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The Development of Arabic Multiple-Text and Composite Manuscripts: The Case of *ḥadīth* Manuscripts in Damascus during the Late Medieval Period

Abstract: This article is based on documented book collections in pre-Ottoman Syria and focuses in particular on a corpus of Arabic *ḥadīth* manuscripts produced between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. These manuscripts came mostly in the format of composite manuscripts, but occasionally also as multiple-text manuscripts. Many of them had originally been stand-alone booklets that were subsequently transformed into larger codices. This article shows how changes in the social and intellectual profile of a scholarly field (here *ḥadīth* studies) changes the materiality of the books the scholars used. The article furthermore argues that the term ‘*majmūʿ*’ that contemporaries used for composite and multiple-text manuscripts is meaningful when we consider the manuscripts not as ‘production units’, but as ‘circulation units’.

Multiple-text manuscripts (MTMs) in Arabic have—as in so many other fields of study—lingered on the margins of historical scholarship and cataloguing practices. Even though MTMs have been widely used in scholarship, they have rarely been the object of dedicated study. Some scholars have taken a more profound interest in them, such as—yet once again—Franz Rosenthal who published in the 1950s a description of a ‘one-volume library’ of philosophical and scientific texts, Georges Vajda who dealt with an Ottoman ‘bibliothèque de poche’ and James Kritzeck who described a philosophical MTM.¹ Yet these articles remained mostly on a descriptive level without discussing the multiple-text character of the manuscript in question in more depth. While they offered tantalising comments on broader issues related to the production, circulation and

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¹ Rosenthal 1955; Vajda 1954; Kritzeck 1956.

reception of these manuscripts, the manuscripts' multiple text character was not yet in the focus of scholarly interests. In consequence, the main academic resource for the field of Middle Eastern history/Islamic Studies, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, has no entry dedicated to MTMs or composite manuscripts (CMs) either in its first edition (early twentieth century), second edition (second half of the twentieth century) or its third edition (ongoing since 2007). And while we have comparatively good handbooks for the study of Arabic manuscripts, these have again relatively little to say on such manuscripts.²

In the same vein, library catalogues of Arabic manuscripts have rather sidelined MTMs and CMs as physical objects of significance. If they have been catalogued at all, they have been more often than not 'ripped apart' in the sense that each individual text got its entry in the respective thematic (law, mathematic, philosophy etc.) or alphabetical category. In this way, the manuscript's materiality and the interplay between its texts was obliterated and the individual entries often did not even cross-reference the other texts in the same manuscript. This is as much true for many of the seminal catalogues of the late nineteenth century (such as Wilhelm Ahlwardt's catalogue for the Staatsbibliothek Berlin) as for catalogues which have been published in the twenty-first century (such as 'Abd al-Sattār al-Ḥalwajī's dedicated catalogues for what he calls 'collections' in the Egyptian National Library, the Dār al-kutub, in Cairo).³ The latter encompasses some 3,000 pages of wonderful descriptions of individual texts in alphabetical order—yet the reader looks in vain for an index which would allow identifying the texts belonging to the same manuscript. There are only some laudable exceptions which broke away from this practice and which preserved the integrity of manuscripts with multiple texts, such as the excellent three catalogues for the Syrian National Library⁴ in Damascus by Yāsīn al-Sawwās or the catalogue of the Yahuda collection in Jerusalem.⁵ Here the criterion for ordering the texts has indeed been the MTM or the CM as a codicological unit. Such a catalogue does not only represent a wonderful resource for anybody interested in manuscripts beyond their textual content, but we see in the detailed entries that the cataloguers themselves started to see the manuscripts as much more than just neutral carriers of given texts.

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² Gacek 2009 and 2012; Déroche 2005.

³ Ahlwardt 1887-1899; al-Ḥalwajī 2011.

⁴ The Damascus collection was housed until the 1980s in the Ṣāḥirīya Library when it was transferred to the al-Asad National Library (referred to in the present article as 'Syrian National Library'). The manuscripts retained their class marks and secondary literature occasionally refers to them until today as 'Ṣāḥirīya' manuscripts.

⁵ Al-Sawwās 1983-86 and 1987; Wust 2016.

1 Setting the scene: MTMs and CMs in late medieval Damascus

In light of the absence of a dedicated scholarly interest and appropriate resources, we are thus far from having an overview on Arabic MTM and CM practices which would allow understanding regional differences (Arabic manuscripts circulated in considerable numbers between al-Andalus and South Asia), thematic differences (practices seem to be different in fields as diverse as mathematics, Qur'ān commentary and history) and diachronic change (significant numbers of Arabic manuscripts survive from between the tenth to the twentieth centuries). In light of this state of affair the present article sets out to discuss one specific case: MTMs and CMs produced and circulating in Damascus during the high and late medieval period (c.1200–1500) and in particular those with texts from the field of *ḥadīth*, i.e. the traditions reporting first and foremost the prophet Muḥammad's deeds and words. The argument proposed here will thus not give insight into regional differences (do we see the same development in other Syrian cities such as Aleppo, cities in neighbouring regions such as Cairo or even further away in a city such as Marrakesh?) and thematic differences (do we see the same development in other textual genres within Damascus?). However, leaving the regional and thematic factors outside the equation enables this case study to propose a first diachronic argument with regard to the development of Arabic MTMs and CMs.

The argument proposed here is that Damascene MTMs and CMs in the field of *ḥadīth* experienced a considerable upsurge in the course of the thirteenth century until their numbers started to dwindle away towards the end of the fifteenth century. This change in the physical format was closely linked to shifting practices of textual transmission in this scholarly field, in particular the enormous popularity of highly idiosyncratic small booklets of *ḥadīths* from the thirteenth century onwards and their subsequent declining popularity two hundred years later. This argument is primarily based on a survey of the hundreds of Damascene *ḥadīth* MTMs and CMs that were not only named in medieval book lists, but which have survived in large numbers (primarily in the Syrian National Library in Damascus, but in smaller numbers also in other collections around the world such as Cairo, Istanbul, Berlin, Paris, Dublin and Princeton). While the argument is thus consciously cautious in making too broad a claim, it would rather be surprising if the same—or at least a very similar—development did not occur in other cities where *ḥadīth* was a prime field of scholarly activities, such as Cairo. In the same vein, I assume that this development was not exclusively limited to *ḥadīth* scholarship, but was part of a much broader reconfiguration of textual formats in various fields during this period. To

cite but one example, the enormous upsurge of manuscripts with poetic and prose anthologies for scholarly consumption and also the parallel rise of MTMs with all possible material for more popular readerships⁶ indicate comparable trends beyond the field of *ḥadīth* scholarship. Yet, as I have not systematically surveyed the *ḥadīth* MTMs and CMs from other regions, nor the non-*ḥadīth* MTMs and CMs from Damascus these broader claims in regional and thematic terms are for the time being hypotheses.

As this article is published in a volume for a readership beyond those specialising in Middle Eastern history, some words on its methodology are in place. Firstly, the argument presented here is based on the ability to ascribe to manuscripts a narrowly-defined place of production and circulation, here the city of Damascus. This might seem slightly over-confident when working on other manuscript traditions, but the Arabic manuscript tradition has one striking characteristic, namely the large number of manuscript notes. Users of manuscripts systematically used blank spaces and margins, and occasionally even added further folia, to register the ownership status of the manuscript (such as ownership notes, sale notes, endowment notes, lending notes) and also the scholarly transmission of its text(s) (such as authorisations to transmit and reading certificates).⁷ These notes carry more often than not a date and place allowing to get a detailed understanding of a manuscript's regional circulation. Secondly, the period chosen here is the period from which we start to have large numbers of extant manuscripts. While it would be possible to extend the argument in synchronic terms (region and theme) and in diachronic terms for the following centuries, a move further back in time would have to take a completely different approach as the available source material is strikingly different.

As much as in other manuscript cultures, neither the term MTM nor the term CM has an equivalent in pre-modern Arabic. Rather what we observe is that scholars used the Arabic term *majmūʿ* (lit. 'brought together') for both formats.⁸ This term was widely used in the period under examination for simply describing those manuscripts which were not single-text manuscripts. A *majmūʿ* could thus be (rarely so) a single production unit (i.e. produced in one delimited time period), a MTM, and (much more often) could consist of distinct production units, a CM, which were brought together at a later point.⁹ The translation of the broad category *majmūʿ* as either MTM or CM is closely tied to the production context. However, this differentiation becomes more difficult to maintain when we follow medieval Arabic authors of

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6 Hirschler 2012.

7 Görke / Hirschler 2011.

8 For a brief discussion of the term see Friedrich / Schwarke 2016, 12.

9 For 'production unit' and 'circulation unit' see Andrist / Canart / Maniaci 2013.

book lists and look at manuscripts in terms of ‘circulation units’ and focus on how they were used and perceived. When we move away from the production context as the determining factor for a codex’s status, and the Arabic scholars discussed here clearly did so, it is evident that a *majmūʿ* had a clear meaning for them. For these scholars a (composite or multiple-text) codex was a *majmūʿ* irrespective of how it came into being and as long as it did not carry a title for the entire codex. The following will thus use the terms MTM and CM in order to probe to what extent the distinction between these two terms is reflected in the way of how a massive collection of *majmūʿ*’s was built up in late medieval Syria.

2 MTMs and CMs in Damascene medieval book lists

This interest in contemporaneous understandings of MTMs and CMs is very much informed by one set of source materials underlying this article, namely documentary Arabic book lists. With ‘documentary book lists’ I refer to lists that reproduce an actual collection of codicological units in contrast to ‘title lists’ which enumerate the titles known to a given author—a distinction often overlooked in studying Middle Eastern history. We have many examples of the latter, most famously the *Fihrist* of the tenth-century Baghdadi book trader Ibn al-Nadīm,¹⁰ but these bibliographies offer obviously a perspective completely different from documentary book lists. Although Arabic medieval societies were highly literate and characterised by the prominence of the written word, only a handful of documentary lists have been identified so far. The field is thus still a far cry from undertaking a project as rich in documents as for instance the *Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues*.¹¹ However we are in the fortunate position that the two largest known documentary Arabic book lists dating from before 1500 both come from the same city, Damascus, and thus allow working with them from a comparative angle: the Ashrafiya library catalogue written around the 1270s¹² and the book endowment of the scholar Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī (d. 909/1503).¹³ These two documents are highly relevant for discussing

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¹⁰ Ibn al-Nadīm 2014.

¹¹ The first volume published in this series was Humphreys 1990.

¹² *Fihrist kutub khizānat al-Ashrafiya*, MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Fatih 5433, fols 246–270; edited and discussed by Hirschler 2016.

¹³ *Fihrist al-kutub*, MS Damascus, Syrian National Library, 3190 (written before 896/1491); edited and discussed by Hirschler 2019.

MTMs and CMs for two reasons: Firstly, they both employ the basic conceptual differentiation between *kitāb* ('book' or in codicological terms here best translated as single-text manuscript) and *majmū'*, which is crucial for the interest in MTMs and CMs employed here. Secondly, and much more importantly, the Ashrafiya list and the Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī list in particular include hundreds of codicological units that have survived until today and which are identifiable in modern collections. This combination of a medieval documentary book list and a large corpus of extant manuscripts offers a case study so far unique for Middle Eastern history to understand the geographical trajectory of *majmū'*s—and also to understand the ways in which many of these manuscripts have been rebound into new codicological units in the course of the subsequent centuries.

The Ashrafiya library catalogue lists the books of an endowment in the heart of medieval Damascus, the Ashrafiya mausoleum, which was meant to commemorate its endower, the Damascene ruler al-Malik al-Ashraf (d. 635/1237), as well as to function as a scholarly teaching institution. Though the Ashrafiya was a rather minor player within the city's scholarly institutions, its library held the considerable number of over 2,000 codices. In order to guide the library's users one of its first librarians, Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad al-Anṣārī (d. 683/1284), devised a catalogue that was first and foremost a practical tool to locate the books on the library's shelves. For this aim al-Anṣārī employed on the catalogue's twenty-five folia a sophisticated ordering system with three criteria, title (in alphabetical order), subject (organised in 15 thematic categories) and size (either normal or small). Each codex was thus assigned what might be called a three-tier class mark with, for example, all titles starting with the letter 'A' being slotted in one of the thematic categories (e.g. medical works were in the thematic category 10) and these titles being further differentiated between normal and small size (so that a normal-sized medical work starting with 'A' would have the class mark 'A/10/n'.¹⁴ Fig. 1 shows the catalogue's second folio where we are in the section with normal-sized codices bearing titles starting with the letter 'A'. The thematic categories are announced with the respective number in display script; in the middle of line 2 we see the word 'fifth' (*al-khāmisa*) to denote the start of the works on history, in line 5 the word 'sixth' (*al-sādisa*) for poetry, between lines 10 and 11 (the cataloguer had initially forgotten to insert the number for the thematic category here) the word seventh (*al-sābi'a*) for *adab* and so on.

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14 For this library and its catalogue see Hirschler 2016.

Fig. 1: Ashrafiya catalogue (Damascus, 670s/1270s), MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Fatih 5433, fol. 247r © Istanbul, Süleymaniye Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi

However, this neat system hit the wall when al-Anṣārī came to the *majmūʿ*-manuscripts where the different units could obviously not be reduced to a single letter or a single subject—not too dissimilar to the predicament faced by modern cataloguers. However, in contrast to the modern practice of ‘ripping’ these manuscripts apart, i.e. listing the individual texts under the respective thematic category, the Ashrafiya cataloguer rather preserved their physical unity. This decision came at a cost as al-Anṣārī had to abandon the catalogue’s sophisticated system at this point and just listed each of these codices starting with the term *‘majmūʿ*’ followed by all (or some of) its texts. Fig. 2 shows the very different *mise-en-page* of the catalogue in this section compared to the single-text manuscript section in Fig. 1: The neat and orderly organisation of the

single-text manuscript section has given place to a hasty and less careful presentation. At the same time the organising term in display script is not anymore the numerical number for thematic categories, but the word *majmūʿ* with an elongated stroke in the middle of the word (for instance first word [reading right to left] in line 4). This section was thus considerably less user-friendly as users of the library would have had considerable problems in locating a given text in any of these *majmūʿ*s. However, the cataloguer took this short-cut as the number of *majmūʿ*s in this library was so low (less than 8%) that he considered it useful to devise a system exclusively catering for single-text manuscripts. Even though it did not work for the MTMs and CMs the vast majority of the library's holdings were still easily accessible for its users.

Fig. 2: Ashrafiya catalogue (Damascus, 670s/1270s), MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Fatih 5433, fol. 265r © Istanbul, Süleymaniye Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi

Fig. 3: Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī book list (Damascus, late ninth/fifteenth century), MS Damascus, Syrian National Library, 3190, fol. 9v © Damascus, Syrian National Library

The Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī book list, written some 200 years later, is a very different animal from the Ashrafiya catalogue: This was not a practical catalogue to locate books on the shelves, but a list of the books that this Damascene scholar endowed into a much larger library without an apparent system of ordering the entries. As much as scholars before him and after him Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī thus added a collection of his books to the existing library of an institution with which he was closely associated—in his case the ‘Umarīya Madrasa to which we will return further below. This autograph book list contains on its fifty-eight folia some 600 codices which he either describes as a single-text *kitāb* or as a *majmū‘*—exactly the same conceptualisation as in the Ashrafiya catalogue. Fig. 3 shows a typical section of this catalogue which starts with two single-text *kitābs*, followed by a *majmū‘* with seven texts on lines 3-6, a single-text *kitāb* in line 7, a *majmū‘* with five texts on lines 8-10 and so on. We do not know whether

a dedicated practical catalogue for the Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī endowment ever existed (nor do we have any surviving medieval catalogue from the entire ‘Umariya library or any of its other sub-collections). However it is clear that any such catalogue would have been very different from the Ashrafiya catalogue as the Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī endowment had a much higher ratio of *majmū*’s, around 70%. The Ashrafiya’s system geared towards single-text manuscripts would have been completely useless for providing the library’s users with a practical tool to retrieve books. The crucial point for the present discussion is that the ratio of MTMs and CMs in these two book collections, differing by the factor nine, represents a striking diachronic change in the profile of documented medieval Damascene book collections. While this observation alone is evidently not sufficient to argue that a broader change in textual practices and the materiality of the written word occurred in the city at large it does raise the question as to whether the differing profiles of these two collections signify a broader change.

3 The *majmū*’ and *ḥadīth* scholarship

The Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī book list consists in its vast majority of entries belonging to the field of *ḥadīth*, one of the characteristic fields of Islamic scholarship. The large body of transmissions concerning Muḥammad’s words and deeds that started to circulate after the development of Islam were transmitted in a combination of written and oral modes. This started to change in the course of the ninth century when the traditions were increasingly subject to a process of ‘canonization’. As a result, authoritative written collections, most famously those by the two scholars al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and Muslim (d. 261/875), came into being, which established a corpus of traditions deemed to be authentic. However, this process was not uncontested as it prioritised the written mode of transmission to the detriment of oral practices.¹⁵ Crucially, it very much challenged the professional identity of those scholars who transmitted *ḥadīth*: What was the point of having a large group of highly specialised scholars safe-guarding the textual witnesses of the prophetic model in oral modes of transmission when these witnesses were anyway accessible in an established corpus of written texts?

The forthcoming book by Garrett Davidson now offers a splendid analysis of how the field of *ḥadīth* scholarship reacted to the challenges of the canon-

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¹⁵ Brown 2007.

zation process in the period covered by the present article. He shows that *ḥadīth* scholars developed an ‘ideology of orality’, which asserted that the continuous oral transmission of the traditions had a value for its own sake as an essential and distinguishing trait of the Muslim community. Continuing to transmit traditions, irrespective of the existence of canonical works, was re-configured as an act of piety linking each generation anew to the Prophet. In this way the chains of transmission did not become obsolete, but remained a crucial form of social capital and they retained a paramount position in scholarship. This reconfiguration of the field of *ḥadīth* studies resulted in the emergence of new textual genres that bore witness to the continuous vivacity of this field. Most prominent among these new genres were the *muʿjam* or *mashyakha* (presenting an scholar’s shortest and most prized chains of transmission) on the one hand and collections of forty *ḥadīths* (organised around a colourful range of criteria, such as sharing the same theme and/or the same transmitters and/or transmitted in the same city and/or transmitted by a chain of scholars all carrying the same name etc.) on the other hand.¹⁶ The genre of forty *ḥadīths* could also appear as collections of five, ten, twenty or eighty *ḥadīths* (to cite but the most frequent versions).

The booklets produced within these new genres shared one distinctive trait: They were extremely short, often not comprising more than a few folia.¹⁷ In consequence they were a nightmare for practical purposes: How was a library to stock thousands of miniature booklets on its shelves and how was it to develop a system that made these texts actually retrievable? The response to the upsurge of these miniature booklets was to bind them into larger codicological units and the Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī book list with its strikingly high ratio of such CMs is in many ways an embodiment of this practice. To cite one random example: Item 444 (my numbering) in his list is described as a *majmūʿ* comprising a total of sixteen texts (Fig. 4). Among these we find all typical genres of this period’s *ḥadīth* scholarship, i.e. small-scale collections organised around specific transmitters and themes. The length of these booklets varies between four folia (item 444m: *ḥadīths* transmitted in three sessions by the thirteenth-century scholar Ibn Ṭabarzad) to twenty-four folia (item 444e; two volumes of *ḥadīth* transmitted by the ninth-century scholar Ibn Ḥarb) with a clustering of works of around ten folia.

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¹⁶ Davidson 2019.

¹⁷ Hirschler 2020a.

Fig 4: Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī book list (Damascus, late ninth/fifteenth century), MS Damascus, Syrian National Library, 3190, fol. 35v/fol. 36r; item 444 is on 35v, l.12 – fol. 36r, l. 1
© Damascus, Syrian National Library

The spread of small-scale booklets did also lead to new manuscript practices beyond the rise of CMs. While this wider development is beyond the scope of this paper, they are at least relevant to set the rise of *majmūs* in wider perspective. One of the new practices was the increased reuse of discarded folia and documents to produce these booklets. These fragments were especially used as title pages or booklet covers and occasionally even to produce a new quire itself. These practices have not been systematically researched yet,¹⁸ but it is evident that they are particularly concentrated in the small-scale *ḥadīth* booklets. Among the reused material are folios with texts in Arabic, Latin, Armenian, Syriac, Greek and Hebrew including biblical, liturgical and legal texts. Especially frequent was furthermore the reuse of documents in Arabic, for instance marriage and divorce contracts as well as contracts on real estate transactions. In most cases this reused material was parchment while the booklets themselves were almost without exception written on

¹⁸ First work on this issue include Bauden 2004, Rustow 2010, Sijpesteijn 2015.

paper.¹⁹ The CM listed by Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī as item 444, for instance has survived in its fifteenth-century shape and is today held in the Syrian National Library with the class mark 3803. This manuscript is a typical example of the proliferation of reuse practices as it contains several fragments of Arabic documents and Latin liturgical texts. On the left-hand side of Fig. 5 we see for instance the title page of what was in Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s list item 444p. On the right-hand side, in contrast, we see the fragment of a marriage contract reused for binding purposes. Such reuse practices in turn had an impact upon the material form of the *majmū*’s: Once these booklets were bound into CMs we see that reuse practices are quite popular for binding purposes, especially as fly leaves. While this practice is certainly not unknown from single-text manuscripts, the frequent reuse of fragments in *ḥadīth* booklets seems to have encouraged producers of MTMs and CMs to also employ them distinctively more often.

Fig. 5: MS Damascus, Syrian National Library, 3803, fol. 222v/223r with reused marriage contract © Damascus, Syrian National Library

¹⁹ Hirschler 2017 and 2020b.

Before we move on with the discussion, let us briefly return to the question of ‘circulation’-MTMs and CMs. Item 444 is clearly a CM as its sixteen texts are different production units written in different hands. We do not know when they were bound into one codex, but there is no indication that this occurred shortly after the last item was copied. However if we compare this codex with another codex from the Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī book list we see that the distinction between CM and MTM was indeed not meaningful for him. Item 205 in his list is again described as a *majmū‘* containing the following fourteen texts of very similar nature to those in item 444: (a) ‘Ten *ḥadīths* [transmitted via the Prophet’s grand-son] al-Ḥasan’ (b) ‘Ten *ḥadīths* [transmitted via the Prophet’s grand-son] al-Ḥusayn’ (c) ‘Forty *ḥadīths* [transmitted via the ninth-century scholar] al-Dārimī’ (d) ‘Forty *ḥadīths* [transmitted via the nine-century scholar] ‘Abd b. Ḥumayd’ (e) ‘Forty *ḥadīths* [transmitted via the twelfth-century scholar] al-Ḥāfiẓ ‘Abd al-Ghanī’ (f) ‘Ten *ḥadīths* [transmitted via the eleventh-century scholar] al-Thaqafī’ (g) ‘*Ḥadīths* with all transmitters called Muḥammad’ (h) ‘Forty *ḥadīths* with all transmitters transmitting from their father’ (i) ‘Forty *ḥadīths* [transmitted via the scholar] Nāṣir al-Dīn’ (j) ‘Ten *ḥadīths* [transmitted via the scholar] Ibn al-Ṣadr’ (k) ‘Twenty *ḥadīths* [transmitted via the scholar] Ibn Ṣafī’ (l) ‘Ten *ḥadīths* [transmitted via the scholar] Ibn Nāẓir al-Ṣāhibiya’ (m) ‘Forty *ḥadīths* [transmitted via the ninth-century scholar] al-Nasā’ī’ (n) ‘Twenty *ḥadīths* [transmitted via the scholar] ‘Imād al-Dīn’.²⁰

While items 205 and 444 share exactly the same structure with each having more than a dozen of small distinct *ḥadīth* booklets, they differ in one regard: As described above, 444 is a combination of different production units, a CM, while the items in 205 were almost without exception written in one hand (incidentally that of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī himself) and were produced in one delimited time period (in the summer of 889/1484) and is thus best described as a MTM. However, this codicological differentiation is not at all reflected in Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s book list where both codices were described as *majmū‘*. Perhaps even more importantly there is no difference evident in the way these two codices functioned within the period’s scholarly practices: Both were meant to document the continuous transmission of the Prophetic model down to Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s lifetime. His role in the autograph 205 is self-evident and further supported by notes of transmission on the various booklets in his own hand. In contrast 444 was written in different hands and Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī appears nowhere as scribe. However, they were as much connected to his person as 205 via a set of notes of transmission in his hand which he systematically distributed all over this codex.

²⁰ *Fihrist al-kutub*, MS Damascus, Syrian National Library, 3190, fol. 12v, ll. 10–16.

For instance, Fig. 6 shows on the left-hand side the title page of what was in Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s list item 4441. This item had been written in the early thirteenth century, but Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī appropriated the text with a note in his very distinctive hand (last line on this title page) stating ‘From among the authorised transmissions (*marwiyāt*) [of *ḥadīth*] of Yūsuf Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’. Thus, in terms of their circulation context both codices fulfilled the same function in demonstrating Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s authority to transmit such texts.

Fig. 6: MS Damascus, Syrian National Library, 3803, fol. 169v/170r with highlighted transmission note by Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī © Damascus, Syrian National Library

4 The social role of *majmū*’s and editorial agency

Returning to the main question at hand, i.e. how to explain the upsurge of producing MTMs and CMs in Damascus in the late medieval period, this was partly driven by above-discussed practical concerns of how to store material, but this is evidently not the full explanation. Rather, the production of *majmū*’s was very much driven by scholars enthusiastically taking advantage of the considerable degree of editorial agency this textual format offered—‘editorship’ has evidently to be conceived in very broad terms here, including most importantly the prac-

tice of compiling. The new textual and material practices in *ḥadīth* scholarship offered scholars agency on two main levels: Firstly, they started to produce their own booklets of *ḥadīths*, for which they had received the right of transmission. Even though none of these booklets contained any ‘new’ material (the *ḥadīths* had been known and accepted as authentic for centuries at that point), to ‘author’ such booklets was highly attractive as they allowed scholars to make again and again a statement on their (self-perceived elevated) position within the scholarly landscape as expressed in their lines of transmissions. These texts thus had a very specific social function and were crucial in bolstering or furthering an individual’s career. For example, Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī himself is said to have compiled some 800 titles, thus actively participating in this textual practice producing hundreds of new booklets along the way. While this number sounds incredibly high it does become realistic when taking into account that many of these titles were such very short booklets of *ḥadīths*.

Even more importantly, the popularity of these booklets offered a second instance of editorial agency when bound into larger codices, which leads us to the *majmū*’s. The author/compiler of such a manuscript could combine in one physical unit various items that contained his or her scholarly claim to prestige and status. While an individual booklet allowed making one specific statement, the *majmū*’ allowed broadening this statement considerably—it resulted in a unique textual monument of where one positioned oneself within the scholarly landscape. Whether the author/compiler wrote these texts on his own (as in item 205) as a MTM or combined texts written previously (as in item 444) to a CM does not make a difference as to this social function of a *majmū*’. This was the case because scholars could appropriate the texts written by others via inserting themselves as their transmitters so that these texts became part of their cultural and social capital. As seen above, this is clearly evident in Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s case when we take the example of item 444: Here we see his hand on the individual title pages inserting notes that the text in question was ‘from among [his] authorised transmissions’ (*min marwīyāt*)²¹ or that he had received for the text a ‘licence to transmit’ (*ijāza*).²² The *majmū*’s contained in the Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī list are thus a striking example of how a scholar of the late fifteenth century translated his scholarly activities into a bewildering array of small-scale booklets bound into large CMs and short texts written into large MTMs. Even though virtually all the traditions contained in these works had been available

21 *Majmū*’, Damascus, Syrian National Library, 3803, fol. 18r (444b), 78r (444e), 170r (444l), 182r (444m).

22 *Majmū*’, Damascus, Syrian National Library, 3803, fol. 45r (444c), 68r (444d), 151r (444k).

in the canonical collections since the ninth century, the emphasis on continuous *ḥadīth* transmission with oral modes in the ‘post-canonical’ age made these *majmū*’s highly relevant for their compilers and their audiences.

Fig. 7: Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī book list (Damascus, late ninth/fifteenth century), MS Damascus, Syrian National Library, 3190, fol. 38r with item 462l highlighted © Damascus, Syrian National Library

The *majmū*’s offered this second instance of agency not only because they allowed including a unique combination of ‘appropriated’ texts, but also because they enabled scholars to insert their own booklets among the textual production of their lofty predecessors. For example, item 462 in Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s list is

again described as a *majmūʿ* comprising a total of eighteen texts.²³ After the first eleven texts, all small *ḥadīth* booklets and virtually all appropriated with notes by him, we suddenly find a title by Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī himself (item 462l, see Fig. 7). The strategic insertion of one's own texts into a group of appropriated texts from previous generations evidently further strengthened the claim to be among the leading scholars of one's own time. Each of the hundreds of *majmūʿ*s in Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī's list, whether CM or MTM, thus has to be seen as a carefully crafted object, which was meant to do something in his specific social context. To what extent Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī actually was responsible for binding all these manuscripts is beyond the limits of this paper. However, in numerous cases, such as in item 462, we find his own works inserted into a *majmūʿ* and here it is beyond question that he had it (re?)bound in his life time. It is thus evident that this scholar embarked on a massive binding project, which must have demanded considerable resources and which thus underlines the importance he ascribed to this material format.

If we conceive of his *majmūʿ*s as a crafted object or even a monument, we can take this metaphor further: his book list as a whole maps out a carefully crafted scholarly landscape centred on one person—Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī. As much as each of the MTMs and CMs was a monument on its own constructed from individual texts and booklets, the book list as a whole expressed his broader claim. Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī was a scholar of the Ḥanbali legal school (*madhhab*) and this list contains all the great scholars from a late fifteenth-century Damascene Ḥanbali perspective. Texts ascribed to the founder of this legal school, Ibn Ḥanbal (241/855), evidently take prime position, but subsequent representatives of this law school, such as the Baghdadi scholar Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) follow with dozens of works. A particular emphasis is placed on the great tradition of Damascene Ḥanbalism in the centuries preceding Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī's lifetime. Works by Ibn Taymīya (d. 728/1328), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya (d. 751/1350) and Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1392) do appear over and over again, either as single-text manuscripts or as parts of *majmūʿ*s. However, the really striking element in the authorial profile of the book list is the prominence of scholars belonging to the Damascene Ḥanbali Ibn Qudāma family. This comes as little surprise as Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī himself belonged to the Maqdisī branch of this family. After the migration of the Qudāma family to Damascus in the mid-twelfth century its various branches started to play a salient role in the city's scholarly life for the next four centuries. Yet even if they were prominent the number of works by

²³ *Fihrist al-kutub*, MS Damascus, Syrian National Library, 3190, fol. 38r, ll. 11–18. This item 462 is today held in Damascus, Syrian National Library as MS 3761.

various family members in the Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī book list is clearly out of proportion: texts by the first prominent representatives of this family, the brothers Abū ‘Umar (d. 607/1210) and Muwaffaq al-Dīn (d. 620/1223), appear in their dozens as much as those by representatives of the following generations, such as Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn al-Maqdisī (d. 643/1245).

5 Fifteenth-century *majmū*’s and their subsequent fate

If we thus move from the individual booklets via the MTMs and CMs to the complete book list we find several instances of agency of which Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī took full advantage. Yet, his aim was obviously not only to consolidate and bolster his own position, but also to make sure that this status was transmitted to the next generation to continue the family’s scholarly genealogy. In order to do this he had to prolong his chains of authorised transmission to other family members, especially those of the next generation. This transmission had to ideally occur in reading sessions, which were to be registered on a manuscript of the text in question in form of a *samā*’-note (reading certificate)—and Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī did this on an impressively regular basis. As many of the texts were very short and part of *majmū*’s he was furthermore able to take a much-targeted approach as to whom he wanted to benefit from a specific line of transmission. If we return to the example of MTM 205—its remaining parts are today dispersed in the Dār al-kutub in Cairo and the Syrian National Library—we see how this worked in practice: On each of the fourteen texts we find a *samā*’-note which passes on his right to transmit the text to family members. These notes register a series of reading sessions, which took place in short intervals in the year 897/1492, presumably in his home.²⁴ For instance, Fig. 8 shows one such note on the title page of what was item 205f in Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s list, naming ‘my sons ‘Abdallāh, Badr al-Dīn Ḥasan, the latter’s mother Bulbul bt. ‘Abdallāh; Jawhara, the mother of ‘Abdallāh and [my son] ‘Abd al-Hādī attended some of [this session].’ These were very homely session with few participants, which contrasts with ‘public’ reading session of *ḥadīth* works that could easily attract one hundred participants and more.²⁵ Among the participants were in most of the sessions Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s above-named three sons ‘Abd al-Hādī, ‘Abdallāh and Ḥasan (though

²⁴ *Majmū*’, Cairo, Dār al-kutub, 2237 (*ḥadīth*), fols 84r, 87r, 90v, 97r, 105r, 113r, 116r, 120r, 125r, 129r, 136r.

²⁵ For such public reading sessions see Hirschler 2012, 32–81.

The significance of the book collection for the future of the family as envisioned by Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī is also evident in the fact that he endowed it for the benefit of his descendants. He describes his book list thus as the ‘list of the books [that] its writer endowed for his own benefit, for that of his children, their children and his offspring.’²⁶ The actual legal document for this endowment has not survived (his book list is not a legal document), nor do we find any endowment notes on the manuscripts themselves (writing endowment notes on manuscripts was not standard practice yet). We are thus left with this rather brief note, which does not offer any details on where the books were to be held (in a private home?), how access was regulated (as an endowment they should at least theoretically be public) and how its upkeep (for rebinding, repairs etc.) would have been financed. However, this absence of a normative text is not necessarily a major problem as we see from other manuscript notes that his offspring happily breached even the most fundamental rule of an endowment—its inalienability—by selling books in the aftermath of their father’s death. A sale note shows for instance that his son ‘Abd al-Hādī sold what was item 184a in Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s book list (today MS 1032 in the Syrian National Library), an autograph by Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī himself, to a prominent Damascene scholar for thirty Dirhams (Fig. 9).²⁷ While Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī clearly thought of his large book collection as a crucial element for securing his family’s future social and cultural prestige, his children seemingly took a different take on their father’s strategy and were occasionally more interested in immediate pecuniary advantages. In the case of item 184, it is most likely that the son cut this MTM into pieces as he sold its first title on its own and as the texts in what used to be item 184 have come down to us as single-text manuscripts preserved in the Syrian National Library.²⁸

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26 *Fihrist al-kutub*, MS Damascus, Syrian National Library, 3190, fol. 1v.

27 This item is on fol. 10b, l. 10 of his book list (*Fihrist al-kutub*, MS Damascus, Syrian National Library, 3190).

28 184(a) = Damascus, MS Syrian National Library 1032; 184(c) = Damascus, MS Syrian National Library 4557; 184(d) = Damascus, MS Syrian National Library 4535; 184(e) = Damascus, MS Syrian National Library 4536; 184(f) = Damascus, MS Syrian National Library 3257.

Fig. 9: MS Damascus, Syrian National Library, 1032, fol. 1r with highlighted sale note by Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī's son © Damascus, Syrian National Library

While we do not have any further documents on details of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s endowment there are two strong indications that the books were placed in the above-named ‘Umariya Madrasa. The first indication is a report by Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s student, the Damascene historian Ibn Ṭulūn (d. 953/1546) who was incidentally the buyer of item 184a, that ‘in this *madrassa* [al-‘Umariya] several people endowed cases for books [...]. Among them are also the books of Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī [...].’²⁹ This is not conclusive proof as Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī might have made a different endowment to this *madrassa*. However, we are in the fortunate position that a catalogue was produced in 1882 when the Ottoman authorities started to bring together the various endowment libraries in Damascus into one central library—the Ṣāḥiriya Library which was to develop into the present Syrian National Library.³⁰ This catalogue has not been studied yet, but it is a unique document for the history of Damascene libraries as it records for each codex from which endowment library it had been taken. When we take the entries of former ‘Umariya codices it is evident that they overlap to a very large extent with the items recorded in the Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī book list. Thus, even though we do not have endowment notes on the manuscripts which would have been conclusive proof, the vast number of codices from the Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī list which were still in the ‘Umariya in the late nineteenth century makes it very likely that this *madrassa* was where his book endowment was kept.

The ‘Umariya Madrasa was of outstanding importance within the scholarly landscape of Damascus as it was one of the city’s greatest and best endowed institutions. It was of particular importance for the city’s Ḥanbali community as it was founded by one of its ‘founding fathers’ in the city, the above named Abū ‘Umar (d. 607/1210).³¹ The ‘Umariya was furthermore the scholarly epicentre of the extra-muros Ṣāliḥiyya quarter which was founded in the twelfth centuries by the Qudāma family and which remained at the heart of Damascene Ḥanbalism in the following centuries.³² The *madrassa*’s library belonged to the city’s largest book collections and even though we are not yet able to trace its exact history in the early modern period, it certainly did play an important role until Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s life-time.³³ The mere fact that it is one of the few medieval libraries to have survived until the foundation of the modern Ṣāḥiriya Library in the late nineteenth century is testament to its crucial position within the city. Ibn ‘Abd

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²⁹ Ibn Ṭulūn, ed. 1949-56, I, 273/4.

³⁰ *Sijill jāhil* 1299 [1882].

³¹ Al-Ḥāfiẓ 2001.

³² Miura 2016.

³³ Liebreiz 2016.

al-Hādī thus made a very conscious decision when he decided to place his endowment for the benefit of his offspring in this *madrassa*. He belonged to the Qudāma family and placing his oeuvre in this library made a very distinct point as to reiterating his illustrious family background. More importantly it physically placed his books into the centre of Ḥanbalī scholarly practices—as much as he had inscribed such a place into the book collection itself by appropriating the texts of others and inserting his texts into the grand scholarly traditions. Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s carefully crafted *majmū*’s thus found a place fully appropriate for his intentions—except that many of them were sold and/or rebound in subsequent centuries.

A final methodological consideration emerging out of the case study presented here is that *majmū*’ manuscripts can obviously be very fleeting affairs. Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī himself had many manuscripts (re)-bound and we have already seen that his son immediately set out to break up some of his father’s MTMs into single-text manuscripts—even though they had been endowed. The late fifteenth-century book list of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī is a rare chance for us to get a snapshot of the textual format of a high number of texts. Many of the MTMs and CMs in his list have remained stable until the present day, but many others have changed their format beyond recognition. Above I discussed item 205 consisting of fourteen texts. This MTM was also broken up—by whom and when is unclear—and is today preserved in the Dār al-kutub library in Cairo as two distinct *majmū*’s, MS 2237 and 2238. However, in contrast to item 184, item 205 was not simply converted into smaller units, but rebound with fragments of other MTMs and CMs from Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī’s collection. MS 2237 has eleven texts from item 205 (a-f, j-m) and MS 2238 has three of them (g-i). MS 2237 was combined with eight texts that used to be in item 230 in the Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī book list, which was also broken up. In turn, two other texts from item 230 went into MS 2238 and two further texts were bound into yet another rebound *majmū*’ which is held today in the Syrian National Library with the class mark 3249. Fully discussing the intricate relationships between the MTMs and CMs in their late fifteenth-century shape and their present shape would require a paper on its own. Suffice is to say that once one starts with a MTM such as 205 the search rebounds between the fifteenth-century list and present day libraries to where codicological units have been moved over the last centuries well beyond Damascus and Cairo, including Istanbul, Jerusalem, Escorial, Berlin, Paris, Dublin, Princeton and so on. Most tellingly, what used to be one MTM (205) was later broken into two and rebound with other booklets so that the new manuscripts Dār al-kutub 2237 and 2238 turned into CMs.

6 Conclusion

The high proportion of *majmū*'s that we find in Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī's book list is thus expression of a crucial change in textual practices in the late medieval period. It is this transformation which made MTMs and CMs a highly meaningful format and which a scholar such as Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī amply employed. Once small booklets had become a prime unit of transmitting knowledge, practical demands of storability and the increased textual agency of expressing one's claim and transmitting this claim led to significantly higher numbers of *majmū*'s. In the sixteenth century, the popularity of such small booklets significantly declined in the field of *ḥadīth* on account of changing scholarly practices. We see a return to the great canonical compilations of the ninth and tenth centuries as the prime sites of scholarly activities in *ḥadīth* scholarship. This development has not been subject to dedicated research yet.³⁴ However for the case of Damascus this development can be seen in extant manuscripts: The 1882 foundation catalogue of the new Ottoman central library in the city has a dedicated section on *majmū*'s and here we find almost exclusively manuscripts that came from the only medieval collection covered at that point, the 'Umariya. Among the 131 *majmū*'s, a whopping 123 came from that library.³⁵ These numbers evidently have to be taken with caution as the 'Umariya library did not remain static, but had entries and exits, and the Ottoman-period libraries did evidently also include pre-Ottoman codices. The 1882 catalogue can thus only be a first impression, but the lopsided distribution clearly indicates that the *majmū*'s' popularity as a textual format in *ḥadīth* scholarship decreased from the sixteenth century onwards.

The example of *ḥadīth* MTMs and CMs in late medieval Damascus thus shows how closely the format of texts is bound to broader changes in the intellectual and social contexts of manuscript production and circulation. The *majmū*' became at one point a meaningful vehicle to express one's scholarly outlook and one's social aspirations and retained this function for an extended period. However as much as it could turn into such a meaningful embodiment of how a scholarly community functioned, it could cease to play this role in a relatively short period of time.

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³⁴ Cf. the brief comments in Sayeed 2015, 180-4.

³⁵ *Sijill jālil* 1299 [1882], 28–32.

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