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**The *Majmū‘ al-tarbiya* between Text and Paratext:
Exploring the Social History of a Community’s
Reading Culture**

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In general terms, the manuscripts of the *Majmū‘ al-tarbiya* (henceforth MT) in The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London (henceforth IIS) can be described as multiple-text manuscripts featuring a content-wise homogeneous, miscellaneous work belonging to the Ismaili Ṭayyibī literary tradition of the 12th century. As literary objects the manuscripts belong to the handwritten heritage of the Dā’ūdī Bohra community of, mostly, the 19th century. Recently an edition of part one of the MT was published based on a manuscript in Tübingen University library¹ while the second part of this work is still extant only in manuscript form. Altogether, selected extracts of this work have been published in recent years or been the subject of study. Many copies of this work are to be found in several public and private libraries worldwide. The MT is perhaps best known for including the earliest known extract of a letter allegedly sent by the Fatimid caliph al-Āmir (d. 524/1130) to the Yemeni Queen al-Sayyida al-Ḥurra (d. 532/1138) announcing the birth of his son al-Ṭayyib, a document that played a foundational role in the establishment of Ṭayyibī Ismailism.²

The manuscripts considered in this chapter are exclusively those in the IIS collection. These are 8 MSS of volume 1, cat. nos: B (121), A (263) (Gacek); 937, 953, 961, 1012 (Cortese 2000); 1163 (Cortese 2003); 1502 (de Blois) and 4 of volume 2, cat. nos: C (122) (Gacek); 867, 932 part only (Cortese 2000); 1503 (de Blois).³ Content-wise the MT includes 51 different texts of various lengths, some consisting of complete short treatises and many being extracts from or abridgments of larger treatises. The oldest *dated* copy of the MT in this collection is

that of MS 937 dated 20 Rabi‘ al-awwal 1121/30 May 1709. All of these manuscripts are the product of individual strands of transmission of the work as none show any indication of having served as master copy for another item in this collection.

A Ṭayyibī Work, its Bohra Manuscripts and their Paratextual Apparatus

The apparently straightforward description of ‘miscellaneous manuscript’ often used to describe works transmitted in handwritten form such as the MT betrays a number of complexities, with implications for the analysis of the text it contains, its manuscripts and its cataloguing criteria.⁴ In order to address these complexities it will be useful to consider in some depth the generic description given at the start of this paper. As literary objects the MT manuscripts are late multiple-texts manuscripts. However, the literary content of these late MT manuscripts consists of miscellaneous medieval textual material, it being a collection of individual texts (*majmū‘a* lit. a bringing together, an assemblage, in this specific case) of various lengths, by various authors, from short extracts to full-length treatises, internally arranged according to no self-evident system. Unlike most *majmū‘as*, the MT features an originally given overall title; has one identifiable compiler (or a consensually agreed attribution to a particular one) and a preface indicating the compiler’s purpose in producing the work and his generic criteria for selecting texts the work contains. This makes the MT a textual product unit, that is an identifiable single work whose content consists of many, separate texts. The texts forming this unit—though by various authors and in different genres—are thematically coherent. As such the multiple-text manuscripts of the MT can be defined as late literary objects featuring a homogeneous medieval textual miscellany. In physical terms, most of the MT manuscripts—all written on paper—occasionally might feature added pages of different size and quality as well as writing by different hands, in different inks and added at different times. However, none of the MT manuscripts examined can be said to be ‘composite’, that is material objects that feature multiple texts as a result of the collection—over a period of time and by different people—of formerly independent units.

Many *majmū‘as* result from the personal intellectual pursuits of individuals and are destined for personal use. Since in many instances the copyist and the compiler are one and the same person, *majmū‘as* are often only extant in unique manuscripts and are known to have had limited circulation. By contrast, in the case of the MT, its literary contents came to be accepted as a canonical work whose texts came to be repeated in the same sequence across many multiple-text manuscripts over a long period of time. However, variants in the texts reproduced and the paratextual elements⁵ featured in each copy render each manuscript textually unique, irrespective of their identical literary content. The considering of these variants and paratextual elements helps us to bridge the gap between the multiple-text manuscript as literary production and the miscellaneous manuscript as textual entity. The relationship between paratext and main text is variable: dependent elements can be integrated as part of the main text in the course of its life, while individual elements of the main text can become paratext. Manuscripts by their very nature favour such flexible divisions and inclusions, particularly the process of transmission by copying. In the case of the manuscripts of the MT this fluidity between text and paratext can be noted for example in the variant ways in which each copyist chooses to introduce each work forming the miscellany. In some cases the titles and authors of entries can be absent in the main text, but added later in the margin (e.g. MS 121 and MS 1052). In other cases these details appear within the main text, indicating that to the copyists in charge they were considered an integral part of the work being reproduced, probably replicating what was found in the master copy used by the scribe.

Beyond the original intentions of the compiler, the paratextual apparatus in some of the MT copies shows signs of varied reading practices and aids that either the copyists had provided in redacting their works or that subsequent users had created for themselves. For example, in some instances we see that users attempted to draw a list of contents. In several manuscripts the headings of titles and chapters are written in the margins by a different hand as well as in the text by the copyist; often headings are written in different colours, an ornamental device but also a practical ‘finder’ tool. In some manuscripts these ‘finders’ devices in the margins are particularly visible, with the titles of some works indicated by initials (e.g. *‘l al-ṣalāt* for *Ta’wīl*

al-ṣalāt)—thus implying that readers were expected to be already familiar with the full title of what they would read, and, occasionally, the title of the compilation and that of the specific work featured in the page being written in the upper margins by the side of the page numbering, also added at a later stage. This practice of reproducing running headings imitates similar occurrences in printed books. In these cases paratexts indicate a desire to establish a sense of order, enabling the texts to be structured in line with different needs. The adoption of some of these devices goes back to the 14th century when authors were increasingly using techniques to increase the searchability of texts resorting to layout of headlines, different size of letters, various colours, etc., to ease visual orientation.⁶

Preferences on the physical arrangement of the content of a book can have a significant impact on its literary fortunes. For example, the text of the MT is conventionally transmitted in two volumes. As a result of this practical choice the texts in the MT had different fortunes and circulation depending on whether they were in volume 1 or volume 2. In the IIS collection there are more ‘complete/comprehensive’ manuscript copies of volume 1 than of volume 2,⁷ with only one two-volume set written by the same copyist (MS 121 and MS 122).⁸ Copies of volume 1 are often heavily annotated unlike copies of volume 2 which only rarely show sign of use and engagement with the text on the part of the prospective user. The fact that many of the MT two-volume sets appear to have become split apart over time is not unusual. A. Tritton commented that, when it came to books, it was the typical way in India that, on the death of the original owner, each heir would get a volume of multi-volume books.⁹ To that effect, a clear statement of inheritance appears for example on a paratextual note at the beginning of MS 1502, that is, volume 1 of the MT in the Hamdani collection while the matching volume 2 from the same set is absent. The past practice of dispersing volumes among heirs in the Hamdani family was confirmed to me by the late Professor Abbas Hamdani: his ancestor, Safiyya, was instructed to distribute the volumes in the family library among her younger brothers following the death of their father. This form of dispersal of multi-volume manuscripts points to an understanding of their value in the eyes of their owners resting not so much or only on the literary content but in the volumes being assets that became symbols of family scholarly pedigree and cultural capital

to be (physically) transmitted and perpetuated from generation to generation. In such cases the manuscript becomes an object with agency in that its endowment was intended to reinforce familial bonds and community attachment where its possession bestowed on each new owner in turn the role of keepers of secret knowledge and heritage. However, even when an MT two-volume set did not get split such as the one example in the IIS collection we note that volume 1 is heavily annotated and corrected—often by a different hand—while volume 2 of the same set shows almost no sign of subsequent engagement. This may be an indication that even when belonging to the same set and sharing the same journey, over time the volumes must have enjoyed separate destinies and uses.

Author or Compiler?

In literary terms, the character of the MT is compilatory.¹⁰ The 'author' is in fact a compiler who does not engage with the texts he reproduces, except for adding formulaic notes of praise (for example, to Muḥammad, to al-Ṭayyib) to indicate the end of a text and the beginning of the next. Beyond the obvious educational intentions reflected in the consensually assigned title given to this work, as a compilation the MT satisfied two practical purposes in view of its intended readership: (1) the preservation and perpetuation, but also the claiming (even monopolising) for the Ṭayyibīs of a Fatimid Ismaili-based literary tradition and (2) the functioning as a 'two-volume library'¹¹ by making these texts more readily available to readers, while maintaining strict religious secrecy and control over their teachings and complying to rigorous academic supervision. Within the Ṭayyibī Ismaili tradition, the MT constitutes the first major example of a form of composition that was to be followed by subsequent *majmū'as*. In many ways it can be said that, in the context of Ismaili literature, the MT inaugurated a literary genre that acquired a distinctive status in the Bohras' written heritage.

The term 'compiler' to describe the author of a Ṭayyibī work raises a number of questions. With the establishment in the 6th/12th century of the *dā'ī muṭlaq* as the Ṭayyibī supreme religious leader whose authority rested on him being recognised as the exclusive holder of the highest possible degree of esoteric knowledge after the hidden imam,

the hierarchically organised Ṭayyibī scholarly élites exercised the strictest control over the access to doctrinal learning by Ṭayyibī adherents. Bearing this in mind, to be an author—provided one had the right credentials—was not a problem if the purpose of writing was to repeat and perpetuate Ismaili teachings as elaborated during the Fatimid period. But the act of ‘compiling’, in a Ṭayyibī context, carried implications, being a potentially doctrinally-endorsing activity based on the ostensibly subjective choice of literary pieces to be included in the collection.¹² On the basis of which or whose authority was a scholar allowed to ‘compile’ texts in first place? On the basis of which criteria did the compiler select some material at the exclusion of other? As literary innovator within the Ṭayyibī tradition the compiler here becomes for the first time an editor who pre-selects what *he* deems to be best for his audiences with the deliberate (or by default) effect of influencing the trajectory of their learning and thinking. Who was the originally intended audience of the MT? Was it intended for a selected group of learners with potential to join the highest rank within the Ṭayyibī scholarly élite? Was it written for adherents in pursuit of knowledge and answers to doctrinal questions? Was the MT intended to promote a specific religious scholarly line? In most copies texts at the end are said to be followed by other texts and a statement in the preface of the MT states that the work was intended to be read. But was the text intended to be read sequentially or was it meant to be used as a resource from where teacher and learner could ‘pull out’ selected readings to cover specific themes or answer specific issues? Were these texts intended to be read out during learning sessions or did the reader have some degree of autonomy?

Insights into the organisation of multiple-text manuscripts can reveal important clues about the function of texts and textual knowledge. The works featured in these types of manuscripts may in some cases reflect in turn access to a collection of manuscripts on the part of the compiler. In the case of the MT we are dealing with a high-ranking scholar who, in order to make his selection of texts, must have had access to manuscripts containing secret texts exclusively reserved for the religious leadership. This point raises questions about the method of the compiler as ‘researcher’ in view of the production of his work. For example, in the case of the second treatise in volume 1 of the MT—*Ta’wīl al-ṣalāt*—the compiler hints at drawing the treatise

from a 'majmū' al-thānī', a 'second compilation' that must have been at his disposal. Some texts of the MT are fragments or extensive paragraphs: in such cases did the compiler source his material from other fragments available to him, *hypomnema*, that is, draft notes and notebooks, or did he have at his disposal whole works from which he selected parts to quote? Many texts are reproduced in full but, with few exceptions, they are only thus far known to us through the transmission via the MT. Did the compiler copy them from a collection of manuscripts that was exclusively available to him? If, as stated in the preface of the MT, the works contained were must-reads, how come then we do not have other copies of them, either as independent manuscript units or in other *majmū'as*, instead of being—with few exceptions—uniquely circulated via the MT?

The compiler of the MT is commonly identified as Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Ḥārithī (d. 583/1188). He was a close associate of the 2nd and 3rd *dā'i muṭlaq*s—respectively Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāmidī and his son Ḥātim¹³—and teacher of the 5th *dā'i*, 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Walīd (d. 612/1215) who dedicated a eulogy to him. He was a close associate of the scholar 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Ja'far b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Walīd (d. 554/1159) who, according to Ḥasan b. Nūḥ al-Bharūchī (d. 939/1533), in volume 2 of his *Kitāb al-Azhār*, had been Muḥammad's mentor. Three works by 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn are included in the MT. The 19th Ṭayyibī *dā'i muṭlaq* and historian Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn (d. 872/1468) in his *Nuzhat al-afkār* says that al-Ḥārithī was the author of many works on the imamate of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and on many aspects of knowledge.¹⁴ There is however in the *Nuzhat* no specific reference to al-Ḥārithī as the compiler of MT. Likewise, while there are several references to al-Ḥārithī in Ḥātim's *Tuḥfat al-qulūb*, no mention is made of him as the compiler of the MT. Bohra scholars of the 19th century, such as Quṭb al-Dīn Burhānpūrī (author of *Muntaza' al-akhbār*) and Muḥammad b. 'Alī (author of *Mawsim-i bahār*), provide information on Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir but neither refer to him as the author of the MT. In the MSS of the MT in the IIS collection al-Ḥārithī's authorship is consistently indicated only in the paratextual parts of the manuscripts, that is, in later/subsequent annotations by owners or scribes written on initial flyleaves or inserted in the colophons. In MS 1502 late paratextual annotations in the initial flyleaves include a short biographical note on al-Ḥārithī.

Indeed, al-Ḥārithī does not announce himself or is openly stated as the ‘author’ or compiler of the MT within the text of the compilation. Among the texts included in this miscellany, a number of works are indicated as authored by al-Ḥārithī.¹⁵ But while the compiler of the MT speaks in the first person in his preface to his work, al-Ḥārithī is always referred to in the third person in those copies where his name is spelt out. Also, when it occurs, al-Ḥārithī’s name is often followed by laudatory formulae suited for a dead person. In short, it is not self-evident—based on the MSS of MT at the IIS—where, when and how the identification of al-Ḥārithī as compiler of the *majmūʿ* (in addition to being a contributor to it) came about. The earliest direct attribution of the MT to al-Ḥārithī I could find occurs in the 18th-century bibliographical work commonly known as *Fihrist* by the Bohra scholar Ismāʿīl al-Majdūʿ.¹⁶

Pedagogical Practices: Copying and Reading the MT

The word ‘*tarbiya*’ in the title by which the MT is best known needs some comment.¹⁷ First of all, its presence gives an indication of what the work was understood to have been conceived for: that is, to be a summa for the purpose of instruction, education, nurturing. According to a statement in the preface of the work, its pedagogical value was intended to be that of serving as an introduction to what were the must-read books of the *daʿwa*. Reported experiences by Ṭayyibī scholars when confronted with the study of the MT as well as paratextual annotation in the manuscripts available, give us some clues of how this work as an educational tool was used in practice.¹⁸ The MT occupies a special place in the history of Ṭayyibī learning and, subsequently, Bohra religious instruction. The very title given to the compilation and its conferred authoritativeness by the strong association to al-Ḥārithī points to the fact that it was understood to be as a compendium for practical use in the transmission of knowledge. In the preface of the MT the compiler explains his purpose for assembling the texts stating:

‘I have gathered (*jamaʿtu*) in this book the sciences (*ʿulūm*) the reading of which is necessary for the knowledge of the matters of the rightful *daʿwa*, the worship (*ʿibāda*) and the acquisition of . . . happiness and I have placed (*jaʿaltu*) [in it] from that, both the

summary and the detailed. It is the gateway (*madkhal*) to what must be read from among the books of the rightful *da'wa* and I have called it the Book of Essences (or Jewels) (*Kitāb al-jawāhir*) because its making (*kawni-hi*) consists of (*mushtamilan*) the choicest (*zubda*) Arabic expressions and wondrous meanings'.¹⁹

With regard to the practical, educational uses of Ṭayyibī literature, the acquisition of religious learning was gradual and progressive, from the exoteric to the esoteric. The religious scholar was the gatekeeper of this knowledge. He would judge which student should advance, based on the intellectual skills of the pupils and their desire to advance in mastering the *ḥaqā'iq*. Accordingly, works would be read in a particular order.²⁰ The Bohra religious leadership enforced a secretive approach to their literature to ensure that it would be exclusively accessible to sworn community members.²¹ In addition to that, based on level of sophistication, doctrinal texts were only disclosed to seekers of knowledge within the community proportionally to their intellectual abilities and level of advancement in knowledge. It is therefore not surprising to find that the copies of texts were executed, when known, by people who belonged to scholarly families and/or achieved formal recognition of their learning by being allowed to act as religious teachers at various levels. In the IIS manuscripts of the MT we come across scribes whose names are accompanied by titles like 'mullā', 'shaykh' and 'mālik' which, in Dā'ūdī Bohra context, indicate formal positions that individuals occupied at the service of the community. For example, a *shaykh* would officiate in large centres and teach *ḥaqā'iq* at an intermediate to advanced level. A *mullā* would be leader of worship in small centres and teacher of esoteric knowledge for seekers at beginners' level. Because of the strict control imposed over the circulation of knowledge, it is likely that these copies were initially made for personal use, either to preserve knowledge capital with the family and/or for teaching purposes in the case of those who were authorised to do so. The style of writing of the IIS MSS of the MT, while mostly clear, tends to be rather unsophisticated and inconsistent, occasionally with changes of hands indicating that the scribing process was a pursuit conducted over a lengthy period of time, probably in a domestic setting, that might have seen the participation of presumably other family members or very close associates of equal rank, given the secrecy surrounding the text.

The act of copying the book was in itself a learning process as we gather, again, from the colophon of MS 937 where the scribe adds a post-scriptum dedication to his scholar mentor. According to Professor Abbas Hamdani, his great-great grandfather Muḥammad ‘Alī (cf. MS 1502 and MS 1503) organised learning circles during which attendants would be asked to copy manuscripts in two copies: one copy for themselves and one for Muḥammad ‘Alī.²² The fact that several MSS show little to no internal sign of engagement with the text by lacking annotations or corrections may be indicative of engaging in the act of copying as a learning technique that would make the manuscript a copybook for the personal use of its copyist—almost the product of an act of devotion—rather than a tool solely intended for the propagation and dissemination of knowledge. In such cases we can say that the manuscripts as objects carried a degree of ‘agency’ as the testament of a social practice that would be expected of a learned Bohra with a specific educational role within his community. Scholarly communities and élite households employed cultural practices in order to build up and sustain their status.²³

In general, the act of copying at a time when printing was by then available as a device for learning and transmitting knowledge, acquires particular significance when considered within the attitude to accessibility to knowledge held by the Bohras. Copying, when seen in light of a community bent on scholarly élitism and secrecy, became a method to ensure and enforce control over who could be entrusted (and trusted) with acquiring knowledge that was (and still is, in conservative Bohra quarters) only meant to be shared among a few.

In Volume 1 of his *Kitāb al-Azhār*, the Indian Ṭayyibī *dā‘ī* al-Bharūchī describes his early training.²⁴ Upon being inducted into the Ismaili faith as formulated by the Fatimids, he was sent to Yemen to learn the doctrine directly from the reigning *dā‘ī muṭlaq*, al-Ḥasan b. Idrīs (d. 918/1512). Having progressed to earn the trust of his master, al-Bharūchī was allowed to learn hidden sciences. He lists 37 titles of books that he had to master to demonstrate his proficiency. In this latter list the MT is ranked no. 2, after *al-Risāla al-waḍ‘iyya fī ma‘ālim al-dīn* by Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. 5th/11th century). He states that only after completing their reading attentively and absorbed their meaning, was he allowed to progress with reading other books such as

Asās al-ta'wīl by al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974) which he also read according to a pre-established plan and method. Al-Bharūchī describes his experience of being handed a copy of the MT by the *dā'ī* himself and reading it back to him in a psalmodising manner (*bi'l-tartīl*), 'letter by letter', and with the *dā'ī* explaining what he could not grasp.²⁵ The *dā'ī* ordered that the books should be read time after time continuously, something that necessitated their study day and night. What al-Bharūchī appears to imply is that he read the content of the MT during sessions with his master to be followed by further private study.²⁶

In the *Masā'il Miyān Sham'ūn* we have another indication of the list of must-reads as specified again by the 20th *dā'ī muṭlaq* al-Ḥasan b. Idrīs. In his answer to a question about the books to study to rise through the ranks of knowledge, the *dā'ī muṭlaq* answers: Start with the books on *sharī'a*, and then go to those on *ta'wīl*. Among the books listed in this latter category MT is ranked no. 3, after *Tanbīh al-ghāfilīn* by Ḥātim al-Ḥāmidī and *Tanbīh al-hadī wa'l-muhtadī* by al-Kirmānī but before al-Nu'mān's *Asās al-ta'wīl*. By comparing the reading list that al-Ḥasan b. Idrīs had devised for al-Bharūchī and the one that he prescribed for his contemporary, the scholar Miyān Sham'ūn b. Muḥammad al-Ghūrī we can see that the MT consistently occupies a high position in the programme of study devised for both. Though sharing many similarities, there are however some significant additions and omissions in the other recommended books for each of the two seekers of knowledge, an indication of a certain degree of adaptation of the curriculum to match the abilities of the students and, presumably, their different accessibility to texts and learning contexts. Al-Bharūchī studied at the 20th *dā'ī muṭlaq's* headquarters, on books given to him by his master and, as he explained, he verbally and directly interacted with the *dā'ī* who explained to him secret teachings and expounded to him sciences to be kept secret.²⁷ We don't know about Miyān Sham'ūn's learning context or level of proficiency but the changes in his list, compared to al-Bharūchī's, show that the *dā'ī*—besides core books—also tailor-made the reading list for this pupil.

It appears that the 20th *dā'ī muṭlaq* al-Ḥasan b. Idrīs might have been instrumental in securing a formal role for the MT as compulsory reading for advanced seekers of knowledge. In a paratextual note found in one of the initial leaves of MS 1502 it is stated that the text 'on the back (that is, back of the leaf on which the paratextual note is

written) is a copy of the book MT and it was written (the copy) during ‘the days of Sayyid-nā Nūr al-Dīn—blessed may be his soul—for al-Ḥasan b. Idrīs al-Anf. Based on this claim the main bulk of MS 1502 would have to date sometime during the lifespan of al-Ḥasan b. Idrīs. This dating however is highly unlikely as the MS does not appear to have been produced in Yemen as one would expect for this period. Instead the MS is written in an ‘Indian’ Arabic script and ends with a Persian expression typically used for concluding the writing of texts, again, a feature that links the MS to the Indian Persianate world as already observed by F. de Blois.²⁸ Nevertheless the paratextual note is important here in that, at least according to the knowledge held by its scribe, a copy of MT was especially commissioned at some point for or by this *dā‘ī muṭlaq* which might evidence his personal investment in the MT to the point of eventually declaring it mandatory reading. Another paratextual note at the beginning of MS 937 of the MT consists of a quote of few verses attributed to al-Ḥasan b. Idrīs in praise of the MT. This reinforces the view of the strong connection (whether real or perceived) between this text and this particular *dā‘ī*.

In his *risāla* the Shaykh Luqmānjī (12th/18th century) gives an account of the course of his studies under the direction of the 37th *dā‘ī* Nūr Muḥammad Nūr al-Dīn (d. 1130/1718) in 1711. This *dā‘ī* at the time had several students but Luqmān and another pupil, Chand Khān, were the more advanced. Unlike others, Luqmān and Chand were taught the MT. This is further indication that the MT was considered a text for intermediate-to-advanced level to be taught selectively.²⁹ Luqmānjī b. Ḥabīb Allāh (d. 1760) went on to become a highly ranked Ismaili scholar and author of numerous treatises.³⁰

According to A.A.A. Fyzee in the *Majālis Sayfiyya* by Ibrāhīm al-Sayfī (d. 1236/1821) we find an account of the education of the 18th century scholar ‘Abd Mūsā, son of the 38th *dā‘ī* Badr al-Dīn (d. 1150/1737). Fyzee says that al-Sayfī gives the usual list of books but, summarising the list in his article, he does not mention the MT specifically.³¹ However we have proof that the MT was definitely part of ‘Abd Mūsā’s learning pedigree because MS 937 was originally his copy as demonstrated by the presence of his ownership seals.³² Paratextual evidence on the flyleaves in ‘Abd Mūsā’s copy also shows that his manuscript of the MT came to be used in collective study sessions.

In his *Fihrist*, al-Majdū' classifies the MT in the second part of his work, among the *bāṭinī* books that must be read according to a prescribed order. In his catalogue he ranks the MT 'only' as the sixth must-read work but wedged, as in al-Bharūchī's list, between al-Kirmānī's *al-Waḍ'īya* and al-Nu'mān's *Asās al-ta'wīl*.³³

In the early 19th century however, we note a twist of fate for the MT. A *Risāla* by the 45th *dā'ī muṭlaq* Sayyidnā Ṭayyib Zayn al-Dīn (d. 1252/1837), contains specific and authoritative directions regarding the manner in which instruction should be imparted. While giving the usually comprehensive list of books that formed the standard reading list for the curriculum and the order in which they should be read (*tartīb fī qirā'at al-kutub*), it is interesting to note that the MT is no longer included. This exclusion however is in stark contrast to the fact that the majority of the MT MSS at the IIS (and most of those in other collections as far as one can tell) were produced in India between the mid 19th century and the early 20th century. The circulation at this time and place of a work that had been a landmark tool of traditional advanced education in character and purpose since Ṭayyibī times, captures some of the cultural tensions that dominated the intellectual life of the Bohra community in modern times.

The conservative scholarly élites, protectors of traditional educational practices through selective delivery of esoteric knowledge found themselves challenged by those community members who called for opening for Bohras access to modern, western-style education. The 50th *dā'ī*, 'Abd Allāh Badr al-Dīn (d. 1333/1915), had opposed the spread of western-style education whereas some Bohras were determined to establish educational institutions for the community. The situation for progressive education improved somewhat under the 51st *dā'ī*, Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1385/1965), though with mixed fortunes. The reformist movement gathered again momentum in 1928 with the control of pious donations that the reformists wanted to be under the *waqf* board rather than the absolute control of the *dā'ī*. It might be that it was thanks to the effects of the actions of this reformist movement and the excommunications that in some instances they generated that copies of the MT (and many other manuscripts) made the transition from being books secreted and circulated within closely-knit learning circles to become available to a

broader readership. MS 263 could be taken as an example of how the reformists' hold over pious donations, caused a less stringent control over the physical availability of books. Originally held in the library of the *dā'ī muṭlaq*, MS 263 was given away as *waqf* to become at some point property of the Sarkariyya library. From there it changed hands again, ending up outside Bohra learning circles. The Hamdani and the Ali families, both originally owners of copies of the MT, became enthusiastic supporters of the reform movement, following their excommunication. Fayḍ Allāh b. Muḥammad 'Alī al-Hamdānī (d. 1969), who by opposing the 51st *dā'ī*, Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn, had precipitated his family's exclusion from the community, had been entrusted with preserving part of the family collection of Ismaili MSS. Being ostracised, it meant that the Hamdanis were no longer bound by the rule of secrecy surrounding the literature in their MS collections and made their manuscripts available to scholars.³⁴ Other copies of the MT found their way, probably under similar circumstances, to the library of the Ismaili Society in Mumbai and the book trade. For example, MS 1012 of the MT might have come into the possession of its likely previous owner—the Syrian scholar Mustafa Ghalib—while the latter was touring India during a research trip in 1973. Beside the copies of MT at the IIS, there are several other examples following this pattern of dissemination in other libraries.

The early 20th-century Bohra dissident Mian Bhai Abdul Husain provided a vitriolic account of the Bohra religious teachings as exposed in literature: "They talk of essences, far-fetched analogies, quiddities, theosophies, speculations about names, letters & numbers in this connection. This sort of hair-splitting which they call Taviḷ and Haqiqat is unattractive and incomprehensible for a European reader but the Ismaili Shi'a realizes their quiddities with astonishing tact and incomparable skills. . .".³⁵ This passage exemplifies how, in some learned quarters, works such as MT, while valued as historical and literary documents for the sake of academic research, had lost their charisma for doctrinal and religious purposes. Therefore, the greater public availability from the 19th century onwards of the MT manuscripts does not point so much to it having become more used for educational purposes but rather that restrictions to its access had been relaxed in some circles.

Conclusions

In conclusion, what is the MT? Started probably as an informal collection of notes, fragments, annotations and texts that might have served as a resource to help produce sermons and/or for use as religious instruction tools—in conjunction with oral guidance—in time this collection came to be elevated to the status of a systematised, 'canonical' corpus-organiser³⁶ with a specific place in the Ṭayyibī, and later, Bohra learning curriculum. The presence of a preface in this gathering of texts testifies to the shift in the way in which the MT came to be conceived and how its use should be understood. Content-wise, the MT reflects the themes, debates, concerns and polemics that were dominant within the 12th century Ṭayyibī community. In particular, part of the selection of texts forming the MT testifies to the establishment of a Ṭayyibī religious identity and the subsequent scholarly transition that took place with the transfer of religious and scholarly authority from the al-Ḥāmidī family to that of the al-Walīd.

How relevant was the MT as text to its readers? Its compiler in his introduction makes a grand claim for the MT to contain essential reading for those who wish to engage in the *da'wa*. But to what extent does the selection of works forming the MT constitute must-read material for intellectually and scholarly advancing *dā'īs*? Most of the full texts featured in the MT are, thus far, only known to have been transmitted through this compilation. At a glance, many do not even seem to have received mention in other Ṭayyibī works. The MT is obviously a treasure trove for textual preservation, even when abridged, but if the works it contains were really so important for the formation of the *dā'īs* wouldn't one expect to find them more widely available as stand-alone texts and/or included in other *majmū'as*? Are we here witnessing the efforts of a compiler bent on pushing a doctrinal-political agenda by raising the status of otherwise obscure works that nevertheless carried distinctive messages on sensitive issues (*naṣṣ*, imamate of al-Ṭayyib, anti-Nizārī polemics)? The MT did indeed become mandatory reading for the scholarly formation of *dā'īs* at intermediate/advanced levels but there is no evidence so far of the work having made a direct and overt impact on the writings of those figures known to have read it in great depth. Even al-Bharūchī does not quote or display evidence of having used the MT as a source for

his seven-volume *Kitāb al-Azhār*. For example, when reporting the story of the letter sent by al-Āmir to al-Sayyida al-Ḥurra announcing the birth of al-Ṭayyib and therefore his designation as al-Āmir's heir apparent, al-Bharūchī relies on Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn's account with no mention of the MT's version. By the late 18th–early 19th century the MT disappears from the list of mandatory readings sanctioned by the *dā'ī muṭlaq*. However, the falling out of favour of this text among Bohra's scholarly élites broadly coincides with the popularisation of this work through the relatively copious production of its manuscripts. The fact that the MT contained several authoritative sections on sensitive issues such as *naṣṣ* might have prompted the ruling scholarly élites to curb the authoritativeness of this work at a time when dissent over matters of leadership succession dominated and divided the Bohra community. At the same time its popularisation and dissemination through the production of many manuscript copies was in many cases spearheaded among or through Bohra reformist families who, among other things, challenged the exclusive hold on knowledge that the Bohra scholarly ruling élites strived to preserve for themselves. In light of this polarised use of the MT one can argue that the MT became officially both 'demoted' and 'declassified': 'demoted' because it advertised doctrines that could be used to challenge the authoritativeness of *dā'ī muṭlaq*s whose entitlement to leadership was disputed and 'declassified' because, by becoming widely circulated by or through reformist families, the text had lost 'potency' as a work that should be handled in secrecy and exclusivity.

Not only is the MT made up of many texts but, in turn, the majority of texts it contains are 'polyphonic' treatises, consisting as they do of their authors' choice of voices by a number of Fatimid thinkers in order to communicate ideas and teachings in matters of law, ritual and cosmology. Questions of authorship of multiple-text manuscripts, miscellaneous texts and multi-voice treatises in the context of a closely guarded literary production such as the Ṭayyibī/Bohra are yet to be addressed in this emerging field of research in Islamic Studies. The many 'voices' involved in sourcing, conception, assembling, writing, copying, distributing, reading, annotating and cataloguing the MT make its multiple-text manuscripts living documents that testify to the nature of manuscripts as being 'processes' rather than products.

NOTES

- 1 Cf. *Kitāb Majmūʿ al-tarbiya*, ed. H. Khaḍḍūr (Damascus, 2011).
- 2 Cf. S.M. Stern, 'The Succession to the Fatimid Imam al-Āmir, the Claims of Later Fatimids to the Imamate, and the Rise of Ṭayyibī Ismailism', *Oriens*, 4 (1951), pp. 193–255.
- 3 Respectively in the following catalogues: A. Gacek, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies* (London, 1984), vol. 1, entry 86; D. Cortese, *Ismaili and Other Arabic Manuscripts* (London, 2000); D. Cortese, *Arabic Ismaili Manuscripts: The Zāhid 'Alī Collection* (London, 2003); F. de Blois, *Arabic, Persian and Gujarati Manuscripts: The Hamdani Collection in the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies* (London, 2011).
- 4 While there is extensive literature on the study of multiple-text medieval European manuscripts, the subtleties of 'miscellanies' have yet to be fully investigated within the field of study of Islamic manuscripts. For a survey of the state of art in this area of research see the introduction in Michael Friedrich and Cosima Schwarke, ed., *One-Volume Libraries: Composite and Multiple-Text Manuscripts* (Berlin, 2016), pp. 1–26. See also A. Bausi. 'A Case for Multiple Text Manuscripts being "Corpus-Organizers"', *Manuscript Cultures*, Newsletter, no. 3, pp. 34–36. The limited, dedicated literature on conceptual analyses revolving around multiple-text manuscripts within an Islamic framework includes Franz Rosenthal, 'From Arabic Books and Manuscripts, V: A One-Volume Library of Arabic Philosophical and Scientific Texts in Istanbul', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 75 (1955), pp. 14–23; N. Martínez de Castilla Muñoz, 'Manuscritos musulmanes misceláneos y facticios del Aragón del siglo XVI', *Manuscritos para comunicar culturas* (2102), pp. 141–150; Konrad Hirschler. "Catching the eel"—Documentary Evidence for Concepts of the Arabic Book in the Middle Period', *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 12 (2012), pp. 224–234, and his recent 'The Development of Arabic Multiple-Text and Composite Manuscripts: The Case of *ḥadīth* Manuscripts in Damascus during the Late Medieval Period', in Alessandro Bausi, Michael Friedrich, and Marilena Maniaci, ed., *The Emergence of Multi-Text Manuscripts* (Berlin, 2020), pp. 275–302 and Gerhard Endress, "'One-Volume Libraries" and the Tradition of Learning in Medieval Arabic Islamic Culture', in *One-Volume Libraries: Composite and Multiple-Text Manuscripts*, pp. 171–205. I take this opportunity to thank Arianna D'Ottone, University of Rome 'La Sapienza', and Verena Klemm, University of Leipzig, for some valuable bibliographic suggestions.
- 5 That is, textual forms that exhibit physical and/or content-related dependencies on the main text, such as later, marginal annotations, glossae, colophons, interlinear annotations, ownership inscriptions, certificates, different handwritings within the same manuscript, etc. On the value of paratextual notes for the documentary study of Islamic manuscripts see A. Görke and K. Hirschler, ed, *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources* (Beirut, 2011).
- 6 K. Hirschler, *The Written Word in Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh, 2012), p. 18.
- 7 At a glance the discrepancy in the greater availability of volume 1 compared to volume 2 can be observed across sets in other known library collections.
- 8 The copyist in question was Ghālib b. 'Alī Ḥusayn Muḥsin al-Jabalī al-Ya'burī. He also inscribed himself as the owner of the volumes. This may indicate that the MSS were at least initially intended by the copyist to be primarily for his personal use. He is also the copyist of Ḥasan b. Nūḥ al-Bharūchī's *Kitāb al-Azhār* MS 21, MS 22, MS 23 and 26 also in the IIS collection. From the colophon of MS 23 of *al-Azhār* we learn that this copyist was based in Surat.
- 9 A. Tritton, 'Notes on some Ismaili Manuscripts', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, 7 (1933), pp. 35–39.

- 10 For a general discussion on the compilation as a literary device see N. Hathaway, 'Compilatio: From Plagiarism to Compiling', *Viator*, 20 (1989), pp. 19–44.
- 11 I echo here the definition 'One-volume library' devised by F. Rosenthal in 1955.
- 12 Rosenthal's appreciation for the compiler's 'courageous willingness to make his choice of literary works with a remarkable disregard of religious barriers and traditions' would not apply here, Rosenthal, 'From Arabic Books and Manuscripts', p. 15. For questions about the concept of authorship in the context of compilatory works within the Islamic literary tradition see L. Behzadi's introduction to L. Behzadi and J. Hameen-Antilla, ed., *Concepts of Authorship in Pre-Modern Arabic Texts* (Bamberg, 2015), pp. 9–22.
- 13 Ḥātim b. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāmīdī. *Risālat Tuḥfat al-qulūb wa-furjat al-makrūb, aw, Kitāb Tuḥfat al-qulūb: fī tartīb al-hudāh wa'l-du'āh fī Jazīrat al-Yaman*, ed. A. Hamdani (London, 2012), p. 44.
- 14 See the section of Idrīs' *Nuzhat al-afkār* published in A. Hamdani's edition of *Tuḥfat al-qulūb*, pp. 178, 188. Several manuscripts of works by al-Ḥārīthī can indeed be found in the IIS MS collection.
- 15 Six short treatises and another two are attributed. They are all featured in volume 1 only.
- 16 Ismā'īl b. 'Abd al-Rasūl al-Majdū'. *Fahrasat al-kutub wa'l-rasā'il wa-li man hiya min al-'ulamā' wa'l-a'imma wa'l-hudūd al-afāḍil*, ed. 'Alī Naqī Munzawī (Tehran, 1966), pp. 129–134.
- 17 MT is the title that features in the heading and paratexts of most manuscripts and it is by this title that the work has been known to its readers and cataloguers. However, within the work itself this title is never mentioned. Instead in the preface it is stated that the work is called *Kitāb al-Jawāhir* (*Book of Essences or Jewels*). To my knowledge only al-Majdū' names also this title along with MT.
- 18 On the materialistic philology that renders a multiple-text manuscript an historical artefact for socio-anthropological insight into patronage or readership see Michael Friedrich and Cosima Schwarke, ed., *One-Volume Libraries*, p. 4.
- 19 Extract from the preface found in MS 121, MS 961, MS 953, MS 1163 and MS 1502. In his edition, Khaḍḍūr considers this preface to be the introduction of *Kitāb ta'wīl al-ṣalāt*, that is the first treatise featured in the MT. However evidence from the IIS MSS shows that the piece was intended as an introduction to the whole compilation.
- 20 A.A.A. Fyzee, 'The Study of the Literature of the Fatimid Da'wa', in G. Makdisi, ed., *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honour of Hamilton A.R. Gibb* (Leiden, 1965), pp. 232–249, 233.
- 21 On the role of the Bohra manuscript library as a sacred locus for social codicology, see Olly Akkerman, 'The Bohra Manuscript Treasury as a Sacred Site of Philology: A Study in Social Codicology', *Philological Encounters*, 4 (2019), pp. 182–201.
- 22 Conversation with Professor A. Hamdani held at the IIS, London, 10 June 2016.
- 23 Hirschler, *The Written Word*, p. 22.
- 24 'A. al-'Awwā, *Muntakhabāt Ismā'īliyya* (Damascus, 1958), pp. 183–250 for the edition of Volume 1 of al-Bharūchī's *Kitāb al-Azhār*.
- 25 On the obligation of supporting reading with the shaykh's oral authority in medieval Islamic learning practices, see Badr al-Dīn b. al-Jamā'a, *Tadhkirat al-sāmi' wa'l-mutakallim fī adab al-'ālim wa'l-muta'allim* (Hyderabad, 1353/1934), pp. 172–177. Here the pedagogy described follows in the footsteps of classical Islamic learning characterised by the close link between textual transmission and a personal teaching tradition. See Endress, 'One-volume Libraries', p. 171.
- 26 About the pedagogical understanding of some reading techniques in the medieval Islamic world see J. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton, NJ, 1994), p. 27.
- 27 On the possible reasons for the special student status granted to al-Bharūchī, see S. Traboulsi, 'Transmission of Knowledge and Book Preservation in the Ṭayyibī Ismā'īlī Tradition', *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World*, 4 (2016), pp. 22–35, 26.

- 28 Cf. F. de Blois. *Arabic, Persian and Gujarati Manuscripts: The Hamdani collection* (London, 2011), p. 111.
- 29 Fyzee, 'The Study', pp. 244–245.
- 30 cf. I.K. Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature* (Malibu, CA, 1977), pp. 201–204.
- 31 Fyzee, 'The Study', p. 246.
- 32 It should be noted that the text in the manuscript of *Majālis Sayfiyya* in the IIS collection (MS 1274 ArI ZA), while reflecting other aspects of what is stated by Fyzee regarding the most important works of the *da'wa*, does not nevertheless contain the list of books studied by 'Abd Mūsā as described by Fyzee who must have therefore consulted a manuscript of these *majālis* with a somewhat different content.
- 33 Al-Majdū', *Fahrasat*, pp. 127, 134.
- 34 The Hamdani and 'Ali manuscript collections are good examples of collections that developed outside the strict control of the *da'wa*. Cf. Traboulsi, 'Transmission', p. 24.
- 35 See Mulla Mian Bhai Abdul Husain, *Gulzare Daudi for the Bohra of India* (Ahmedabad, 1920; repr., Surat, 1977); cited in J. Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe: Islam and Modernity among the Daudi Bohras* (Chicago and London, 2001), p. 167.
- 36 I adopt here a concept that has been devised by A. Bausi in his discussion of Ethiopian multiple-text manuscripts. What is meant by this expression is texts belonging to an identifiable religious-cultural tradition being organised into the physical space of the manuscript. See 'A Case for Multiple Text Manuscripts being "Corpus-Organizers"'.

