

Maktabat al-Khānjī Archive Workshop I

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Abstracts

Güler Doğan Averbek (Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey)

The al-Khanji Family's Book Trade Activities in Istanbul

This study will discuss book trade through the al-Khanji family's connections to Istanbul, with background figures also being given space as needed. In activities conducted in connection with Istanbul prior to World War II, the al-Khanji family traded various goods that could be sent to Egypt, such as henna, mahlab, and rugs, as well as manuscripts and printed books. When evaluating the family's activities as a whole by focusing on Muhammad Amin al-Khanji, however, the top activities are always seen to have been book-related businesses, such as copying, publishing, buying and selling printed books and manuscripts, and trading stationery.

When discussing the al-Khanji family's activities in Istanbul, I see two separate areas of distinction. The first of these is the purchase and sale of books. This also has two bases: printed matter and manuscripts. The printed material trade can be separated into two periods, before and after the Turkish Alphabet Reform (due to its profound impact on content). The second area is publishing. I think both publishing and printing should be covered together here. I can divide these into two periods: the Ottoman and the Republican. I should also separate the Republican era into two periods: before and after the Alphabet Reform (again due to its profound impact).

İsmail Erünsal has conveyed the history of second-hand booksellers up to the late Ottoman period. We know part of what happened after the 1950s through the various memoirs that were penned. The period between 1900-1950, however, when Istanbul witnessed one of the biggest changes to the book trade, remains in darkness. Although the cultural change that occurred in the country during this period can be determined to some extent through the book trade, we have no clear data for that period. A comprehensive history on secondhand booksellers not having yet been written is one of the main challenges facing this study, which aims to examine the activities of the al-Khanji family who operated as secondhand booksellers and publishers and who'd also established close commercial relations with secondhand booksellers between 1900-1960, which is when booksellers were among the actors of a major transformation in Istanbul. Another challenge stems from not having all the correspondence and documents on hand.

My studies on Oskar Rescher's almost 60 years of manuscript trade may serve as a background in the manuscript chapter of the Istanbul al-Khanji file. In fact, when I evaluate the two brokers' activities alongside one another, a picture appears before me of the 50-year period covering the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic. During the period in question, a significant flow of manuscripts following two separate routes occurred from Turkish lands to outside the country. One involves the manuscripts sent directly from Istanbul to the West, and the other involved the manuscripts that first went to the Arab geography; from there, a portion remained in Arab lands while another portion passed on to the West. Of these two routes, Oskar Rescher was the lead actor of the Western branch, while the lead actor of the Eastern branch was Muhammad Amin al-Khanji, his sons, and Abraham Shalom Yahuda. I absolutely must emphasize that Raif Yelkenci had served as a generous resource for both routes after 1924.

This study will present an overhead view, sometimes chronologically and other times at the level of topic or concept, and make limited evaluations of the commercial activities of the al-Khanji family, whose leader was

Muhammad Amin al-Khanji, with regard to Türkiye and especially Istanbul. The plan for this study could have taken shape in quite a number of different forms. In order to present a more easily readable picture due to the variety of activities and rapid change of eras, however, I have divided the family's activities into two periods: that of the father, Muhammad Amin, and that of the son, Sami Amin. Under the first heading, I evaluate Sami Amin's activities between 1924-1937 under his father's instruction. I believe that these hitherto undiscovered activities may hold a modest key role in understanding the impact the dizzying developments that occurred in Türkiye had over the course of a half century from the 1910s until the 1960s.

Guy Burak (New York University)

Maktabat al-Khanji's Book Lists

My paper looks at Khanji's bibliographic practices by examining his interest in *Kashf al-Zunun*, the seventeenth/eighteenth-century bibliographic work by Katip Celebi, by situating it in the broader context of the invention of the *Kashf* as bibliographic "reference work" in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. The paper also examines Khanji's interest in the *Kashf* in light of the rise of the publisher catalog in the Middle East and North Africa (and specifically Khanji's catalog).

Moya Carey (Chester Beatty Library, Dublin):

Who was Aslan Sarkissian's Cairo supplier for Chester Beatty?

Recent provenance research at the Chester Beatty has demonstrated the visionary role of Abraham Yahuda in forming this Dublin museum's Arabic Collection, as both supplier (1927-1932) and consultant cataloguer (1927-1939). Yahuda sold over 1,200 manuscripts and printed books to Alfred Chester Beatty (1875-1968), apparently sourcing the great majority from Maktabat al-Khanji in Cairo. This is evidenced only obliquely, because Yahuda never mentioned al-Khanji's name to Beatty in over a decade of correspondence. Instead the Yahuda-Khanji connection can be established thanks to Davidson and Mikati's new investigations of the Maktabat al-Khanji Archive, and by correlating the internal marking systems (and occasional business cards left as bookmarks) in Yahuda-supplied manuscripts now in Chester Beatty, Princeton University Library, and other collections. Between 1934 and 1947, Beatty purchased even more extensively (over 1,400 Arabic manuscripts) from a second Cairo supplier, Aslan Sarkissian. This paper compares the internal paratextual evidence of the Chester Beatty Arabic manuscripts bought from both Yahuda and Sarkissian, and asks whether Sarkissian too was sourcing his manuscripts from Maktabat al-Khanji, or instead the firm's commercial rival.

Garrett Davidson (College of Charleston) and Rana Mikati (College of Charleston)

The Master of the Booksellers: the Life of Muḥammad Amīn al-Khānjī (d.1939)

This presentation offers the first comprehensive biography of Muḥammad Amīn al-Khānjī (d. 1939), a preeminent bookseller, publisher, and dealer in rare manuscripts whose activities bridged the worlds of manuscript culture and modern print. Drawing extensively on newly accessible archival sources—including letters, contracts, account books, and family testimonies—it reconstructs al-Khānjī's personal background, professional networks,

and commercial strategies from his beginnings in late Ottoman Aleppo to his emergence as a major figure in the Cairo book market. The presentation traces his early fascination with manuscripts, nurtured through copying and collecting in Aleppo, and situates his career within the city's shifting economic and cultural landscape. It follows his migration to Cairo in 1897, his early publishing ventures, and the establishment of the *al-Maktaba al-Ḥalabiyya* and the *al-Jamāliyya Press*, highlighting his collaborations with family members and other prominent bookmen in Cairo, Istanbul, and beyond. Al-Khānjī's role as an intermediary between manuscript-rich regions and emerging institutional collections in Egypt, Europe, and North America is examined in detail, alongside his adaptation to changing market conditions during the First World War and interwar period. Through this narrative, the chapter illuminates the largely overlooked but pivotal role of commercial publishers and booksellers in shaping modern Arabic intellectual life, revealing al-Khānjī as a self-made cultural entrepreneur whose legacy lies in both the preservation and dissemination of the Islamic written heritage.

Garrett Davidson (College of Charleston) and **Rana Mikati** (College of Charleston)

Al-Khānjī's Career as a Publisher and Editor of Medieval Arabic Texts

This presentation situates Muḥammad Amīn al-Khānjī's publishing career (1899–1939) within the evolving landscape of modern Arab print culture, arguing that his trajectory reflects—and in key ways helped shape—the transformation of the book trade from late Ottoman traditions to the commercially and intellectually diverse publishing scene of interwar Egypt. The chapter follows his early reliance on established printers, his eventual operation of the al-Jamāliyya Press, and his later career as head of the Khānjī Bookstore, noting continuities in his editorial vision across these phases. It underscores the archival and bibliographic challenges of reconstructing his output and presents the methodological strategies used to recover his publishing record. In doing so, it positions al-Khānjī as both a product and a driver of the expanding print economy, whose activities illuminate the intersection of commerce, scholarship, and cultural revival in early twentieth-century Egypt.

Konrad Hirschler (Hamburg University) and **Said Aljoumani** (CSMC, Hamburg)

Al-Khānjī's Role in Translocating Manuscript Libraries: Aḥmad al-Zarqā of Aleppo and the Municipal Library of Alexandria

This presentation explores al-Khānjī's role in translocating and trading manuscripts within West Asia and North Africa during the late Ottoman period. Through a case study of the Ahmad al-Zarqa collection of Aleppo and its transfer to Alexandria's Baladiya Library, it reveals regional manuscript trade practices, the influence of print culture, and socio-economic motivations behind dispersal. Analysis of the Khanji correspondence shows that manuscript dealings were driven by regional demand and especially Egypt's burgeoning printing industry. Regional trading houses, such as Ajjan al-Hadid's in Aleppo, engaged in profit-sharing and sourced manuscripts regionally. The paper explores sourcing practices and, in particular, the complexities involved in a transregional sale of a manuscript library. It also addresses research gaps, aiming to deepen understanding of the Arab manuscript economy and library translocations.

Mostafa Hussein (University of Michigan)

The Excellence of Arabs (*Faḍl al-‘Arab*): Rethinking *ṣuḥba* through Manuscript Trade and Anticolonial Thought

In scholarship on Jewish-Muslim relations in the Islamic world, the concept of *ṣuḥba* has long been a key framework for analyzing socioeconomic interactions. Scholars such as S. D. Goitein underscore the notion of *ṣuḥba* as a model of informal cooperation rooted in trust, particularly within Geniza merchant communities where commercial dealings often occurred without formal contracts. Other interpretations, however, view this reliance on informal mechanisms and the lack of transparent contracts in the commercial dealings as contributing factors to the eventual decline of Islamic civilization and the rise of the West. This study reexamines the concept of *ṣuḥba* through a different lens, moving beyond its commercial and socioeconomic application and focusing on the intellectual history of Jews and Muslims in the first half of twentieth century. It argues that a form of *ṣuḥba* existed between Yahuda and al-Khānjī that facilitated the movement of Arabic and Islamic knowledge (in the form of manuscripts) from the East to the West motivated not only by mutual economic benefit but also by satisfying intellectual and ideological objectives. While this socioeconomic exchange was built on mutual trust, it benefitted from the powerful intellectual trope of *faḍl al-‘arab* (The Excellence of Arabs). This trope was prevalent among modern Arab intellectuals to articulate a larger nationalist and anticolonial discourse—one that sought to demonstrate the inherent virtue and historical precedence of the East over the West. By reframing *ṣuḥba* in this intellectual context, this paper highlights its role in the complex interplay between cultural exchange and the formation of modern nationalist identity.

Lina Jabali (Tel Aviv University and École Pratique des Hautes Études—PSL) Through the Lens of the Silent Archive: Al-Khānjī in the Yahuda Collection at the National Library of Israel

This presentation examines materials in the Abraham Shalom Yahuda Collection at the National Library of Israel (NLI) relating to the Cairo-based al-Khānjī Bookstore. Although al-Khānjī’s own archive—recently identified in his private library and transferred to the American University in Cairo—constitutes the largest known body of his papers, it is complemented by scattered documents preserved in various locations around the world. Among these, and perhaps the most notable so far, is an uncataloged corpus within the Yahuda Archive, part of Yahuda’s personal papers, containing both commercial and scholarly materials that illuminate transnational networks. By analyzing al-Khānjī’s documents alongside other archival sources in which he is mentioned, this presentation traces how these materials reached the NLI, maps the networks linked to him, and highlights their significance for reconstructing a more accurate picture of the Islamic manuscript trade between the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Mohammed Ayub Khan (Independent Scholar)

Al-Khanji, Jitekar and the Arabic Book Trade in India

This paper examines the outsized influence of al-Khanji and his Bombay based business associate Abdullah Jitekar in the Arabic book trade in twentieth century India. It demonstrates that the books published by the Maktaba al-Khanji were widely read by a large section of Indian Muslim intellectuals. I use a diverse set of sources including letters, biographies, custom house data, and polemical works to document the role of al-Khanjis in influencing towering personalities such as Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (Islamic scholar and India’s first education

minister), the poet philosopher Muhammad Iqbal, and the modernist Muslim intellectual Ghulam Jilani Barq among others. This article makes an original contribution by documenting the transnational flow of books and ideas and the shaping of intellectual discourse among Indian Muslims in the twentieth century.

William Kopycki (Library of Congress Office, Nairobi)

Al-Khānjī's Publications in the Library of Congress: Means of Acquisition

This presentation will provide insight as to how al-Khanji imprints were acquired and processed by the Library of Congress and, to a certain extent, other libraries in the United States. Using the data found in the bibliographic and holdings records, this presentation will reveal the different collecting streams that have taken place over the years for the systematic acquisition of Egyptian commercial publications (and al-Khanji publication in particular), with little-known points about processing workflow that will be of interest to those wanting to know more details about how such processes operate. The presentation will also highlight some the collection development issues within the Library that help drive the selection process for Egyptian publications, including those of al-Khanji.

Valentina Sagaria Rossi (University of Rome Tor Vergata)

Al-Khanji's Notebook on Manuscript Transactions

The recent discovery of the Maktabat al-Khanji archive has revealed the crucial role of its founder, the Syrian-born, Cairo-based bookseller, publisher, and manuscript dealer Muhammad Amin al-Khanji (d. 1939), in shaping Abraham Shalom Yahuda's (d. 1951) personal manuscript collection and in supplying thousands of manuscripts to libraries and collectors across Europe and North America. Among the archive's materials is al-Khanji's notebook documenting his extended trip to Iraq in 1930–31. In my presentation, I will focus on the sections devoted to Baghdad and Mosul, examining his travel notes—which offer rare insights into his activities and networks—together with the list of manuscripts he acquired there, many of which are now preserved in the Princeton University Library.

Walid Saleh (University of Toronto)

Trade in Printed Qur'ans: Another History of the Modern Qur'an is Possible

The literature on the printed Qur'an is a new field, with many gaps in this history. What we lack is an inventory of prints that is based on actual copies. What is surprising is that we lack names for famous editions – apart from the King Fu'ad Egyptian copy. Yet a cursory perusal of the lists of inventories and correspondence of Khanji archive shows, without a doubt that there were appellations for many of the Qur'ans that were published. This talk is a first attempt to outline a few steps to write a new history of the printed Qur'an: one based on archival research and hopefully on a parallel inventory of actual copies in the major research libraries in the world.

Sabine Schmidtke (Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton)

Muhammad Amin al-Khanji and His Journey to Iraq in 1930: Najaf

The recent discovery of the Maktabat al-Khanji archive has brought to light the important role played by its founder, the Syrian-born Cairo-based bookseller, publisher, and manuscript dealer Muhammad Amin al-Khanji

(d. 1939), for Abraham Shalom Yahuda (d. 1951) and his personal collection of manuscripts and the thousands of manuscripts he sold to various libraries and collectors in Europe and North America. Preliminary study of the archive leaves no doubt that the majority of what is now known as the Yahuda manuscripts were supplied by al-Khanji. In my presentation, I will discuss aspects of al-Khānjī's notebook documenting his trip to Iraq (Baghdad, Najaf, and Karbala) in 1930, focussing on his dealings with some of the members of the Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' family as well as Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Samāwī.