

The Damascus Fragments

Towards a History of the Qubbat al-khazna Corpus of Manuscripts and Documents

Edited by **Arianna D'Ottone Rambach**

Konrad Hirschler

Ronny Vollandt



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Workmen in front of the Qubbat al-khazna in Damascus, 1902 (reprint of 1898 photograph?).
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Books within books: The link between Damascene reuse fragments and the Qubbat al-khazna

Konrad Hirschler (Freie Universität Berlin)

We are slowly starting to understand what the Qubba actually was, what its function was, and what material was deposited in it.¹ As a consequence, the time has come to widen our perspective and look at the role of this depository within the wider Damascene manuscript culture. In this spirit, the present paper turns away from the building and from the known Qubba corpus to examine a set of fragments that we find outside the Qubba itself, namely parchment fragments reused in medieval Damascene manuscripts. We find these fragments with a variety of material functions: as part of pasteboards, as outer binding covers, as sewing guards, and as wrappers of small booklets. The texts on these parchments are, just like the Qubba material, in a multitude of scripts and in a multitude of languages, and they come from various religious contexts: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim. The argument that follows is that the strikingly similar profiles of the reuse corpus on the one hand and the Qubba corpus on the other indicate that these binding fragments were intimately linked with the Qubba. The exact nature of this link is yet to be firmly established, but I propose that manuscript producers in Ayyubid and Mamluk Damascus used the Qubba as a storehouse from which they sourced binding materials. This, in turn, means that the Qubba was not a one-way depository into which material was simply put, but that it had a more complex role within the topography of the written word in Damascus. To make these points, this contribution will first introduce the profile of the “reuse corpus”, that is the reused fragments. In a second step, the article will discuss the “host corpus”, the manuscripts in which we find these fragments. Finally, the article’s third part will deal with the significance of these reuse practices for the field of Qubba studies.

Right from the outset it needs to be underlined that the reuse of old writing material is obviously an almost universal practice and not specific to either Damascene or Arabic manuscript culture.² For Egypt, Frédéric Bauden has unearthed

¹ This article is the result of a research interest over the last few years. I have to thank numerous colleagues who have discussed with me aspects of this topic over that time, in particular those who attended my presentations in London (2015), Beirut (2015), Cambridge (2016), Princeton (2017, with particular thanks to Marina Rustow and Eve Krakowski), Cairo (2017), Mainz (2017), Münster (2018), Berlin (2018), New York (2019, with particular thanks to Peter Miller), and Beirut (2019).

² Erik Kwakkel, “Discarded Parchment as Writing Support in English Manuscript Culture”, in: *English Manuscripts before 1400*, A.S.G. Edwards and Orietta Da Rold, eds., London: British

petitions reused to produce notebooks and Marina Rustow has shown how widespread reuse practices were in the Geniza.³ Anne Regourd, in turn, has edited death certificates from the Red Sea port of al-Quṣayr that were reused to write private letters.⁴ In addition, reuse practices existed well beyond the world of books, and we find Arabic fragments used as arrow flights or reused to produce textiles and headgear.⁵ However, for Damascus no systematic work has been done so far, except for a brief introductory article and the examination of the case of a late ninth/fifteenth-century scholar who reused his own documentary “archive” to produce manuscripts.⁶ More importantly, the field of Arabic-script manuscript studies as a whole does not yet conceive of this phenomenon as a set of practices worthy of dedicated study, but has rather been interested in enlarging the corpus of available texts and documents. This paper, by contrast, puts reuse at its centre as a meaningful cultural practice. In its approach, it draws on “material philology” with its dedicated interest in the “thingness” of books and fragments, rather than exclusively focusing on these items’ textuality.⁷

This paper is based on a corpus of Damascene manuscripts that I have built up over the course of the last few years. The Damascene nature of these manuscripts is mostly evident from the manuscript notes that we find on them, in particular those referring to the scholarly transmission of the text. Such “*samā‘* notes” regularly contain information on where the reading and transmission of a text took place, so that the geographical trajectory of the manuscripts in question can be

Library Board 2012, 238–261; Elisabetta Caldelli, *I frammenti della Biblioteca Vallicelliana: Studio metodologico sulla catalogazione dei frammenti di codici medievali e sul fenomeno del loro riuso*, Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo 2012; Francesco D’Aiuto, “Graeca in codici orientali della Biblioteca Vaticana (con i resti di un manoscritto tardoantico delle commedie di Menandro)”, in: *Tra Oriente e Occidente: Scritture e libri greci fra le regioni orientali di Bisanzio e l’Italia*, Lidia Perria, ed., Rome: Università di Roma La Sapienza 2003, 227–296.

³ Frédéric Bauden, “The Recovery of Mamluk Chancery Documents in an Unsuspected Place”, in: *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society*, Amalia Levanoni and Michael Winter, eds., Leiden: Brill 2004, 59–76; Marina Rustow, “A Petition to a Woman at the Fatimid Court (413–414 A.H./1022–23 C.E.)”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 73 (2010), 1–27.

⁴ Anne Regourd, “A Late Ayyubid Report of Death Found at Quṣayr al-Qadim”, in: *Documents and the History of the Early Islamic World*, Alexander T. Schubert and Petra M. Sijpesteijn, eds., Leiden: Brill 2015, 11–26.

⁵ David Nicolle, *Late Mamlük Military Equipment*, Damascus: IFPO 2011; Lucian Reinfandt, “Recycled Documents in Textiles from Ayyūbid and Mamlük Egypt”, paper presented at the 21st Colloquium on the History of Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras, University of Ghent, 10 May 2012; Tamer El-Leithy has an ongoing research project on documents and headgears.

⁶ Konrad Hirschler, “Document Reuse in Medieval Arabic Manuscripts”, *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies Bulletin* 3, no. 1 (2017), 33–44; Konrad Hirschler, *A Monument to Medieval Syrian Book Culture: The Library of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2020.

⁷ The seminal reference point remains Stephen Nichols, “Philology in a Manuscript Culture”, *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 65, no. 1 (1990), 1–10.

confidently traced. This corpus was not systematically built up in the framework of a project on reuse, but is rather a “spin-off” of a project on a late Mamluk Damascene book collection.⁸ Consequently this paper cannot yet offer a systematic survey nor can it offer precise numbers on questions such as the proportion of Damascene manuscripts that include such reuse material.

In total, I have surveyed some 4000 manuscripts, either the actual copies or digital reproductions. Among these manuscripts, I have identified some 400 reuse fragments in different scripts and languages. All host manuscripts, in contrast, are exclusively in Arabic and were without exception produced in Muslim contexts. The vast majority of these manuscripts are still in Damascus, in the al-Asad National Library (henceforth ANL), with a significant additional number distributed in other libraries across the globe, including libraries in Cairo, Berlin, Dublin, Paris, and Princeton.⁹ The term “reuse” refers here exclusively to fragments that were reused in the context of binding books and not to mere palimpsests. The world of palimpsests partly overlaps with that of reuse for binding purposes and thus some palimpsests are indeed part of the corpus. However, palimpsests without evident traces of reuse as binding material are not part of this corpus.

The reuse corpus

For the purpose of this paper, we can divide the corpus of reused fragments into two broad clusters: fragments of (mostly) Muslim texts in Arabic script, and fragments of non-Muslim texts (especially Christian) in a variety of scripts other than Arabic (especially Greek, Syriac, and Latin). The presence of the non-Muslim fragments is particularly noteworthy in a host corpus that exclusively contains Arabic-script Muslim manuscripts. The relative distribution of these two clusters reflects what we know so far from the Qubba and this is an important part of the argument in this paper, that there is a striking similarity between the reuse and the Qubba corpora. Muslim fragments in Arabic script are the majority and the non-Muslim fragments form a minority. However, the proportion of non-Muslim fragments in the reuse corpus (around 100 out of 400) is significantly higher than in the Qubba corpus (probably a low four-digit number out of more than 200,000). We will return to this high proportion and the possible meanings of reusing these non-Muslim fragments in the third part of the paper.

The Arabic reuse fragments can in turn be divided into two groups, documents and non-documentary texts. The larger group of these two is the documentary

⁸ Hirschler, *Monument*.

⁹ In the early twentieth century, Ḥabib al-Zayyāt undertook the only other brief attempt to identify a reuse corpus of Damascene manuscripts. In his case, though, this was limited to manuscripts that had remained in the city (see Ḥabib al-Zayyāt, *Khazā'in al-kutub fī Dimashq wa-dawāhibhā*, Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Ma'ārif 1902, 28) and never led to a dedicated publication.

group, which includes in particular fragments of documents that were produced or used in the context of *qādi* justice. Among these, the most important body are documents related to marriage and divorce, with a substantial further number of sale deeds, especially of real estate. By contrast, documents linked to the sphere of the state, such as petitions, edicts and grants of *iqtā'*, are virtually absent, and the same goes for commercial documents other than real estate deals.¹⁰ This profile of the documentary group is again highly relevant for our purposes as the documentary Qubba corpus has exactly the same profile: looking at the published Qubba documents, we have large numbers of documents on marriage and divorce as well as on real estate deals, but little else.¹¹ The absence of state-related and non-real estate commercial documents from the reuse corpus is particularly striking, as they are also almost completely absent from the Qubba corpus. This congruence of the corpora in terms of the absence of state-related and commercial documents is all the more conspicuous once we compare this absence in the Damascus corpora with the Egyptian case. The ever-present sister of the Qubba, the Cairo Geniza, has a high number of precisely such state-related and commercial documents, and the few known Egyptian cases of reuse are state-related documents.¹²

An in-depth discussion of why the Qubba's Arabic documentary fragments have this very peculiar profile is beyond the scope of this paper. In my view, there are two lines of explanation that are worth pursuing. Firstly, the Geniza was a community depository and thus reflects to a much larger degree the whole range of documents that circulated within a socially highly diverse group of users. The Qubba, on the other hand, seems to be much more restricted in terms of the social profile of its users, who seem to primarily come from the scholarly community.¹³ This might explain the low number of commerce-related documents in Damascus.

¹⁰ For one of the few known commercial documents not dealing with real estate, see Said Aljoumani and Konrad Hirschler, "Trading Fruits and Legumes on a Medieval Damascene Market: The Documentary and Archival Life Cycle of an Account Book from the Qubbat al-Khazna (Şam Evrakları 1332)", in: *Festschrift in Honour of Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu for his 75th Birthday*, Hatice Aynur, Didar Bayır, Fatma Şen, and Tuncay Zorlu, eds., Istanbul 2020 (forthcoming).

¹¹ Jean-Michel Mouton, Dominique Sourdel, and Janine Sourdel-Thomine, *Mariage et séparation à Damas au Moyen Âge: Un corpus de 62 documents juridiques inédits entre 337/948 et 698/1299*, Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres 2013; Jean-Michel Mouton, Dominique Sourdel, and Janine Sourdel-Thomine, *Propriétés rurales et urbaines à Damas au Moyen Âge: Un corpus de 73 documents juridiques entre 310/922 et 669/1271*, Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres 2018.

¹² Bauden, "Recovery"; Rustow, "Petition". In the same vein, Frédéric Bauden, "Antiquarianism and Manuscripts: Spoliation in Arabic Medieval Books", paper presented at the workshop "Antiquarianism in the Islamic World", Bard Graduate Center, New York, 9–10 May 2019, discusses a Rasulid letter to the Mamluk Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh dated 817/1415 and reused in the manuscript Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library MS Süleymaniye 4340.

¹³ This statement is, as so often in Qubba studies, highly tentative. Most known documents go back to the photographs taken by Dominique Sourdel and Janine Sourdel-Thomine in the 1960s (see the introduction to this volume on this). Yet they have never published an account indicating whether they examined all fragments or whether they photographed all documents.

Secondly, it is possible that the nearby citadel, the topographical centre of the “state” in Damascus, was the place to deposit state-related documents. The German traveller Hermann von Pückler-Muskau (1785–1871) reported in the 1830s that he saw a room full of manuscripts and papers in the citadel, and his description of how he accessed this room (“through a partly bricked hole”) and its contents (“numerous half-mouldered and tattered manuscripts”) indicate a space very similar to the Qubbat al-khazna.¹⁴ It is thus worth considering the possibility that the documentary Qubba material mostly reflects archival holdings of documents produced in the vicinity of the “civilian” judges, while “state”-related paperwork went into a “qubba” in the citadel. In any case, however we explain the peculiar profile of the Qubba documents, the matching profile of the reuse corpus is another strong indicator of the close links between the reuse and the Qubba corpora.

The documentary reuse and Qubba corpora not only match in terms of their profiles, as we have just seen, but also in terms of the dates when these documents were produced. In both cases we find some documents from the fifth/eleventh century,¹⁵ a sharp increase in the sixth/twelfth century,¹⁶ a peak in the seventh/thirteenth century,¹⁷ a sharp decline in the eighth/fourteenth century,¹⁸ and very little thereafter. This chronological congruence is noteworthy as document production in Damascus certainly did not stop in the eighth/fourteenth century. In consequence, we might have expected – assuming the standard survival bias – that the closer we move to the present the more documents we would find. However, the Qubba documentary corpus tells a very different story, namely one where Damascenes used this building to deposit some documents from the late Seljuk to the mid-Mamluk period, while thereafter the function of the Qubba as a depository for documents must have ended or at least become less important. In other words, throughout its more than 1000-year history, the Qubba functioned only for roughly 250 years as a deposit for (mostly legal) documents. That the reuse corpus consists of similar legal documents from exactly the same period is thus a strong indicator that these two corpora share historical links.

Let us now turn to one example within the body of Arabic documents of the reuse corpus related to marriage and divorce. When leafing through the pages of ANL MS 3748, the reader immediately sees that something strange is going on between folia 143b and 158b. Suddenly, some of the pages carry two different scripts, with the main text squeezed between the lines of a much larger script (see

¹⁴ Cited in Boris Liebrenz, *Die Rifa'iya aus Damaskus: Eine Privatbibliothek im osmanischen Syrien und ihr kulturelles Umfeld*, Leiden: Brill 2016, 186–187: “Nachdem wir in ein zum Theil vermauertes Loch hineingekrochen und eine schwankende Treppe in dunkler Nacht hinaufgetappt waren, auf der, wie wir beim Öffnen der Rüstkammer erst gewahr wurden, eine Menge halb vermoderter und zerrissener Manuskripte lagen ...”

¹⁵ For instance, ANL MS 3853, fols. 136b and 155a (year 432/1041), in the reuse corpus.

¹⁶ For instance, ANL MS 3821, fols. 194b and 205a (year 572/1176), in the reuse corpus.

¹⁷ For instance, ANL MS 3764, fols. 111b and 128a (year 620/1223–1224), in the reuse corpus.

¹⁸ For instance, ANL MS 3827, fols. 20b and 35a (early 700s/1400s), in the reuse corpus.

fig. 1). What had happened here is that the producer of this manuscript cut a rather splendid marriage-related contract (the original size must have been around 68 × 92 cm) into fourteen pieces to reuse them as folia for a small booklet. As the document's verso was blank (seemingly this couple did not divorce) we observe in manuscript 3748 that pages with the script of the contract (the left-hand side in fig. 1) alternate with pages without the script of the contract (the right-hand side in fig. 1). Two rather wealthy spouses had concluded this marriage in the year 524/1130: the husband, a known Damascene scholar, undertook to pay his wife a deferred marriage gift of fifty gold dinars. The families of husband and wife both originally hailed from the Eastern lands, more precisely Isfahān, and they made the transaction, rather unusually in the Damascene context, in "red Isfahānī Sultānī dinars". Otherwise, this document matches exactly what we know of Damascene marriage-related contracts from the published Qubba specimens in terms of date, textual formula, and documentary practices.¹⁹

A second example from the body of Arabic documents related to marriage and divorce within the reuse corpus is contained in ANL MS 3822. It dates to the heyday of this corpus, the seventh/thirteenth century, and is a divorce contract, many of which we also find in the Qubba corpus.²⁰ This parchment contract from the year 621/1224 was not cut into pieces, but the producer laid it as a "wrapper" around this small booklet (such wrappers will be further discussed below). We see that the title of the booklet is at the top of the page, but that the wording of the contract and the signatures of the witnesses take up most of the space (fig. 2). The vast majority of the divorce contracts in the Qubba corpus refer to *khu'l* divorces, that is, the dissolution of the marriage by returning part of or the entire marriage gift. The document from 621/1224 is an example of such a *khu'l* divorce, and this is the case for the vast majority of divorce contracts in the reuse corpus – again neatly mirroring what we find in the Qubba corpus.

Having discussed the documentary group within the reuse corpus, we can move on to the Arabic non-documentary texts. This corpus is significantly smaller and shows one major difference from the Qubba material, namely that there are no Korans in the reuse corpus. This is not too surprising, as manuscript producers probably did not deem the reuse of Koranic parchments appropriate in the production of new books. However, the matter is not that simple, since we do find in this non-documentary corpus fragments that are quite close to sacred texts as they include quotes from the Koran. These are texts from the field of Islamic law, *fiqh*, such as the Mālikī *Mudawwana* by Saḥnūn (d. 240/855),²¹ which contains quotes from hadith and the Koran. Damascene manuscripts producers evidently had no qualms about cutting and pasting such material into their new manuscripts. The

¹⁹ Mouton, Sourdel, and Sourdel-Thomine, *Mariage et séparation*.

²⁰ Mouton, Sourdel, and Sourdel-Thomine, *Mariage et séparation*.

²¹ Reused in ANL MS 3841.

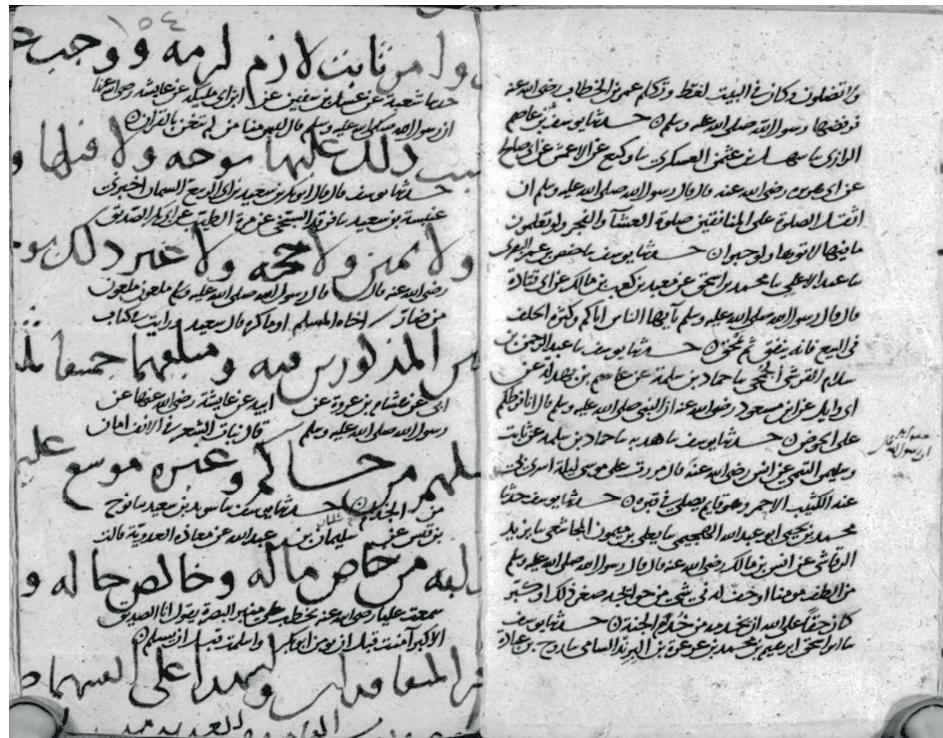


Fig. 1: Reused marriage-related contract dated 524/1130. (ANL MS 3748, fols. 153b/154a. al-Asad National Library.)

boundaries between what was acceptable and what was not acceptable when it came to the reuse of fragments certainly depends on local factors and deserves more attention in future. I strongly doubt that there are homogeneous “Islamic” or “Middle Eastern” Qubba and Geniza practices that can be understood with reference to normative texts.²²

What is striking in the fragments that fall into the group of Arabic non-documentary texts is the high proportion of Mālikī texts written in Maghribī script. Texts in Maghribī script are certainly part of the Qubba material – for instance, the only non-Koranic Qubba fragment mentioned in the 1930 *Dalil mukhtaṣar* (Summary Guide) of the Damascene National Museum was a Mālikī hadith collection.²³ The problem, however, is that the Arabic non-documentary fragments in the Qubba corpus remain a complete terra incognita. As we have seen in the introduction to this volume, apart from the Koranic fragments they have hardly been

²² Joseph Sadan, “Genizah and Genizah-like Practices in Islamic and Jewish Traditions”, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 43 (1986), 36–58.

²³ al-Amir Ja‘far al-Hasani, *Dalil mukhtaṣar: al-Hukūma al-sūriyya, Dār al-āthār bi-Dimashq*, Damascus: Mufid 1930, class mark ‘/273.

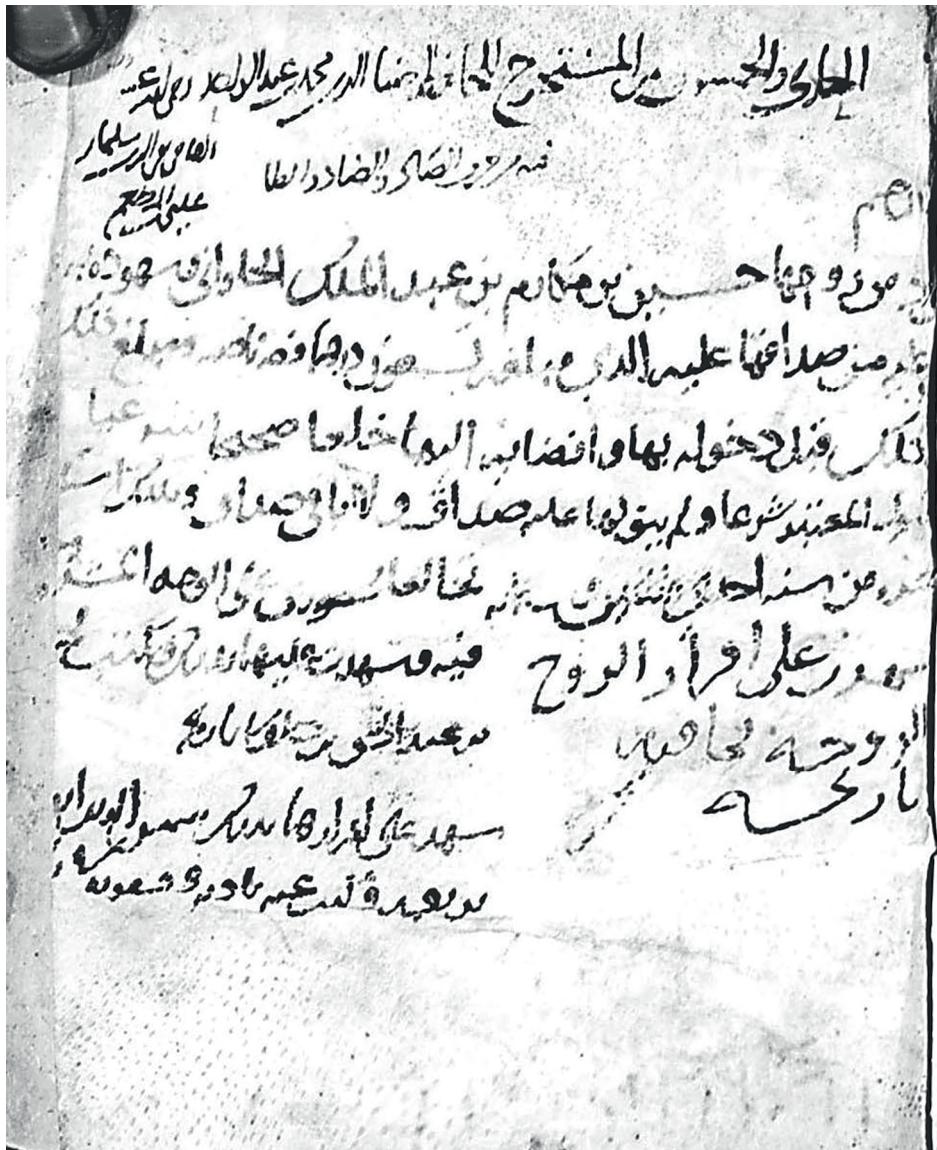


Fig. 2: Reused marriage-related contract dated 621/1224. (ANL MS 3822, fol. 1a. al-Asad National Library.)

studied at all. In consequence, it is impossible to get even a rough idea of what is there or of how important subcorpora such as fragments in Maghribī script are. During my own, very impressionistic, work on the Qubba material in the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum in Istanbul, I saw pieces in Maghribi script, but they were far from forming the majority. There must thus be some reason why these pieces feature so prominently in the reuse corpus and why manuscript producers

preferred to reuse such pieces. We will return to this question in the final part of the paper.

To discuss the fragments of this non-documentary group, by way of example we can turn to ANL MS 3841, which brings us back to the *Mudawwana* by Saḥnūn. In this case, the manuscript producers took three parchment folia of the original work, using them as wrappers for small booklets, just as in the case of the 621/1224 divorce contract, so that they became six folia in the new manuscript. Also as was the case with the divorce contract, we see that the user wrote the title of his new booklet at the top, but that the original text of the *Mudawwana* takes up most of the space on the page (fig. 3). In addition, we find a further folio in Maghribī script in the same manuscript.²⁴ Umberto Bongianino identified these parchments as having been written in the Ifriqī script used in Qayrawān,²⁵ and he argues that this script had fallen into disuse by the late fifth/eleventh century.²⁶ Most likely, Maghribī migrants to Syria, of whom there were plenty in the following two centuries,²⁷ brought these books to Damascus. Manuscripts in Maghribī script thus became a significant element in Damascene manuscript culture and after they had fallen into disuse some of them found their long-term resting place in the Qubba, whereas others, those in the reuse corpus, were repurposed to produce new manuscripts.

Apart from the fragments of (mostly) Muslim texts in Arabic script, the second large cluster in the reuse corpus consists of the fragments of non-Muslim texts in numerous scripts. In contrast to the case of the Arabic-script cluster, in this cluster we do not find any documentary texts. This absence of non-Muslim documents again neatly matches the profile of the Qubba corpus, where we find that documents in scripts other than Arabic are virtually absent as well. One exception is the famous safe-conduct document issued in Latin for a Muslim trader by the Frankish king Baldwin III in the mid-sixth/twelfth century;²⁸ the only other known examples are three documents in Hebrew script that we find among the photographs taken in Berlin in 1909.²⁹ Other than that, it seems that the vast majority of non-Muslim material in the Qubba is of a non-documentary nature. The most famous example

²⁴ ANL MS 3841, fols. 18a/b, 31a/b; 62a/b, 73a/b; 209a/b, 220a/b; not *Mudawwana*: 223a/b, 245a/b.

²⁵ Personal communication, June 2016.

²⁶ Umberto Bongianino, “The Origin and Development of Maghribī Round Scripts: Arabic Paleography in the Islamic West (4th/10th–6th/12th century)”, PhD dissertation, University of Oxford 2017, 25–32.

²⁷ Louis Pouzet, “Maghrébins à Damas au VII^e/XIII^e siècle”, *Bulletin d’études orientales* 28 (1975), 167–199.

²⁸ Hans Eberhard Mayer, “Abū ‘Alis Spuren am Berliner Tiergarten”, *Archiv für Diplomatik* 38 (1992), 113–133.

²⁹ Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin MSS simulata orientalia 6, fols. 24r, 25r, and 26r (available online at <https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/>); see the contribution by Gideon Bohak in this volume.

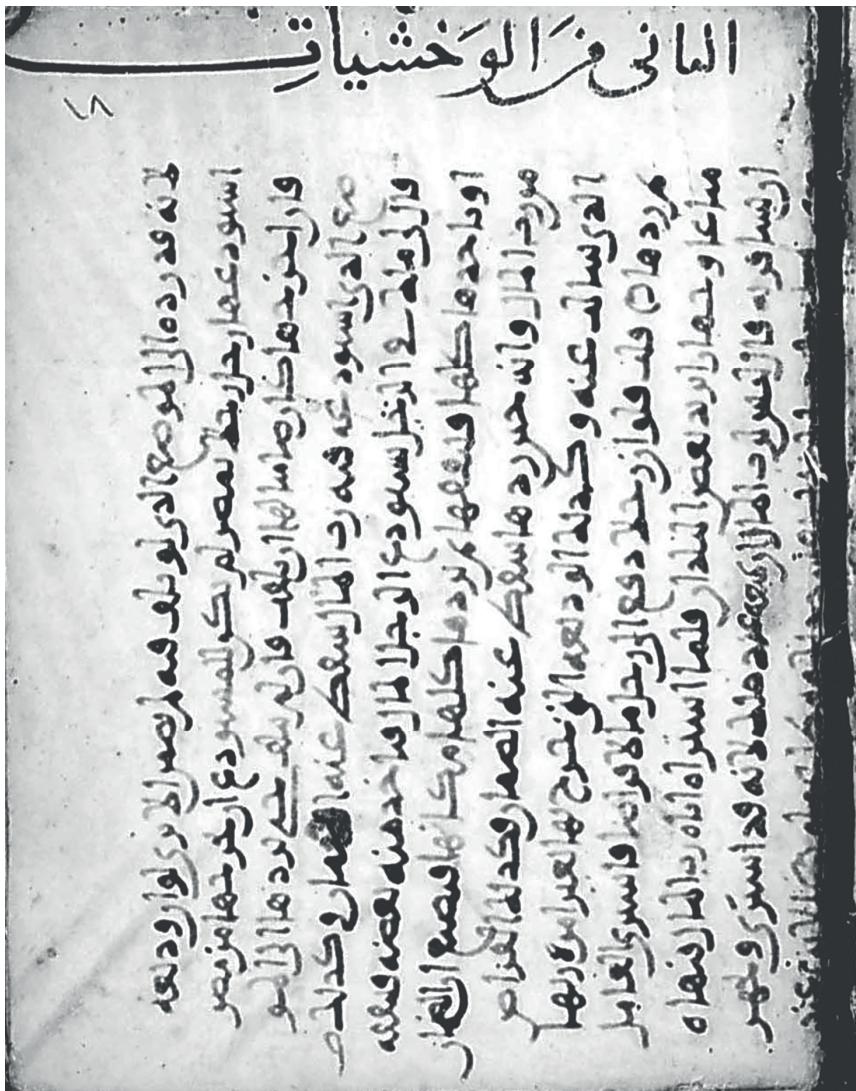


Fig. 3: Reused folio of the *Mudaravana* by Sahnün (turned by 90 degrees). (ANL MS 3841, fol. 18a. al-Asad National Library.)

of such “literary” non-Muslim texts in the Qubba corpus is certainly the Violet fragment, a bilingual Greek–Arabic Bible fragment.³⁰ As with the Arabic-script cluster, the similarities between the cluster of non-Muslim texts in the reuse corpus and those of the Qubba corpus are once again conspicuous and go well beyond the shared (near-)absence of documentary material. The most salient overlap between the two corpora is the sheer range of scripts and languages. In the reuse corpus, we find fragments in Greek,³¹ Latin,³² Syriac,³³ Hebrew,³⁴ Georgian,³⁵ and Armenian.³⁶ Similar to the Qubba corpus, these fragments are thus testament to the “multilingual and multicultural society” in which they were produced and in which they circulated.³⁷ The vast majority of the fragments in both corpora come from sacred or liturgical texts including Greek sermons, Latin hymns, and Hebrew commentary literature, as well as Bibles in Georgian, Syriac, and Armenian. In the reuse corpus, sermons have a particularly salient position and future research will show whether the same is true for the Qubba corpus of non-Muslim texts. Among the languages in the reuse and the Qubba corpora, Greek and Syriac take pride of place. This is not surprising as both were widely used as liturgical languages in the Christian communities of Damascus and Bilād al-Shām at large. One such example is a folio of a Greek Menaion for December (fig. 4), a liturgical book containing hymns, reused as a wrapper.³⁸ Here we see – just as in the cases of the Muslim material above – that the producer of the manuscript wrote the Arabic title of the new booklet at the top of the page (in addition to the red endowment notice written over the Greek text and further notes in the margins on the left-hand side).

Particularly interesting is the presence of Latin fragments, which have a relatively modest position in the Qubba corpus but a prime position, rivalling even Greek, in the reuse corpus.³⁹ These fragments bear witness to manuscript culture within the Frankish communities of the Middle East, who had settled in the region in the

³⁰ On this, see Ronny Vollandt, “Beyond Arabic in Greek Letters: The Scribal and Translational Context of the Violet Fragment” in: Ahmad Al-Jallad, *The Damascus Psalm Fragment: Middle Arabic and the Legacy of Old H̄igāzī*, Chicago: Oriental Institute 2020, 93–110.

³¹ For example, ANL MS 3821.

³² For example, ANL MS 1039.

³³ For example, ANL MS 1232.

³⁴ For example, Bibliothèque nationale de France MS Supplément Turc 983.

³⁵ For example, ANL MS 3817.

³⁶ For example, ANL MS 3831.

³⁷ Arianna D’Ottone, “Manuscripts as Mirrors of a Multilingual and Multicultural Society: The Case of the Damascus Find”, in: *Negotiating Co-Existence: Communities, Cultures and Convivenza in Byzantine Society*, Barbara Crostini and Sergio La Porta, eds., Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier 2013, 63–88.

³⁸ Bibliothèque nationale de France MS Supplément Turc 986, fol. 117a. I am greatly indebted to Francesco D’Aiuto, who generously shared his knowledge of Greek texts.

³⁹ On the Latin fragments in the Qubba corpus, see Serena Ammirati’s article in this volume.



Fig. 4: Reused folio of a Greek Menaion of December (turned by 90 degrees). (Bibliothèque nationale de France MS Supplément Turc 986, fol. 117a. © Bibliothèque nationale de France.)

course of the Crusades.⁴⁰ That the Qubba and the reuse corpora are the only Arabic and Muslim contexts in which we find such specimens is a further indicator of the close link between these two corpora. Within the reuse corpus, it seems that manuscript producers favoured in particular Latin fragments with musical notations. One such example is a folio of a Latin breviary with musical notations (fig. 5) that a manuscript producer reused as a wrapper for a new booklet⁴¹ – we see by now how popular wrapping booklets was in Damascus. Here again we find an endowment notice and notes on the content of the booklet.

What we have seen in the first part of this paper is that there are numerous indicators that the reuse corpus of Damascene manuscripts and the Qubbat al-khazna corpus are historically closely linked. Firstly, those fragments that can be dated – the documents – come from the same 250-year period (circa 500/1100–750/1350). Secondly, those fragments that can be regionally placed all originate from Damascus or the surrounding lands. Thirdly, both corpora display very close resemblances in their distinctive thematic profile and in incorporating highly diverse languages and scripts. This is true whether we compare the two overall corpora or specific subcorpora within them. In sum, while there is no smoking gun to show that Damascene manuscript producers did indeed source fragments from the Qubba, the outstandingly strong congruence between these two corpora makes this scenario at least highly likely.

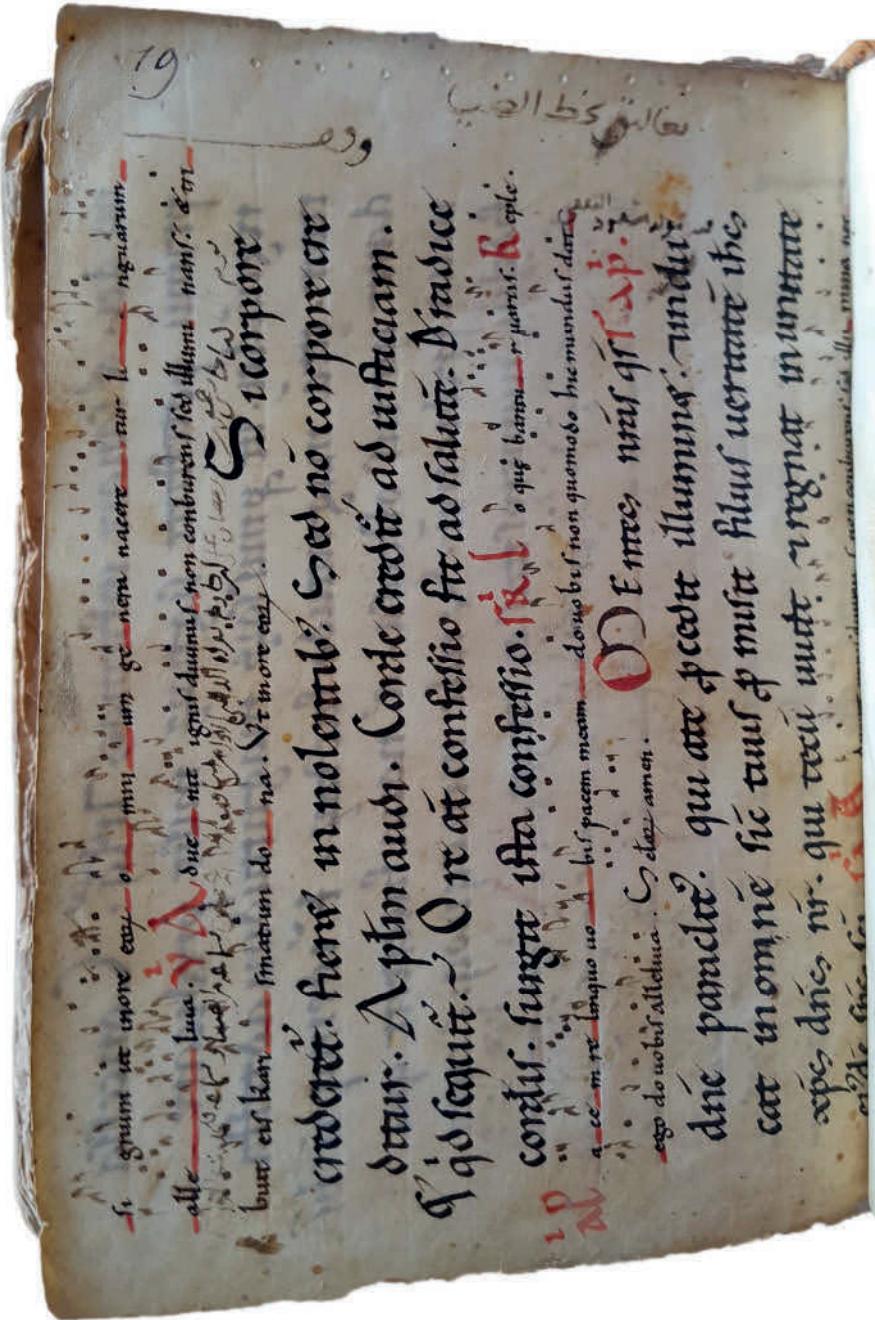
The host corpus

We have seen the strong links between the reuse fragments and the Qubba fragments and will now turn to the manuscripts in which we actually find these reuse fragments, the “host corpus”. The main aim of this discussion is to provide some historical context to the reuse practices, especially to situate them better in time and place. The main argument will be that the reuse took place in Damascus within a clearly distinct period, namely between the sixth/twelfth and eighth/fourteenth centuries. In addition, discussing the host corpus will allow us to bring in further evidence on the link between the reuse and the Qubba corpora.

Quite surprisingly, the vast majority of host volumes in which we find the reuse corpus belong to a single thematic field, hadith – that is, texts preserving the deeds and words attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. This extraordinarily close corre-

⁴⁰ The history of Latin and Arabic is only beginning to be investigated. See, for instance, Arianna D’Ottone and Dario Internullo, “Arabic in Latin Letters: The Case of the Papyrus British Library 3124”, in: *Palaeography between East and West: Proceedings of the Seminars on Arabic Palaeography at Sapienza University of Rome (Rivista degli studi orientali, n.s., 90, supplement 1)*, Arianna D’Ottone Rambach, ed., Pisa: Fabrizio Serra 2018, 53–72; Daniel König, ed., *Latin and Arabic: Entangled Histories*, Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing 2019; and Julian Yolles’ forthcoming book *Making the East Latin: The Latin Culture of the Twelfth-Century Levant*.

⁴¹ Bibliothèque nationale de France MS Supplément Turc 986, fol. 19a.



lation between the reuse of fragments and this single theme does not stem from any thematic affinity between hadith texts and the reuse fragments. Rather, the unique position of hadith manuscripts in the host corpus is linked to the specific materiality of these manuscripts in Damascus between the sixth/twelfth and eighth/fourteenth centuries.

Hadiths had started to circulate right after the development of Islam and from the third/ninth century onwards these traditions were increasingly subject to a process of “canonisation”. As a result, authoritative written collections of hadiths, most famously those by the two scholars al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and Muslim (d. 261/875), came into being. These collections established a (never entirely fixed) canon of traditions that was increasingly deemed authentic – a process that lasted well into the sixth/twelfth century. However, this process was controversial as it prioritised the written mode of transmission to the detriment of oral practices.⁴² Crucially, it challenged the professional identity of those scholars who primarily transmitted hadith: what was the point of having a large group of highly specialised scholars safeguarding the textual witnesses of the prophetic model in oral modes of transmission when all these witnesses had now become accessible in an established corpus of written texts?

The field of hadith scholarship reacted to the challenges of the canonisation process by developing an “ideology of orality”. This asserted that the continuous oral transmission of the traditions was valuable in its own right as an essential and distinguishing trait of the Muslim community. Continuing to transmit traditions, despite the existence of the authoritative collections, was reconfigured as an act of piety linking each generation anew to the Prophet.⁴³ This “post-canonical” reconfiguration of the field of hadith studies resulted in the emergence of new textual genres that bore witness to the continued vivacity of the field, such as the *mu'jam* or *mashyakha* (presenting an author's shortest and most prized chains of transmission) and collections of forty hadiths.

In material terms, the rise of post-canonical hadith transmission meant that short collections of hadiths, or booklets, became extraordinarily popular in Damascus from the sixth/twelfth century onwards – my rough estimate is that a high four-digit number of them were produced. Rather than engaging in the first place with the grand “canonical” collections of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, and so on, many hadith scholars of this period centred their scholarly activities on these brief collections that (mostly) contained hadiths drawn from the canonical collections. These booklets were very cheap to produce and were clearly objects for everyday use – they were emphatically not books with select paper, fine bindings, decora-

⁴² Jonathan A.C. Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunni Hadith Canon*, Leiden: Brill 2007.

⁴³ Garrett Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition: A Social and Intellectual History of Hadith Transmission across a Thousand Years*, Leiden: Brill 2020.

tion, or careful mise-en-page. Rather, these booklets share six fundamental characteristics that set them apart from manuscripts in other fields of knowledge:

- (1) they are thin and small,
- (2) they are made from low-quality paper,
- (3) they are unbound,
- (4) they have protective wrappers,
- (5) they were growing booklets with further folia continually added, and
- (6) they carry what I call additional “secondary”, “tertiary”, and so on title pages.⁴⁴

As is evident from the examples that we have seen in the first part of this paper, it is the fourth point that is of central importance for understanding the material logic of Damascene reuse practices. We have repeatedly seen that the reuse fragments appear as outside wrappers, turned by 90 degrees, with the Arabic title written on them, and this is indeed the most common material shape in which we find them in the reuse corpus. By contrast, the case of the marriage-related contract from 524/1130, where the manuscript producer reused the fragments as folia for the main text inside the manuscript, is rare.

Post-canonical hadith booklets were generally unbound, and thus manuscript producers and users in Ayyubid and Mamluk Damascus laid old parchment sheets around the paper booklets so that these vulnerable items at least had a sturdy protective wrapper. Reusing parchment sheets gave their booklets some protection from the vicissitudes of life, which included water spillage, inattentive users ripping off the front page, being stuffed into bags, and so on. To illustrate the material logic of these parchment wrappers, we can return to the divorce contract from 621/1224. This parchment contract was laid around a thin booklet that consisted of no more than twenty-two folia. The booklet contains the text of the fifty-first part of the *Selected Hadiths that are in neither al-Bukhārī nor Muslim* compiled by one of the most famous of all Damascene post-canonical hadith scholars, *Diyā' al-Din al-Maqdisī* (d. 643/1245). The copy preserved in the al-Asad National Library is a *unicum* as is the case with virtually all such post-canonical booklets.⁴⁵ It was produced in the late 630s/early 1240s in Damascus with eleven bifolia that were stacked on top of each other and vertically folded in the middle to produce the twenty-two-folia booklet. This thin and flimsy paper booklet was subsequently enwrapped and sewn with our parchment contract to protect it. This same procedure

⁴⁴ For more details, see Hirschler, *Monument*; and Konrad Hirschler, “The Materiality of Hadith Scholarship in the Post-Canonical Period”, in: *Beyond Authenticity: Towards Alternative Approaches to Hadith Narrations and Collections*, Mohammad Gharaibeh, ed., Leiden: Brill 2021 (forthcoming). For a comparable corpus of cheap books from the Geniza, see Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, “Cheap Books in Medieval Egypt: Rotuli from the Cairo Geniza”, *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 4, (2016), 82–101.

⁴⁵ ANL MS 3822/1.

can be seen in virtually the entire reuse corpus, where the large majority of parchment fragments follow this material logic.

Most fragments in the reuse corpus thus served as wrappers of post-canonical hadith booklets. Yet the majority of Damascene booklets are outside the host corpus because they do not carry reused parchment wrappers. There are two possible reasons for this: either these wrapper-free booklets never carried one in the first place, or this wrapper was removed at a later stage in the booklets' life cycle. The first line of reasoning is certainly possible, but I am hesitant to see this as an explanation for the phenomenon of wrapper-free booklets as a whole. Post-canonical hadith booklets were not items that calmly rested on the bookshelves of libraries. They were rather highly mobile creatures, as we can see from the thousands of manuscript notes of transmission that we find on them. These notes show that scholars repeatedly read out the booklets to new generations of their peers and non-scholars in mosques, madrasas, Sufi convents, private houses, markets, and gardens.⁴⁶ Manuscript producers and owners thus had a very strong incentive to come up with some kind of solution to protect the booklets against the perils of this mobile life. The only solution for this dilemma of which we actually find traces are our wrappers and it is fair to assume that Damascene manuscript producers and users widely adopted this technique.

The second line of reasoning, that many wrappers were removed at a later stage, is a viable option, at least for some of these wrapper-free booklets. What is more, there is one moment in the trajectory of these booklets that shows that this is precisely what happened to them. Post-canonical hadith scholarship went into steep decline in the course of the eighth/fourteenth century in Damascus and ground to a halt in the ninth/fifteenth century. The production of new booklets virtually ceased and scholars wrote hardly any further notes of transmission on the existing booklets. The existing booklets started to fall out of circulation and to be of less and less social and cultural relevance. In response to this, a late ninth/fifteenth-century Damascene scholar, Ibn 'Abd al-Hādi (d. 909/1503), systematically collected the booklets that he could still find in the city with the aim of preserving them. This turned out to be a massive project to safeguard "cultural heritage" and build a "monument to medieval Syrian book culture" that occupied him for many years and cannot be described in detail here.⁴⁷

Of direct relevance for the present paper is that this scholar not only collected these booklets, but materially transformed them: he bound up to twenty of these booklets into large-scale composite manuscripts with "proper" bindings. As a re-

⁴⁶ On such manuscript notes, see Andreas Görke and Konrad Hirschler, eds., *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*, Würzburg: Ergon 2011; and Stefan Leder, "Hörerzertifikate als Dokumente für die islamische Lehrkultur des Mittelalters", in: *Urkunden und Urkundenformulare im klassischen Altertum und in den orientalischen Kulturen*, Raif Georges Khoury, ed., Heidelberg: Winter 1999, 147–166.

⁴⁷ Hirschler, *Monument*.

sult, the booklet in which we find the above-mentioned marriage-related contract from 524/1130 reused as folia, is today found in a composite manuscript between folia 143b and 158b. In this composite manuscript, today ANL MS 3748, we find it together with eight other booklets that prior to Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādi’s intervention had all been stand-alone booklets.

In the process of producing these massive composite manuscripts, the old wrapper parchments became rather pointless as the new heavy bindings now protected all the booklets in any such manuscript, and Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādi thus removed many of them. One example of this can be seen with a booklet which today makes up the sixth item in the composite manuscript 3796 in the al-Asad National Library, and which contains the text of the tenth part of the *Fawā’id al-Mukhallīṣ* (referring to Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Mukhallīṣ, d. 393/1003).⁴⁸ This is a wrapper-free booklet, and there is no sign that this post-canonical hadith collection ever carried a protective parchment wrapper. However, in the binding of another of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādi’s composite manuscripts, today composite manuscript Supplément Turc 983 in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, we find the very parchment that was previously the wrapper of this booklet. Most likely, Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādi removed the wrapper from the *Fawā’id al-Mukhallīṣ* booklet as there was no longer any material need for it, and then he subsequently reused it for the cover of another of his new creations. As he produced so many of these composite manuscripts, he had a high demand for binding materials, and old parchment wrappers were certainly an attractive pool to tap into. Producing covers by reusing parchment sheets that had already been reused as wrappers of booklets was not just an efficient and cheap solution; it reproduced the visual appearance of the old booklets on the outside of the new composite manuscripts so that future manuscript users would know what kind of material to expect. One might read them as the visual markers of post-canonical hadith texts.

The role of “wrapper” should be seen as just one stage in the life cycle of these parchment fragments. It was in some cases a very long stage – for example, when we see the parchment fragment still as a wrapper today – but in many other cases, such as with the parchment wrapper of the *Fawā’id al-Mukhallīṣ*, this stage was rather short. In the case of the *Fawā’id al-Mukhallīṣ* wrapper, we are lucky that the fragment remained in the reuse corpus, even if it shifted its position from booklet wrapper to composite manuscript binding. However, the story gets more complicated still as users sometimes completely removed reuse parchments from the host corpus. This in turn alerts us to the fact that the reuse corpus is far from being a neatly delineated group of parchments. Rather, in many cases we see that a fragment that was once a stand-alone fragment and is so again today must have served at some intermediate point as a binding fragment.

⁴⁸ Hirschler, *Monument*, entry 461e.

The prime example of this takes us to a collection that we have not discussed so far, the Schøyen Collection in Oslo and London. In 1993, this collection bought from Sotheby's a set of twelve fragments in a variety of languages and scripts, including Latin, Armenian, and Greek. Today these fragments carry the class mark 1776 in the Schøyen Collection.⁴⁹ They are of interest to us as eleven of these fragments carry Arabic script on them.⁵⁰ In the Schøyen catalogue some of these notes are misread, and one of the fragments (1776/04; see fig. 6) is described as containing the “most quintessential of Middle Eastern romances and fairy tales, Thousand and One Nights, also known as the Tales of the Arabian nights”;⁵¹ and the fragment is thus classified as “children’s literature”. This is a misreading, as the Arabic text has nothing whatsoever to do with “Middle Eastern romances and fairy tales”, but is the title of a post-canonical hadith collection. The reference to the *Thousand and One Nights* goes back to the Sotheby's sale catalogue, which marketed the items as “a series of fascicules of the Tales of the Arabian Nights” – a reference that certainly made these items more attractive to potential buyers, but is simply nonsense.

We can narrow down the provenance of these twelve fragments bought by the Schøyen Collection still further, and here we will look at one example to illustrate this. The fragment that is misclassified as children’s literature, item 1776/04, is a parchment fragment with a Latin homiliary, and we can see that it contains the Arabic title in a position that we have previously seen in parchment wrappers (fig. 6). What is more, under the title are two brief notes on hadiths contained in the booklet that this fragment once enwrapped. These notes are in the distinctive hand of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādi himself, and we find numerous similar notes on other booklets that he bought in the course of his safeguarding project. The Arabic title on fragment 1776/04 reads: “The first and the second [part] of the reading to [‘Isā b. ‘Alī Ibn al-Jarrāḥ] al-Wazīr [d. 391/1001] on the authority of [‘Abd Allāh b. Muhammad] al-Baghawī.” Satisfyingly, we find this exact booklet in one of Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādi’s massive composite manuscripts, ANL MS 3774, where the booklet has become the sixth item and occupies folia 54–76.⁵² When we open the Damascus manuscript, it is evident that a folio is missing as the front of this booklet bears

⁴⁹ The fragments in the class mark 1776 were sold to a buyer (so far unknown) in the auction *The History of Western Script: A Selection from The Schøyen Collection, in Celebration of the Collector’s Eightieth Birthday*, Dreweatts (London), 8 July 2020, lot 46.

⁵⁰ On the Damascene provenance of these fragments and their link to the Qubbat al-khazna, see Konrad Hirschler, “Saleroom Fiction versus Provenance: Historicising Manuscripts via their Marginal and Material Logic (Schøyen Fragments 1776)”, *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* (forthcoming).

⁵¹ Schøyen Collection, “Tales of the Arabian Nights”, catalogue page for MS 1776/04, <https://www.schoyencollection.com/24-smaller-collections/childrens-literature/homiliary-st-gregory-ms-1776-04> (accessed 16 August 2019).

⁵² Hirschler, *Monument*, entry 481h.

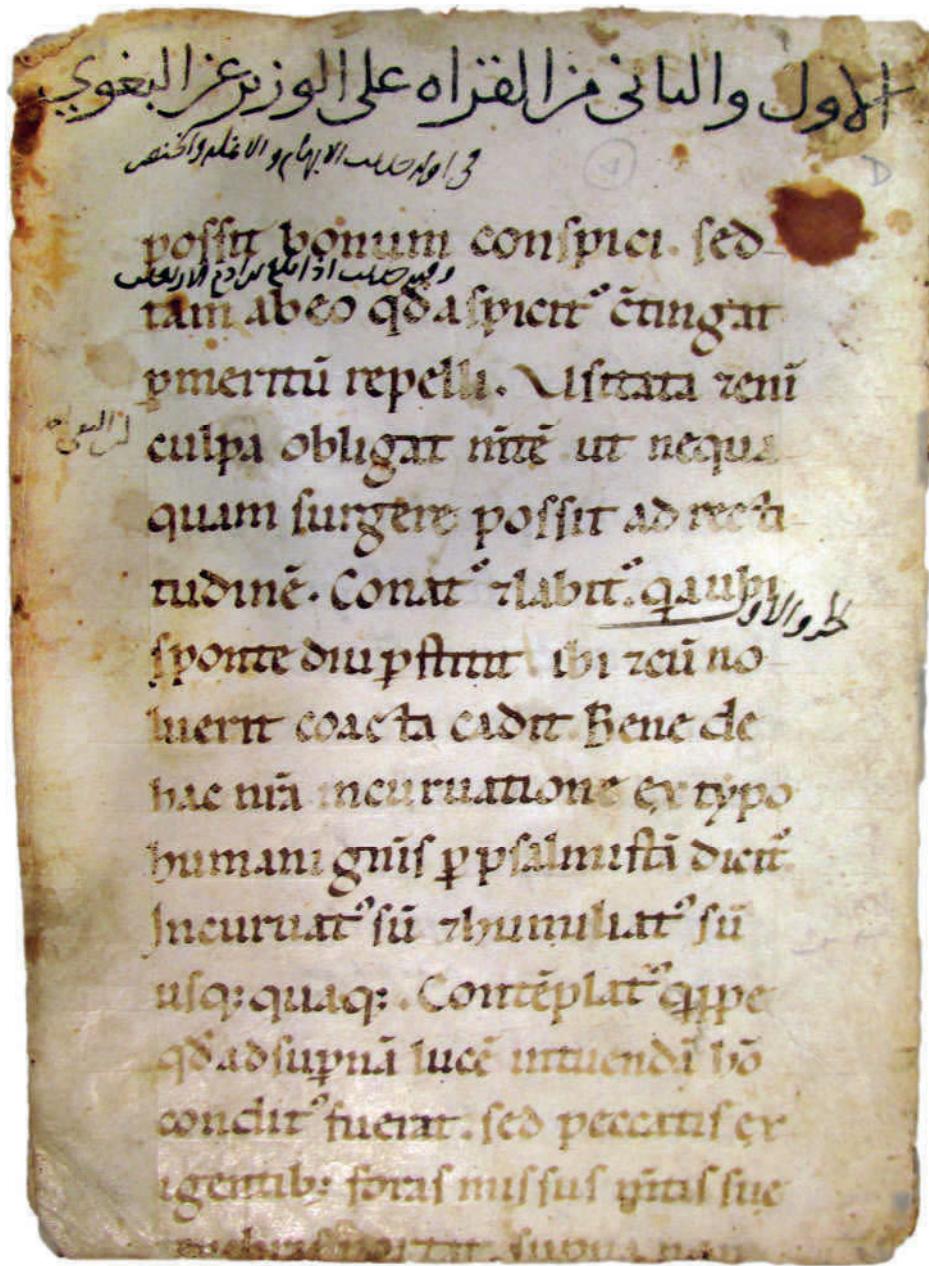


Fig. 6: Reused folio of Latin homiliary. (Oslo and London, The Schøyen Collection MS 1776/04. © The Schøyen Collection.)

no title – and the missing folio had once been a parchment wrapper, and is today known as fragment 1776/04.

In other words, the fragment that sits today in the Schøyen Collection as fragment 1776/04 is part of the Damascus reuse corpus, and is thus also closely linked to the Qubba. The same is true for all twelve items within the class mark 1776 in the Schøyen Collection.⁵³ That the fragments had previously been in the possession of a “private owner, Damascus, Syria (-1993)”⁵⁴ makes it highly likely that Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādi removed these wrappers from their respective booklets once their material function had become pointless. However, he did not reuse them for other purposes (such as covers) and they must have had a shared trajectory with other such removed wrappers for some 500 years in the city of Damascus.

We have no information yet as to where such former reuse fragments were (and in many cases probably still are) held in Damascus. However, there is one trace to a private collection. When Bruno Violet was working on the Qubba material in Damascus in 1900 and 1901 he was also looking for additional material outside the Qubba itself. This led him into the Ottoman public library (*al-Zāhirīyya*) and brought him into close contact with local scholars and collectors. One of them was a certain “Mr Hajāz” who was an employee of the Banque Ottomane. This Hajāz (we do not yet know who he was) loaned non-Arabic fragments from his private possession to Violet, who describes them as “having served as protections of Arabic manuscripts” (die alle zum Schutze arabischer Handschriften als Deckblätter gedient haben müssen).⁵⁵ We are fortunate to have a photograph of one of these fragments (fig. 7), where we see the Arabic title “First [part] of the Teachings of Ja‘far al-Thaqafi”, once again a title that refers to a post-canonical hadith booklet.⁵⁶ This fragment is a bifolium taken from a tenth-century Prophetologion (an Old Testament lectionary), here with musical notation written in sloping ogival majuscule.⁵⁷ It is thus evident that private collectors in Damascus in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries held such former reuse fragments in their possession.

The cases of the Schøyen Collection and the Hajāz fragment show that the host corpus is not the only place where we can find reuse fragments, but that former reuse fragments circulated in the wider manuscript topography of Damascus. There is a further – and final twist – to the story of the reuse fragments and the host corpus. In the argument above, the Qubba was not a one-way depository, as

⁵³ Hirschler, “Historicising Decontextualised Manuscripts”.

⁵⁴ Schøyen Collection, MS 1776/04 (<https://www.schoyencollection.com/24-smaller-collections/childrens-literature/homiliary-st-gregory-ms-1776-04>, accessed 16 August 2019).

⁵⁵ Letter from Violet to Harnack, 14 June 1900, archive of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. My thanks go to Arnd Rattmann for providing me with this reference.

⁵⁶ My thanks go to Arnd Rattmann for providing me with this reference and the photograph.

⁵⁷ I thank Francesco D’Aiuto for providing the identification of the Greek text.



Fig. 7: Reused folio of Greek Prophetologion; photograph by B. Violet in Damascus in 1900. (Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities [no class mark]. © BBAW.)

manuscript producers accessed it to source fragments for reuse purposes. In addition, we have seen that the reuse corpus is again not a one-directional corpus into which fragments went, but that fragments left this corpus for new destinations, such as private collections, as well. However there are also traces of an additional link between the Qubba and the reuse corpus, namely that fragments that went into the reuse corpus could subsequently go (or return?) to the Qubba – thus rendering the trajectory of these items even more colourful. For instance, among the photos of Qubba material that Violet took in Damascus in 1901 are several items that carry Arabic writings on them. One of them is a Samaritan bifolium that carries Arabic script and looks very much as if it was reused as a wrapper at some point in its life cycle (fig. 8).⁵⁸ Another case is the Violet fragment of a bilingual Greek–Arabic Bible mentioned earlier. This bifolium also had a life stage of reuse before it entered the Qubba.⁵⁹ A final example of a Qubba fragment with a prior life stage of reuse and photographed by Bruno Violet is a Greek fragment of the

⁵⁸ Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, BBAW/GCS, Akz.-Nr. 481/45, available at <https://biblexegese.bbaw.de/handschriften/damaszener-handschriften/>. My thanks go to Arnd Rattmann for drawing my attention to this fragment.

⁵⁹ Vollandt, "Beyond Arabic".



Fig. 8: Reused folio of Samaritan fragment; photograph by B. Violet in Damascus in 1901. (Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, BBAW/GCS, Akz.-Nr. 481/45. © BBAW.)

Proverbs discussed by Karl Treu.⁶⁰ These examples show an intricate relationship between this deposit of disused books and documents on the one hand and reuse practices on the other. Such a complex relationship is certainly not unique for the Qubba, and, as Serena Ammirati highlights in her contribution to this volume, the Cairene Geniza displays a similar interplay between depository and reuse.

We still do not know who deposited what materials when in the Qubba, nor for what reasons. However, the reuse corpus shows that the Qubba was neither a closed-off building nor an isolated space of no relevance to Damascene society. Rather, it seems that the Qubba material was closely integrated into the city's written culture and bookmaking practices – this depository was an essential part of the manuscript topography of Damascus. When Europeans claimed to have “discovered” the Qubba and its contents, this merely heralded the next stage in a long history of how individuals have interacted with the contents of this building.⁶¹ The example of reuse practices clearly shows that future research will bring to light a story that is much more complicated than a clearly delineated Qubba corpus housed in the building until Europeans discovered it.

Why reuse fragments? Parchments as spolia

So far, we have seen that reusing fragments was an intricate part of Damascene manuscript culture, especially in the field of hadith transmission. The final question tackled in this paper is why manuscript producers and users opted for this practice in the first place. The first possibility that comes to mind is that this was primarily a pragmatic move to source cheap and sturdy material. As we have repeatedly seen, there is indeed a clear material logic to the reused fragments, whether they appear as wrappers or as material reused for “proper” bindings. This pragmatic line of explanation is certainly a major factor, but the following will argue that the reuse practices in Damascus are more multifaceted and have also to be taken seriously as practices that ascribed new meanings to these fragments.

Before considering why fragments were reused, it is important to note that Damascene manuscript producers and users almost never opted to make palimp-

⁶⁰ Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, BBAW/GCS, Akz.-Nr. 481/170, available at <https://bibelexegese.bbaw.de/handschriften/damaszener-handschriften/>. Kurt Treu, *Majuskelbruchstücke der Septuaginta aus Damaskus*, Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen: I. Philologisch-Historische Klasse, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1966. I thank Ronny Vollhardt for drawing my attention to this fragment.

⁶¹ On the Ottoman-period engagement with the Qubba, see the contribution by Cüneyd Erbay and myself in this volume. On the European discovery of the Qubba, see the paper by Boris Liebrenz in this volume, and also Paolo Radiciotti and Arianna D’Ottone, “I frammenti della Qubba^t al-ḥazna di Damasco: A proposito di una scoperta sottovalutata”, *Nea Rhome* 5 (2008), 45–74; Cordula Bandt and Arnd Rattmann, “Die Damaskusreise Bruno Violets 1900/1901 zur Erforschung der Qubbet el-Chazne”, *Codices Manuscripti* 76/77 (2011), 1–20.

sest fragments before they reused material for binding purposes.⁶² As the reuse fragments are made of parchment, it would have been relatively easy to scrape or wash off the writing on them. Thus the absence of palimpsest practices makes it probable that manuscript producers and users were not entirely disinterested in what they reused. This is particularly noteworthy because these fragments are visually so striking: it would be difficult to miss the non-Arabic scripts when leafing through an Arabic-script booklet, and the same goes for the Arabic reuse fragments, whether they are in Maghribi script or documentary hands. It must have been a deliberate decision not to engage in palimpsest practices.

Returning to a consideration of the reuse of fragments, the sole explanation other than pragmatism offered in scholarship so far for the existence of these striking elements in Damascene manuscripts is only partly convincing. Georges Vajda remarked, almost in passing, that the manuscript producers and users had little concern for these fragments “in particular when it was war booty or property of groups physically eliminated or expelled by a hostile majority: massacres or expulsion of religious minorities, be they Jewish, Christian, or Muslim”.⁶³ This assumption of “hostile” reuse goes hand in hand with one of the instances where a modern scholar commented upon the presence of Latin and Old French items in the Qubba: Hermann von Soden wrote in his short survey of the pieces lent to Berlin that it was “probably [Muslim] fanaticism, which tore these parchments into pieces to seal them away in the Qubba, even traces of blood are evident”.⁶⁴ The search for bloody traces of past wars and invasions is certainly a widely spread *topos* in this period’s discussion of medieval manuscripts. When George Borrow published his *Wild Wales* in 1862, he wrote in a similar vein upon visiting Lampeter:

The grand curiosity [in this library] is a manuscript Codex containing a Latin synopsis of Scripture [Peter of Capua’s *Distinctiones Theologicae*] which once belonged to the monks of Bangor Is Coed. It bears marks of blood with which it was sprinkled when the monks were massacred by the heathen Saxons, at the instigation of Austin the Pope’s missionary in Britain.⁶⁵

There is no doubt that some of the Latin and Old French items in the Qubba had changed ownership in the framework of armed conflict against the Franks. In the same vein, the Crusaders had plundered Jewish books in Jerusalem after the con-

⁶² One rare exception is ANL MS 954, fols. 41a/b and 46a/b.

⁶³ Georges Vajda, “Trois manuscrits de la bibliothèque du savant damascain Yusuf Ibn-Abd al-Hadi”, *Journal Asiatique* 270 (1982), 231.

⁶⁴ Hermann von Soden, “Bericht über die in der Kubbet in Damaskus gefundenen Handschriftenfragmente”, *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (1903), no. 39, 827: “Vielleicht war es der Fanatismus, der diese Pergamente, auch Blutspuren fehlen nicht an ihnen, in Fetzen zerriß, um sie dann durch Einschließung in der Kubbet unschädlich zu machen”.

⁶⁵ George Henry Borrow, *Wild Wales: Its People, Language and Scenery*, London: Murray 1862, ch. 95. I thank Elaine Treharne at Stanford University for drawing my attention to this reference.

quest of the town in 1099.⁶⁶ Against this background of books being transferred as part of a hostile act, a case of “hostile reuse” can certainly be made for some examples in the reuse corpus. There are cases where the producer of a manuscript has consciously built in a Frankish or Crusader parchment to express a sentiment of superiority and to celebrate the fact that this written artefact had come into his possession. For instance, ANL MS 1039 is another composite manuscript created by Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādi,⁶⁷ and one of its booklets contains the text of *The Cited Tales of the Wondrous Doings of the Shaykhs of the Holy Land* by Ḏiyā’ al-Din al-Maqdisi. This text has a very close connection to Frankish rule in Palestine as Ḏiyā’ al-Din’s ancestors had migrated from these lands controlled by “unbelievers”;⁶⁸ and this particular booklet was wrapped in a Latin parchment carrying the text of 1 Maccabees.⁶⁹ In this case, there is little doubt that reusing the fragment of a text belonging to the Frankish community that had led to the migration of the author’s ancestors from Palestine to Damascus was quite a statement.

However, hostile reuse is not necessarily the whole story. It is striking that the non-Arabic and non-Muslim fragments are reused in exactly the same way as the Arabic documents and the Arabic law books. The simple act of reuse is certainly not hostile by itself and one would have to argue for such a meaning in each case individually, as argued above for the wrapper parchment of the *Wondrous Doings* – one cannot simply assume that reuse was a hostile act *per se*.

Consequently, I propose that we read reuse fragments in the same way as building spolia. Scholarship moved away from the simple idea that spoliation was necessarily either the outcome of a pragmatic act or a hostile act a long time ago. The incorporation of “foreign” elements into a new building can occur for a variety of reasons (and whether elements were in fact foreign for the people of the time is often open to discussion). Even for the case of “Crusader” spolia in Ayyubid Jerusalem, Finbarr Barry Flood has convincingly shown that the traditional assumption of this reuse being a case of Muslim patrons displaying victory over the religious other is not that easy to support. Rather, contemporaries ascribed a range of meanings to these spolia that Flood termed “an ambiguous aesthetic”.⁷⁰ To read reuse fragments as spolia is

⁶⁶ Moshe Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634–1099*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992, 831–835.

⁶⁷ Hirschler, *Monument*, entry 476i.

⁶⁸ Daniella Talmon-Heller, “The Cited Tales of the Wondrous Doings of the Shaykhs of the Holy Land by Diya al-Din Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahid al-Maqdisi (569/1173–643/1245): Text, Translation and Commentary”, *Crusades* 1 (2002), 111–154.

⁶⁹ ANL MS 1039, fol. 89a.

⁷⁰ Finbarr Barry Flood, “An Ambiguous Aesthetic: Crusader Spolia in Ayyubid Jerusalem”, in: *Ayyubid Jerusalem: The Holy City in Context 1187–1250*, Robert Hillenbrand and Sylvia Auld, eds., London: Altajir Trust 2009, 202–215. See also Konrad Hirschler, “Frankish-Muslim Relations in the Ayyubid Period, c.589/1193–c.648/1250”, in: *The Cambridge History of the Crusades*, vol. 2, *Expansion, Impact and Decline*, Jonathan Phillips and Andrew Jotischky, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2021 (forthcoming).

particularly tempting when they are associated with the Qubbat al-khazna, since – at least in its current shape – that building itself rests on spolia columns.

As with building spolia, there are at least two other lines of explanation that emerge from the reuse corpus besides pragmatism and hostile reuse, what might be called “affirmative reuse” and “aesthetic reuse”. With affirmative reuse, I refer to those instances where we can actually make a case that the manuscript producer or user chose a specific fragment because he or she considered this item to add to the manuscript’s intended function. In these cases, reuse is the exact opposite of hostile reuse, and the user must have consciously chosen to incorporate the spolia fragments into the new manuscript and repurpose them.

A pertinent example of affirmative reuse is that of the marriage-related contract from 524/1130 discussed above, where the manuscript producer cut the contract into fourteen pieces to reuse as folia to produce a small booklet. This new booklet is a standard post-canonical hadith booklet and carries the prosaic title *Hadith of [Muhammad b. Ayyūb] Ibn Durays [d. 294/906]*.⁷¹ The interesting element is that the writer and owner of this booklet is none other than the son of the couple whose marriage the contract documented.⁷² In other words, we have here a son lovingly cutting his parents’ marital paperwork into pieces to make writing material for a new booklet.

This act might indicate rather troubled relationships within this family, but in fact the son’s intention was affirmative. The text of this booklet was of crucial importance to him as it inserted him into prestigious and short lines of transmission back to the Prophet Muhammad – the central purpose of post-canonical hadith scholarship. This booklet was thus an important stepping-stone in the career of an aspiring scholar and the numerous notes in the manuscript documenting his transmission of the text show that he was quite successful in this aim. Repurposing the marriage-related contract of his parents had the benefit of combining the scholarly prestige embedded in the hadith text (and the growing number of transmission notes) with the social prestige embedded in the contract. As mentioned earlier, his family belonged to the wealthy strata of Damascene society, and so the new booklet elegantly combined cultural and social prestige. It thus functioned as a kind of curriculum vitae, allowing the son to display where he came from (and probably where he aspired to go). When leafing through the booklet one gets the impression that he did not leave the succession of the contract’s fragments in the booklet to chance. The reader encounters in the first fragment of the original contract a passage with parts of two lines where the names of the scholar’s father, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather are clearly legible. In addition, he made sure that the reader did not miss the sum of fifty dinars in this first encounter with the fragment.⁷³ Even

⁷¹ Hirschler, *Monument*, entry 564f (ANL MS 3748/6).

⁷² His role is evident from the notes of transmission such as ANL MS 3748/6, fol. 158b (dated 586/1190).

⁷³ ANL MS 3748/6, fol. 144b.

though cutting a contract into pieces might seem at first glance a destructive act, the real intention here was the exact opposite. It was an act of spoliation to preserve what was important and to repurpose it for one's own benefit.

As well as affirmative reuse, aesthetic reuse seems to have played a major part in Damascene reuse practices. It is evident that the manuscript producers wanted to retain the text of their spolia – as we have seen, we find almost no palimpsests. They clearly had an interest in preserving the original text and this is also evident from the way the fragments are repurposed. The wrapper fragments, for instance, were generally employed in a way that allowed the producers to write the new title in existing margins without having to remove part or all of the original text (see e.g. figs. 3, 6, 7, and 8).

In the case of the Maghribi fragments and the non-Arabic fragments, it seems that incorporating the exotic was a major driving force. In this sense fragment reuse was not too different from reusing building spolia where, as has been argued with reference to the Frankish or Crusader spolia in Jerusalem, “the use of spolia ... constituted an engagement with some of the aesthetic values and decorative principles of an antecedent tradition”.⁷⁴ In some sense, it could be argued that the deliberate preference for Maghribi fragments comes down to a fascination with what was clearly a rather foreign element in Damascene manuscript culture. Anybody with even the most basic levels of literacy would have recognised that the script on this wrapper was clearly distinct from the standard scripts employed in the city. What exactly was written on these fragments was most likely not of major interest – it was their “exotic” visual appearance that counted. The fragments’ materiality reinforced this exotic element. Damascene manuscript culture had fully transitioned from parchment to paper by the sixth/twelfth century. The only exceptions were Korans and some legal documents, where we find the use of parchment well into the eighth/fourteenth century;⁷⁵ manuscripts with hadiths or on law were without exception written on paper. The Maghribi parchment fragments thus had a distinctively archaic feel to them. One might wonder to what extent antiquarian interests drove reuse practices – that is, an interest in preserving objects of the past while being fully conscious of their pastness and believing that this pastness deserved to be salvaged precisely because it was long gone.⁷⁶

Even more exotic than the Maghribi fragments were those fragments in scripts other than Arabic. As mentioned above, it is particularly noteworthy that Damascene manuscript producers and users loved to reuse Latin-script fragments, in particular those with musical notation, as seen for example in figure 5. Within

⁷⁴ Flood, “Ambiguous Aesthetic”, 214.

⁷⁵ For Damascene parchment documents, see Mouton, Soudel, and Soudel-Thomine, *Mariage et séparation*.

⁷⁶ On antiquarianism, see for instance Peter N. Miller and François Louis, eds., *Antiquarianism and Intellectual Life in Europe and China, 1500–1800*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2012.

Damascus, Latin was certainly the more exotic script when compared with Greek or Syriac. In addition, pages with musical notation must have been exceptionally flashy, as Arabic culture had not developed any such written system to record music, and manuscript users would perceive these weird dots and strokes between the lines as a visually attractive element and were particularly inclined to reuse such fragments for aesthetic reasons. Similarly, while scripts such as Greek or Syriac were much less foreign to a Damascene reading audience, they were certainly striking within the context of Arabic booklets. Here, the visual attractiveness might have also been a conscious reference to the city's past, a nod to earlier Damascene manuscript cultures that were much more multiscriptual and multilingual.

When Ibn 'Abd al-Hādi brought so many of these booklets into his possession in the late ninth/fifteenth century he arguably shared this aesthetic appreciation. As we have seen, he repeatedly used fragments that had been wrappers as the covers of his new composite manuscripts. One such fine example is a Hebrew fragment that we see today on the outside of the composite manuscript Supplément Turc 984 in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (fig. 9). Even though time has taken its toll and the parchment has damage on the margins, this manuscript still has a striking appearance. When Ibn 'Abd al-Hādi wrote a list of the manuscripts that he had created, he repeatedly noted with evident self-satisfaction "and it is one of the precious [books]."⁷⁷

The elephant in the room is the following question: how exactly did the fragments find their way from the Qubba into the booklets? This paper certainly cannot settle the question conclusively, but it can point to one likely path. The sale of scrap paper and parchment on the paper market was certainly quite normal. For instance, after the transition to paper it was standard practice for discarded books to be sold on the market to paper makers for pulping. Hence, writers of normative works, such as the well-known fourteenth-century treatise by the Egyptian author Ibn al-Hājj (d. 737/1336), were worried and warned that pulping had its limits. He explicitly censured those who sold paper for this purpose with Koranic text, hadiths, or the names of God, the prophets, and the angels on it.⁷⁸ In the same vein, we read of undeserving relatives who accessed a scholar's library to dismantle the bound volumes and sell them for their scrap paper value by weight. Moreover, there was always the possibility that paper could be reused for other purposes such as wrapping foodstuffs.⁷⁹ The neighbourhoods around the Umayyad Mosque were the most bookish and "paperish" areas of Damascus and to their north we find in the Kallāsa Quarter a well-established book market. More importantly, just outside the mosque to its west was the massive bookbinders' market

⁷⁷ "Wa-huwa min al-nafā'is"; for instance Hirschler, *Monument*, entries 404q, 411u, 412k, 446k, 463o, 468s, 485o, 488o.

⁷⁸ Ibn al-Hājj, *al-Madkhal li-Ibn al-Hājj*, Cairo: Dār al-turāth c.1992, 4:82.

⁷⁹ Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *The Book in Mamluk Egypt and Syria (1250–1517): Scribes, Libraries and Market*, Leiden: Brill 2018, 12.

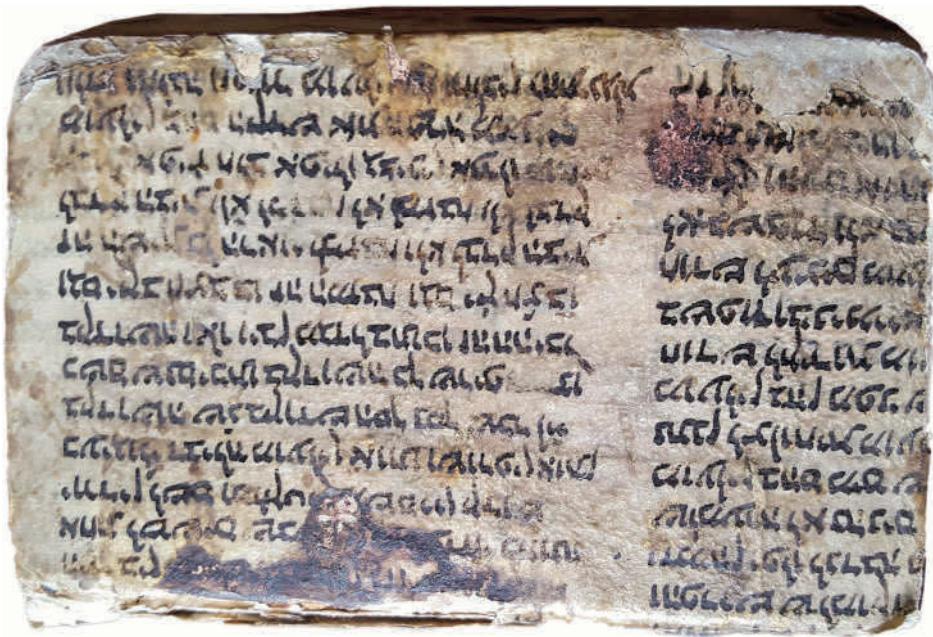


Fig. 9: Hebrew folio reused as a binding cover. (Bibliothèque nationale de France MS Supplément Turc 984. © Bibliothèque nationale de France.)

and the paper market (*sūq al-warrāqīn*) in Bāb al-Barīd.⁸⁰ It is likely that parchment fragments from the Qubba found their way into this market as well (which was less than fifty metres from the Qubba) and subsequently into the booklets of our corpus.

In sum, reuse practices have to be seen in terms of a range of motivations that went far beyond pragmatism and hostile reuse. We must add at least affirmative reuse and aesthetic reuse as additional factors that make sense of the numerous booklets and manuscripts with reuse fragments in our corpus. Most importantly, each of these booklets and manuscripts has its own idiosyncratic story. Their producers and users are poorly served if they are depicted as nothing but waste pickers or aficionados of blood-spattered pages. These fragments were attractive because they were available at a low cost or no cost at all, and they certainly might have been reused as an expression of hostility. Yet these manuscript producers and users have more complex stories to tell once we start to consider reuse seriously as a culturally meaningful practice undertaken by social actors.

⁸⁰ Hirschler, *Monument*, ch. 2.

Conclusion

The discussion of reuse practices in Damascene hadith booklets, primarily produced and circulating between the fifth/eleventh and eighth/fourteenth centuries, has shown that Qubba fragments are found well beyond the known collections. For the Cairo Geniza, we have a comparable case, where producers of cheap rotuli tended particularly to reuse Arabic administrative documents; but the beauty of those books is that they subsequently returned to the Geniza and have thus retained a much clearer corpus identity.⁸¹ For the Qubba, we have seen examples of some fragments being reused and subsequently returning to the Qubba, but the much larger part of the reuse corpus is today in the covers of manuscripts distributed across libraries around the globe that have no evident connection with the Qubba. The fragments in the Schøyen Collection show furthermore that these fragments reappear in very unexpected locations. The example of this reuse corpus thus alerts us to the fact that reconstituting what was in the Qubba can lead us down rather unexpected and at first glance secondary roads. The question of which exact fragments have a Qubba provenance and which do not will certainly be a major issue in future scholarship. The Qubba corpus, in other words, has quite obscure boundaries at the moment.

These unclear boundaries, in turn, go back to the fact that the Qubba corpus did not lie dormant for centuries before its “discovery” in the late nineteenth century. We know that material went into the Qubba right up to the very moment of its “opening”. Bruno Violet himself saw recent financial documents from the mosque and an Arabic Bible printed in London in 1830 among the Qubba material.⁸² More importantly, this paper has argued that the Qubba was not a one-way depository, but an integral part of the wider Damascene manuscript culture. Fragments from the Qubba were able to find their way into manuscripts and were reused in a variety of ways – here we have only focused on one of their functions, as wrappers of booklets. These reused fragments could subsequently return to the Qubba, where we find them as fragments that only at first glance seem to have had an unproblematic and linear Qubba trajectory. Only by seeing the Qubba as one part of the topography of the written word in Damascus will we be able to understand its history and, more importantly, the history of individual items.

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⁸¹ Olszowy-Schlanger, “Cheap Books”, 95–97.

⁸² Bruno Violet, “Ein zweisprachiges Psalmfragment aus Damaskus”, *Orientalistische Literatur-Zeitung* 4, nos. 10–12 (1901), 384–403, 426–441, 475–488.

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