A Handbook and Reader of Ottoman Arabic

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5. ARABIC GRAMMAR BOOKS IN OTTOMAN ISTANBUL: THE SOUTH ASIAN CONNECTION[1]

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The transregional transmission of Arabic grammar books from South Asia to the Ottoman Empire contributed significantly to the scholarly curriculum of Ottoman Istanbul and beyond over the 16th and 17th centuries. Based on a study of several manuscripts of al-Muḥammad al-Damāmīnī's (d. 827/1424) and Shihāb al-Dīn al-Dawlatābādī's (d. 848/1445) commentaries (*shurūḥ*, sg. *sharḥ*), this article will argue that commentaries from South Asia on Arabic grammar treatises from earlier periods circulated widely among learned groups of Ottoman Istanbul. Thereby, they formed a crucial part of the scholarly engagement with the Arabic philological tradition and its broader cultural idiom in the Ottoman Empire. A focus on the variety of manuscripts, their marginalia and paratexts can shed light on cultural

practices in the circulation and reading of philological texts that emerged over the course of the 16th and 17th centuries.

A burgeoning field of scholarship on the early modern Middle East and South Asia has diversified its sources and approaches to the study of elite formation, scribal cultures and text circulation over the last years. Francis Robinson and Maria Szuppe expounded various scholarly connections and a shared canon of Islamicate works across the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal dispensations (Robinson 1997; Szuppe 2004). Sanjay Subrahmanyam's 'connected histories' across Eurasia interrelated synchronous historical processes on commensurable levels of inquiry to study the workings of cultural encounters (Subrahmanyam 1997 and 2012). In particular, a focus on scribal cultures and traditions of *adab* and *akhlāq* informed the study of Indo-Persian forms of governance and bureaucracies, mainly across the Mughal world, but with implicitly strong connections across Western Asia (Alam 2004; Kinra 2015). Yet, while there is a general consensus that early modern entanglements facilitated forms of exchange among imperial elites and other sociabilities such as Sufi networks (Choudhury 2016), there is still room for further explorations regarding the empirical and material foundations of such cultural exchanges.

While Persian was central to these trans-imperial connections, Arabic has been considered as a major complementary idiom among mobile imperial and scholarly elites, but for different reasons. On the one hand, Arabic was a significant communicative medium among mobile learned groups between the regions of Gujarat and the Deccan with Yemen and the Hijaz (Robinson

1997; Ho 2006) but also across the wider Indian Ocean region (Ricci 2011). On the other hand, Arabic served in inquiries relating to a wider Islamicate canon across the disciplines of Quranic exegesis (*tafsīr*) and Islamic law (*fiqh*) (Ho 2006). Still, it could serve a variety of further social and cultural purposes. Recent studies by Rajeev Kinra on the Mughal bureaucratic elite have pointed out Arabic's integral part in the educational curriculum of a Mughal civil servant responsible for running the day-to-day imperial administrative business (Kinra 2010, 552). Similarly, Khaled El-Rouayheb's recent work on Islamic intellectual currents in the Ottoman Empire made implicit the central place of Arabic philology in the linguistic schooling of scholarly elites (El-Rouayheb 2015, 97–105).

Thus, Arabic philology was a requisite for the cultural refinement of the learned elites across early modern Islamicate cultures. Yet, while scholarship has explored the multifaceted terrain of Arabic philology over earlier periods, especially the disciplines of grammar (*ʿilm al-naḥw*), rhetoric (*ʿilm al-balāgha*) and lexicography (*ʿilm al-lugha*), research into later commentarial traditions is only in its infancy (Simon 1993; Gully 1995; Bauer 2005). At the same time, these studies mainly focus on the Arabic scholarship from the medieval central Arab lands and Persia, but often do not acknowledge contributions from learned centres across other regions.

As I will argue in the following, scholarly contributions from South Asia became more important from the 15th century onwards, when intellectual conversations and debates in Arabic philology extended further to the East. Scholars across the South

Asian subcontinent composed treatises and commentaries on Arabic syntax, morphology and rhetoric which circulated widely across learned groups of the Ottoman worlds further west by the 16th and 17th centuries (Ahmad 1946). A survey of the manuscript collections of the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul discloses a large number of copied commentaries in the field of rhetoric by well-known figures such as al-Siyalkūtī, a courtier of the Mughal Emperor Shāh Jahān (Ed. 2018). However, there are also commentaries in the field of grammar from less-prominent figures, such as Muḥammad al-Damāmīnī (d. 827/1424) and Shihāb al-Dīn al-Dawlatābādī (d. 848/1445). And these are spread across a wide range of the individual collections of the Süleymaniye (Hitzel 1999).

1.0. Writing *Naḥw* in 15th-century South Asia

Al-Damāmīnī's and al-Dawlatābādī's contributions to Arabic grammar have to be situated within the wider processes of decentralisation that shaped the political landscape of 15th century South Asia. The declining Delhi sultanate was superseded by a regionalised configuration of courts from Gujarat, Malwa in the West to Jawnpur and Bengal in the East, and the Bahmanī kingdom in the Deccan (Schimmel 1980, 36–74; Asher and Talbot 2006, 85). These new political dispensations began to compete for service elites and scholars and could offer lavish patronage to those seeking to live their lives as migrant scholars. Muḥammad al-Damāmīnī (763–827/1362–1424) was born in Alexandria in Egypt and had passed through various educational stages in Mamlūk Egypt and Syria, teaching at the al-Azhar mosque among

other learned sociabilities (al-Sakhāwī 1934–1937, VII:184–87). His change of career into the weaving business was unsuccessful and after the pilgrimage to Mecca he embarked on a career as a mobile scholar which first brought him to Zabīd in Yemen, but then even further across the Western Indian Ocean to Cambay and Nahrwāla (Patan) in Gujarat (see prefaces in MS Ragip Pasa 1326 and MS Carullah 1941). He received patronage from the court of Aḥmad Muẓaffar Shāh and composed, amongst other works, three grammar commentaries. The first work, written after his arrival in the western port city of Kanbāyat (Cambay) in Gujarat during the years 820–821/1417–1418, is the *Taʿlīq al-farāʾid ʿalā tashīl al-fawāʾid* 'Explanation of the precious pearls on the facilitation of benefits', a commentary on Ibn Mālik's (672/1274) *Tashīl al-fawāʾid wa-takmīl al-maqāṣid* 'The facilitation of benefits and the completion of objectives' (see prefaces in MS Ragip Pasa 1326 and MS Carullah 1941; Fleisch 2017a; 2017b). The second work, composed while he resided in the famous scholarly centre of Nahrwāla in Gujarat in 824/1421, is entitled *Tuḥfat al-gharīb ʿalā l-kalām mughnī al-labīb ʿan kutub al-aʿārīb* 'Gift of the extraordinary concerning the speech of sufficient understanding on the books of declinations', a commentary on Ibn Hishām's (d. 760/1360) treatise on syntax, *al-Mughnī al-labīb* (see preface and colophon of MS Bijapur 7; Fleisch 2017b). He then continued his vagrant life and travelled on to the Deccan. A third work, written while on his way from Gujarat to the city of Aḥsānābād (Gulbarga) in the Bahmanī realm of the Deccan during the years 825–826/1422–1423, is entitled *al-Manhal al-ṣafī fī sharḥ al-wāfī* 'The pure watering place in the explanation of

the perfect', again a commentary, in this case on al-Balkhī's (d. 8th/14th c.) grammatical work al-*Wāfī* (see preface in MS Nahw 108). This was presented to the sultan Aḥmad Shāh Bahmanī and seems to have been his last scholarly composition before he died in 1424.

Al-Damāmīnī's contemporary Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Shams al-Dīn al-Hindī al-Dawlatābādī (d. 848/1445) had a different professional trajectory, but he similarly benefitted from the increasing availability of courtly patronage during the 15th century. Al-Dawlatābādī was born in Dawlatābād in the Deccan, studied in Delhi and after Timur Tamerlane's invasion in 1398 he left and became attached to the court of Sulṭān Ibrāhīm Sharqī (804–844/1400–1440) in Jawnpūr as prime judge (*qāḍī al-qudāt*) and scholar (Nizami 2018). And there he joined a larger group of learned men who turned the court of Jawnpur into a flourishing centre of learning during the 15th century (Würsch 2018). He soon received the title Malik al-ʿUlamāʾ (Nizami 2018). Among the works he composed during his courtly tenure are the commentary *Sharḥ al-Hindī* on the famous treatise *al-Kāfiya* by Ibn al-Ḥājib (d. 646/1249) as well as the work *al-Irshād*, a treatment of Arabic syntax (Nizami 2018).

With their texts in the field of *naḥw* both scholars primarily provided crucial commentaries for the refinement of Arabic. The *shurūḥ* were written with a South Asian audience in mind that engaged with the Arabic cultural idiom on a different canonical textual background in comparison to what for example al-

Damāmīnī had been accustomed to in Mamlūk Egypt[2]. Ultimately, such works served to develop skills in the exegesis of Islamic canonical works. And this intellectual purpose had also shaped the textual fabric of these commentaries. Grammar works were thick intertextual re-fabrications of Islamicate canonical texts. Excerpts of Islamic canonical works, specimen of poetry and by the early modern period a diverse commentarial layer had turned Arabic grammar books not only into foundational readings in the acquisition of Arabic language skills, but also substantiated them as digests of Islamicate cultural traditions (Gully 1995).

While these commentaries thereby contributed to the larger discourse and perpetuation of Islamicate textual traditions, the extent of the contribution of al-Damāmīnī's and al-Dawlatābādī's commentaries to different regional and local learned sociabilities can only be gauged by tracing the transmission of their texts as manuscript copies. Marginalia and paratextual elements on manuscripts offer a window into the world of reading practices, the conditions of the perception of texts among audiences and the

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[2] This becomes especially clear when comparing two of al-Damāmīnī's commentaries on the same treatise, one written in Egypt and the other composed in Gujarat. The intertextual variety and reference to scholarly authorities differs considerably, a venue of research that I elaborated on in Bahl (2018).

forms of circulation among scholarly networks (Görke/Hirschler 2011).[3]

2.0. Manuscript Circulation in Ottoman Istanbul

In comparison to al-Damāmīnī, who was an established scholar before he had left Egypt for India, knowledge about al-Dawlatābādī's scholarly background and oeuvre must have slowly spread across scholarly networks from South Asia to Ottoman Istanbul. A survey of his commentaries on *naḥw* in the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul reveals 30 manuscripts of his *Sharḥ Hindī* on the treatise *al-Kāfiya* for the 9th–11th (roughly 15th–17th) centuries, and only one version of the *Irshād*, his summary on Arabic syntax. The majority of these versions can be dated to the 16th and 17th centuries. Even if other works circulated in larger quantities, the numbers for the *Sharḥ Hindī* point to a considerable circulation of al-Dawlatābādī's texts in Istanbul and beyond. And the general reference to his commentary in various short-hands such as *Sharḥ Hindī, Kitāb Hindī*, and simply *Hindī* suggest that his work had become common parlance in the early modern Ottoman Empire.

Due to fragmentary spatial data, it is often difficult to clearly trace a direct transfer of manuscripts from South Asia to Ottoman Istanbul. The inscription of a specific paratext can serve as a very tentative indicator for an initial circulation of a text in South Asia. Across South Asia the phrase *yā kabīkaj* (the term

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[3] The terms and concepts paratexts, hypertexts, intertextualities and other forms of transtextualities throughout this article are taken from Genette (1993; 2001).

kabīkaj refers to wild parsley and 'king of the cockroaches') was often written on the fly-leaf of a book in the belief that this formula would save the manuscript from cockroaches (Steingass 1977)[4]. Adam Gacek (1986) further referred to the regional varieties in the use of such talismanic paratexts locating the use of *yā kabīkaj* in the subcontinent. Among the collections in Istanbul, four manuscripts of al-Dawlatābādī's commentary come with this inscription on the fly-leaves and one of them even contains a separate inscription on the folios with the table of contents (see the fly-leaves of MSs Aya Sofya 4501, Darulmesnevi 1504, Laleli 3416, Yusuf Aga 347). However, even if the phrase *yā kabīkaj* developed in this form in South Asia, the practice of its inscription on manuscripts could have (and probably did) circulated as far as the Ottoman Empire among mobile learned groups. Thus, the use of the phrase *yā kabīkaj* can only situate the respective manuscript within a wider circulation of cultural practices and scribal traditions that extended as far as the subcontinent. A more precise assessment of the geographical spread of the use of *yā kabīkaj* awaits the study of larger surveys of manuscripts.

Additionally, since references to places were not always provided in the colophons, the exact origin of most of the manuscripts cannot be traced in detail. Yet, some versions demonstrate copying efforts across the Ottoman Empire making manifest a proliferation of the *Sharḥ Hindī* among its learned audiences. In two versions the respective scribes located their transcriptions in the city of Constantinople (*qusṭanṭīnīyya*) (see the colophons in

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[4] I am grateful to Olly Akkerman for pointing this out to me.

MS Esad Efendi 3082 and MS Sehid Ali Pasa 2453). Still, manu-
scripts also hailed from other regions of the Empire. MS Carullah
1931 of the *Sharḥ Hindī* was copied by a certain Muḥammad b.
Aḥmad b. Yūsuf in 966/1559 in Kefe (also Kaffa), a city on the
south-eastern coast of Crimea, and since the reign of Bayezid II
(886–918/1481–1512) a *sanjak* (administrative subdivision of a
province) of the Ottoman Empire (Orhunlu 2018). These exam-
ples indicate multiple local demands and interests for al-Daw-
latābādī's commentary.

   Al-Dawlatābādī's text circulated across different scholarly
sociabilities in the early modern period and thereby had a crucial
share in the learned encounters across the field of Arabic philol-
ogy. Paratextual profiles on several of his manuscripts demon-
strate the minutiae of multiple interpersonal transmissions of the
commentary and thereby a high velocity of the text. MS Lala Is-
mail 635 is a transcription of the *Sharḥ Hindī* with the appended
ḥawāshī 'marginalia' of a certain Ibn al-Qalʿī on al-Dawlatābādī's
commentary (MS Lala Ismail 635, fol. 171r). After the transcrip-
tion of both texts by different scribes, the manuscript was first in
the possession of a certain Aḥmad b. Abī […] al-Maḥāsīnī in
1060/1650 and then came into the possession of a certain ʿAbd
al-Karīm b. Muḥammad b. […] al-Ḥusaynī in 1073/1662 (see MS
Lala Ismail 635, fol. 1r). Similarly, another version of the *Kitāb
Hindī*, which was finished in 1028/1619 with a *yā kabīkaj* note,
was transmitted (*naqala*) and owned (*ṣāḥabahu*) by at least three
different people and annotated extensively in this process (MS
Laleli 3416, fol. 1r). Al-Dawlatābādī had arrived in the scholarly
circles of the Ottoman world.

Similar paratextual profiles of extensive circulation mark al-Damāmīnī's commentaries, in principle his *Tashīl al-fawāʾid* and the *Sharḥ al-Mughnī* or *Tuḥfat al-gharīb* on Ibn Hishām's work of grammar, which, given the numbers of 19 and 35 manuscript versions respectively, circulated more prominently than the *Man-hal al-ṣāfī*, with only four copies. Most importantly, the circulation of his commentaries was subject to larger changes in the paratextual anatomy of Arabic manuscripts. These can highlight the high degree of incorporation of these commentaries into learned sociabilities of Ottoman Istanbul and beyond.

3.0. The Emergence of the *Fihrist*

Manuscripts in Istanbul of both al-Damāmīnī's and al-Dawlatābādī's commentaries show that by the late 16th and 17th centuries the *fihrist* (table of contents) emerged as a new paratextual element. The term *fihrist* comes with a variety of forms and meanings stretched out over a considerable period. Here, I want to distinguish between two types of *fihrist*s, the internal and the external. The internal *fihrist* refers to the authorial table of contents and constitutes an intertextual feature that often appears at the end of the *muqaddima* 'introduction' or 'preface' to a work. Internal *fihrist*s form crucial textual elements of transition in an introduction after outlining authorial intention, reason, method and purpose of a work, framed in religious formulae and a localisation in a scholarly genealogy. They offer a 'road map' for the reader, locking the successive evolution of ideas of the work into a set of succinct terms or phrases. Thereby they precondition the

reading experience by previewing how the larger argument is going to unfold successively. In general, the internal *fihrist* sprang from the pen of the authors, although the layout in manuscripts could be changed later on by the respective scribes.

In contrast to the internal *fihrist*, I want to focus on the use of the external *fihrist* in manuscripts of al-Dawlatābādī's and al-Damāmīnī's grammar commentaries, meaning a table of contents that was added subsequently by a reader or scribe. While the different forms of authorial internal *fihrist*s indicate potential perusals of a text, manuscript notes in the form of paratexts, marginalia and other reading statements partially document the actual textual engagement of a reader with a text.[5] They register time and place, when and where a reader intervened or engaged with the text. Needless to say, this does not provide a full account of a reader's intellectual encounters with an oeuvre. Nevertheless, these manuscript notes can indicate changing cultural engagements through their own emergence or alteration over time. Most importantly, the focus on the intertextuality of *matn* and paratexts provides a perspective that goes beyond the interpretative exercise of a text. It encompasses its appropriation by a reader and thereby the historical significances it had in its perusal at a particular point in time. This means that texts could be appropriated in various ways, which highlights changing cultural practices among communities.[6]

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[5] A strong argument for tracing such textual engagements in a different context was made in Krimsti (2019, 202–44).

[6] For a more detailed discussion of the *fihrist*, see Bahl (2018, chapter 4).

For the current purpose, I argue that the emergence of external *fihrists* during the late 16th and early 17th centuries on manuscripts of al-Damāmīnī's and al-Dawlatābādī's texts underscore their incorporation into scholarly curricula in Ottoman Istanbul. Readers introduced this device to render the texts more accessible. Here, I refer to the external *fihrist* that does not spring from the pen of the author but was added by a reader at a later stage. I base this argument on an extensive survey of al-Damāmīnī's texts and their 58 manuscripts, as well as on 30 manuscripts of al-Dawlatābādī 's text. Such a survey reveals a period of relative absence, relative because there might have been individual cases where such a *fihrist* was added to the manuscript but did not survive because it would have been located among the more vulnerable fly-leaves, which could have easily been torn away. Still, with the absence of 'tables of contents' for the 15th century, and their appearance during the late 16th and throughout the 17th century, there is a diachronic argument to be made. And although 16th and 17th century copies are empirically based on earlier 15th century transcriptions, they do not feature *fihrists* from the 15th century. As far as my research has shown, only late 16th and 17th century copies come with *fihrists*. Their appearance throughout the 17th century indicates a change over time in these Arabic manuscript cultures.

The more common appearance of external *fihrists* suggests a historical trend that took off during the early modern period in the wider field of Arabic philology. Four of the 30 manuscripts of al-Dawlatābādī's *Sharḥ Hindī* survive with a *fihrist*. Similarly,

al-Damāmīnī's texts, as they survive on manuscripts in the Süley-
maniye in Istanbul, show that the process of *fihrist*isation was not
an all-encompassing phenomenon. Altogether 35 transcriptions
of either al-Damāmīnī's *hindī* or *yamanī* commentary on Ibn
Hishām's *Mughnī al-labīb* survive among the Süleymaniye collec-
tions. Only one transcription of the *hindī* commentary, the *Tuḥfat
al-gharīb*, comes with a *fihrist*, and this version was copied in
1092/1681 (MS Carullah 1941). Of the four transcriptions of the
al-Manhal al-ṣāfī in Istanbul again only one version has a *fihrist*,
however not dated (MS Haci Selim Aga 1170-001, fol. 1v–2r).
Yet, of the 19 copies of the *Taʿlīq al-farāʾid* in Istanbul, eight ver-
sions entail a *fihrist* and these versions date to the second half of
the 16th and the 17th century (see MS Hekimoglu 888, MS Murad
Molla 1675, MS Murad Molla 1676, MS Murad Molla 1677, MS
Sehid Ali Pasha 2413, MS Sehid Ali Pasha 2414, MS Laleli 3176,
MS Fatih 4909). Two of these versions can be pinned down to a
circulation within Istanbul and from Mecca to Istanbul, and thus
the wider Ottoman world of the mid-16th century (MS Murad-
molla 1675, fol. 248r; MS Hekimoglu 888, fol. 445r).

Scribes and readers added external *fihrist*s to the fly-leaves
of a manuscript version. Three manuscripts of al-Dawlatābādī's
Sharḥ Hindī come with a *fihrist* (MS Darulmesnevi 504, MS Servili
306, MS Yazmabagislar 342). All three are decorated in different
ways. MS Darulmesnevi 504 was copied in 1027/1618. It simply
consists of an enumeration of terms and sections of the treatise
and its commentary, not in the form of a list, but spread out
across the two pages together with corresponding folio numbers.
MS Servili 306 is not dateable. Here, the *fihrist* contains a similar

set of terms, but their arrangement is ordered and framed through a grid pattern, each field containing one term and the respective folio number across three pages. MS Yazmabagislar 342, copied in 978/1571, contains a *fihrist* that only stretches across one half-folio (probably incomplete).

Style and execution suggest several characteristics and functions of these *fihrists*. Firstly, their location on the fly-leaves before the title-page marks the process of creating the *fihrist* as separate from the transcription of the *matn* (main text). Readers or scribes most probably added it later after the completion of the manuscript copy. Secondly, this is further corroborated with the addition of folio numbers. Folio numbers locate the respective grammatical phenomena in the manuscript. Thus, the foliation broke up the text and made it more accessible. Significantly, this also enhanced the readability of the text, since readers could now browse through the *fihrist* to look up a specific grammatical term or phenomenon which they wanted to study. Thirdly, these terms or phenomena were formalised or standardised in all three manuscript copies. The *fihrist* functioned like an index that helped a reader navigate the text.

Thus, individual readers began to engage with these texts by creating a *fihrist* for individual manuscript versions. I argue that readers introduced this device to render the texts more accessible, which would serve them in their study pursuits. The overall location among the fly-leaves defined the paratextual characteristics of the external *fihrist* as a meaningful written elaboration of a hypertextual appropriation of a text. In general, they

functioned as practical guides and provided a condensed over-view of a work's contents. *Fihrists* in manuscripts of al-Damāmīnī's texts worked in a similar way. They were added to the manuscript at a later stage and appear before the title-page and the introduction to the text. Chapters, sections, important terms and phenomena were often referred to with a particular folio number. In one of the Istanbul versions of the *Tuḥfat al-gharīb* the *fihrist mā fī l-kitāb* 'index of what is in the book' goes over one and a half folios before the start of the *matn*'s foliation and was marked as completed with the symbol *tamma* at the end (MS Carullah 1941, fly-leaves). Chapter names were written in red and section titles in black. They were specified with a folio number and corresponded with their counterparts in the *matn* in red ink. In other cases, *fihrist*, *matn* and marginalia seem to be written in the same hand, yet the *fihrist* still was a final addition, because the foliation of the work conformed with the numbers given in the table of contents (MS Carullah 1941, fly-leaves). In contrast to this, a version of the *Manhal al-ṣāfī* entitled *fihrist hādhā al-kitāb* 'index of this book' is produced without foliation (MS Haci Selim Aga 1170-001, fol. 1v–2r). The *fihrist* offers only a bullet-point summary of grammatical terms and phenomena covered in this commentary.

Changing paratextual profiles in manuscripts of al-Damāmīnī's and al-Dawlatābādī's texts document changing tex-tual practices of scribes and readers in this period. They empha-sise the high degree to which al-Damāmīnī's and al-Dawlatābādī's texts had become a part of scholarly engagements with Arabic grammar in Ottoman Istanbul and beyond. Thus, both examples

showcase empirically substantiated transregional connections be-
tween early modern South Asia and the Ottoman Empire and how
such forms of text transmission were shaped by readers and their
needs in the field of Islamicate learned pursuits.

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