THE LIBRARIES OF THE ARABS DURING THE TIME OF THE ABBASIDES[1]

(*Translated from the Italian by F. Krenkow*).

THE history of books among the Arabs, so important for the knowledge of the development of Arabic Culture, is almost completely ignored in the larger works dealing with the History of Libraries[2]. Neither in the work of Petit-Radel[3], nor that of Edwards[4], nor that of Axon[5], of Olschki[6], nor even in the most recent by Hessel[7], is any mention made of them. Only in Lalanne[8], a collector of the most curious notes on bibliography, and in the steps of Cim[9], are short notes found about the libraries of Cairo and Tripolis of Syria.

(1) The author of this monograph, Dr. Olga Pinto, is an Italian lady, pupil of Prof. Levi della Vida of Rome, who obtained her degree of D. Ph. for her Arabic studies; her article on Arabic Libraries is the most complete monograph upon the subject and the following translation has been made with her consent. Any additions or differences of opinion on my part are marked in the notes by the letter (K.)

(2) The principal articles upon Arabic libraries are found in *Kremer, Kulturgeschichte* (Vienna 1877, vol. 2 p. 483 ff.); *Girgi Zaidan, Tamaddun* (taken from Kremer); A. Mez, *Renaissance des Islams* (Heidelberg 1922 p. 162-180); Quatremere, *Gout des livres* (*Journal Asiatique* 1838 vol. 2 p. 36-74); A. Grohmann, *Bibliotheken, etc. im-ismamischen Orient* (Vienna 1926 p. 431-42); Heffening, *Kutubkhanah* (*Encyclopaedia of Islam* s.v.). All are more or less incomplete and only Julian Ribera has written a short work *Bibliofilosy Bibliotecas en la Espana Musulmana* Zaragoza 1896) dealing with Spanish libraries, but this work has no references to the authorities from which the author has drawn his information. (It will be seen from this note that most of the works dealing with the subject are hardly within the reach of English readers. (K.)

(3) Petit-Radel, *Recherches sur les bibliotheques anciennes et modernes*. (Paris 1819).

(4) E. Edwards, *Libraries and Founders of Libraries* (London 1865).

(5) W. Axon, *Biblioteche antiche e moderne* (Buonarotti, II. series vol. XI. 1876).

(6) L. Olschki, *Das Bibliothekswesen im Altertum*, (Weimar 1889).

(7) A. Hessel, *Geschichte der Bibliotheken* (Gôttingen 1926).

(8) L. Lalanne, *Curiosites bibliographiques* (Paris 1857) p. 208-11.

(9) A. Cim, *Le Livre* (Paris 1905) p. 269 of vol. 2.

Among few peoples, however, has the cult of books and literary tradition had such importance in the spiritual and cultural life as with the Arabs.

At first sight it appears strange that a people, uneducated, coming from the desert, to become rulers in youthful energy of a vast territory at one time ruled over by two large empires, the Roman-Byzantine and Sassanide-Persian, should in a short time exhaust the originality of its impulsive creativeness and impress upon its own civilisation the characteristics of a reflective, traditional and typically "book"—culture. The reason for this apparent incongruity must be sought (as is demonstrated by the recent enquiries into the formation of Islamic civilisation by Goldziher[1], and Becker[2]), in the facts that the Arabs, especially on account of their own imperfect cultural development at the time of the conquests, absorbed more rapidly the essential elements and the inquisitive spirit of the three civilisations which they had subjugated politically and ethically: the Greek, Persian and Jewish. All three, on account of their secular evolution, had arrived at a state of saturation and petrification, so that the Arabic-Muslim civilisation presents at its formation almost all the characteristics of what is called "Mediævalism."

For the Arabs, every book, commencing with the great book, "the Kur'an," represented a whole world in itself; more than for any other people of antiquity it was the only and inexhaustible fountain for the inner life. This people is accused at the time when it appeared on the stage of the history of the world, of having committed an act of vandalism in the first century of the Hijrah, of having destroyed, at the command of 'Umar Ibn al-Khattâb, the greatest library of antiquity, the library of Alexandria. This accusation, which has long been relegated to legendary fiction[3], is also in complete contrast to the spirit which animated the Arabs at the time of the conquests, which

---

(1) I. Goldziher, *Stellung der alien islamischen Ortodoxie zu den antiken Wissenschaften* (Prussian Academy, 1915).

(2) C. H. Becker, *Islamstudien* (Leipzig 1924).

(3) Cf. specially L. Caetani, *Annali dell'Islam* vol. VII. p. 119-125 where previous notes on the subject are given. (The earliest mention of the destruction of the Alexandrian Library as far as I know is made by Bar Hebraeus, *Mukhtasar ad-Duwal*, an author who lived six centuries after the event and could hardly have possessed any reliable information. K.)

was not that of violent proselytism or fanatic destructiveness, but rather that of respect for the superior civilisations with which they came into contact, and of which they appropriated the greater part of the spiritual heritage.

It must be well understood that at the time of 'Umar one could not speak of Arabic books, much less of libraries, but a little over a hundred years later we see in Baghdâd, the capital of the empire, the rise of the first, what may be called " public," library.

The Arabs always speak with affection and respect of books as if they were things dear to the heart and faithful friends :

" What a good companion a book is when you happen to be alone with it ! You can find consolation with it, even if those whom you loved have betrayed you ! "

" It does not betray the secret which is confided to it, and out of itself bears fruit of wisdom and truth[1] ! "

Yet another says :

" The book is a companion who does not betray, does not annoy nor make reproaches when harshly treated[2]."

The most celebrated poet of the 'Abbaside times, Al-Mutanabbî, says[3] :

" The most honourable seat in this world is in the saddle of a horse, and the best companion will always be a book."

Sometimes it is considered of equal value with arms, as al-Muhallabî advised his sons[4] :

" My sons ! Whenever you stand in the market before a shop, stand only before those where weapons and books are sold."

Everything that had relation to books had a great and, stupendous development ; they were copied, embellished and sumptuously bound. At the same time they were most carefully preserved and also they were communicated to others ; all that was the aim and preoccupation of Muslim culture. There arose veritable schools of calligraphy[5], from which the Banû Muqlah and Ibn al-Bawwâb issued as real artists. Among the calligraphists were authors and scholars like Al-Jauharî, the author of

---

(1) Ibn Abd Rabbihi, '*Iqd* (Bulaq 1293) I. 199.
(2) Ibn at-Tiqtiqa', *Al-Fakhri* (ed. Ahlwardt) p. 3.
(3) Mutanabbî, *Diwan* (ed. Diterizi, Berlin 1861) p. 683.
(4) Ibn Tiqtiqa', l. c.
(5) C. Huart, *Les Calligraphes....de l'Orient musulman* (Paris 1908).

the dictionary *As-Sahah*, the celebrated traditionist Ibn al-Jauzî and the musician 'Abd al-Mu'min of Isfahân. Not only were books produced by celebrated calligraphists, but also the art of painting in miniature originated in this manner[1]. At first this art confined itself to painting plants and flowers, but soon also animated beings were introduced[2] and the artists displayed remarkable skill in the technique of their pictures.

Binding of the books was not neglected and often mention is made of books bound in valuable leather[3], of various colours[4] and tooled with silver and gold[5].

A great impulse was given to the development of the book by the importation of the art of paper-making, because it made them less expensive and consequently within easier reach of the masses[6]. As late as the fourth century of the Hijrah (Xth century A.D.) books were still written upon parchment and papyrus, but this made the books very expensive. The art of paper-making having come from China by the way of Samarqand[7] to the Muslim world, made very rapid progress and in many centres of the extensive Muslim empire paper-factories were established on a large scale. It was principally in Egypt where flax was cultivated extensively that most factories arose ; here the Arabs substituted linen rags for the silk-waste which had been the material of the Chinese in the manufacture of paper. From the fifth century of the Hijrah (XIth century A.D.) the whole of Europe was supplied with paper from the Arab world, from the factories of Baghdad and Cairo in the East, or from those in Spain in the West, where the principal centre of the industry was in the town of Shâtiba (to-day Xativa).

With the introduction of paper and the increased traffic in books caused by the fall in prices, in every Arab city book-shops were opened, which assumed a great import-

(1) E. Blochet, *Les enluminures des Mss. Orientaux de la Bibliotheque Nationale* (Paris 1926).

(2) H. Lammens, *L'attitude del 'Islam primitif en face des arts figures*, (*Journal Asiatique* XI. Series 1915 p. 239-279).

(3) 'Arib, Dhail (Leiden 1897) p. 90.

(4) Ibn Khallikân, (ed. Bûlâq 1275) I. 727=ed Wûstenfeld No : 659.

(5) The oldest paper manuscript in Arabic which I have seen is *Gharib al-Hadith* of Abu 'Ubaid in the Leiden Library dated 243 A. H.—(K).

(6) Maqrizi, *Khitat* (Bûlâq 1270) I. 408.

(7) J. Karabacek, *Das Arabische Papier* (*Mitteilungen. Erzherzog Rainer*) III. 98 ff.

ance because they became the meeting-places of scholars and students, who, seeking and examining the books, conversed and discussed their value[1].

Baghdâd for example had already in the third century (XIth century A.D.) one hundred book-shops[2]. These were in small shops in close proximity to each other and generally in the vicinity of a mosque. The books exposed for sale on trestles had a label on the back to facilitate the search for them, whether by the book-seller or the purchaser, or to be copied. These labels were affixed either by the seller himself or by his assistants, whether for sale privately or by auction, a custom which was much in vogue in all parts of the Arab world. The proprietors of such shops or their agents were at times well-known scholars. The poet al-Hazîrî[3] (died 568/1172) was, on account of his profession, called *Dallal al-Kutub*, *i.e.*, book-agent; book sellers were Abû Hâtim Sahl ibn Muhammad as-Sijistânî[4], one of the chief pupils of al-Asma'î, and the geographer and historian Yâqût[5] (died 626/1229).

The price of books, though made cheaper by the introduction and use of paper, was always high, and one can understand the necessity of public libraries for persons who could not afford the luxury of acquiring a library of their own.

In the fifth century (XIth) a copy of the dictionary *Al-Jamharah* of Ibn Duraid cost sixty Dînârs[6] (1 dînâr=10 sh.); a copy of the vast historical work of at-Tabarî one hundred Dînârs[7], a copy of the poems of the Omayyad poet Jarîr ten Dînârs[8]. In the year 248/862 a copy of the dictionary *Kitab al-'Ain* of Al-Khalîl was sold for fifty Dînârs[9]. The translation of the commentary of Alexander of Afrodisia upon the "Acrosis" of Aristotle was sold for one hundred Dînârs[10]; and Al-Hakam, caliph of Cordoba, paid to the author one thousand Dînârs for the immense poetical and literary collection,

(1) Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, 'Iqd II. 223.
(2) Kremer, *Kulturgeschichte* II. 310 (after Al-Ya'qûbî).
(3) Ibn Khallikân I. 286 (W. No. 258).
(4) Ibn Khallikân I. 308 (W. No. 281).
(5) Ibn Khallikân II. 312 (W. No. 800).
(6) *i.e.* about £30. Ibn Khallikân I. 479 (W. No. 849).
(7) Maqrîzî, I. 408.
(8) Ibn Khallikân, II. 522 (W. No. 454).
(9) Fihrist (ed Fluegel) p. 42.
(10) Ibn Abî Usaibi'a, 'Uyûn al-Anba' I. 69-70.

the *Kitab al-Aghani*[1]. In the seventh century (XIIIth A.D.) books cost already less. The above named Yâqût, mentioning the loan of books which he had at the Damîriyah library at Marw, says, "My house was never clear of 200 volumes, taken on loan, or more, and I had never to give a deposit though their value was 200 Dînârs[2]." This would mean an average price of one Dînâr per volume.

In spite of the high price of books we find in the Arab world many bibliophiles who collected fine libraries; among these are mentioned in the 3rd/9th century the prolific writer on all matters Al-Jâhiz, Al-Fath ibn Khâqân, the courtier of the caliph Al-Mutawakkil, and the judge Ismâ'îl ibn Ishâq.

Al-Jâhiz (died 255/868) was a real devourer of books for in addition to his eagerness in reading and absorbing the books which he could buy, he took on deposit, as agent, books from booksellers, and no book ever fell into his hands but he read it from cover to cover. But the books which he loved were the cause of his death like a true bibliophile. As it was his habit to heap up round him all the books which he needed for his studies, and being on account of his great age partially paralysed, one day a heap of books fell on him and killed him. Also Ismâ'îl ibn Ishâq (died 282/895 or 286/899) passed all his time among his books; and one of his contemporaries relates that he never entered his presence except that he found him handling some book[3].

Al-Fath ibn Khâqân had a magnificient library probably at Baghdad, collected and arranged by 'Alî ibn Yahyâ al-Munajjim (died 275/888) another patron of learning who will be mentioned shortly. No one could see a more marvellous library than his for the quantity and beauty of the books, and his house was open to the Bedouins and scientists of al-Basrah and al-Kûfah. Always did he carry a book with him, which he carried either in his sleeve or in the legging of his boot and whenever be found a spare moment he began to read it. If

(1) Ibn Khaldûn, *Tarikh* (Bûlâq 1284) IV. 146 Maqqari *Nafh at-Tib* (Cairo 1302) I. 180. (We can hardly call this a price for the book, the money sent by al-Hakam to the author of the *Kitab al-Aghani* was rather a princely present than payment for the book. (K.)

(2) Yâqût, *Mu'jam* (ed. Wûstenfeld) IV. 509-10. (The wording of Yâqût is not very clear, but it is reasonable to assume that the total value of the books borrowed was 200 Dînârs, or about ten shillings each. Books must have been very cheap at that time and much depends upon their size, etc. (K).

(3) *Fihrist* p. 116-117.

ever he had cause to leave the table of the caliph, he fetched out his book, even when he went to the lavatory[1].

The habit of carrying a book in the sleeve was also adopted by another book-lover, Abu Dâ'ûd as -Sijistânî, the celebrated author of the *Sunan* or collection of traditions. For the purpose of being able to carry books of greater volume he had his sleeves made larger so as to be able to accommodate such books[2]. Also the above-named 'Alî ibn Yahyâ al-Munajjim collected a large library in his magnificent castle in the village of Karkar, near Qufs in the neighbourhood of Baghdad, and called it *Khizanat al-Hikmah* "Treasury of Wisdom." Yâqût relates: Many people from all countries travelled to it in order to study various sciences. In it the books were completely at the disposal of students and all were entertained at the sole expenses of 'Alî. This library was known in the whole Arabic world and attracted students in such manner that the astronomer Abû Ma'shar (died 272/885) coming from Khorasan with the intention of going to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage, decided to go and see it. He was so enthusiastic about it that he remained there and did not continue his journey[3].

The historian of the 5/11th century, Ghars an-Ni'mah of the celebrated family of scientists as-Sâbî, collected at Baghdad a small library of 400 volumes to which admission was granted to a limited number of students. He sold it later when the instalment of the library of the Nizâmiyyah college drew the students away from his more modest establishment[4].

We have much less information about the private libraries in Egypt. In that province were but few large town-centres, and as in Cairo existed one of the most marvellous public libraries in the world, private persons did not feel the necessity to possess their own collections of books.

A private character had the library of the Fatimide caliph al-'Azîz Billah (reigned 365/975-386/996), probably collected and arranged by his Wazîr Ya'qûb ibn Killis, who was himself a book-lover; for among his heritage

---

(1) Yâqût, *Irshad* VI. 79-80.
(2) Abul Mahâsin, *Nujum* (ed. Juynboll) II. 79.
(3) Yâqût, *Irshad* V. 467.
(4) Safadi, *Al-Wafi* (Brit. Mus. Or. 5320 fol. 110 v. (Safadi also records that the dishonesty of the librarian accounted for this library falling into decay. See my article on the Sâbî family in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. K.).

was found among other treasures a rich library[1]. The collection of manuscripts of the caliph, the librarian of which was the author Abû'l Hasan 'Alî ibn Muhammad Ash-Shabushtî[2], has been described as being rich in books, distributed in forty rooms. 18,000 books dealt with theology alone. Of the Kur'ân there were 2,400 copies, written by celebrated calligraphers, like Ibn al-Bawwâb and the Banû Muqlah already mentioned; they were embellished with gold and silver. But there were also many other manuscripts of celebrated authors, among them several autographs[3]. This library was incorporated in one of the greatest public libraries of the world, the "Dâr al-'Ilm" or "House of Knowledge[4]" by his successors, the caliph Al-Hâkim bi Amr Allâh. This remarkable ruler, who was responsible for many wise ordinances but also for extravagance, towards the end of his life conceived the mad idea of having himself proclaimed a Godhead, and as such he is worshipped to this day by the sect of the Druzes in the Lebanon.

At the time of the conquest of Egypt by Salâh ad-Dîn (Saladin) in 567/1171 his Wazîr Al-Fâdhil[5] formed out of the books presented to him by his sovereign an immense library consisting of 68,000 volumes. Being, however, sequestered after a few months, they came back to their owner diminished by about 12,000 volumes[6].

The Wazîr of the Ayyûbi dynasty founded by Saladin, Abû'l Hasan 'Ali al-Qiftî, known also by the title Al-Qâdhi al-Akram, had a fine library at Halab, valued at 50,000 Dînârs, which by his will he left to An-Nâsir, the ruler of that city[7].

Also, in the Western provinces of the Arab empire, arose everywhere private libraries to some of which foreign students were admitted.

The Sultans of the Persian dynasties who in the 4/10th century wrested the power from the Caliphs, made their courts the protectors of sciences. Besides the large library founded by 'Adhud ad-Daulah (reigned 338/949-372/982), which has been mentioned before, there existed smaller libraries of the princes like that of

---

(1) Ibn Khallikân II. 495 :W. No. 848 . Maqriîzî II. 6.
(2) Ibn Khallikân I. 481 : W. No. 456.
(3) Maqrîzî I. 408.
(4) Maqrîzî I. 409.
(5) Maqrîzî I. 409
(6) *Kitab as-Suluk* : Ms. Paris fol. 76 v.
(7) as-Safadî, Wâfî Ms. Brit. Mus. fol. 232 r-233 v.

Majd ad-Daulah[1], of Mu'izz ad-Daulah[2], (and of some of the wazîrs of this dynasty like Abû'l Fadhl ibn al-Amîd and as-Sâhib ibn 'Abbâd. The latter (died 385/995) declined the office of wazîr of the Samanid princes, making the pretence that it would be impossible to carry with him his library, the theological works in which alone amounted to 400 camel-loads[3].

Of Ibn al-'Amîd the historian Ibn Miskawaih, who was his librarian, treats at length in his history. The house of this wazîr having been plundered by the soldiers of Khorasan so that not even a cup remained to drink from nor a thing to sit on, he did not worry ; his mind was solely occupied with his library because he did not know what had become of it and nothing in the world was so dear to him. "He had many books," says Ibn Miskawaih, "on every science and every branch of philosophy and literature, more than a hundred camel-loads. He hardly had seen me when he asked me about them and when I informed him that they had been saved and none had been lost he became happy and said to me : Thou art a man of good omen, everything can be replaced, but this, meaning his library, could never have been made good. I saw his face become serene[4].

The Samanid Sultans, also, in the third (9th) century, who reigned over the Eastern part of the Arab realm, cultivated an intense cultural life at their courts. The Sultan Nûh ibn Mansûr (reigned 366/976-387/997) had his private library, praised by Avicenna, who was permitted to visit it and became some time after its librarian[5]. To him is wrongly attributed the mad act of having set the library on fire[6].

Spain, which had but few public libraries, was instead rich in libraries collected by private persons, not only such formed by princes and rich nobles at great expense, but also by poor students who spent for books their meagre means. They were collected gradually, as was done by Muhammad ibn Hazm, a schoolmaster, who by degrees was able to bring together in Cordoba a fine library, envied by many scholars who frequently made use of his manuscripts which he himself had carefully copied, and guarded

(1) Ibn Athîr, Kâmil ed Tornberg IX. 261.
(2) ib. VIII. 341.
(3) Yâqût, *Irshad* II. 315.
(4) Ibn Miskawaihi, *Tajarib*, Facsimile VI. 286 ff.
(5) Nicholson, *Literary History of the Arabs*. p. 265-66.
(6) Hâjji Khalîfah ed. Fluegel III. 99.

with the utmost care[1]. One of the greatest book-lovers in Spain was the judge Futais ibn Sulaimân, known as Abû Mutrif, of Cordoba ; he had a rich library in which six scribes were continually working and the great value of his collection was not revealed till through misfortune which befell his family the books were sold by auction. The sum realised was 40,000 Dînârs[2].

The love for books was inherited by the many small kings, Mulûk-at-Tawâ'if, who divided Spain among themselves at the death of the caliph Hishâm in 423/1031. Known are the libraries of the Aftasid Al-Muzaffar[3], prince of Badajoz (Batalyaus), of the Banû Hûd of Saragossa, the Banû'l Ahmar of Granada, the Banû Dhû-Nûh of Toledo, who to enrich their own collection did not hesitate to rob those of Al-Araushî, and many others[4].

Also the Hasside princes of Tunis followed the cultural movement of the whole Arab empire. The founder of the dynasty, Abû Zakarîyâ' (reigned 625/1228-647/1249) collected a library[5] which was sold much later by one of his successors Abû Yahyâ Zakarîya' al-Lihyânî (reigned 711/1313-717/1317) when he retired to private life to Cairo[6].

There were also not lacking in the Arabic empire people of high rank who considered it their duty to collect a library equipped with the utmost luxury, with shelves filled with books, bound artistically, but which were never taken from the shelves except now and then to be dusted and cleaned. A clear example of this occurred at Cordoba to a great book-lover and passionate scholar, al-Hadhramî. He used to visit every auction of books in search of a manuscript of a work in which he had the greatest interest. Having at last found one at one of the auctions, there ensued between him and another bidder a struggle by which the price rose by leaps and bounds till it reached a sum out of all proportion with the value of the book. Al-Hadhramî at last decided to give up, but he wanted to know the person who bid against him as he believed him to be a student as ardent as himself, but possessing larger means. His disillusion and anger were immense when he

---

(1) Ibn Abbâr, *Takmilah* Biography No. 312.
(2) Ibn Bashkuâl, *Silah* p. 304-305.
(3) Ibn Abbâr *Takmilah* I. 128.
(4) Ribera, *Bibliofiles* p. 42-45.
(5) Ibn Khaldûn, *Histoire* des *Berberes*, Paris ed. I. 508 (French translation II. 446).
(6) Ibn Khaldûn, *Muqaddimah*, Paris ed. p. 104.

learned that the fortunate purchaser did not know any thing at all about the work he had bought but was attrracted solely by the beautiful binding and the size of the book, as it would just fill a gap on his book shelf in his library[1].

An indication of the civilisation of a people however are not private libraries, but public ones ; and it is these which in the Arabic world found their greatest development It must be noted as a curious fact that, while those regions and provinces of the extensive empire which were nearest to Europe (then buried in the obscurity of the Middle Ages) could boast of many and rich private libraries, they were practically destitute of public ones ; as, for example, Spain, where no library existed which was open to everybody. The contrary was the rule in the great centres of the Orient, like Baghdad, Cairo, Shiraz, etc.

The Arab sovereigns and government-officials in general, following a conception which we may call "democratic," which always ruled in Islamic countries, by which studies and science were not considered the monopoly of a few privileged persons, but ought to be accessible to all people of good intentions, be they rich or poor, free or slaves, understood early the necessity for consulting books. At first they commenced by admitting to their private libraries persons desirous to study, later they undertook professedly to found real public collection.

The centre in which undoubtedly the first public library saw its initiation was the capital of the empire, Baghdad, where in fact in the third (9th) century, by order of the great caliph al-Mâ'mûn (reigned 198/813-218/833) the first library was instituted as an annexe to the *Dar al-'Ilm* or *Bait al-Hikmah* "The House of knowledge" or "Abode of Wisdom." After this there arose in the capital as well as in other centres many similar institutions, which gained world-wide fame, and perhaps gave to Louis XI of France, when he was in Eastern lands, the idea of imitating them and initiating at Paris a collection which was to become in later time a public library[2].

Commencing at Baghdad, the principal centres of Mesopotamia and Syria, followed, then Egypt which was a very important cultural centre, then the Eastern provinces which, though divided into many small principalities, still maintained a vivid sentiment of Arabic culture, and at last that distant branch of the Arabic world, Spain

---

(1) Maqqarî, *Nafh at-Tib*, (Cairo ed. I. 215. Z Leiden I. 302).
(2) Lalanne, *Curiosites*, (Paris 1857) p. 160-1.

where, as in all countries conquered by the Arabs, their culture penetrated gradually, and attained a wonderful development, perhaps greater than in any other part.

I have thought it advisable to arrest my enquiry with he collapse of the Arab Empire and the end of the Abbasid dynasty, partly because the sources of information concerning the later period are scarce and scattered, but also on account of the great decay of Arabic Culture and the rise of new nations, the Persians, Turks and Mongols ; except that at the end of this article I shall try to trace a brief review of the condition and growth of modern Ariabic libraries, to show the relationship between them and the ancient ones, and point out the new aspects which belong to them and the importance they have for Oriental studies.

As I have already pointed out concerning the private libraries, many of these were open to students, like that of 'Alî ibn Yahyâ, of Ghars an-Ni'mah and others, but the public character arose and developed gradually from three types of large libraries. Those of the sovereigns who with their ample means were able to found vast collections worthy of being placed at the disposal of the public, those of the mosques and those of the Madrasahs.

In ancient times education, elementary as well as advanced, came from the mosques, each of which had its own small library in which the necessary books were brought together, but only such as were strictly connected with theological studies, a custom still in vogue. Later and gradually, under lay influence which flourished most in the 3/9th century, the advanced studies remained no longer confined to the mosques. The Madrasahs arose, resembling our colleges. In these the instruction had a wider scope, for in Baghdad as well as in Damascus and elsewhere history, grammar and philosophy were also included. In the Madrasah founded in Cairo by the caliph Al-Hâkim, which was in reality the first Lay University also Mathematics, Astronomy, Medicine and Methaphysics were taught[1].

---

(1) For this subject see Wûstenfeld, *Akademien der Araber*, Gôttingen 1837 : Arminjon, *L'enseignement....dans les Universites musulmanes d'Egypte*, Paris 1907 ; Ribera, *La ensenanza entre los musul mamnes espanoles*, Zaragoza 1983 ; Kremer, *Kulturgeschichte* II, 480-482 ; Mez, *Renaissance* p. 60-82 ; Girgi Zaidân, *Tamaddun* III. 199-205; Suyûtî, *Husn al-Muhadharah* I. 199-184-190 ; Maqrîzî, *Khitat* II. 362-405.

These great institutions had their libraries which, at the time of their foundation or soon after, were made public and did not remain the preserve of the professors and students alone.

The same process can be noticed in the West, for we see the great public libraries arose out of those of princes given to the State, or of libraries belonging to monasteries, which in Europe were the first places where a love for books and their preservation can be traced and finally the libraries of the colleges or universities. But while in the East the institution of the Waqf conferred upon private libraries an inalienable public character, this characteristic is not to be found in Europe till much later, in the 15th century.

The development of the Arabic libraries was much quicker and more extensive. These institutions, a sign of high culture, received not only admirable support from the Abbasid Caliphs, masters of a realm worthy to stand at the head of the greatest empires of East and West, but also from the ambition of many small princes from the early centuries of the Hijrah onwards to gain favour with the Caliphs of Baghdad. First, these princes acted as governors, later as independent rulers of the various provinces of the Arab empire. The same process can be noticed in Arabic civilisation which we find in the Italian renaissance. While the splitting up and dismembering of the State into small semi-independent principalities certainly meant a weakening of the power of the State, it nevertheless gave greater impulse for cultural life on account of the continual rivalry of the small princes. So it happened in Halab (Aleppo) in the case of the Hamdânid dynasty, especially under Saif ad-Daulah (reigned 333/944—356/967) when the city became an important cultural centre, or in Tripolis under the Banû 'Ammâr. The same occurred in distant Persian provinces under the dynasties of the Sâmânids, Buwaihis and Ghaznawis ; also in Spain under the Banû Dhû-Nûn in Toledo, the Aftâsis in Badajoz, the Banû Hûd in Saragossa, the Banû-'l-Ahmar in Granada and others. Al-Qalqashandî (died 812/1418), author of a voluminous encyclopædia for the instruction of State officials under the Mamlûk Sultans (the *Subh al-A'sha*) speaks with pride of the great libraries which had once existed and laments that they had been left abandoned in his times :

" The Caliphs and kings had in ancient times a great interest in the large libraries and bestowed much care

upon them, which enabled them to get the most beautiful and numerous collections. It is said that the greatest libraries in Islam were the following three : First, the Library of the Caliphs in Baghdad. It contained an enormous quantity of books of inestimable value. It existed till the Tâtars came to Baghdad and their king Hûlagû murdered the Caliph al-Musta'sim, the last of the Caliphs. The library disappeared like so many other things and was lost and its traces disappeared[1]. Second, the library of the Fatimide caliphs at Cairo. This was one of the largest libraries and one of the richest collection of books in all sciences. It remained in existence till the death of the last of their Caliphs, when Salâh ad-Din (Saladin) ibn Ayyûb made himself master of the kingdom ..... The third was the library of the Omayyad Caliphs of Spain. This library also remained intact till the end of the dynasty when the smaller kings divided Spain among themselves. It was then that the books were dispersed for ever. As regards to-day, kings have but little interest in libraries, they content themselves with the libraries of the Madrasahs because these are a greater necessity[2]".

I have compiled in the pages which follow a list of all the public libraries which existed in the Arab empire during the time of the Abbasid Caliphate of which I have been able to find any mention. Some of the sources simply enumerate them while others tell us about their foundation their utility and management.

BAGHDAD.

(1) The library attached to the Dâr al-'Ilm or Bait al-Hikmah founded by the Caliph Hârûn ar-Rashîd (170/786—194/809)[3] or by Al-Mâ'mun (198/813—218/833)[4] which was still in existence at the time of Al-Mû'tasim (218/833—227/842)[5].

(1) Dr. Pinto is here mistaken, for though many books certainly perished in the sack of Baghdad, the library of the Mustansirîyah existed for more then a century later. In the biography of Ibn al-Futi which I have published in the Loghat al-'Arab (Baghdad) vol. VI. p. 647-649 it is distinctly stated that he was for many years librarian there. In the same biography mention is made of the vast library collected by Nasîr ad-Dîn Tûsî in Marâghah near Tabrîz. K.

(2) Qalqashandî *Subh al-A'sha* I. 466.

(3) *Fihrist* p. 105.

(4) *Fihrist* p. 5 line 18 and 30 : 21-120 and 274.

(5) Ibn Khallikân I. 549 : W. No. 515.

(2) A library attached to another Dâr al-'Ilm, founded in 381/991[1] or in 383/903[2] in the street *Bain as-Surain* in the town-quarter Al-Karkh by the Buwaihi wazîr Abū Nasr Sâbûr ibn Ardashîr (died 416/1025), praised by many writers for its beauty and size[3] and also that it contained more than 100,000 volumes, among them some copied by the most celebrated calligraphists. This library survived the death of its founder for a short time only, because it was completely plundered and burned to the ground by the soldiers of the Saljuq Sultân Toghrul Beg when he conquered Baghdad in 401/1059[4]. A certain quantity of books were saved from destruction and incorporated in the library of 'Amîd al-Mulk al-Kundurî, the wazîr of Toghrul Beg[5].

(3) The library attached to the Nizâmîyah Madrasah, founded in 457/1064 by Nizâm al-Mulk, the wazir of the Saljuq Sultan Alp Arslân[6].

(4) The library of the Mustansirîyah Madrasah founded in 631/1233 by the last but one Abbasid caliph al-Mustansir (624/1226—641/1243)[7].

All these libraries, and in the seventh century of the Hijrah (XIII century) there were thirty-six[8] in all, were probably destroyed at the entering of Baghdad by the Mongols under Hûlagû Khân in 656/1258[9].

Mosul (Al-Mausil)

(5) The library of the Dâr al-'Ilm founded by the scholar and poet Ibn Hamdûn in 323/935[10].

Al-Basrah

(6) and (7) Two libraries, one founded and opened to the public by a certain Ibn Sawwâr[11], the other mentioned by al-Harîrî[12], the author of the *Maqamat*,

(1) Safadî fol. 26r.
(2) Ibn al-Athîr, Kâmil IX. 71.
(3) Ibn al-Athîr IX. 246 : Safadî fol. 26v, 27r ; Yâqût I. 799.
(4) I. Athîr, *Kamil* IX. 246 ; Safadî fol. 26v : Bundârî, (Leiden 1889) p. 18 : Yâqût, *Buldan* I. 799.
(5) I. Athîr, *Kamil* IX. 246 ; Bundârî p. 18.
(6) Safadî fol. 110v.
(7) Abul Fidâ', *Tarikh* III. 179 : Qazwînî, *Nuzhat* (ed. Le Strange 42).
(8) Reinaud, *Introduction to the Geography of Abul Fida* (Paris 1848) p. CXLI.
(9) Qalqashandî I. 466 (but see my remarks in Note above. K.)
(10) Yâqût, *Irshad* II. 420.
(11) Al-Maqdisî, *Bibl. Geog.* III. 413.
(12) Harîrî, *Maqamat* ed. Paris 1847 p. 26-27 of vol. I.

were both probably burned down when the Bedouins invaded the town in 483/1090[1].

Ramahormuz.

(9) A library founded by the same Ibn Sawwâr who founded the library at Al-Basrah[2].

Halab (Aleppo).

(10) A library founded by the Hamdânide princes who reigned there in the fourth (10th) century[3].

Tripolis in Syria.

(11) The library founded by the rulers, the Banû 'Ammâr towards the end of the fifth (11th) century and destroyed by the Franks at the time of the First Crusade (503/1109)[4].

Cairo.

(12) The library attached to the Azhar mosque founded by the Fatimid Caliph Al-'Azîz (reigned 365/975 —386/996)[5].

(13) The library attached to the Dâr al-'Ilm founded in 395/1004 by the Caliph Al-Hâkim, successor of Al-'Azîz[6]. This library was still flourishing under his successor Az-Zâhir[7], but was later neglected and partly plundered[8], though it still existed at the time when Salâh ad-Dîn took the city in 567/1171. He made a present of part of the library to his secretary, Al-Fâdil 'Abd ar-Rahîm[9], while the remainder was sold by auction[10].

(14) The library attached to the Fâdilîyah Madrasah founded by the above named Al-Fâdil, in which were incorporated the books which he had received from Salâh-ad-Dîn. Very soon after, the books were sold by the students (!) and scattered in all directions[11].

(1) Ibn al-Athîr X. 122.
(2) Maqdisî l.c.
(3) Ibn al-'Adîm, Paris Ms. fol. 56 : Margoliouth, Letters of *Abu'l-'Ala'* al-Ma'arrî p. XVI.
(4) Ibn al-Furât, *Tarikh*, Vienna Ms. under year 503 A.H. : Ibn al Athîr X. 334.
(5) Maqrîzî, *Khitat* I. 408.
(6) Maqrîzî I. 458.
(7) Ibn al-Qiftî, *Tarikh al-Hukama'* ed Lippert p. 440.
(8) Maqrîzî I. 408-409.
(9) Maqrîzî I. 409 : Ibn Khaldûn IV. 81.
(10) Abû Shâmah, *Raudhatain* (Cairo 1287) I. 228.
(11) Maqrîzî, *Khitat* II. 367 ; Qalqashandî I. 467.

Ghaznah

(15) Libraries enriched by the books plundered from ar-Rây in 420/1029 and from Isfahân in 425/1033 by the Ghaznawî troops, but they were a century later destroyed and scattered when the city was taken in 550/1155 by the Ghûrî Sultân Husain[1].

Marw. possessed ten libraries, among them :

(16) The Nizâmîyah founded by the above-named Nazîm al-Mulk[2].

(17) The 'Azîziyyah founded in the sixth (XIIth) century by 'Azîz ad-Dîn, a court chamberlain[3].

Nishapur.

(18) Libraries are mentioned only on account of their being burned by the Ghuzz Turks in 548/1153[4].

Ray.

(19) The library which in 420/1029 was removed to Ghaznah by the conqueror Mahmûd of Ghaznah[5].

Shiraz.

(20) The library founded by the Buwaihi ruler 'Adid ad-Daulah (reigned 367/977-372/982)[6], but it was already neglected at the time of his son Bahâ' ad-Daulah[7].

SPAIN.

Cordoba.

(21) The library founded by the Caliph Al-Hakam al-Mustansir (349/961—365/976)[8]. The wazîr of his successor Hishâm (365/976—396/1006) named al-Wâdish, a freedman of Al-Mansûr Muhammad ibn Abû 'Amir, had all materialistic and philosophical works in it burned[9]; part of it was sold at the time of the Berber invasion (5/11 century) and what remained was plundered by the conquerors[10].

---

(1) Ibn al-Athîr IX. 297.
(2) Yâqût, *Buldan* IV. 509.
(3) Yâqût, *Buldan* l.c.
(4) Ibn al-Athîr XI. 120.
(5) Yâqût, *Irshad* II. 315.
(6) Maqdisi, p. 449.
(7) Yâqût, *Irshad* V. 446-7.
(8) Ibn Khaldûn IV. 146; Maqqarî, Cairo ed. I. 180 (Leiden I. 249).
(9) Ibn Sâ'id. *Tabaqat.* Bairut p. 65-66; Al-Adhârî, *Bayan* ed. Leiden II. 314-5.
(10) Ibn Khaldûn, IV. 146; Maqqarî ed. Cairo I. 80 (Leiden I. 250).

MAGHRIB.

Fas. (*Fez*).

(22) The library of the Madrasah as-Saffârîn founded by the Merînî Sultan Ya'qûb ibn 'Abd al-Haqq (591/1195—614/1217) formed to a great extent from the books found in Spain, which the Sultan demanded from the defeated Sancho, king of Spain[1].

The princes took great care concerning the buildings which were to serve as public libraries. Some of them like those of Shîrâz, Cordoba and Cairo were placed in separate structures, with many rooms for different uses ; galleries with shelves in which the books were kept, rooms where the visitors could read and study, rooms set apart for those in charge of making copies of manuscripts, rooms which served for literary assemblies[2], and even in some cases rooms for musical entertainment[3], etc. All rooms were richly and comfortably fitted ; on the floors were carpets and mats, where the readers in Oriental fashion squatted with crossed legs, reading and even writing, holding the sheet of paper or parchment adroitly in the palm of the left hand. The windows and doors were closed with curtains, the chief entrance-door having a specially heavy curtain to prevent the cold air from entering[4].

The Arab historians have described some of these libraries at some length as if they were finding a great delight in their beauty and riches. So, for example, al-Maqrîzî describes a library in Cairo :

" On the 8th day of Jamâdâ II. 395 A.H. (1004) was opened the building called " *The House of Wisdom.* " The students took up their residence. The books were brought from the libraries of the Inhabited Castles (residences of the Fatimid Caliphs) and the public was admitted. Whoever wanted was at liberty to copy any book he wished to copy, or whoever required to read a certain book found in the library could do so. Scholars studied the Kor'ân, astronomy, grammar, lexicography and medicine[5]. The

(1) *Raudh- al-Qirtas* ed. Tornberg p. 18

(2) Harîrî, *Maqamat* I. 26-7.

(3) Abul 'Alâ, *Siqt az-Zand* (ed. Cairo 1324) II. 7 ; (ed. Bulaq 1286) II. 51.

(4) Maqdisî 449 : Maqrîzî II. 459.

(5) As this Academy was not a theological one the library attached to it contained also books on exact sciences. (It was probably here that Ibn al-Haitham, one of the greatest scientists Islam has produced, could find the Greek works upon mathematics, astronomy etc. and pursue his studies after his arrival in Cairo, K.)

building was, moreover, adorned by carpets, and all doors and corridors had curtains, and managers, servants, porters and other menials were appointed to maintain the establishment. Out of the library of the Caliph al-Hâkim those books were brought, which he had granted—books in all sciences and literatures and of exquisite calligraphy such as no other king had ever been able to bring together. Al-Hâkim permitted admittance to everyone, without distinction of rank, who wished to read or consult any of the books[1]."

Al-Maqdisî has left an interesting description of the rich library at Shîrâz[2]:

" 'Adad ad-Daulah founded in Shîrâz a residence which had not its equal East to West ; no ignorant person entered it but was enchanted, nor any learned person but his imagination was filled with the delights and perfumes of Paradise. He made it intersected with water-courses, the buildings were crowned with domes and surrounded by gardens and parks, lakes were excavated and every kind of comfort that could be thought of. I have heard the servants say that there were 360 rooms and pavilions, in each of which he resided one day of the year, some were on the ground-floor and some above. The library constituted a gallery by itself ; there was a superintendent, a librarian and an inspector chosen from the most trustworthy people of the country. There is no book written up to this time in whatever branch of science but the prince has acquired a copy of it. The library consists of one long vaulted room, annexed to which are store-rooms. The prince had made along the large room and the store-chambers, scaffoldings about the height of a man, three yards wide, of decorated wood, which have shelves from top to bottom ; the books are arranged on the shelves and for every branch of learning there are separate scaffolds. There are also catalogues in which all the titles of the books are entered. Only persons of standing are admitted to this library. I myself inspected this library, downstairs and upstairs, when all was still in order. I observed in each room carpets and curtains, I also saw the ventilation chamber, to which the water is carried by pipes which surround it on every side in circulation."

The rooms set apart for the books had along the walls shelves which did not surpass the height of a man, so that

(1) Maqrîzî I. 458.
(2) Maqdisî p. 449.

it was not necessary to use dangerous ladders to reach the books on the top-shelves. The scaffolds were all furnished with shutters some on hinges while other were let down from the top, and with locks. These locked shelves though not very commodious for the distribution of the books had the advantage that they preserved the rich and beautiful bindings from dust and sunlight. They certainly added to the books being infested by vermin on account of the want of ventilation[1].

The books were placed on the book-shelves divided in sections so as to form little heaps as can be clearly seen in the miniature taken from a manuscript of Harîrî, published by Blochet[2], which reproduces the wall of a public library, most probably at Môsul.

The name of the author and the title were written on the back of the book. The arrangement was according to subjects, and to facilitate the search for a work required the contents of each section of a bookshelf was registered upon a strip of paper attached to the shelf outside ; these strips had also indications of works which were incomplete or lacking in some part.

The number of books in libraries naturally varied considerably. The library founded by Sâbûr ibn Ardashîr contained 100,000 to 140,000 volumes, among them a hundred copies of the Kor'ân written by the celebrated Banû Muqlah[3]. The library at Tripolis, according to Ibn al-Furât, possessed three millions, certainly an exaggerated figure, among them 50,000 copies of the Kor'ân and 80,000 commentaries upon the same[4]. That of Cordoba consisted of 400,000 volumes, and six whole months were required to remove it from its old building to a new one[5]. The number of the volumes in the library of the Fatimid Caliphs is very uncertain because the various Arabic sources used by al-Maqrîzî, author of a very extensive topographical description of Egypt, do not state explicitly the number of books in total, but here and there one or the other portion of this library. One of these, for example, speaking of the library of Al-'Azîz, later incorporated in that of al-Hâkim, says that it consisted of forty chambers each containing 18,000 books upon

(1) Yâqût, *Irshad* VI. 359-360.
(2) Blochet, *Les Enluminures* plate X.
(3) Ibn al-Athîr X. 5 ; Safadî fol. 27r.
(4) Ibn al-Furât, Vienna Ms. fol. 38r.-v of vol. I.
(5) Maqqarî, Cairo ed. I. 256 (Leiden I. 184-5).

the "*ancient*" sciences[1] and that of the *Kitab al-'Ain* the great dictionary of Al-Khalîl, thirty copies were found, and of the colossal historical work of Tabarî twenty copies, while the Jamharah of Ibn Duraid was represented by one hundred copies, besides 2,400 copies of the Kor'ân. Another source states that the library was accommodated in one single room which housed about 200,000 volumes, a notice which is incredible as one room could not possibly hold such an enormous quantity of books. Another source states that the library contained 1,600,000 volumes, among them 1,200 copies[2] of the history of At-Tabarî; and finally another author limits the number to only 120,000[3] a figure which agrees with that of another historian, Al-Qalqashandî, who has drawn from other sources independent of al-Maqrîzî[4]. Though we are unable to arrive at a correct figure, the library must have been composed of a much greater quantity than 120,000 because, though frequently plundered in the time of the Fatimids, Salâh-ad-Dîn, at the conquest of the city of Cairo, after having given to his secretary Al-Fâdil 100,000 to 120,000 books, had the remainder sold at auctions which were held twice a week and lasted for a whole year[5].

In order that the public might use with ease all the material collected in these great libraries there existed proper catalogues collected in booklets or larger volumes, as was the case with the libraries at Cordoba[6], Ar-Rây[7], Bukhârâ[8] and Shîrâz[9].

---

(1) By *ancient* sciences or the *sciences of the Ancients* the Arabs understood mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, etc.

(2) Perhaps 1,200 volumes are meant, which would mean about thirty complete copies of the colossal work.

(3) Maqrîzî I. 408.

(4) Qalqashandî III. 475.

(5) Abû Shâmah, *Raudhatain* I. 228.

(6) Ibn Khaldûn IV. 146 : Maqqarî Cairo ed. I. 250 (Leiden I. 180).

(7) Yâqût, *Irshad* II. 315.

(8) Nicholson, *Literary History* p. 266.

(9) Maqdisî p. 449. Sprenger for this reason believed that Ibn an-Nadîm, author of the *Fihrist*, derived his biographical and bibliographical notes from some such catalogue, especially his extracts from Greek, Pehlewi and Indian works. But when one simply goes through the pages of this important work, especially in the earlier parts, one will see that it is a reasoned work of bibliography and not a book-catalogue. For the different opinions see Kremer, *Kulturgeschichte*, Browne, *Literary History of Persia* and Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur*. We possess perhaps one such catalogue in Nos. 21 and 26 of the Berlin Library, and certainly in the work of Hâjji Khalîfah, *Kashf az-Zunun*, but this author is very late in date (died 1069/1658).

Additions to the library were made either by the purchase of manuscripts or by copying for which special copyists were employed.

Immense sums were spent by the founders of libraries for the acquisition of new books ; the pride and ambition of many was to be the first to possess the work of a well-known author. For this purpose princes like Al-Hakam of Spain[1], and the Banû 'Ammâr of Tripolis[2] employed specialists and merchants who undertook this class of trade to acquire books in all foreign lands.

Probably some founders or directors of libraries acquired books at the auction sales, much in vogue in oriental countries, which was also one of the means adopted by private persons.

Besides the direct purchase of books it was also the custom to make copies of a work of which a copy was wanted. For this work the great libraries employed in a room set apart for the purpose a number of special copyists. Their manner of working varied. Sometimes a copyist would work by himself, in other cases several scribes would copy to dictation, so that at the same time several copies were made of the same original. The library at Tripolis is stated to have employed 180 such scribes, 30 of whom never ceased working day and night[3] ; such scribes were also employed in the libraries of Cairo[4] and Shîrâz[5]. The same method was used by private persons like the Caliph al-'Azîz in Cairo[6], Al-Hakam in Spain[7], the historian Al-Wâqidî (died 208/823)[8], the Spanish scholar Abû Mutrif[9] and others, when for some reason they were unable to purchase the book they required.

The large private libraries as well as the public ones had their librarians and attendants and among these we find at times distinguished authors and scientists. The historian Ibn Miskawaihî (died 421/1030) was librarian

---

(1) Maqqarî Cairo ed. I. 249 (Leiden I. 180) ; Ibn Khaldûn IV. 146.
(2) Ibn Furât, Vienna Ms. fol. 38v.
(3) Ibn al-Furât fol. 36v.
(4) Maqrîzî I. 458.
(5) Yâqût, *Irshad* V. 447.
(6) Maqrîzî I. 409.
(7) Ibn Khaldûn IV. 146.
(8) *Fihrist* p. 98.
(9) Ibn Bashkuâl, *Silah* I. 304-5

of the wazîr Abû'l Fadl ibn al 'Amîd of Ar-Rây[1], the historian Ibn as -Sâ'î (died 674/1275) was director of the Mustansirîyah library at Baghdâd[2], Avicenna (Ibn Sina) as mentioned before, was librarian of the Sâmânid prince Nâh ibn Mansûr at Bukhârâ[3], the author 'Alî ibn-Muhammad ash-Shâbushtî (died 389/998) was librarian of the Fatimid Caliph Al-'Azîz[4].

In the large public libraries the work of one librarian was absolutely impossible and he had under him as a rule one or more sub-librarians[5]. In fact the librarian, though primarily in charge of the administration and cataloguing of the books, was supposed to keep the public informed and to overlook the loan of books and the handing of books to the students ; as it was difficult work the ordinary servants attached to the establishment could not take charge of it. For this post it was imperative to be able to read, while the ordinary attendants may have been analphabets. One interesting notice has come down to us : In the large library of the *Dar al-'Ilm* at Baghdâd the charge of handing the books to the copyists was a negro woman's named Taufîq[6].

The administration of such an establishment incurred large expenses, especially as nearly all libraries supplied the students with paper, ink and pens[7]. A survey of the fixed sums for the needs of the library at Cairo at the time of Al-Hâkim shows that the expenses incurred by this institution were not inconsiderable[8].

---

(1) Ibn Miskawaihi, *Tajarib* VI. 286.

(2) Wüstenfeld, *Geschichtsschreiber* No. 354 ; Safadî fol. IIv-12r.

(3) Nicholson, *Literary History* p. 265.

(4) Ibn Khallikân I. 482 (W.No. 456).

(5) Yâqût, *Irshad* VI. 358 ; Safadî fol. 26v ; Ibn Tiqtiqa' p. 450 ; Maqdisî p. 449 : Maqrîzî I. 458.

(6) Abû'l-'Alâ' al-Ma'arrî, *Risalat al-Ghufran*, ed. Cairo 1321 p. 73 (Cairo 1343 p. 138). The librarian Abû Mansûr Muhammad ibn 'Alî is the same to whom Abû'l-Alâ' has addressed a letter (*Rasa'il*. ed. Margoliouth XIX) and to whom one of his poems (*Siqt az-Zand* II. 121) is addressed. He is most likely also identical with the one of whom Yâqût speaks (*Irshad* VI. 360). Margoliouth is certainly mistaken in identifying him in a foot-note, p. 358, with another Abû Mansûr ibn Ahmad ibn Tâhir, also a librarian of the *Dar al-'Ilm*, who died in 510/1116, sixty years after the death of Abû'l-'Alâ'.

(7) Maqrîzî I. 459 ; Yâqût, *Irshad* II. 420.

(8) Maqrîzî l.c.

	Dînârs
Price of 'Abbadânî matting ..	10
Paper for the coypists	90
For the librarian (perhaps his salary).	48
For water	12
For servants	15
Paper, ink and pens	12
Repairs to the curtains	1
Repairs to books and missing leaves supplied.	12
Felt curtains for winter use ..	5
Carpets for winter use	4

The large public libraries were open to all without distinction; upon this the sources insist continually, saying that anyone who could read, write or study a subject was admitted. Such was the free admission in the libraries at Tripolis[1], Cairo[2] Shîrâz[3] and Môsul[4]. It is not clear from the original sources whether the library of the Caliph Al-Hakam at Cordoba was open to the public. The explicit statement that the public were admitted cannot be found but the words of the informant: "Al-Hakam was very generous towards the people, collecting many books[5]," seem to indicate that the library was open to the public, for if the Caliph had only collected a fine private library, he could hardly have done any service to the people even if, as Mr. Ribera believes[6], some scholars were allowed to use it. In such case the modest schoolmaster Muhammad ibn Hazm would have been infinitely more generous towards the public who freely permitted many scholars of Cordoba to work in his library. The same can be said of 'Alî ibn Yahyâ al-Munajjim and many other private persons[7].

To facilitate in every way the use of books by students and scientists the public libraries also permitted their loan to places far away, sometimes against a deposit of money, at others, even without such deposit. An example

(1) Ibn al-Furât fol. 38v.
(2) Maqrîzî II. 458.
(3) Maqdisî p. 449.
(4) Yâqût, *Irshad* II. 420.
(5) Ibn Hazm in Ibn Khaldûn IV. 146; Maqqarî, Cairo ed. I. 184: Leiden ed. I. 256.
(6) Ribera, *La ensenanza entre los musulmanes* p. 94.
(7) See above, p....

is the Damîrîyah library at Marw from which Yâqût had borrowed 200 books[1], and others visited by the Spanish historian Abû Hayyân (died 745/1343) who would not buy any books, because, he says : Whatever book I want to have I can get on loan from any library, while if I wanted to borrow money to buy these books I should find no-one who would lend it to me[2].

But not all were so generous. Some donors, leaving their books in *Waqf*, made the condition that such books should not under any circumstances be lent out, as was done by the Qâdi Ibn Hibbân of Nîshâpûr[3]. Many books lent were not returned to the library they belonged to, and the verses of a certain Ar-Rabbât of Halab composed in 1216/1801) were a cry from the depth of his heart :

" Never lend a book, but rather make an excuse ! Take some lien for it, for such is a just way of acting. If you do not pay attention to my words you will certainly lose the book ! "

Also the verses of a certain Ibn as-Sârim (964/1556) " Whoever borrows my book and then keeps it is certainly not noble, but of low breed and a traitor[4]."

After all the life of these wonderful libraries was not long, through carelessness of the librarians, change of government, acts of vandalism by conquerors who tried to eradicate everything they found made by the hands of the defeated, these immense intellectual riches gradually vanished. In Arabic history not infrequent are notices of the loss of this or that library. One of the most frequent causes was destruction by fire. So ended the library founded in Baghdâd by Sâbûr ibn Ardashîr, which did not long survive its founder who died in 416/1025, being burned down with the whole quarter of the city where it was situated by the soldiers of the victorious Saljuk Sultan, Toghrul Beg[5].

(1) See above, p.....

(2) Wüstenfeld, *Die Schafi'iten*, Gôttingen Academy vol. 37 p. 152. (This statement of Abû Hayyân is found also in the *Durar al-Kaminah* in his biography. This work, it is to be hoped, will soon be accessible to students by the intended publication by the *Da'iratul Ma'arif*, Hyderabad.—K).

(3) Wüstenfeld, *Geschichtsschreiber* No. 409.

(4) G. Weil, *Arabische Verse uber das Ausleihen von Buchern. Islamica* 2nd series IV... 556-61. (A very long chapter could be written about the thefts from Waqf libraries by borrowers, and especially by dishonest persons in charge, and I hope to come back to this subject at another time. K.)

(5) Ibn al-Athîr IX. 246, X. 5 ; al-Bundârî p. 18 ; Safdî fol. 26v ; Yâqût, *Irshad*, who places this event in 447/1055.

A similar fate had several other libraries in Baghdâd, burned and destroyed by the Tâtars under the leadership of Hulâgû so that all traces of them were wiped out[1]; that of Ghaznah, burned by the troops of the Ghûrî prince Husain, when he sacked the city in 550/1155[2]; that of Marw, destroyed by the Tâtars in 606/1209[3]; that of Nîshâpûr laid to ashes by the Ghuzz Turks in 548/1153[4]. Less disastrous was the fate of the library of Ar-Rây. Of its books only those were burned by the conqueror, Mahmûd of Ghaznah, which were against the Sunni doctrines of which the Sultan was a fervent supporter[5].

The rich library at Shîrâz, on the contrary, decayed gradually; at the time of the successor of its founder it was already neglected. In fact one of the copyists, Ibn al-Bawwâb, complained one day to the sultan Bahâ' ad-Daulah about the disorder which reigned in it, so that a manuscript of the Kor'ân copied by the celebrated caligraphist Ibn Muqlah in thirty sections had lost one section and it took a long time to bring the fragments together to make the copy complete[6].

Neither was the library of the Banû' Ammâr in Tripolis spared from being destroyed by fire, the incendiaries were in this case not Tâtars or Turks, but Christian bands[7]. In fact this library was burned down by the Frank soldiers in the First Crusade 503/1109.

This fact has been recorded by the historian Ibn al-Furât (died 807/1404) as follows :

" The Shaikh Yahyâ ibn Abî Tayy Humaid an-Najjâr Al-Halabî[8] says : In Tripolis was an academy the like of which there was nowhere else in the world on account of the abundance, beauty and excellence of its books. Yahyâ said that his father informed him on the authority of a Shaikh of Tripolis who said : I was with Fakhr al-Mulk

---

(1) Qalqashandî I. 466 (but see my remarks above. K.)
(2) Ibn al-Athîr IX. 297.
(3) Yâqût, *Buldan* IV. 509.
(4) Ibn Al-Athîr XI. 120.
(5) Yâqût, *Irshad* II. 315.
(6) Yâqût, *Irshad* V. 446-7.
(7) Concerning this see Henri Lammens, *As-Salibiyun wa maktabat* Tarâbulus ash-Shâm (The Crusaders and the Library in Syria), *Mashriq* 1922 p. 107ff.
(8) Historian of the 7/13th century. Cf. Wüstenfeld, *Geschichtsschreiber*, No. 316.

ibn 'Ammâr[1], lord of Tripolis, at Shaizar[2]. He received the news of the conquest of Tripolis (by the Franks) and he fell down in a faint; then he regained consciousness and tears fell from his eyes. He said: By God! Nothing has caused me greater sorrow than (the destruction of) the Academy. In it were three million books in all sciences of theology, Kor'âns, traditions and literature. There were fifty thousand copies of the Kor'ân alone and eighty thousand commentaries on it. My father said that this library was one of the wonders of the world and the Banû 'Ammâr had bestowed the greatest care upon it. There were 180 copyists employed in it, and thirty worked day and night, and all were well paid for their services. The Banû 'Ammâr had in all lands agents who bought for them choice books and Tripolis during the reign of the Banû 'Ammâr became one whole Academy; from all countries came students and eminent persons, and under the Banû 'Ammâr all sciences flourished, especially the doctrines of the Imâmî sect; as a matter of fact the Banû 'Ammâr had recalled to life this doctrine and its followers. When the Franks entered Tripolis and conquered it they burned the Academy down to the ground. The cause of the burning was that a priest (may God curse him) when he saw all those books became beside himself. It happened that he entered the rooms where the Kor'âns were stored and he picked up a volume and behold! it was a Kor'ân. Then he took a second book and it was again a Kor'ân like the first; so he went on till he had picked up about twenty Kor'âns. Then he exclaimed: "All that is to be found in this library are Kor'âns of the Muslims[3]!" After this they burned it, only a few volumes were carried away by the Franks—May God curse those who are gone down to perdition already, and may He send to perdition all those who remain! And these are those who afterwards wander through Muslim lands[4]."

---

(1) Abu Tâlib ibn 'Ammâr, Qâdhi of Tripolis, made himself master of the town in 426; he was succeeded by his son Fakhr al-Mulk (Ibn al-Qalânisî ed. Amedrôz, Leiden 1908 p. 97.)

(2) A fortified town near Hamât where Fakhr al-Mulk had retired when the Crusaders attacked Tripolis (Ibn al-Qalânisî p. 164; Ibn al-Athîr X. 335.)

(3) One can see that the priest in question had never been in a real library where books are arranged according to subjects.

(4) The translation given in the text is direct from the manuscript. Quatremère (*Memoires sur l'Egypte* 1811 II. 506-7) had noticed it already, but translated it rather freely, and he has been followed by all modern hitorians of the Crusades like Michaud, *Histoire des Croisade*

A slower but nevertheless inexorable agony underwent also the libraries of Cairo and Cordoba. At the death of the Caliph al-Hâkim the Cairo library was still cared for; the wazîr of his successor Abû'l Qâsim 'Alî ibn Ahmad al-Jarjarâ'î in 435/1043 caused a new catalogue to be made of the books and had the bindings repaired[1]. But gradually the library fell into decay, especially under the Caliph al-Mustansir (426/1035—487/1094). During this reign a serious revolt occurred in Cairo by the negro soldiers in the service of this prince against the Turkish soldiers, commanded in this civil war by the Egyptian general Nâsir ad-Daulah ibn Hamdân, who, having, after much trouble, defeated the rebels in 461/1068, demanded from the Caliph for himself and his followers large recompenses. One of his partisans was the wazîr Abû'l Faraj Muhammad ibn Ja'far al-Maghribî who as reward received many books which were carried by 25 camels, while the sum of money which was due to him was 5,000 Dînârs, but the books which he had selected were valued at well over 100,000[2].

The same Nâsir ad-Daulah and his partisans were the same year compelled to flee from Cairo driven out by the same Turkish soldiers, who were exasperated by their preponderance and assumed excessive power and many houses, among them the library of the castle were plundered. The books which were in the so called "Internal Library" of the castle escaped out of the large library. This library, it appears, had a secret entrance[3].

Other books ended by falling into the hands of the governor of Alexandria, who is not known, but on being sent back to Cairo they were again plundered by slaves, and the negro slaves tore off the bindings to make sandals of them, burning the leaves, making the pretence that the book had come from the castle of the Sultan, who was

---

I. 305 and *Bibliotheque des Croida des* IV. 24 and Wilken, *Geschichte der Kreuzzuge* II. 221. The complete silence of the Christian chroniclers who have recorded some times very minutely even trivial matters, has induced some writers, (especially Lammens in his above-mentioned article) to cast doubt upon the account of Ibn al-Furât, or at least consider it an exaggeration of the Arab author, as if he wanted to invent a parallel to the presumed burning of the library at Alexandria. Really, while it depicts the natural grief of the Arabs about the loss of their cultural heritage, the Crusaders, who knew very little about Muslim Culture or hated it, saw in their destruction of the library of Tripolis only an episode such as happened continually and everywhere and consequently did not deserve special notice.

(1) Ibn al-Qiftî, Târîkh al-Hukamâ' p. 440.
(2) Maqrîzî I. 408-9.
(3) Maqrîzî I. 408.

a Shî'ah in opposition to their own creed[1]. Other books were thrown away and scattered in all directions. The remnants which were not burned were covered by heaps of dust and formed hillocks and remained in the vicinity of the ancient deposits called to-day "Hills of Books[2]."

The experiences of the books included in the libraries of the Fâtimids had not finished here. In 567/1171 Salâh ad-Dîn made himself master of Egypt and also took a share in the fate of the libraries. As already mentioned he gave to his secretary the Qâdî al-Fâdl 'Abd ar-Rahîm ibn 'Alî[3] 100,000 books while he ordered the remainder to be sold by auction. The sales were twice a week and lasted for years as they were still going on in the year 572/1176, and among the purchasers was the historian 'Imâd ad-Dîn al-Isbahânî, secretary of Salâh ad-Dîn, who, however, was by his master absolved from payment for the books he had purchased[4].

The library of Cordoba also perished miserably. Under the caliphate of the weak Hishâm II., the power passed into the hands of the wazîr al-Mansûr Muhammad ibn Abî 'Amir who, hating everything that dealt with philosophy, religious controversy or similar themes, invited some theologians to the library of Al-Hakam, made them sort out all books of a materialistic or philosophical nature, and had some burned[5] while others were cast into wells and cisterns of the palace where they soon decayed under the dust and stones thrown upon the top of them[6].

A few years later when Cordoba (in the 5/11th century) was menaced by Berber troops the wazîr al-Wâdih, freed-

---

(1) The Fatimide Dynasty as is well-known were Shî'ahs, while most of the population of Egypt, including the slaves here mentioned, were Sunnis.

(2) Maqrîzî I. 409. The words "Hills of Books" make us believe that this notice refers to heaps of papyri existing in that quarter but the writings they contained were not those of Arabic books but ancient papyri, the well-known *Kom* which even to this day furnish interesting materials for students.

(3) Maqrîzî I. 409 : Ibn Khaldûn IV. 8. Contrary to this statement Abû Shâmah *Raudhatain* I. 200 asserts that the Qâdhî al-Fâdhil, trusted by Salâh ad-Dîn to supervise the selection and sale of the books caused the covers to be stripped off the most valuable ones and had them thrown into a cistern, only to buy them when the sales were finished at a ridiculous price because they were damaged and practically worthless.

(4) Abû Shâmah p. 228.

(5) Al-Adharî, *Bayan* II. 314-5.

(6) Ibn Sâ'id, Tabaqât p. 66.

man of Al-Mansūr, had part of the remaining library sold, while what was left was plundered and destroyed by the conquerors[1]; only a very small remnant of the books which escaped was taken to Toledo, where they probably served to form the beautiful library of the Banû'n-Nûn of Toledo, when after the death of the Caliph Hishâm III, Spain was split into a number of small kingdoms (the Mulûk at-Tawâ'if)[2].

The 7/13th century, fatal for the independence of the Caliphate, was also disastrous for Arabic culture and libraries. Almost simultaneously this immense realm, already diminished and enfeebled by the continual struggle of the princes who had divided the power among themselves, was invaded from two sides by two great movements of nations totally different in civilisation and religion but both intent upon destroying and eradicating all that was dear and sacred to their common enemy; the Mongol horde and the Christian armies of the West.

But while the Christians of Spain were able to drive out the Muslims and supplant their civilisation for that of the Arabs, though being to no mean degree influenced by them, the Mongols, less civilised, allowed themselves to be converted to Islam and the religion transfused gradually into the new converts the love for books. The Mongol dynasty established in India was the first to feel the need for intellectual food and became the initiator and protector of all sciences. It was then that in the great cities libraries saw the light which collected the remnants of the great cultural heritage of the Arabs. They were followed by the Othmanlî Turks who, in their capital, Constantinople, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries, collected great libraries, most of which were attached to the mosques while the richest and most important one was comprised in the heritage of the Sultans themselves.

Principally, however, in the 19th and more so in the 20th century there has arisen in so many oppressed nations a sentiment of patriotism, of independence and a pride in the sacred and inalienable heritage of their own civilisation, and this feeling has also roused the Islamic Orient from its torpor. After the example of Europe all cultural manifestations have revived and flourished, and

(1) Ibn Khaldûn IV. 146: Maqqarî, Cairo ed. I, 180; Leiden I, 249-50.

(2) Ribera, *Bibliofiles* p. 45.

with these, libraries have taken a new lease of life. If those which exist in the Islamic world are only in part a poor step towards the revival of a glorious past they nevertheless represent this renewal of Muslim culture and the tendency to collect and put into order the cultural treasures. Egypt, most closely in contact with Europe, first felt the need for establishing libraries of European type, and the Khedivial, now National, Library was arranged by distinguished German Orientalists, Spitta, Vollers and Moritz[1]. In this library are brought together the most precious manuscripts which were scattered in the various mosques of Cairo, arranged with modern acumen in such a manner that they can be utilised and studied by the learned of all nations. Since the time of the first European director, Spitta, this library, has had a special staff of qualified copyists able to produce exact copies of the manuscripts for scholars who made a request for such, and recently has been introduced the more commodious and exact process of photographing.

Besides this Public Library, Egypt boasts also of private collections of valuable manuscripts, among which the most important is that of Ahmad Taimûr Pâshâ, one of the most learned modern Egyptians[2].

Constantinople has not remained behind in this movement so much more so because, as already mentioned, this city boasted of flourishing libraries in the 16th and 17th centuries, and the contents of the collections scattered in many mosques and madrasahs are set out in a large catalogue (in 40 volumes) which catalogue unfortunately leaves much to be desired. Precious mines for students are the Kôprûlû, Yenî Jamî', Tôp Kapû Sarâi, Hamidîyeh and other libraries in which some of the most precious and

---

(1) The Italian Orientalist Griffini was in 1920 entrusted with the arrangement of the Royal Library in Cairo, but was unable to complete his task as he died in May 1925. (Since then Prof. Jean Deni has been working upon the same task and is, as far as I know, still engaged upon it.—K).

(2) Al-Ma'lûf, *Al-Khizanat al-Taimuriyyah* in *Review of the Arab Academy* III. 225 ff. (Ahmad Taimûr Pâshâ with the greatest liberality permits students to make ample use of his unique private collection of valuable Arabic manuscripts. He even permits photographs to be taken. Another similar library is that of Ahmad Zekî Pâshâ in Gîzeh, which is particularly rich in photographs of rare manuscripts in Constantinople libraries, and the learned owner is equally liberal in permitting free use of his treasures.—K).

unique Arabic manuscripts are found[1]. It is certain that the government of the Turkish Republic will consider it a duty to preserve these treasures and make their use more easily accessible to European students than has been the case hitherto.

The influence of the West has made itself strongly felt in Syria in recent years; at Bairût, where, besides several small libraries[2], through the efforts of the Jesuit fathers who direct the University of St. Joseph an important collection of manuscripts has been formed. In Damascus, where the first impulse was given by the far-seeing governor, Midhat Pâshâ, about 1870, several libraries have come into existence[3].

The libraries of Baghdâd, capital of the 'Irâq and once the seat of the Caliphate, underwent during the last fifty years a deplorable decadence, which commenced in the 16th and 17th centuries. Inundations, plague, and last but not least the sale of manuscripts to Europeans have almost completely dispersed the manuscripts. In 1909 there still existed public libraries attached to mosques, the most important of which was that of Shaikh 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Jîlânî[4]. To-day, principally by the interest taken and under the guidance of the learned Carmelite, Father Anastase, a very learned Arabic scholar and himself the possessor of a valuable collection of manuscripts, an important cultural movement has taken place there also.

The libraries of the principal cities of the interior of the Arabian peninsula, like Mecca and Medîna[5], are too

(1) (Catalogues of the libraries in Constantinople are published but they leave much to be desired and many a unique manuscript has had to be rediscovered. Such have been described, principally in German Journals.—K.)

(2) Tarrâzî, *Dar-al-Kutub al-Kubra fi Bairut*, *Review of Arab Academie* II. 18; Al-Ma'lûf, *Al-Khizanat al-Barudiyah ibid.* V. 32 ff. (Three fascicles of the Catalogue of the Jesuit Library have been published so far, and these mention several unique manuscripts.—K.)

(3) Az-Zayyat, *Khaza'in al-Kutub fi Dimashq*, Cairo 1902.

(4) Massignon, *Etude sur les manuscripts des Bibliotheques de Baghdad*, *Revue du Munde Musulman VIII.* 233 ff. (By order of the 'Irâq Government the collections of manuscripts found in the Waqfs of various mosques have been collected into a State Library. His Excellency Ja'far Pasha informs me that only about 10 per cent. of the original possessions of the Waqf have been saved.—K.)

(5) Rif'at Pasha, *Mir-at al-Haramain*, Cairo Q 344 I-422-3. (Enquiries I have made from learned Muslims who have made use of the libraries at Al-Medînah reveal that the quantity of manuscripts preserved there is very considerable, but it will be long before these will be accessible for any but a very limited number of students.—K.)

little known, but are sure also to contain precious material, if we can judge by the copies made by the learned Shaikh ash-Shinqîtî, and others made for Count Landberg.

Other collections exist in the Yaman especially in the city of San'a, where the Lombard merchant Caprotti acquired at intervals large quantities of Yamanite manuscripts which, forming an important collection, are now preserved in the Ambrosian Library at Milan. Professor Griffini commenced to make a catalogue of this collection but it was left unfinished on account of his premature death[1]. Other collections of smaller size, coming from the Yaman, are among the manuscripts preserved at Berlin and at the British Museum in London. The cordial relations between Italy and the Yaman make us hope that the time is not far distant when this extreme portion of the Arab world can be explored scientifically.

Under the influence of the French, libraries have also been established in the cities of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, which are gradually being enlarged and enriched by continual new acquisitions. At the present time the following libraries are well known on account of the precious manuscripts which they contain : the library of the Zaitûnîyah mosque at Tunis, the library at Algiers, the fine collection in the madrasah at Tlemsen and that of Rabat (Morocco), a catalogue of the latter having been published recently[2].

Also India, with the very great number of its collections of manuscripts found in the larger cities, like Madras, Bombay and the cities of Bengal and the Punjab, continues with pride, aided by England, the cultural movement

---

(1) L. Beltrami, *Augenio Griffini Bey*. (Also in the Yaman a new order has commenced, for in the recently published history of Yaman (by 'Abd al-Wâsi' al-Yamanî, Cairo 1326) we find on page 274 under the year 1344 the following note : In this year the Imâm Yahyâ, whom God strengthen, built in San'â' the large library and collected in it valuable books of every branch of learning and he brought together the libraries of the ancient Waqfs in San'â,' which some hands had tried to bring to ruin."

(2) E. Levi-Provencal, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes de la Medrsa de Rabat*, Paris 1921.

commenced by the Mongol dynasty in the 16th and 17th centuries[1].

But all that has been done up to the present for the preservation of manuscripts in the East is not sufficient. Many precious manuscripts are still scattered everywhere, sometimes in the hands of private people who perhaps do not know even the value of them, or in small mosques or madrasahs where they remain buried and unknown. These ought not only to be saved from destruction and loss and collected in larger institutions, but should also be catalogued rationally and correctly and, in case of need, photographed so that they can be studied in other parts of the world. For this purpose Western Orientalists and learned Orientals should collaborate, the former bringing their scientific methods, the latter their practical knowledge of the language and the cultural tradition of their country. In this manner the study of Arabic culture and civilisation, which has in latter years shown such a great development, may continue more rigorously and more successfully.

(1) L. Bouvat, *Les societes, les publications officielles et les Bibliotheques de l'Inde* in *Revue du Monde Musulman* IV. 599 ff. (The author here does not dwell long enough upon the very large and valuable collection of Arabic books found in the great public libraries in India, which contain many treasures for which one would search in vain in the libraries of the West. Fortunately these treasures are gradually being made known to scholars by proper catalogues. But many other treasures are still almost unknown. The Library of the India Office possesses about 3.000 Arabic manuscripts, once part of the Royal Library at Delhi, which are not catalogued as yet. Other large and important additions are in the libraries of the British Museum (about a thousand Mss. not catalogued) and in Berlin.—K).

OLGA PINTO.