

KONRAD HIRSCHLER

MEDIEVAL DAMASCUS

PLURALITY AND
DIVERSITY IN AN
ARABIC LIBRARY

THE ASHRAFIYA LIBRARY CATALOGUE



EDINBURGH STUDIES IN CLASSICAL ISLAMIC HISTORY AND CULTURE

Medieval Damascus

Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library

The Ashrafiya Library Catalogue

Konrad Hirschler

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support a stand-alone project at a time when funding is increasingly focused on large-scale research groups and networks – a funding approach that does not always sit easily with the research culture in the Humanities.

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Introduction

This is the story of a medieval Arabic library. Positioned in the centre of seventh-/thirteenth-century Damascus, part of an educational institution and endowed by members of the political and social elite there is nothing too unusual about the Ashrafiya library. In many ways it is a run-of-the-mill library of which dozens probably existed in Damascus and hundreds more in the various Syrian and Egyptian cities. Yet this library differs in one significant way from all of its counterparts: its catalogue has come down to us. Library catalogues do not sound like the most exciting documents we can lay our hands on and this book is certainly not the Middle Eastern equivalent to Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose* (although the first *shaykh* to preside over the library's mother institution did fall victim to a highly suspicious and unsolved murder). Rather this library catalogue is so valuable because it opens a door into a pre-print world of books and shelves, which was at the very heart of society but was hitherto largely inaccessible.

For the first time we are able to gain a detailed insight into what books were held in such a medieval Arabic library and thus its intellectual profile. William of Baskerville would not have found Aristotle's *Book on Comedy* on the library's shelves, but at least eighteen other titles ascribed to Aristotle, Plato, Galen and Socrates would have been available to him among the 2,000 books in its stock. The catalogue also allows us to understand for the first time how the books were actually organised on the shelves (How do we make the books retrievable?) and it allows us to grasp the spatial dimensions of a medieval library (How do we cram all of these books into such small places?). Finally, for the first time one can follow the nuts and bolts of founding

a medieval library in the Arabic Middle East (From where do we get the books?) and of running it in the subsequent decades and centuries (How do we prevent those folks from running off with the books?). The catalogue was known to the great scholar of manuscripts Ramazan Şeşen, who briefly cited it in some of his publications from the 1970s onwards. On the basis of his work the catalogue was referred to in subsequent publications by other scholars such as Şalâh al-Dīn al-Munajjid, who mentioned it in a Syrian training manual for librarians published in the 1970s.¹ This early work laid the basis for some of the misunderstandings that have circulated in scholarship on this library and its catalogue.² In the late 2000s the catalogue was studied more intensively in the framework of an Egyptian PhD thesis on pre-modern Arabic library catalogues.³ However, as it has neither been edited nor been the subject of an in-depth study, this catalogue is still awaiting its appropriate place in scholarship as a unique insight into medieval Arabic cultural life.

Research Context and Approach

Arabic societies, at least those in Syria and Egypt, arguably belonged to the most literate and bookish societies worldwide when the Ashrafiya library was founded in the seventh/thirteenth century.⁴ In the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries Middle Eastern societies had experienced a book revolution, partly driven by a significant fall in paper prices and accompanied by the spread of new cultural practices.⁵ This in turn led to a ‘reading revolution’, where the written word became increasingly central and spread to wider sections of society. Although literacy rates are virtually impossible to determine with the source material currently at hand, the ubiquity of reading suggests that it became a two-digit number in the cities of Egypt and Syria.⁶ One of the salient features of the intertwined processes of textualisation and popularisation was the rise of a new type of library in the Middle Period, the local endowed library. In contrast to the previously dominant royal libraries, these local endowed libraries offered a large number of venues spread across the region’s cities where broader reading audiences could access books. As this development gained pace in the seventh/thirteenth century, the Ashrafiya library sat at the very heart of the increasing availability and circulation of the written word and it itself was in no way an outstanding book collection. As we will see in the course of Chapter 1, it was rather a minor library set in

a mausoleum and contemporaries did not consider it to be very remarkable. This very averageness (or perhaps even below-averageness) is what makes the Ashrafiya so interesting: we are not necessarily dealing with an outlier or with an exceptional institution, but with a library that can typologically stand for hundreds of counterparts in Syria and Egypt.

The number of books held in the Ashrafiya is a good example of why this library's averageness matters. The Ashrafiya held a remarkably large collection of more than 2,000 'books', many of them multi-volume works (more on this number in Chapter 2). To put this number into perspective, on the British Isles the number of books in medieval monastic libraries typically did not exceed the low to mid-hundreds. In the late fourteenth century the largest Friars' library, the Austin library of York, held 646 volumes; the catalogue of the Cistercian library of Meaux listed 363 volumes; the Benedictine Dover Priory's library stocked 450 volumes; and the Augustinian library of Lanthony had 508 volumes.⁷ In this period, more than a century after the Ashrafiya was founded, only the most remarkable libraries had a collection that came close to 2,000 volumes: Norwich cathedral's priory arguably held more than 1,600 volumes; Christ Church cathedral in Canterbury and St Augustine's abbey both boasted some 1,800 volumes; and Bury St Edmunds more than 2,000.⁸ As late as the fifteenth century, all of the libraries of Cambridge University taken together possessed no more than 2,000 volumes.⁹ Although we do not have numbers for other Arabic libraries, the fact that the library of this rather unremarkable institution in Damascus was of a magnitude only matched a century later by the most prestigious institutions in medieval Britain gives a taste of how bookish life in Syria was.

The Ashrafiya catalogue is of outstanding importance for another very simple reason, namely that it has survived. Although libraries in Britain were clearly of a comparatively modest size, a large number of medieval library catalogues and inventories have come down. Certainly a large number of catalogues have been lost: of the 130 Cistercian abbeys and priories a mere three catalogues have survived; the same number has been preserved for the 50 Premonstratensian houses; and there is not a single catalogue for the 25 Gilbertine institutions.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the surviving material is so large that the wide-ranging edition project of the *Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues* could be undertaken. For the pre-1500 Arabic Middle East, by

contrast, the number of known surviving catalogues in a strict sense is easy to enumerate: two. In consequence, we face the absurd situation that our ability to write the history of the much larger and much more numerous book collections in the Middle East is severely curtailed compared with what we know about those in the relatively book-poor British lands.

The question why these catalogues have had a low survival rate is part of the much wider debate on document survival and archival practices in Middle Eastern societies and is beyond the scope of the present discussion.¹¹ However, with regard to the field of book studies two points need to be made that are to some degree also relevant for other fields of historical enquiry. First, although numbers are relatively low this cannot be a reason for sidelining documentary evidence and falling back on the more easily available narrative sources. The fact that the Ashrafiya catalogue has not been edited yet is a typical example of how crucial documents remain on the margins of scholarship while numerous research articles and monographs on Middle Eastern libraries continue to plough the depleted soil of a narrow band of narrative sources.¹² To give but one example of problems associated with narrative sources we only need to return to the issue of the actual size of medieval Arabic libraries. Narrative sources repeatedly gave outlandish numbers going into several hundred thousand volumes or even more than a million for one specific library. For instance, when the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty, Saladin, conquered the northern Mesopotamian town of Amad (Diyarbakir) in 579/1183 he supposedly found the rather unlikely number of 1,040,000 books in the library.¹³ While the topos-like quality of these numbers is a fascinating topic in itself, to rely on them for writing the history of libraries in the Middle Period will contribute little to furthering our knowledge of the past. The reliance on narrative sources has also led to highly questionable statements on the Ashrafiya library itself. For instance, in his seminal work on Damascus, Louis Pouzet briefly remarks that ‘we know of several madrasas in Damascus [including the Ashrafiya] to which books were endowed even though these institutions did not have a real library in the sense as it is generally understood today’.¹⁴ On the contrary, as the following will show, there is no doubt that even according to the narrowest of definitions the Ashrafiya was very much a ‘real library’.

The second point to be made on the use of documents in book studies

is that there is a danger – as much as in other fields – of reproducing Eurocentric research paradigms by looking for pendants with source genres in Latin European societies. The relative absence of library catalogues clearly does not indicate a poor literary life and rather than lamenting the absence of what is presumably not there scholarship should instead mobilise the source genres that we do have for Middle Eastern societies. In the field of book and library studies these are, in particular, the rich marginal notes on the numerous medieval manuscripts, which give insight into their production, circulation and use.¹⁵ It is this source genre that will drive most progress in research on medieval Arabic literary culture in the foreseeable future. In the field of medieval library studies Youssef Eche first pursued this approach in what is still a towering achievement: his *Les bibliothèques arabes publiques et semipubliques en Mésopotamie, en Syrie et en Égypte au Moyen Âge* from 1967. Although heavily reliant on narrative sources he put his knowledge of manuscripts as former director of the Syrian national collection (currently al-Assad National Library) to very good use. With this he offered the first diachronic account of the development of medieval Arabic libraries even though the earliest catalogue Eche was aware of was a late eighteenth-century catalogue from Aleppo.

Against this background there is little need to underline the importance of the Ashrafiya catalogue: written in the 670s/1270s it is not only the earliest-known Arabic medieval library catalogue, but it is – in a much wider perspective – one of very few pre-Ottoman book-related documents that are available at all. The only other known medieval Arabic catalogue is the inventory of the mosque library in the North African city of Kairouan from 693/1293–4, which only had 125 titles. If we broaden the search and include book-related documents other than catalogues there is more material: the largest such document is a list of more than 900 titles selected from Aleppo's libraries written in 694/1294, although its authenticity is in my view doubtful. In addition we have book lists of scholars' private collections, which range from brief informal notes with a few entries, via estate inventories to endowment lists with several hundred entries.¹⁶ The largest number of medieval Middle Eastern book lists known so far comes from the Cairo Genizah, the depository for disused writings in the Ben Ezra synagogue, and the authoritative monograph on this material lists more than one hundred of

them. These documents are mostly from the period from the eleventh century to the thirteenth century and most likely come from the usual Genizah territories of Egypt and southern Syria. Yet among these lists there are only four that refer to book holdings of institutions – works held in synagogues – in contrast to inventories of private collections, lists of categories of books, price-lists, legacies, and registers of loans. Furthermore, these four documents are difficult to use for comparative purposes in the framework of the present study as they are not catalogues, but rather inventory lists of all the property, including books, in a given synagogue. Compared with the Ashrafiya catalogue they are not only distinctively shorter, but they are much more concerned with the physical aspects of the books (size and format of paper, bound or unbound, number of volumes and pages). Concomitantly, they are also less concerned with developing a system of ordering the books according to criteria such as alphabet or theme – quite similar to the brief Kairouan catalogue-cum-inventory.¹⁷

The most recent survey of Arabic library ‘catalogues’ by Sa‘īd al-Jūmānī is only able to identify the frustratingly small number of twenty-five documents for the entire period up to the nineteenth century and only five of them, including the Ashrafiya and the Kairouan catalogues, belong to the pre-Ottoman period.¹⁸ In addition it is problematic to apply the phrase ‘library catalogue’ to all of them as some refer to private collections and others are endowment lists, rather than library catalogues. For instance, one of the largest pre-Ottoman documents refers to the endowment of the Damascene scholar Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī (d. 909/1503). This endowment was made for the benefit of a madrasa library, but the document itself is not a catalogue composed for the use of a librarian and readers. It is first and foremost a legal document.¹⁹ While it is thus highly problematic to compare the Ashrafiya catalogue with such chronologically and functionally diverse material, the following pages will occasionally refer to this ‘Jūmānī-corpus’.

In addition to book-related documents, bibliographical book lists were composed by individuals during the medieval period, most famously the *Fihrist* of the fourth-/tenth-century Baghdadi bookseller Ibn al-Nadīm. It is likely that these lists expressed the accumulated knowledge of books gained by an individual over the course of many years in various cities and numerous collections. Confusingly, scholars have suggested that such book lists can pro-

vide insight into a specific ‘library’.²⁰ Obviously this is highly misleading, as we have no indication whatsoever that the books known to the author of any such list were held in one single collection. In this sense Ibn al-Nadīm’s work is comparable with the fourteenth-century *Catalogus* of Henry of Kirkstede, the prior of Bury St Edmunds. In this work Henry listed hundreds of authors and thousands of works leaving a fascinating bibliography, but certainly not a library catalogue. In the same vein it is debatable to what extent the seventeen Genizah book lists written by Joseph Rosh ha-Seder in about the late sixth/twelfth and early seventh/thirteenth century can be considered ‘catalogues’.²¹

Middle Eastern library catalogues only survive in large numbers – or rather many more are known – from the Ottoman period onwards. The work of Ismail Erünsal has greatly contributed to our knowledge of libraries and their catalogues from the late ninth/fifteenth century onwards.²² However, the Ottoman catalogues generally refer to collections in the non-Arabic provinces – as is also evident from the small size of Arabic catalogues in the Jūmānī-corpus. Istanbul collections appear over and over, but also those in other cities such as Bursa, Skopje, Konya and Edirne.²³ One of the most fascinating early Ottoman catalogues is the palace library inventory of 1502/3, which is the subject of a forthcoming publication edited by Gülru Necipoğlu, Cemal Kafadar and Cornell Fleischer. As there is no indication of a steep cultural decline in the Arabic provinces, the relative paucity of catalogues from these areas is most likely a result of academic preferences, with the Ottoman period in the Arabic lands still a relatively under-researched field.

Although we have Ottoman catalogues they are of limited relevance for this study, which will avoid drawing together material from a wide variety of regions and periods to develop the idea of a ‘Muslim’ library. Rather, it is an explicit aim of this book not to label the Ashrafiya as a ‘Muslim’ library that is supposedly representative of book collections in the vast geographical area influenced by Islam. To eschew such essentialist categories is no longer noteworthy in most fields of Middle Eastern history, but they are surprisingly durable in small sub-fields such as book studies and library studies. Work based on narrative sources is still very prone to adopt this label – largely because the net needs to be cast wide enough to reach a critical mass of source material.²⁴ However, the Ashrafiya was set up and run in a specific local context that is fundamental to any satisfying analysis: its setting in the

urban topography of Damascus and its arrangement by an outstanding librarian played just as crucial a role as the background of the two endowers. The present study is in this sense very much meant to show that the Ashrafiya is best understood with a micro-historical approach.

To write a book on the basis of a unique document poses considerable challenges as there are hardly any points of comparison. While I will make occasional references on the basis of narrative sources to other libraries, mostly in Syria and Egypt, the different nature of the information available makes a far-reaching contextualisation simply impossible. The more promising strategy has thus been to compare the findings on the Ashrafiya with a case where similar source material has survived and has been made accessible. Here contemporaneous Latin European history offers ample material, but rather than using ‘Latin Europe’, an essentialist category that has gained significant traction in recent work on Middle Eastern history, this study draws comparisons with one specific region. The *Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues* offers a series of editions and studies on catalogues that are very similar to the Ashrafiya catalogue. Now standing at fifteen titles with hundreds of medieval catalogues they give a unique insight into the history of medieval libraries in one specific region. These documents are not only contemporaneous with the Ashrafiya catalogue, but they are – in contrast to many of the Arabic documents in the Jūmānī-corpus – in function and intent identical with it.

Keeping these introductory remarks in mind, the present study has three main aims: to provide the historical context for the Ashrafiya library, to make the catalogue available for future research and to propose how the catalogue may be fruitfully employed in such research. Chapter 1 discusses the library’s foundation in the Ayyubid period with particular emphasis on the possible origins of its book stock. It further follows the library’s history in the following centuries until it gradually disappears from the educational landscape of Mamluk Damascus in the middle of the ninth/fifteenth century. Surviving manuscripts and the notes on them are then used to examine the collection’s fate in the Ottoman period. In Chapter 2 the catalogue is analysed in order to understand the organisation of this medieval library, in particular how the books were arranged on the shelves. This close reading of the catalogue makes it possible to reconstruct the library’s spatiality and thus offers the first

insights into questions such as where books were kept in educational institutions and how shelves were arranged. The building that once housed the Ashrafiya was torn down in the early twentieth century. However, combining the catalogue with surviving survey data, contemporaneous illustrations and reports in narrative sources gives us a unique understanding of what a medieval Damascene library looked like. Chapter 3 turns to the holdings of this library and seeks to ascertain the intellectual profile of its books. The catalogue is used here to offer an insight into the holdings of an educational library – a discussion that has hitherto been impossible simply because of the lack of adequate sources. Most intriguingly it shows that this library held a diversity and plurality of titles, which go well beyond the subjects typically associated with madrasa teaching.

The catalogue itself is at the heart of Chapter 4 and here the individual entries are identified. In many cases a title's identification is unproblematic and straightforward. Yet in numerous cases the identification is debatable and what Richard Sharpe stated with reference to medieval British catalogues and book lists is easily applicable to the Middle Eastern context: 'Entries in medieval booklists can sometimes seem like a fiendish species of crossword, demanding to be solved but providing incomplete or otherwise inadequate clues.'²⁵ This is especially true because the number of Arabic works in circulation during the period when the Ashrafiya catalogue was prepared was considerably larger and more multifaceted than the titles that circulated on the British Isles in this period. The Ashrafiya cataloguer repeatedly used short titles to refer to books, which leaves considerable room for interpretation. Ascribing an entry to a known title is thus to situate it on a spectrum with reasoned argument at one end, conjecture in the middle and informed guess at the other end. The rationale for identifying the specific titles is provided in Chapter 4 and the reader can thus see my line of argument. By contrast, Chapters 1 to 3 do not indicate in each case how secure a given book's identification is. In some cases I may be wrong – and it would rather be surprising if this was not the case – but I am confident that systematic thematic, regional or chronological bias does not underlie any such mistakes. Individual erroneous identifications should therefore not undermine the broader arguments made in these chapters.

Finally, Chapter 5 provides a diplomatic edition of the catalogue, which

should be read in conjunction with the catalogue's facsimile-reproduction (Plates 6–54). The reproductions allow readers to follow my arguments on title identification and, more importantly, they show the catalogue's organisation, which cannot be adequately reflected in an edition. The indexing of such a large document is inevitably unsatisfying and cannot possibly cater for the various ways researchers may want to use it. In consequence, the data contained in Chapter 4 is available as an open-resource database, which allows users to manipulate the information commensurate with their research questions. As there is nothing as unreliable and unstable as references to internet links in printed works, the interested reader is invited to locate it with the search terms 'The Ashrafiya Library Database'.

Historical Context

At the point when the Ashrafiya library was founded, that is, the seventh/thirteenth century, Damascus was arguably the hub of cultural activities in the Arabic Middle East. Syria and its cities had emerged in the course of the sixth/twelfth century as one of the main centres of Arabic literary life, scholarship and manuscript production. This was in some sense an atypical position for Damascus and other Syrian cities, as they had been traditionally overshadowed by regional heavyweights Baghdad and Cairo. It was in these two cities that political control was traditionally located – best exemplified by the Fatimid and 'Abbasid Caliphates who took full advantage of the rich economic resources provided by the irrigated lands in their vicinity. However, the regionalisation of political control in the wider Middle East had opened up new windows of opportunity for hitherto marginalised regions such as Syria. From the fourth/tenth century onwards Baghdad was suffering from lower agricultural returns in Mesopotamia due to overexploitation of the lands.²⁶ While this process did not necessarily entail an overall economic decline – the rich cultural activities under the Saljuq rulers in the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries would have hardly been feasible within such a decline context – it clearly reduced the relative prominence of Baghdad in the wider region. In the same vein Egypt was embroiled for most of the sixth/twelfth century in intricate infighting, which substantially reduced its trans-regional political and also its cultural role.

In this period from the mid-sixth/twelfth to the mid-seventh/thirteenth

century, what may be called the ‘Syrian Century’, the Syrian lands achieved first under the Zangid and subsequently under the Ayyubid dynasties a large degree of autonomy from the dominance of neighbouring regions, especially Egypt. This unusual degree of autonomy and the prominence of the region, and in particular Damascus, was to gradually disappear with the foundation of the Mamluk Empire, when Syrian cities became increasingly subordinate to the political centre in Egypt. Egypt emerged at this point in the seventh/thirteenth century not only as the leading political but also the main cultural region in the Arabic-speaking Middle East and was to remain in this position for the following centuries. At the same time the Mongol Ilkhanid rulers in Iraq and further to the east inaugurated a new epoch where Persian increasingly became the main written language and where cities such as Tabriz emerged as cultural hubs.²⁷

The Syrian Century was not characterised by a highly centralised political structure. On the contrary, the pattern of political organisation can best be understood in terms of a ‘post-Saljuq’ political culture where sovereignty was seen to rest within the ruling family at large. In consequence, there was little tendency towards centralisation and sovereignty was generally parcelled out to the various households that clustered around the family’s powerful men (and sometimes women).²⁸ The Ayyubid family confederation is a clear example of this political structure where a shared dynastic identity only became effective in times of external threats. On account of the high number of small lordships, the political map of Syria during the Ayyubid period was, to say the least, colourful. After the heavyweights of Damascus, Aleppo and northern Mesopotamia around Mayyāfāriqīn (northeast of Diyarbakir), came two second-rank lordships, Hama and Homs, and finally a third layer of more or less ephemeral lordships with little land such as al-Karak/Crac (Transjordan), Boşrā (southeast of Damascus), Bāniyās (southwest of Damascus), Ba’lbakk (north of Damascus), Manbij (northeast of Aleppo), al-Ruhā/Edessa (modern-day Urfa) and Sarūj/Sorogia (southwest of al-Ruhā/Edessa). Added to this was a fourth level of mostly non-Ayyubid lords of castles who, time and time again, succeeded in carving out semi-independent minuscule lordships.

This multitude of autonomous lordships in Syria had a strong impact on scholarly and artistic activities, as the various lords were in fierce competition

to furnish their often quite extravagant claims to political hegemony with artistic patronage. This led also to intensive building activities across the various Ayyubid cities and towns. For instance, a total of 74 mausolea and 76 teaching institutions alone were founded in the eighty-five years that Damascus was under Ayyubid control.²⁹ The intensity of these building activities, as much as scholarly and artistic activities, are testament to the economic upsurge in the region that began in the sixth/twelfth century and reached its peak in the first half of the seventh/thirteenth century. The economic blossoming of the period was accompanied by far-reaching monetary reforms that ensured stable currencies in the region, including the introduction of the region's first weight-controlled silver dirham for three centuries.³⁰ The Syrian Century was thus more than just a period of political autonomy; it was underlain by sustained economic growth and an outstandingly rich cultural life.

It was in this world that the eponym of the Ashrafiya library, al-Malik al-Ashraf, forged his career. As a son of al-Malik al-^cĀdil, Saladin's brother who had successfully monopolised political control of most of the Ayyubid lands for himself and his offspring, he clearly belonged to the winning branch of the family.³¹ It was in Diyār Muḍār, the northern Mesopotamian region bordering Syria, that al-Malik al-Ashraf entered political life in 597/1200 when he was around twenty years of age. With the towns of Ḥarrān and Ruhā'/Edessa as his power base, he gradually expanded his territories to build up an impressive principality that was to dominate all of northern Mesopotamia. He first acted as his father's deputy, then gradually came to rule in his own name and finally became one of the main players in the Ayyubid family confederation. Marriage alliances within the intricate northern Mesopotamian political landscape buttressed his strong position: His first wife, who he married in 600/1203–4, was the sister of the Zangid ruler in Mosul, Arslanshāh; and his second wife was the daughter of the Kurdish, turned Armenian, turned Georgian commander Ivane.³² In light of his formidable position it is therefore slightly surprising that he relinquished half of these lands in exchange for Damascus in 626/1229. In so doing, he neutralised his role as the main rival to his brother, al-Kāmil, who already ruled Egypt and could now embark on extending informal influence in Syria. Al-Malik al-Ashraf, by contrast, now had geographically separated realms around Damascus and in

northern Mesopotamia, which significantly reduced his military capacities. Even though he retained several castles in northern Mesopotamia and continued to participate in every major campaign in the area, he had effectively relinquished his political home turf.³³

When al-Malik al-Ashraf arrived in Damascus he did so with a slightly tainted reputation. Together with al-Kāmil he had ruthlessly ousted his predecessor and nephew al-Malik al-Nāṣir Dāwūd, certainly one of the most tragic figures of the Ayyubid period, who so often found himself to be a member of the losing political coalition. As al-Nāṣir came under increasing pressure he not only drew on his late father's popularity in the city, but successfully exploited the fact that al-Malik al-Ashraf had been promised Damascus in the framework of broader political dealings that involved Frederick II. It did not require too much effort from al-Nāṣir to have al-Ashraf and al-Kāmil condemned in large preaching assemblies for allying with a Christian ruler who came under the banner of a Crusade. Although al-Ashraf's reputation was thus initially blemished he proved to be an effective ruler who secured years of stability for the city and kept it out of military conflicts until he died heirless in 635/1237.

With the inauguration of his mausoleum, al-Malik al-Ashraf's posthumous career became intertwined with that of another al-Ashraf, namely al-Ashraf Aḥmad whose book collection also became part of the Ashrafiya library. The relevant point here is that al-Ashraf Aḥmad is representative of the civilian elite that did very well during the Syrian Century. Local political autonomy combined with an expanding economy allowed members of the urban civilian elites, among others, to play a crucial role as patrons of the arts and scholarship in general and as founders of local endowed libraries in particular.³⁴ Al-Ashraf Aḥmad was the son of one of the most famous administrators in the early Ayyubid period, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil. In his early life he worked in administrative roles continuing the family tradition and became vizier to al-Malik al-ʿĀdil, but after the ruler's death he devoted most of the rest of his life to scholarly activities. The enormous wealth that he had inherited from his father also allowed him to act as patron of established scholars and students.³⁵

The establishment of the Ashrafiya library was thus inscribed in the confluence of the period's main trends with respect to supporting cultural

activities, namely the active patronage of local rulers and of members of the civilian elites. It is far from clear whether the more than one hundred teaching institutions and mausolea that were founded in Damascus during the Ayyubid period had libraries that were as large as that of the Ashrafiya and, in some cases, whether they even had libraries at all. However, it is likely that the size of the Ashrafiya's collection is exemplary of broader trends as we only know of it because of the survival of its catalogue. The narrative sources alone do not give any indication as to this library's size, but since they are also silent on other institutions' libraries this cannot be taken to indicate a small size. The overall number of mausolea and teaching institutions founded in Egypt and Syria during the Ayyubid period alone is close to 300,³⁶ to which we have to add book collections in mosques and palaces as well as private collections. By the late Ayyubid period the number of books in circulation in these lands could thus have easily been in the high hundreds of thousands; the Ashrafiya catalogue, at least, leaves little doubt that a reader in Damascus would have had access to tens of thousands of books in libraries alone.

Notes

1. Şeşen, 'Câhîz'in Eserleri' and Şeşen, *Salahaddin'den*, 336; al-Munajjid, *Qawâ'id*, 20–1. Other references include Sayyid, *al-Kitâb al-ʿarabî al-makḥḥûṭ*, II, 526–7 and Gacek, 'Cataloguing', 173.
2. For instance, Touati, *L'armoire à sagesse*, 302–3, who states that the catalogue supposedly ends with the letter *mîm* and that it gives the full name of the author and codicological information for each entry.
3. Al-Jūmānī, 'al-Fahāris al-makḥḥūṭa' and al-Jūmānī, 'Fihrist'.
4. The term 'Syria' as used in this book does not refer to the modern nation-state of Syria, but to historical Bilād al-Shām, which includes the modern nation-states of Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Syria (except for northern Mesopotamia) and parts of southern Turkey.
5. On these developments see, in particular, Gründler, *Book Revolution*; Shatzmiller, *Early Knowledge Economy*; Ali, *Arabic Literary Salons*.
6. Hirschler, *Written Word*, 29.
7. York: Humphreys, *Friars' Libraries*, 11–154; Meaux: Bell, *Cistercians, Gilbertines and Premonstratensians*, 34–82; Dover: Stoneman, *Dover Priory*; Lanthony: Webber and Watson, *Augustinian Canons*, 34–94.
8. Sharpe et al., *Benedictine Libraries*, XXV and Sharpe, 'Medieval Librarian', 228.

9. Lovatt, 'Introduction', XXX.
10. Bell, *Cistercians, Gilbertines and Premonstratensians*, XXIII.
11. For the relevant literature see Hirschler, 'Archival Practices'.
12. For instance, Ghanem, *Bibliotheksgeschichte*; °Abd al-Mahdī, *al-Ḥaraka al-fikrīya*; Sibai, *Mosque Libraries*; Ibn Dohaish, 'Islamic Libraries'; Elayyan, 'Arabic-Islamic Libraries'; Pourhadi, 'Muslim Libraries'; Kügelgen, 'Bücher und Bibliotheken'; Green, 'History of Libraries'.
13. Abū Shāma, *al-Rawḍatayn*, III, 146.
14. Pouzet, *Damas*, 170.
15. This area of research has been in particular pursued by Boris Liebrecht for the Ottoman period, e.g. 'Die Rifā'īya'. See also Görke and Hirschler, *Manuscript Notes*. Earlier examples of using notes from library history are patchy and include, for instance, Vajda, 'Trois manuscrits'.
16. Kairouan: Kairouan catalogue-cum-inventory, MS Raqqāda, Centre d'Études de la Civilisation et des Arts Islamiques, 289 discussed by Shabbūh, 'Sijill qadīm' and Voguet, 'L'inventaire'. (I thank Élise Voguet for having granted me access to the document's copy.) On the Aleppo list, *al-Muntakhab*, ed. Sbath, see Chapter 4. For an excellent example of the use of a private 'catalogue', albeit very small, see D'Ottone, 'La bibliothèque d'un savant Yéménite'. Another example of a library catalogue fragment is discussed in Nef, 'L'histoire des "mozarabes"'. Estate inventory: Haarmann, 'Library' and MS Jerusalem, al-Ḥaram al-sharīf 61, 180 and 532. Endowment list: Ibn °Abd al-Hādī (d. 909/1503), *Fibrīst al-kutub*, MS Damascus, al-Assad National Library, 3190 (written before 896/1491).
17. Allony, *Jewish Library*. I thank Miriam Frenkel for giving further background on these catalogues.
18. Al-Jūmānī, 'al-Fahāris al-makhtūṭa'.
19. Ibn °Abd al-Hādī, *Fibrīst al-kutub*, MS Damascus, al-Assad National Library, 3190 (written before 896/1491).
20. Kohlberg, *Ibn Ṭāwūs*.
21. Rouse and Rouse, *Henry of Kirkestede*; Joseph Rosh ha-Seder: Allony, *Jewish Library*, nos. 97–114.
22. Erünsal, 'Catalogues and Cataloguing'; Erünsal, 'The Establishment and Maintenance of Collections'; Erünsal, 'History and Organization'.
23. Erünsal, *Ottoman Libraries: A Survey of the History*, 143–62; Stanley, 'Books of Umur Bey'.
24. See, for instance, the studies by Ibn Dohaish, 'Islamic Libraries'; Elayyan,

- ‘Arabic-Islamic Libraries’; Pourhadi, ‘Muslim Libraries’; Kügelgen, ‘Bücher und Bibliotheken’.
25. Sharpe, *Titulus*, 83.
 26. For a good overview of the relevant literature see Wing, ‘Rich in Goods’, 301–20.
 27. Pfeiffer, *Tabriz*.
 28. Chamberlain, ‘Military Patronage States’, 135–53.
 29. Korn, *Ayyubidische Architektur*, I, 115.
 30. Heidemann, ‘Economic Growth’.
 31. The best overview of Ayyubid politics, including the career of al-Ashraf, remains Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, on which this summary is mostly based. To this add Kaya, ‘Artuklu Melikleri ile İlişkileri’.
 32. First wife: Al-Nu[‘]aymī, *al-Dāris*, I, 129; second wife: Eastmond, *Tamta’s World*.
 33. Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols* and Kaya, *Anadolu’da Eyyûbiler*.
 34. Hirschler, *Written Word*, 139–40.
 35. For al-Ashraf Aḥmad see TI, 641–50, pp. 149–51 and the sources given there.
 36. Korn, *Ayyubidische Architektur*, I, 48.