaydi manuscripts as possible in a single repository and providing comprehensive and systematic open access to them for scholars worldwide, regardless of whether the physical manuscripts are preserved in Europe or in North America, in Yemen, or elsewhere in the Middle East. The ZMT is a joint project initiated by the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS), Princeton, in partnership with the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (HMML) at Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota. Work on the ZMT began in September 2016, and to date the project comprises some 1,500 digitized manuscripts from several European and Yemeni libraries, which are accessible online through the project's portal and HMML's virtual reading room. The initiative consists of two components: (1) a digital portal on the IAS website that serves as a comprehensive research guide to relevant collections of Zaydi manuscripts, providing precise information on the location of each collection with a full list of its holdings and the relevant bibliography for every single codex. The digital portal further functions as a gateway to (2) the manuscript surrogates that are available in HMML's virtual reading room (vHMML), which serves as a repository of digital surrogates of manuscript codices and will eventually include full metadata for the manuscripts through its cataloging tools.

The Library of the Shrine of Imam al-Hadi, Sa'da

Among the collections that have recently been processed for inclusion in the ZMT project are the manuscripts of the library of the Imam al-Hadi mosque in Sa'da. The history and current situation of the collection is characteristic for many manuscript libraries of Yemen, private as well as public. While the mosque was constructed during the lifetime of the Imam al-Hadi in the ninth century, the library was not set up until the early twentieth century, together with the madrasa ilmiyya, which is also located on the premises of the mosque. While the library was counted at some point among the most important mosque libraries of Yemen, the situation began to deteriorate sometime before the revolution of 1962 with the appointment of al-qadi Hasan b. Salih Dabbash as its custodian, who was succeeded after his demise by his son, Sulaiman. During their terms the library suffered from neglect and was subject to regular incidents of burglary and theft. The situation improved again during the 1990s following the appointment of Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Ali al-Shami (1926–2013) as minister of religious endowments and guidance (wazir al-aqaid wa-l-trasd). Al-Shami took measures to salvage the library and encouraged the preparation of a catalog of its holdings.

10 ZMT 01600 through 01675. See the entire collection at https://www.vhmml.org/reading Room/, accessed 5 October 2017. Search “ZMT” in the HMML Project Number field.
In his survey of manuscript libraries of Yemen of 1993, ’Abd al-Wahhab ‘Ali al-Mu’ayyad (d. 2005) gives the total number of manuscripts in the collection as “ca. 100,” adding that “the collection has been halved over the last thirty years owing to several factors, including war.” The figure provided by al-Mu’ayyad is corroborated by a catalog prepared by ’Abd Allâh Hammad Dirham al-Izzi. The highest shelfmark recorded by al-Izzi is “218,” while his catalog covers a total of only 131 codices. Assuming that the collection has again grown since 1993, this would confirm al-Mu’ayyad’s statement that the collection had been halved over the past three decades. Al-Izzi had completed his descriptions of the collection in May 2000—the Iranian scholar Sayyid ‘Ali Mujani relates in his preface to al-Izzi’s catalog that when he visited Sa’da in 2002, he was approached by al-Izzi, who inquired about possibilities to have the catalog published. As a result of his mediation, Mahmud Mar’ashi, the head of the Ayat Allâh Mar’ashi Najafi Library in Qum, accepted al-Izzi’s Fibris for publication, which was realized, as previously mentioned, in 2004. In return, the Iranians were granted the right to produce digital surrogates of a select number of codices that are nowadays accessible in various libraries in Iran, including the Mar’ashi library in Qum. Al-Izzi’s Fibris is included verbatim and in its entirety by ’Abd al-Salam al-Wajih in his Maṣādir al-turāb fi l-maktabât al-khâṣṣa fī l-Yaman, though the latter fails to credit al-Izzi for his work. Al-Izzi is only mentioned insofar as al-Wajih includes al-Izzi’s introduction (pp. 429–32), with the latter’s signature at its end (p. 432).

Al-Izzi arranged his descriptions of the manuscripts in his Fibris according to the following disciplines: Qur’anic sciences and exegesis (pp. 13–16), traditions (pp. 17–19), theology (pp. 21–27), legal theory (pp. 29–33), law (pp. 35–67), law of inheritance (pp. 69–71), grammar (pp. 73–85), rhetorics (pp. 87–89), asceticism and mysticism (pp. 91–93), and multivolume volumes (pp. 95–133). This structure disagrees with the arrangement of the manuscripts in the library itself, as is indicated by the shelfmarks recorded by al-Izzi. The original library arrangement looks as presented in table 1.

The digital surrogates of manuscripts from the library that were produced at the time amounted to seventy codices in total. In table 2, those listed in al-Izzi’s catalog that have been digitized are marked in bold.

In addition to these, the digital collection of the Imam al-Hadi library comprises twenty-one codices that are not described in al-Izzi’s catalog. The possibility that these constitute later additions to the library cannot be ruled out, though it might be more plausible that al-Izzi’s catalog covers only a part of the library’s holdings. The actual size and scope of its manuscript collection thus remains uncertain—an observation that applies to most if not all published catalogs of private manuscript collections in Yemen.

Al-Izzi’s partial catalog of the collection and, more importantly, the digital surrogates that are now accessible through eHMML provide a sound material basis to study the curriculum that was taught at the madrasa ‘ilmiiyya

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14 He signs the introduction (muqaddama) with the dates 2 Safar 1421/6 May 2000 (Fibris, p. jin).
### Table 1. Arrangement of the Manuscripts in the Library.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Shelfmark Nos.</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theology (usūl al-dīn / 'ilm al-kālām)</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12</td>
<td>(shelfmark nos. 13 and 14 are missing in al-‘Izzī’s catalog)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal theory (usūl al-fiqh)</td>
<td>15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20</td>
<td>(shelfmark nos. 21 through 29 are missing in al-‘Izzī’s catalog)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorics (‘ilm al-ma‘ānī wa-l-bayān)</td>
<td>30, 31, 32, 33, 34</td>
<td>(shelfmark nos. 35 through 51 are missing in al-‘Izzī’s catalog)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qur’ānic sciences and exegesis</td>
<td>52, 53, 54, 55</td>
<td>(shelfmark nos. 56 through 59 are missing in al-‘Izzī’s catalog)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditions (ḥadīth)</td>
<td>60, 61, 62, 63</td>
<td>(shelfmark no. 64 is missing in al-‘Izzī’s catalog)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law of inheritance (‘ilm al-fārā’ād)</td>
<td>65, 66, 67</td>
<td>(shelfmark no. 69 is missing in al-‘Izzī’s catalog)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asceticism and mysticism (‘ilm al-bātīn wa-l-taṣawwuf)</td>
<td>70, 71, 72</td>
<td>(shelfmark nos. 74 is missing in al-‘Izzī’s catalog)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar (nabū)</td>
<td>75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97</td>
<td>(shelfmark nos. 98 and 99 are missing in al-‘Izzī’s catalog)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multitext volumes (majāmī)</td>
<td>200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219</td>
<td>(shelfmark nos. 200 through 204 are missing in al-‘Izzī’s catalog)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 2. Digital Surrogates of Manuscripts from the Library.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Shelfmark Nos.</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theology (usūl al-dīn / ‘ilm al-kālām)</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal theory (usūl al-fiqh)</td>
<td>15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorics (‘ilm al-ma‘ānī wa-l-bayān)</td>
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<td>70, 71, 72, 73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar (nabū)</td>
<td>75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multitext volumes (majāmī)</td>
<td>200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in Sa’d. The majority of titles represent the standard canon of Zaydi scholarship at the turn of the twentieth century, with a clear focus on Islamic law that is suggested by the proportionally high percentage of works on fiqh, legal theory and inheritance law.16

At the same time, the Imām al-Hādī library houses a number of rarities. For the Mu’tazilite tradition, these comprise an incomplete copy of the first part of the theological summary, K. al-Mu’tamad fi usūl al-dīn, by Rukn al-Dīn Mahmūd b. al-Malāḥīmī al-Khārazmī (d. 536/1141), the principal

representative of the school of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044);17 volume two of the latter’s work on legal theory, K. al-Mu’taṣim fi uṣūl al-fiqh,

17 ZMT 01617; al-ʿİzzī, Fībrīs, 25 no. 7. The manuscript was consulted by Wilferd Madelung in the preparation of the revised edition of the work (Kiṣāḥ al-Mu’taṣim fi uṣūl al-dīn, revised and enlarged edition by Wilferd Madelung (Tehran: Mīrāz-ī maktūb, 2012)).

which was popular among the Zaydis of Yemen;18 and an incomplete copy of the last volume of al-Ḥākim al-Jishumī’s (d. 494/1101) Sharḥ ʿUyūn al-maṣā’il,

18 ZMT 01616; al-ʿİzzī, Fībrīs, 30 no. 15. This manuscript was not consulted by Muhammad Ḥamīd Allāh in his edition of the text (Damascus: al-Ma’āḍī al-ḥilāl, bi-Dimashq, 1964). See also Hassan Ansari and Sabine Schmidtke, Studies in Medieval Islamic Intellectual History, Resources in Arabic and Islamic Studies 7 (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2017), 75n36.
an encyclopedic theological summa with detailed discussions of substances, physics, and biology from a Mu'tazilite theologian’s point of view.19 This last part of the Sharh al-'Uṣūn is otherwise attested only in two manuscripts that are preserved in the Maktabat al-awqāf in Sanaa20 and in the library of the King Saud University.21 Another noteworthy work in the field of theology is ‘Umdat al-mustasribidin, a theological summa by the prominent thirteenth-century Yemeni/Zaydi theologian Abū ʿAbd Allāh Hūmayd b. Ahmad al-Muhallī (d. 652/1254).22 The library also has a copy of K. Naṣrat al-tvisa ‘alā al-madhāhib al-sani’i’a, by a certain “Abd al-Mahmūd b. Dāwūd” (figs. 2 and 3).23 The author’s name is a pseudonym of the renowned Imami scholar Radi al-Dīn ‘Ali b. Mūsā Ibn Tawās (d. 664/1266), and the work in question is his polemical anti-Sunni text al-Tarāʾif fi [mā'rifat] madhāhib al-tawaṣif. It is only among the Zaydis of Yemen that this otherwise famous work circulated under a different title that is attested in this manuscript.24 The manuscript of a theological work entitled Niḥayat dhawā al-tawqīl ‘alā sharh al-ṣaḥīh by a certain ‘Ali b. Yahyā al-Ḥusaynī seems to be a unique.25 Of special value is further al-Maṣā’il al-nāṣfā bi-l-barāšin al-qawwāya al-sādī’a, by ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn b. Yahyā b. ‘Ali b. Ahmad b. Qāsim al-Qāsimi al-Muʿayyadi al-Dāhīyāni (1863/64–1924/25), which was transcribed from the author’s rough copy, on 14 Rabi’ II 1316/September 1898 (figs. 4 and 5).26

19 ZMT 01612. The manuscript is not described in al-’Itiz’s catalog.
20 MS Sanaa, Maktabat al-awqāf no. 707. For a brief description of the manuscript, see Ahmad ʿAbd al-Razāq al-Ruṣayḥi, ʿAbd al-Allāh al-Hībshī, and ʿAli Wāḥhāb al-ʿĀnī, Fibrīs makhṣūṣat maktabat al-Itiz al-ṣanāʿi’ (Sanaa: Wizarat al-awqāf wa-l-irshād, 1404/1984), 2.663.
21 MS Riyadh, King Saud Saudi Library no. 7783. For a description of the manuscript and a digital surrogate, see http://makhorta.ksu.edu.sa/makhorta/8453/1, accessed 3 October 2017. Together with Hassan Ansari, the present writer is currently preparing a critical edition of al-Ḥākim al-Jishumi’s Sharḥ ‘Uṣūn al-maṣā’il.
22 ZMT 01649; cf. al-’Itiz, Fibrīs, 22n1.
23 ZMT 01674. The codex is not described in al-’Itiz’s catalog.
25 ZMT 01675; cf. al-’Itiz, Fibrīs, 24 no. 5.
26 ZMT 01615. The manuscript is not described in al-’Itiz’s catalog. For the author of the work, see al-Wājih, al-lām al-mu‘allifin al-Zaydiyya, 356–60 no. 351.


The collection contains a fair amount of incomplete codices, with beginning and/or end missing. About two-third of the manuscripts are dated: nineteen manuscripts were produced during the eleventh/seventeenth century, eleven manuscripts were transcribed during the tenth/sixteenth century, eight manuscripts are dated to the ninth/fifteenth century, two manuscripts are dated to the eighth/fourteenth century, and two to the seventh/thirteenth
century, one manuscript to the twelfth/eighteenth century, and two to the thirteenth/nineteenth century. The oldest codex in the collection is a multi-text volume containing the *K. al-Maṣāmīḥ* of Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim b. 'Ali al-Ḥarīrī al-Baṣrī (d. 516/1122) (dated to Jumādā II 653) and the *K. al-Najm min kālim sayyiūd al-ʿarab wa-l-ṣāmīḥ Muḥammad al-nabī al-murtas̱al al-kārim* by Aḥmad b. Maʿād b. ʿĪsā b. Wākil al-Tujībī al-Uqlishī (d. 550/1155)

(dated to Dhū l-Qaʿda 553). It is followed by a precious copy of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Mawardī’s (d. 450/1058) *al-Abkām al-sultanīyya* that was completed in Rabi’

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Zaydis of Yemen and is preserved in countless manuscripts.\textsuperscript{29} Eight manuscripts were transcribed, according to al-‘Izī, during the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{30} The overall ratio is again typical for the majority of Yemeni libraries.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{ms.pdf}
\caption{Ms \textit{Ṣa da}, Maktabat al-Imām Yahyā b. Husayn, \#115 [ZMT 01603], final page.}
\end{figure}

I 627 (figs. 6 and 7) and has not been taken into consideration for any of the published versions of this important text.\textsuperscript{28} Another early codex contains volume one of the \textit{K. al-Lumā‘ fi ṣīḥ Abī al-Ḥaytām al-salām} of al-ʿAmīr ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Yahyā b. Yahyā b. al-Nāṣīr (fl. seventh/thirteenth century) (dated to Dhū l-Qādā 696), a legal work that was very popular among the

\textit{Al-Hariri's Maqamat: A Little-Known Illustrated Manuscript from Sana‘a', Yemen, Dated 1709} (independently published, 2017).

\textsuperscript{28} ZMT 01603. See also al-ʿIzī, \textit{Fibrīs}, 46–47 no. 115. Al-ʿIzī erroneously states that the manuscript is not dated.

\textsuperscript{29} Cf. al-ʿIzī, \textit{Fibrīs}, 39 no. 105. For the author and the work, see Ansari and Schmidtke, \textit{Studies in Medieval Islamic Intellectual History}, 182 no. 9.

\textsuperscript{30} To the extent this could be verified, some of the dates provided by al-ʿIzī in his catalog turned out to be erroneous. In more general terms, his descriptions are not always reliable and should be treated with some caution.
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Editors: William Noel and Ralph M. Rosen

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