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Article

How Arabic Manuscripts Moved to German Libraries*

Tilman Seidensticker | Jena

Researchers who are working on or with Arabic manuscripts from a German library will, of course, know where the manuscript is stored. In many cases, they will also know where the manuscript was originally copied because this is often stated in the colophon. The way the manuscript made its way from its place of origin to the library that currently possesses it is much less well known, although information about this is contained in readers' and owners' notes, 'audition certificates'¹ and, in some cases, librarians' remarks about the manuscripts' origins in the catalogue. A closer examination of the circumstances in which Arabic manuscripts were brought to Germany reveals some important aspects of the history of Arabic texts' reception. This paper gives an overview about the last leg of the journey Arabic manuscripts made to the three public libraries in Germany owning the greatest collections of Oriental manuscripts, namely the Berlin State Library (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin), the Bavarian State Library (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, BSB) and the Gotha Research Library (Forschungsbibliothek Gotha). By concentrating on the last stage of their journey, one can gain information on the multifaceted and changing relationship between Europe and the Middle East and North Africa.

Ideally, acquisition by a library will trigger off the last trip that an Arabic manuscript will undertake in its lifetime. There are some known exceptions, however – predominantly of an unpleasant nature. The transfer of cultural property is a well-known phenomenon. It includes transfers from eastern German libraries and the mines, monasteries and castles that items were moved to in the last few years of World War II, involving transfers to disparate places, many of which were in the Soviet Union. Only a limited number of manuscripts were moved from the two libraries we are concerned with here – Berlin and Gotha – in the aftermath of World War II, however. During the

war, Max Weisweiler (1902–1968), the librarian responsible for the Oriental manuscripts kept by the Berlin State Library, which was then called the Prussian State Library, obviously had a premonition of coming events.² He simply ignored the directives given to him, avoiding sending them off to places in the eastern parts of the German Reich, and took the objects to Beuron Archabbey in Württemberg, to a potash mine in Hesse, to a palace called Schloss Laubach, also in Hesse, and to Banz Abbey (now Banz Castle) in Upper Franconia. Unlike many other books and manuscripts from the Berlin State Library, 56 Oriental manuscripts ended up in the Jagiellonian Library (Biblioteka Jagiellonska) in Cracow, while another 53 are thought to have been irretrievably lost. These 109 objects had been evacuated to Silesia.³ The stock of Oriental manuscripts belonging to the Gotha Research Library is a good example of the fact that transferring them to the Soviet Union did not necessarily mean they would be lost, however: the entire collection of more than 3,000 manuscripts was transported to the Soviet Union in 1946 and was returned without any loss or damage in 1956, three years after Stalin's death.⁴

Another earlier example of the repercussions of war is what has been called 'the French book abduction' of 1800, when fifteen Oriental manuscripts from what was then the Munich Royal Library (Hofbibliothek) were taken to Paris. After the Congress of Vienna in 1815, these had to be returned or replaced by other manuscripts in the event of their loss. This was how at least two valuable manuscripts formerly in the possession of the French National Library (Bibliothèque nationale de France) came to be in Munich and now bear the owner's stamps of both libraries.⁵

² For Weisweiler see Wiesmüller 2007 and Briel 2013, 208–209, 229–230, 249–250.

³ Schmieder-Jappe 2004, 19–20.

⁴ Information kindly provided by Cornelia Hopf, Gotha Research Library, November 2012.

⁵ Two such manuscripts are described in Rebhan 2010, nos. 5 and 33. For more information on the 'book abduction', see eadem, 17–18 and Keunecke 1979.

* This paper is based on a lecture I gave at a workshop called *Manuscripts in Motion*, held by the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures in Hamburg, 15–17 November 2012. The original style of the presentation has been retained.

¹ For more information on these certificates, known as *samā' (āt)* in Arabic, see Seidensticker 2015.

Table 1: Acquisitions of Arabic and 'Oriental'⁶ manuscripts by the Berlin State Library

Collections of manuscripts	Arabic	Oriental
Old holdings ('Ms. Or.') until 1887	620	
Diez ⁷ (bequeathed in 1817) Heinrich Friedrich von Diez (1751–1817), Prussian ambassador in Constantinople	100	407
Wetzstein ⁸ I (purchased in 1852) Johann Gottfried Wetzstein (1815–1905), Prussian consul in Damascus	184	215
Wetzstein II (purchased in 1862)	1,934	1,962
Petermann I (purchased in 1853–7) Julius Heinrich Petermann (1801–1876), professor of Oriental languages in Berlin	516	732
Petermann II (purchased in 1870)	607	> 700
Sprenger ⁹ (purchased in 1857) Aloys Sprenger (1813–1893), worked in India, professor in Berne after 1857	1,140	1,972
Landberg (purchased in 1884) Carlo Landberg (1848–1924), Swedish Arabist	1,035	
Glaser (purchased in 1887) Eduard Glaser (1855–1908), Austrian Orientalist and traveller to Yemen	241	
Daḥdāḥ ¹⁰ (purchased in 1941/42) Ruṣāid al-Daḥdāḥ (1813–1889), Lebanese politician and merchant	254	
Rescher (purchased in 1974) Oskar Rescher (1883–1972), German Orientalist, emigrated to Istanbul	1,296	1,722
Spuhler ¹¹ (purchased in 2010) Friedrich Spuhler, expert on Islamic art, collector and trader	225	380
Further acquisitions (1897–2013)	3,350	

⁶ It has been impossible to find out exactly which languages were designated by the adjective 'Oriental' in each case where it has been used by a librarian. In the remainder of the text, I abstained from putting the word in quotation marks.

⁷ See Rauch and Gonella 2013 for more information on the famous picture albums from the Diez collection, stemming from the Topkapı Palace.

⁸ See Rauch 2015 for some information on Wetzstein and especially the early Qur'ans acquired by him.

⁹ See Kurio 1981 for more detailed information on Sprenger as a collector and three sections of his collection (history, geography, Prophetic tradition).

¹⁰ Wagner 1976, xvi–xvii discusses Ruṣāid al-Daḥdāḥ and his collection of Arabic manuscripts.

¹¹ See Rauch 2011.

Another reason for the unforeseen movement of manuscripts was criminal activity. A case of theft involving several items taken by a curator occurred at the Chester Beatty Library and Gallery of Oriental Art in Dublin in the 1980s, but the culprit was caught, convicted and sent to jail.¹²

Let us turn to a more pleasant matter now, namely to those Arabic manuscripts which lie safely on the shelves and will hopefully not be moved again, except to the manuscript reading hall. I will start with the library possessing the biggest collection of Oriental manuscripts in Germany: the Berlin State Library. This was founded in 1661 as the 'Churfürstliche Bibliothek zu Cölln an der Spree' by Friedrich Wilhelm von Brandenburg (Fig. 1), who was called 'Der Große Kurfürst' ('the Great Elector'). He set up the first Brandenburgian colonies in Africa and the West Indies and is said to have planned the foundation of an East Indian company as well. The fact that he gave an order to his Royal Library (Hofbibliothek) to buy Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Ethiopic, Coptic, Indian and Chinese manuscripts is a natural sequel to these commercial and colonial aspirations. In the year 1688, there were a hundred Oriental manuscripts in the collection, but no manuscripts from East Asia were among these. Table 1 lists the most important collections in what is now the Berlin State Library;¹³ the first and the last lines are, of course, not collections in the sense that they were acquired from or by a single person.

What is important to note here is the immense number of Arabic manuscripts the Library gained in the short span of time between 1852 and 1887, roughly the two decades preceding and following the foundation of the German Empire: there were 5,657 in all, beginning with Wetzstein I and ending with Glaser's collection. To explain the enormously increased interest on the part of the Library, we would need to take a closer look at its interdependency with the emerging academic discipline of Orientalistik in Germany. This cannot be done here, however; suffice it to say that the studies by Sabine Mangold, Suzanne Marchand and Ursula Wokoek on German Orientalism in the nineteenth century were groundbreaking



Fig. 1: Frederick William, Elector of Brandenburg (1620–1688), copper engraving of the seventeenth century.

for such an enterprise.¹⁴ The Library's normal budget was not always sufficient for these acquisitions, it seems; Glaser's collection, for example, could only be acquired with the aid of a subsidy from the Prussian king.

The second of these libraries is the Bavarian State Library in Munich. Founded as the Munich Court Library (Münchener Hofbibliothek) by Duke Albrecht V (Fig. 2) in 1558, it currently possesses 4,200 Islamic manuscripts (Table 2).¹⁵ It is the second-largest library in Germany of interest to us, and not only as far as quantity is concerned.

Oriental manuscripts played a major role in the Library's acquisitions right from the beginning. In the year that the

¹² See Geoffrey J. Roper's obituary of David James, <<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Islamart&month=1212&week=a&msg=bTgwYq5bnVRE6Yx7nkj5JA>> (12 March 2016).

¹³ The figures are based on Ahlwardt 1887, v–vi, Schmieder-Jappe 2004, *passim*, and for the Dahdāh collection and the last line, on e-mails from Christoph Rauch, head of the Oriental Department of the Berlin State Library, March/April 2014.

¹⁴ Mangold 2004, Marchand 2009 and Wokoek 2009.

¹⁵ These figures are based on Rebhan 2010, 15–24 and, for the last two lines, on e-mails from Helga Rebhan, head of the Oriental Department of the Bavarian State Library, November 2012 and March 2014.

Table 2: Acquisitions of Oriental, Islamic and Arabic manuscripts by the Bavarian State Library

Collections of manuscripts	Number	Designation
Widmanstetter (purchased in 1558)	50	Islamic
17th and 18th centuries ('Türkenbeute')	?	
Secularisation of monasteries in Bavaria after 1803	?	
Hofbibliothek Mannheim (bequeathed in 1804)	?	
Clot Bey and Pruner Bey (gifts made from 1841 to 1860) Personal physicians of Egypt's viceroys	60	Oriental
Quatremère (purchased in 1858) Etienne-Marc Quatremère (1782–1857), French Orientalist	1,250	Oriental
Glaser (purchased in 1902) Eduard Glaser (1855–1908), Austrian Orientalist and traveller to Yemen	157	Arabic
Purchased under Gratzl's supervision (between 1913 and 1944) Emil Gratzl (1877–1957), librarian at the Library	100	Oriental
Gratzl (bequeathed in 1957)	40	Oriental
Purchased under Dachs' supervision (between 1972 and 1994) Karl Dachs, head of the Manuscript Department at the Munich Library until 1994	1,378 (1,492)	Arabic Islamic
Purchased under Grönbold's and Rebhan's supervision until 2013 Günter Grönbold and Helga Rebhan, heads of the Oriental Department at the Library (1986–2005 and 2005 to the present day respectively)	370 (722)	Arabic Islamic

Library was founded, the library of the humanist scholar Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter (1506–1557) was acquired. Widmanstetter, an Orientalist, was not only one of the most reputable scholars of his time, but he also had a notable career as a diplomat in the service of clergymen and worldly potentates. In Arabist circles, he is especially known for his early publication of the Qur'an in Arabic,¹⁶ and some of the finest pieces in the Library's possession are copies of the Qur'an from his collection.¹⁷ While attending the coronation of Emperor Charles V in Bologna, he got to know the Bishop of Burgos in Castile. It is probably through this acquaintance

that he managed to buy these remarkable manuscripts originating from Islamic Spain and North Africa.¹⁸

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the new acquisitions made by the Royal Library primarily consisted of *Türkenbeute* (literally, 'Turkish loot', that is, spoils from the wars between European powers and the Ottoman Empire). I will come back to this topic later. The secularisation of monasteries after 1803 was the reason for further growth of the holdings; some of these manuscripts are highly valuable, such as the Qur'an owned by Père Lachaise, the confessor of Louis XIV, the 'Sun King'.¹⁹ At around the same time, the Hofbibliothek Mannheim was transferred to Munich – a donation from the elector, Karl-Theodor, who had died in

¹⁶ See *Kulturkosmos* 2008, no. 25.

¹⁷ See Rebhan 2010, nos. 1, 2 and 4.

¹⁸ For more information on Widmanstetter, see Rebhan 2010, 15–18; *Kulturkosmos* 2008, 81–84 (H. Rebhan); on his library, see Rebhan 2009.

¹⁹ See Rebhan 2010, no. 3.



Fig. 2: Albrecht V, Duke of Bavaria (1528–1579), painted by Hans Muelich in 1545.

1799. Later in the nineteenth century, two personal physicians of the viceroys of Egypt, Clot Bey and Pruner Bey, donated their sixty Oriental manuscripts to the Royal Library as well.

In the history of the Munich Royal Library, there are only two counterparts to the major acquisitions the Berlin library made between 1852 and 1887, the first of which was the purchase in 1858 of the library of the French Orientalist Etienne-Marc Quatremère, a professor at the Collège de France and what was then called the École des langues orientales in Paris. The collection's price of 340,000 gold francs could only be paid by auctioning off a considerable number of doublets of printed books from the holdings of the Munich Royal Library. The other large-scale purchase was the acquisition of 157 Arabic manuscripts from Yemen; these were sold by Eduard Glaser, who was also responsible for collecting two other groups of Yemenite manuscripts consisting of 328 and 282 items, now in the possession of the British Library in London and the Austrian National Library (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek) in Vienna respectively.²⁰

²⁰ On Glaser's collections, see the virtual exhibition in *The Digital Bab al-Yemen*, where, in the summer of 2016, 86 Glaser manuscript volumes from

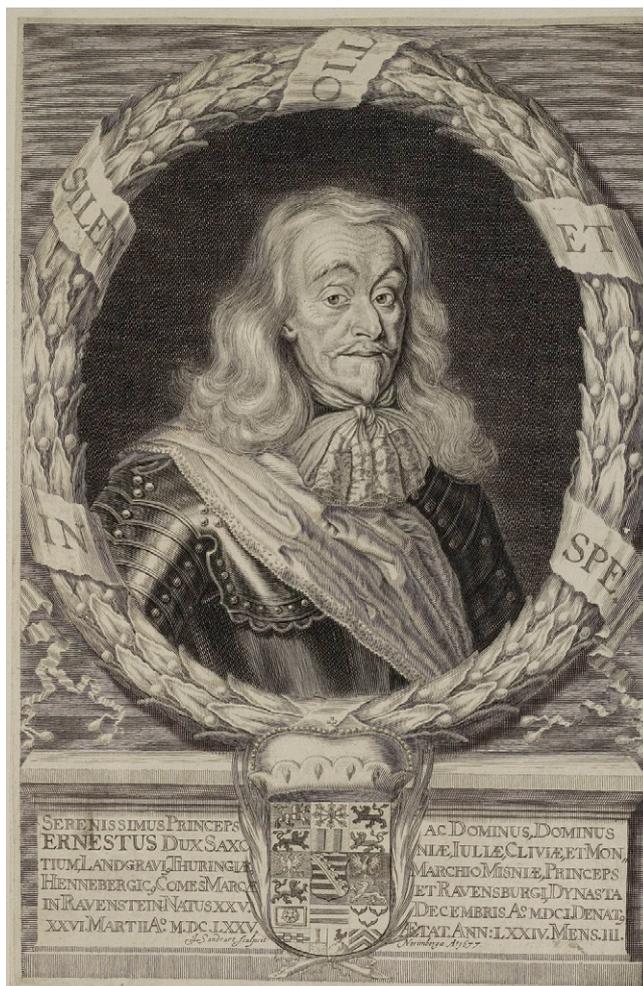


Fig. 3: Ernest I, Duke of Saxe-Gotha and Saxe-Altenburg (1601–1675), copper engraving by Jacob von Sandrart, 1677.

Due to the personal involvement of two Munich librarians, Emil Gratzl and Karl Dachs, the number of Oriental/Islamic manuscripts continued to increase in the second half of the twentieth century, growing by 140 and 1,492 manuscripts respectively. Dachs's interest in copies of the Qur'an deserves special mention here, as he was able to buy many important pieces at a time when precious ones were still affordable. Currently, the Library holds 179 complete copies or fragments of the Qur'an.

Before presenting the history of the acquisitions made by the Gotha Research Library, I should perhaps explain where Gotha is situated geographically. It is a small town halfway between Erfurt and Eisenach in the central German state of Thuringia and owes its fame not only to a genealogical handbook of European nobility first published there, but to the fact that it was the residence of the Duke

the Berlin State Library could be accessed in digitised form <<https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/exhibit/gQs9TMxj>>.

Table 3: Acquisitions made by the Gotha Research Library

Collections of manuscripts	Number	Designation
Old holdings up to 1804	74	Oriental
Purchased by Seetzen, 1803–1809 Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767–1811), naturalist and traveller	2,705 (+ 366)	Arabic other Oriental)
1826 to 1945	100	Oriental

of Saxe-Gotha from 1640 to 1918. The new palace of Duke Ernest I (Fig. 3), called Schloss Friedenstein, was the seat of the residential library ever since it was founded in 1647. At that time, not a single Oriental manuscript seems to have been kept on the shelves, but in 1664, a Turkish manuscript was given to Duke Ernst which, as a note at the end of the manuscript shows,²¹ was gained as booty in the course of the unsuccessful siege of Pécs (Quinque Ecclesiae) in what is now southern Hungary; Pécs was under Ottoman rule from 1543 to 1686.

This is another example of what is commonly called *Türkenbeute* in German.²² We already encountered this term when we looked at the growth of the Oriental manuscripts kept by the Munich Royal Library, and the ‘old holdings’ of the Berlin State Library contain a considerable number of such objects as well. Table 3 shows the figures for the Gotha Research Library.²³

Gotha's old holdings, acquired prior to Seetzen's large-scale acquisitions, amount to 74 Oriental manuscripts in all. In fourteen cases, notes in the manuscripts state that they came into German possession as booty, but this figure is probably much higher in truth; I estimate that a third or even half of the old holdings are instances of *Türkenbeute*.

There are two instances of this in Gotha that are particularly obvious. The first one contains extracts from the Qur'an and prayers (Ms. orient. A 517). A note on fol. Iib reads:

²¹ Ms. orient. T 218, fol. 264b; for a picture see *Orientalische Buchkunst* 1997, 18.

²² A word that might not sound politically correct, but which is nevertheless used as the official name of the website that presents the spoils from the military confrontation with the Ottomans contained in the Baden Regional Museum, Karlsruhe <www.tuerkenbeute.de>.

²³ Based on the chapter ‘Zur Geschichte und Erschließung der orientalischen Handschriften in Gotha’ (Hans Stein) in *Orientalische Buchkunst* 1997, 17–40.

Als Ofen in Ungarn im vorigen Türkenkriege anno 1686 im Aug[ust] von der Christlichen armee belägert und erobert worden, so ist unter der armee der Herr von Köniz zu Unter-Simau, damals Cornet, nachgehends Oberster und Commendant auf der Vestung Coburg gewesen. Der hat einen Türken erschossen, und bei ihm dieses Buch gefunden (anstatt verhoften geldes) und hat solches mit in das Coburg[er] Land bracht.²⁴

When Buda in Hungary was besieged and taken by the Christian army in the last war against the Turks in Aug[ust] 1686, Mr von Köniz zu Unter-Simau was a member of the cavalry. He was a cornet at the time, but later became a colonel and commanding officer at Coburg Fortress. He [once] shot a Turk and found this book upon his body (instead of the money he had been hoping for), and then brought it with him to the Coburg area.

The second example (Ms. orient. A 3) is an Arabic multi-text manuscript mostly containing Prophetic Tradition. A note on fol. 1^r tells us that the manuscript was pulled out from under the body of a mufti killed at Buda and was badly stained with blood.²⁵ A similar note is in a manuscript seized at Stuhlweissenburg [Székesfehérvár] in 1593 and now in the possession of the Austrian National Library in Vienna, it has blood stains on it as well.²⁶

As an aside, many manuscripts preserved in libraries all over Europe bear witness to famous events in military history: the first siege of Vienna in 1529, the second one in

²⁴ A picture of this note can be seen in *Orientalische Buchkunst* 1997, 25.

²⁵ See a picture of the note in *Orientalische Buchkunst* 1997, 22. The Latin note reads: ‘Budae sub Cadavere occisi Muffti extractum multo sanguine aspersum. A. Aveman. Budae post expugnation[em].’

²⁶ Jones 1987, 100 and footnote 42.



Fig. 4: Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767–1811), portrait by Frederik Christiaan Bierweiler, after E. C. Dunker, 1818.

1683 (which proved to be especially fruitful for the libraries), and Gran/Esztergom in 1595.²⁷ Such spoils were also made outside Europe, of course. Robert Jones points out that ‘[i]n 1535, the siege and sack of Tunis by the Emperor Charles V included the looting of manuscripts, especially Qur’ans, from the mosques and libraries of the city’.²⁸ One of these pieces found its way to Heidelberg (and later to the Vatican), a second one – a Qur’an from Seville dated 1227 – came into Widmanstetter’s possession and then made its way onto the shelves of the Bavarian State Library, and three volumes of an eight-volume Qur’an migrated via the Escorial to the National Library of France in Paris.²⁹ A manuscript

²⁷ On these events and the manuscripts seized on these occasions, see Jones 1987, 98, 100, 103.

²⁸ Jones 1987, 100.

²⁹ Jones 1987, 100; on the Seville Qur’an (BSB Munich, Cod. arab. 1), see Rebhan 2010, 16 and 30–31.

containing magical texts that was seized in Tunis came into the hands of the historian Johann Andreas Bose and was sold to the library of the University of Jena in 1675 by his widow.³⁰ Booty of this kind was also made in the course of naval battles, such as during the famous Battle of Lepanto in 1571 between the Christian powers and the Ottomans. About twenty Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts came to the Escorial after that famous day and another one found its way to Leiden University Library via Rome and a Spanish possessor.³¹ Besides naval battles, the sea was witness to pirate attacks, and even enterprises like these could mean that Islamic manuscripts changed hands. In Robert Jones’ opinion,

[d]oubtless the single most dramatic episode [of this kind] [...] was when Spanish pirates closed on a boat off the west coast of Morocco. According to Spanish sources, this took place in 1611. When they boarded the boat, the pirates found it was carrying an exceptionally valuable cargo in the shape of Sultan Mawlay Zaydan’s household effects. This included his entire library of some three or four thousand Arabic manuscripts. Back in Spanish waters, the cargo was unloaded and the library presented to King Philip III, who deposited it in the library of the royal monastery of San Lorenzo at the Escorial.³²

These examples have shown that research on the provenance of such booty manuscripts can yield interesting results even beyond a spectacular change in proprietor. Their history after incorporation into the Christian world can often be reconstructed from paratexts and the libraries’ acquisition books, and in my eyes the high esteem the objects were held in is particularly striking. So far, the *Türkenbeute* has been studied in detail with respect to the holdings of the University of Jena Library (Thüringer Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Jena), Duchess Anna Amalia Library (Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek) in Weimar, the Gotha Research Library³³ and Leipzig University Library

³⁰ Sobieroj 2001, xiv and 70–72.

³¹ Jones 1987, 100.

³² Jones 1987, 103. Mawlay Zaydan’s collection is the main object of SICLE, an ERC research project directed by François Déroche. Cf. <<http://sicle.hypotheses.org>> (12 March 2016).

³³ See Sobieroj 2001.

(Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig), including the inventory of the former Rats- and Stadtbibliothek Leipzig. Boris Liebrecht writes the following about the Leipzig holdings:

Die Rekonstruktion von Beutebeständen und somit eine Bestandsaufnahme des kulturellen Umfeldes einzelner Städte zur Zeit ihrer Eroberung bleibt ein möglicher und wichtiger Gegenstand der Forschung. Wien, Leiden, Dresden, aber auch viele kleinere Bibliotheken bieten eine ausgezeichnete Quellengrundlage zum Studium des intellektuellen Lebens, der Wissensvermittlung, von Buchproduktion und -handel, Bibliotheks- und Personengeschichte des osmanischen Südosteuropas. Die Möglichkeiten, welche Stiftungs-, Besitzer- und Beuteeinträge hierzu bieten, sind noch nicht einmal ansatzweise ausgenutzt.³⁴

Identifying the pieces of booty and thereby gaining an insight into the cultural life of individual towns at the time they were conquered is one possible purpose of research work, and an important one at that. Vienna, Leiden, Dresden and many other smaller libraries elsewhere are an excellent source of primary material by which to study intellectual life, transfer of knowledge, book production and book trade, or the history of libraries and individual people in south-eastern Europe during the Ottoman era. The possibilities that entries on donations, owners and the spoils of battle present us with have only just begun to emerge.

Much more work needs to be done regarding *Türkenbeute* kept by the Berlin and Munich libraries.

Returning to Gotha from south-east Europe, we have already seen that the lion's share of the Gotha manuscripts was purchased by Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (Fig. 4). This man was born in 1767 near Jever in East Frisia, the son of a wealthy farmer.³⁵ He studied Medicine and Natural History and wrote significant publications in various fields, including national economy and technology. At the age of 33, he resolved to make a journey to the Middle East and perhaps afterwards to cross Africa from east to west, partly at his own expense, but

also with help from a yearly subsidy from his sovereign.³⁶ On his way to Vienna in 1802, he received a letter informing him that the Duke of Gotha's heir apparent, Emil August, would pay him an annual sum of 800 Reichstaler and that he should use this money to buy objects of all kinds for a ducal museum or curiosity cabinet. His journey led him via Constantinople and Smyrna to Aleppo, Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo and the Sinai Peninsula and on to Mecca, Medina and Yemen. Not all of the parcels Seetzen sent home actually reached Gotha, however; the last few manuscripts that reached Schloss Friedenstein were those he had acquired in Cairo. From there, he left for the Arabian Peninsula in 1809. In the last letter that has been preserved, he reports his plan to turn inland from the Yemeni seaport of Mokha, carrying his acquisitions with him on seventeen camels. His traces disappear thereafter. According to rumours, he was poisoned by order of the Imam of Sana'a near Ta'iz. Seetzen always left acquisition information in the books he had bought,³⁷ but as yet, not a single manuscript of those he carried with him on the ominous inland journey has surfaced in Yemen.

Some of the manuscripts that did reach Gotha are of immense value, especially the fragments of old parchment Qur'ans from Cairo. The most famous of these is a fragment consisting of twelve leaves from a manuscript which is commonly known as the '*Amr Qur'ān*'. Forty-six other leaves from it have been in the possession of the National Library in Paris since 1830 and 570 leaves are now stored in the National Library of Egypt. This Qur'an was probably written in the first half of the eighth century, as the script bears some resemblance to the early *Hijāzī* script and the width of the oblong leaves is as much as 62 cm. In his diary, Seetzen describes the difficulties he encountered when trying to buy the leaves.³⁸ Apart from the '*Amr Qur'ān*' and the other parchment Qur'ans, which were extremely valuable, Seetzen also bought many other very rare and precious manuscripts. Among Arabists, Gotha is a well-known place due to Seetzen's activities.

As Table 3 on the Gotha inventory shows, the collection grew very slowly after the addition of Seetzen's manuscripts

³⁴ Liebrecht 2008, 26. The notes contained in the Arabic manuscripts of the Gotha Research Library have now been made accessible by Boris Liebrecht, cf. <<http://www.manuscripts-gotha.uni-jena.de/content/index.xml>> under 'Manuskriptvermerke'.

³⁵ On Seetzen, see Nebes, 1997; Henze 2002; Stein 1995; Schienerl 2000.

³⁶ As Jever belonged to Russia at that time, Seetzen was a subject of the tsar. In reality, Jever was under the administration of Princess Friederike Sophia Auguste of Anhalt-Zerbst. See Schienerl 2000, 14.

³⁷ See Stein 1997, 27–33.

³⁸ For more information about this famous Qur'an and the Gotha fragments, see von Bothmer 1997.

up to the end of World War II, and even fewer Oriental manuscripts have found their way into the Library since then. In fact, there have only been three more recent additions to date, which means that this part of the Gotha Research Library is essentially a closed collection.

As for the reasons why German libraries spent such a considerable amount of time and effort in acquiring Arabic – or more generally, ‘Oriental’ – manuscripts, it has now become apparent that colonial and commercial interests played a role in the earliest stage of the Berlin library's acquisitions in the seventeenth century. To what degree the purchased books actually fulfilled these purposes is another question. In the case of mid-sixteenth-century Munich, such worldly interests played a much less prominent role, although there is probably nothing like pure scientific curiosity.³⁹ But at least Seetzen's mission to buy manuscripts and all kinds of other artefacts such as tools or mummies was not subsidised because the Dukes of Gotha planned to establish colonies on the Arabian Peninsula or in Africa; rather, they were simply competing with other German sovereigns in a bid to build up a library and a curiosity cabinet as a status symbol.

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³⁹ See Rebhan 2009, 113, for more on the *Kulturpolitik* of Albrecht V, founder of the Munich library.

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