

Élise Franssen *Authors as Readers in the Mamlūk Period and Beyond*

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The field of the premodern Arabic book has recently seen a flurry of interest in libraries and book collections, as well as in the materiality and marginalia of manuscripts. A subcategory of this trend is the investigation of reading practices, either public or private. Both types are notoriously difficult to reconstruct, demanding considerable methodological creativity of their researchers. A notable contribution to our understanding of public reading practices in the premodern Arab world is Konrad Hirschler's *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh, 2012). For private reading practices, a good place to start is with various types of manuscript notes. Recently, there has been a welcome increase in studies that exploit their potential for revealing the social history of how particular copies of manuscripts were read: by whom, for what purpose, when, where, and under which conditions. Examples of these types of manuscript notes include ownership marks and endowment notes, which reveal clues about the history of the possession, location, and accessibility of manuscripts. More relevant for the volume under review are consultation marks,



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also known as readers' notes, usually to be found on title pages. Other examples are marginal jottings on later folios of the text, often expressing the reader's emotional reactions to a particular section or a mistake in either content or wording they felt should be rectified. These jottings were left by readers who either owned or borrowed the manuscripts, and they can be enormously helpful in the quest to understand the influences of a particular author. Beyond such manuscript notes, other precious sources for the researcher are various types of reading notebooks kept by authors.

Élise Franssen's edited volume *Authors as Readers in the Mamlūk Period and Beyond* is the outcome of a call for papers for a conference that was scheduled to be held in Venice in December 2020, but that was ultimately canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The book brings together eight chapters that exemplify the recent salutary interest in the traceable roles played by reading in the genesis of works in premodern book culture, with the majority of the contributions focusing on Arab-Islamic textual production. Drawing on R. Debray-Genette's notion of "genetic criticism" (see *Essais de critique génétique*, Paris, 1979), Franssen introduces the critical framework of "exogenesis" for the volume, referring to the way authors draw on other authors to shape their own writings (p. 19). Many of the contributions stay close to the materiality of the texts, granting the reader of the volume a privileged access to the lamplight of the authors and scholars who once squinted over these same manuscripts.

Apart from Tiziano Dorandi's dip into an ancient Greco-Roman papyrus draft text in his preface to the volume (pp. 5-9), the "Mamlūk period and beyond" of the title covers roughly the so-called Middle Period (1100-1600) of Arab-Islamic textual culture. Long ignored by scholarship in favor of the formative period (stretching roughly from the rise of Islam in the seventh century CE to the late tenth century CE) and the spread of print culture in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, this period has in the past few decades been the object of increasing scholarly interest. Researchers can draw on a staggering wealth of manuscripts, as the Middle Period was characterized both by a mania for composing very long books as well as by a healthy appetite for scribal activities. In particular, the writers and scholars of Mamlūk Egypt and Syria (1250-1517) produced a flood of reference works on all subjects imaginable, leading to the era recently being dubbed an "encyclopedic" age (see especially Elias Muhanna, *The World in a Book: Al-Nuwayri and the Islamic Encyclopedic Tradition*, Princeton, 2018). In addition to its encyclopedic aspirations, Mamlūk scholarly culture was also characterized by an inward-looking interest in local and recent scholarship. The present volume illuminates that trend by foregrounding many instances of scholars interacting with their near-contemporaries.

The eight contributions follow a chronological order. Stefan Leder's chapter, entitled "Letters in My Mind: Concepts and Practices of Response in the Writing of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil" (pp. 27-43) delves into the epistolary practices of Saladin's bibliophile secretary and head scribe in the chancery of Cairo, the eponymous al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil (d. 596/1200). Building on his ongoing study of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's letters, Leder discusses his literary creativity, his diligent approach to revision, and the intertextuality of the letters. In particular, Leder considers al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's careful attention to the tone and content of his correspondents' letters and the way he strove to respond to them in an appropriate manner. The chapter contains several translated excerpts from the relevant passages in the letters.

Mehdi Berriah's contribution, entitled "Ibn Taymiyya's Methodology Regarding his Sources. Reading, Selection and Use: Preliminary Study and Perspectives" (pp. 45-81), zooms in on the controversial Damascene theologian Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 728/1328) argumentative strategy and the interplay of source selection in this methodology. In concrete terms, the article demonstrates the different priorities evidenced in Ibn Taymiyya's way of drawing on sources to make his (often polemical) point. On the one hand, he would defer to traditional hierarchies of authority when citing his sources, such as the majority opinion among the prophet Muḥammad's companions, but he would also exhibit craftiness in his selection of sources when necessary. For example, he might cite a Mālikī source when wishing to refute a Mālikī opponent, though he himself was an adherent of the Ḥanbalī school of law and would be expected to draw first and foremost on Ḥanbalī legal sources. In this way, Berriah demonstrates the dexterity of Ibn Taymiyya's argumentation strategies.

The third contribution is by the volume editor, Elise Franssen, and is entitled "al-Ṣafadī: The Scholar as a Reader" (pp. 83-152). It focuses on the many handwritten traces left by the versatile polygraph Ḥalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī (d.764/1363), famous for his four biographical dictionaries and protean literary endeavors. The article is a thorough codicological investigation of al-Ṣafadī's reading practices from three main angles. The first makes use of documentary sources, especially manuscripts notes, such as readers' notes in his hand. The second part is an examination of his reading journal, or "commonplace book", known as the *Taḍkira*. Finally, Franssen provides insight into manuscripts copied by al-Ṣafadī, including holographs of his own works. The evidence for al-Ṣafadī's reading practices is copiously supported by photographs of the manuscripts, paired with visualized descriptions of the folios. Franssen also contextualizes these manuscripts as either fair copies or works-in-progress, tracing al-Ṣafadī's methods across various stages of his work.

The fourth chapter, by Yehoshua Frenkel, is entitled "On Networking and Book Culture in Fourteenth-Century Damascus. Tāḡ

al-Dīn al-Subkī's and Ḥalīl b. Aybak al-Şafadī's Working Methodology" (pp. 153-73). In this article, al-Şafadī is joined by two illustrious members of the powerful al-Subkī family, namely Taqī al-Dīn (d. 756/1355) and his more famous son, Tāġ al-Dīn (d. 771/1370). The base of the investigation is a manuscript of the book *Ġam' al-ġawāmi' fī 'ilm uşūl al-fiqh* by Taqī al-Dīn, copied by al-Şafadī. On the basis of this manuscript, Frenkel investigates the transmission of books through the textual and paratextual traces of this trio of scholars. Frenkel underlines the active role copyists were often expected to take, intervening when they found mistakes. He also emphasizes the intergenerational cooperation among the two members of the al-Subkī family, something that shows similarity with the mechanisms of hadith transmission.

The fifth chapter, by Michèle Goyens, is entitled "The Translator as a Reader and Commentator of Aristotle. The Testimony of Evrart de Conty and his Autograph Ms (ca. 1380)" (pp. 175-93), and it is the one contribution in the volume that, apart from the preface, departs from the Islamic cultural context. The article analyzes a medieval translator and author at work, tracing the way Evrart de Conty, physician to the French king, translated the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *Problemata physica* from Latin into Middle French. Goyens delves particularly into the issue of bilingualism in the period, analyzing the translator's choice of diction and the interference of the learned language of Latin.

The sixth chapter is Frédéric Bauden's "Maqriziana XVI: al-Maqrīzī as a Reader" (pp. 195-266). Impressively, Bauden has scoured tens of thousands of manuscripts to identify sixteen works containing a total of thirty-nine consultation marks made by the famous Egyptian historian Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442). Bauden considers two types of notes in his article, namely consultation marks, generally found on the title pages of a manuscript, and marginalia on later folios, which, unlike consultation notes, are generally unsigned. For this reason, Bauden argues that investigations of private reading practices in the Islamic world can only advance through serious paleographical analysis of the handwriting of particular scholars and writers, an argument that was also advocated by Bauden and Franssen in their edited volume, *In the Author's Hand. Holograph and Authorial Manuscripts in the Islamic Handwritten Tradition* (Leiden, 2020). Bauden demonstrates that al-Maqrīzī was highly methodological in his approach to consultation notes, leaving these marks on every single volume of the books he read. Differing terminology in his consultation marks indicates whether he summarized or excerpted from particular sources. The marks also provide insight into loan practices and competitive impulses among scholars of the time, as they were sometimes used to boast about a particular scholar having read a particular text first. Although only four books contain marginal additions

by al-Maqrīzī, the few examples found here give insight into not only boasting, but also the reader's 'emotional reactions', for example when al-Maqrīzī notes his displeasure with an author's ignorance. His tendency to revert to the second person at such moments of frustration might be recognizable to many wielders of the red pen today. Bauden's chapter contains a copious appendix with commented photographs of each consultation mark left by al-Maqrīzī.

The seventh chapter is by Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, entitled "al-Maqrīzī as a Reader of *The Testament of Ardašīr*" (pp. 267-75). The article focuses on a copy of the Sasanian ruler Ardašīr's (d. 242 CE) testament in the hand of al-Maqrīzī, which was in turn copied from the version preserved in al-Miskawayhi's (d. 421/1030) *Taġārib al-umam*. Because the manuscript of *Taġārib* used by al-Maqrīzī has also been preserved, the case study offers a unique opportunity to evaluate his diligence as a copyist. It turns out that al-Maqrīzī was a careful scribe, hardly changing the text, and showing little need to go back to correct his own work. He had few additions to make to the text and left errors in the model text as they were. As Hämeen-Anttila points out, it is hard to know whether al-Maqrīzī noticed the mistakes, and decided not to emend them, or not. His changes are minor, such as an occasional addition of diacritics, which reveal his readings of certain terms. Hämeen-Anttila mentions that some misunderstandings may have arisen from the use of Arabic terms for Sasanian institutions.

The final chapter, by Nazlı Vatansever, leaves the Mamlūk era for the late Ottoman period. It is entitled "Books as Career Shapers. The Reading Activities of Şahhâflarşeyhizâde Es'ad Efendi (1789-1848) at the Rise of His Career" (pp. 277-302). The article focuses on a booklist compiled by the scholar, chronicler, and statesman Es'ad Efendi in his *mecmû'a*, or personal manuscript notebook. This Ottoman borrowing from Arabic corresponds more or less to the Arabic *taḍkīra*, as it is used to refer to al-Şafadī's reading notebook, analyzed by Franssen in chapter three. Es'ad Efendi was active across many scholarly fields. Vatansever analyzes the relationship between the texts he compiled into his *mecmû'a*, his readings, and his career path, and ultimately concludes that the parallels between the books on the list and the texts copied into his *mecmû'a* are limited to a few citations and notes.

The various contributions of the volume complement each other well. Considering the technical nature of many of the chapters, as well as the different book cultures they are embedded in, a glossary or brief discussion of key concepts would not have been amiss. This is especially the case when the reader is introduced to polysemous Arabic terms that become 'false friends' in their transfer to book terminology in Ottoman Turkish. Franssen's chapter introduces us to al-Şafadī's *taḍkīra*, or personal reading notebook, whereas, as we

can read in Vatansever's contribution, a *tezkire* in Ottoman Turkish can denote a biographical dictionary, a type of reference work usually referred to as *kutub al-tarāğim* in Arabic. Conversely, Vatansever's chapter focuses on the *mecmū'a* (personal excerpt notebook) of Es'ad Efendi, whereas in the terminology of Arabic codicology, a *mağmū'a* refers to a composite or multiple-text manuscript. This is, however, a minor point. All in all, the volume contributes valuable new perspectives on Islamic manuscript studies, reading practices, authorial exchange, and premodern book culture.