



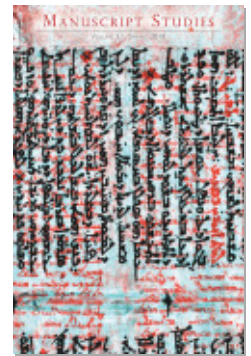
PROJECT MUSE®

---

*Catalogue of the Private Collections of Manuscripts in the  
Egyptian National Library* by Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Bāsiṭ  
(review)

Elias G. Saba

Manuscript Studies: A Journal of the Schoenberg Institute for  
Manuscript Studies, Volume 3, Number 1, Spring 2018, pp. 253-256  
(Review)



Published by University of Pennsylvania Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mns.2018.0013>

➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/693322>

## REVIEWS

---

Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ. *Catalogue of the Private Collections of Manuscripts in the Egyptian National Library*. 8 volumes. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Wathā’iq al-Qawmiyya; London: Mu’assasat al-Furqān li-l-Turāth al-Islāmī, Markaz Dirāsāt al-Mukhṭūṭāt al-Islāmiyya, 2015. 6762 pp. £280. ISBN: 978-1-905-12261-5.

ELIAS G. SABA  
Grinnell College

THE CATALOGUE OF THE *Private Collections of Manuscripts in the Egyptian National Library* published by the al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation is an important contribution to Arabic bibliographic literature. This eight-volume catalog is the result of a larger project by the Egyptian National Library to better catalog and digitize their holdings, much of which is being done in cooperation with the al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation. These eight volumes are the second part of the al-Furqān series of catalogs on the National Library, the first part being the *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts in The Egyptian National Library (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah): Collections (Majāmi‘)*, edited by ‘Abd al-Sattār ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq Ḥalwajī in 2011. Like the first catalog, the present catalog includes only the individual works in volumes of collected works (*majāmi‘*), not individual works that are volumes in themselves. It also represents the prolonged efforts of a team of three scholars, Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Sattār ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm, Ikrāmī Muḥammad Abū al-‘Alā, and Aḥmad al-Sayyid al-Ṣādiq, led by the general editor Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ.

This catalog covers only a small portion of manuscripts in the private collections in this library. An important aspect of this catalog, which is clear in the Arabic, has gotten lost in the English translation. *Majāmi‘*

(sing. *majmū'a*) refers to particular Arabic codices that contain a collection of various distinct works. These codical collections, sometimes written intentionally as one volume and sometimes the result of binding together smaller manuscripts and scattered pages, are a particularly important part of Islamic book history. *Majmāmi'* are very common in manuscript and perhaps the most common way to preserve shorter books, letters, pamphlets, and more. Since they contain many different texts, these collections are usually given short shrift in manuscript catalogs and bibliographies. Thankfully, 'Abd al-Bāsiṭ has overseen the production of a wonderful catalog that does justice to all 6,993 works in these collections. It is a pleasure to see such detailed entries for all of the works covered by this catalog.

The catalog is arranged alphabetically by title of the work. This arrangement makes for easy consultation when searching for a particular text. Each entry is numbered and gives a full description of the larger manuscript in which this work is found. In addition to the title of the work, every entry also contains the name and death date of the author, the copyist, the date of copy, the number and size of pages (in centimeters), a brief physical description of the manuscript, the incipit and explicit, descriptions of ownership marks and other paratextual elements, further references for the work and author, a note on the physical condition of the manuscript, the topic of the work (i.e., grammar, law, prosopography, etc.), and the call number of the physical manuscript and of its microfilm copy. Each entry is meticulously documented. One gets a relatively complete sense of the works in question. In this regard, this catalog will undoubtedly be a useful research aid for those interested in the history of the book. Although it covers only a very limited portion of the library's vast holdings, it is a marked improvement over the earlier catalogs of the Egyptian National Library, such as the catalogs discussed by Noah Gardiner for *Dissertation Reviews* (<http://www.dissertationreviews.org/archives/7355>).

In spite of the praise this catalog deserves, there are some shortcomings to this work that are all the more noticeable given how much effort went into compiling this catalog. In particular, it is missing a robust critical apparatus. There is no general index of any kind; each volume has only an index of authors. Each index is arranged alphabetically, although different

elements of an author's name are considered for alphabetization. For instance, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣafadī al-Dimashqī is alphabetized as "Aḥmad al-Ṣafadī," while Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Yūsuf al-Būnī is alphabetized as "al-Būnī." Other scholars are alphabetized by patronym, cognomen (*laqab*), paedonym (*kunya*), and so on. While the catalog generally uses the most-used part of someone's name as the heading, a consistent organization by, say, given name (*ism*), would make for a much more user-friendly index.

More than anything, one wishes there were an extra volume of indices and reference aids for this catalog. An index of all of the authors covered in all eight volumes of the catalog, for instance, and not just in each individual volume would be most welcome. In addition, a way to reference all of the works included in one particular codex is sorely needed. The reader can search every title and see its accession number, but there is no way to see the other works that are bound with any one title. Given the wealth of information offered in every entry, being able to use this collection by manuscript would be a welcome aid for researchers and bibliographers. Finally, a catalog of the private collections seems to warrant an index cataloging each work by collection, to be able to see the libraries of each scholar when they donated them to the Egyptian National Library.

There are also a few inconsistencies in how works are cataloged. For instance, this catalog documents eight copies of the *Risālat al-Aysa wa-l-Laysa* (Treatise on being and nonbeing) by the Ottoman scholar Kemalpaşazâde (d. 940/1534). Seven of these are said to be about scholastic theology (*'ilm al-kalām*), but oddly, one is said to be on language (6:537–44). Discrepancies of this kind can be found throughout the work. To take a second example, the *Bayān kashf al-alfāz allatī lā budda li-l-faḡih min ma'rifatihā* (Explaining the meaning of those words all jurists must know) by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Abbadhī (d. 860/1456) is listed as "Legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*)," "Law (*al-fiqh*)," "Law—Theory (*al-fiqh—uṣūl*)," "Islamic law, theory; Language" (1:786–89). Again, one wishes a consistent scheme of categorization was used in this catalog.

These shortcomings, however, should not take away from the quality of this catalog. This work is an impressive accomplishment. It has a great deal to offer scholars interested in consulting specific works in the National

Library of Egypt, but also those hoping to get a sense of the holdings of this collection. It will undoubtedly be a tremendous resource for scholars interested in Arabic book history and Arabo-Islamic history.

David T. Gura. *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts of the University of Notre Dame and Saint Mary's College*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016. 752 pp., 8 color illustrations. \$150. ISBN: 978-0-268-10060-5.

LISA FAGIN DAVIS  
*Medieval Academy of America*

IN THE CURRENT CLIMATE of digitization and the ongoing establishment of metadata standards for medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, it seems almost quaint to publish a print catalog. After all, a printed catalog is out of date almost as soon as it is published, once the library in question makes a new acquisition or any of its manuscripts become the subject of new research or more specific attributions. In addition, it is impossible to capture in print the visual detail and discoverability of a digital surrogate. This is true for any printed catalog, even one as thorough and detailed as David Gura's *Descriptive Catalogue of the Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts of the University of Notre Dame and Saint Mary's College*. On the other hand, print catalogs allow for flexibility and detail that may be challenging to implement in a database format. Gura's work exemplifies both the advantages and disadvantages of a printed manuscript catalog.

The catalog provides descriptions of 288 items (69 codices and 219 fragments) from several collections in Notre Dame, Indiana: the University of Notre Dame Library, the Snite Museum of Art, and St. Mary's College. This not the first work to tackle the University of Notre Dame collections: the University Library and the Snite Museum of Art were included in the 1935 de Ricci *Census* and the 1962 Faye and Bond *Supplement*, and James A.