

zu Berlin codices and the correspondences between the current inventory numbers of the manuscripts and their previous designations.

*The Manuscripts of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Part 4: Homiletic and Liturgical Manuscripts from the White Monastery. With Two Documents from Thebes and Two Old-Nubian Manuscripts* will remain an important tool. Scholars and students of Coptic codicology and literature will be effectively served by this volume.

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THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

ALESSANDRO BAUSI (ed.):

*Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies: An Introduction.*

xxii, 677 pp. Hamburg: COMSt, 2015. €56.29. ISBN 978 3 7323 1768 4.  
doi:10.1017/S0041977X1500110X

After many years of neglect, during which it was regarded as an “old” discipline worthy of being forgotten, manuscript studies is experiencing renewed interest. The emergence of the digital humanities has played a significant role in the reconsideration of the validity and utility of the discipline: manuscripts can be consulted without leaving one’s office; critical editions are easier to prepare and can be easily accessed if they are available on an open access basis. As a result, philology, codicology, palaeography and the like are terms that have reappeared increasingly frequently in publications over the last decade, in such a way that what was “old” is now regarded as “new”. Every researcher knows that an application for a grant is more likely to succeed if specific terms are borne in mind that will function as real keywords to open the magic doors during the evaluation process. In other words, the packaging has changed, but the contents are still the same. Be that as it may, what is important is the result: critical editions are again considered a scientific work provided, of course, that they are digital, accessible online and fully searchable. Manuscript studies are once again at the forefront of the scientific agenda of institutional research programmes, and proof of this is found in the book under review.

Generously funded by the European Science Foundation from 2009–2014, the Research Networking Programme “Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies” contributed to gathering, on various occasions, several teams of scholars specializing in one of the many disciplines linked to manuscripts. These meetings aimed to produce a handbook presenting succinctly and analytically the state of the art for the main disciplines deemed essential for the study of the texts preserved in Oriental manuscripts, as well as of the manuscripts themselves. By Oriental, the project intended “all non-Occidental (non-Latin-based) manuscript cultures which have an immediate historical (‘genetic’) relationship with the Mediterranean codex area” (p. 2). One understands that the scholars who participated in this project faced the problem of delimiting the linguistic and geographical boundaries of the manuscript cultures dealt with. This is even clearer with the further chronological and cultural limits they imposed: manuscripts belonging to the ancient, medieval and premodern periods and written in languages among the less taught “or somehow exotic in the present-day academic landscape of Europe (with the exception of Greek)” (p. 1). However, what is sometimes meant by “languages” is more accurately “script”, as exemplified by the case of “Arabic”: in fact manuscripts containing texts in Persian and Ottoman Turkish are also investigated, though on a smaller scale than for Arabic, by the contributors. The matter becomes more

blurred when “scripts” are not immediately associated with “languages”, and we have to do with a “hybrid” system as in the case of Garšūnī (Arabic written in the Syriac script) and Judaeo-Arabic (Arabic written with Hebrew characters). They are seldom mentioned in the sections devoted to Syriac and Hebrew (Judaeo-Arabic does not even feature in the index). On that basis, the following writing systems and/or languages are studied: Arabic, Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopic, Georgian, Greek, Hebrew, Slavonic and Syriac.

The book is divided into five chapters, each covering a specific discipline (codicology, palaeography, textual criticism and text editing, cataloguing, and conservation and preservation), and preceded by a general introduction. Conceived as a co-operative and comparative project, each chapter was prepared under the leadership of one or more individuals and follows a similar pattern: an introduction to the discipline, and sections devoted to each writing system/language. A comparison of the length of individual chapters shows that some disciplines have been investigated in more detail than others. This is particularly conspicuous for palaeography, which covers only 53 pages, when compared with the 140 pages devoted to text editing. One is under the impression that further issues and material could have been presented: a case in point is Arabic, which includes only four pages, presenting mainly the most ancient handwriting used for copying the Quran. The imbalance is observed in other cases such as Hebrew, where scholars have been more active during the past decades, both in codicology and palaeography.

All in all, most of the chapters are informative and based on the most recent findings. Nevertheless, some minor drawbacks should be mentioned. Even though the general editor stresses the importance of digital scholarship for the elaboration of this handbook, some programs specifically designed for the analysis of handwriting (recognition of a specific hand) are not even mentioned in the chapter on palaeography. Some issues have been completely overlooked, such as holograph manuscripts, i.e. those completely in the author’s handwriting: such manuscripts, not rare in Islamic civilization, pose several questions that should have been specifically addressed in various chapters (palaeography, textual criticism, and cataloguing). In the same vein, paratextual elements that permit a reconstruction of the history of the text and of its support (ownership statements, reading notes, certificates of audition) are entirely overlooked.

The chapter on textual criticism is enlightening and is probably one of the best in this volume. Scholars planning to prepare a critical edition will find there a very good starting point. Unlike other chapters, this considers case studies focussed on single writing systems/languages rather than syntheses aimed at covering the whole literature. This choice is fully justified even though in the case of Arabic the four case studies are limited in scope or too specific: they concern respectively Arabic epics, texts in Middle Arabic, Quranic fragments from the late seventh and eighth centuries, and a Persian historical text. The description of a more “common” case would have been most welcome.

The editors made every effort to make this handbook easily accessible – hence the affordable price (less than €60 for a thick volume) and the fact that it can be downloaded for free (<http://www1.uni-hamburg.de/COMST/handbookonline.html>). One of the caveats of this choice regards the size of the font (10 points) used for the text, the very narrow interlinear space and the quantity of text squeezed onto a single page. This makes reading and consulting this handbook wearisome, even for someone who does not need glasses. The quantity of reproductions is also rather limited given the nature of the book, intended as a reference work.

To conclude, this book will undoubtedly provide useful information to a great variety of readers: students interested in manuscripts in general or seeking to gain more insight into manuscript studies; scholars already familiar with aspects of

manuscript studies but wanting to be introduced to others and/or to the specificities of other traditions; and librarians and restorers who will find here comparative data.

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LAUDAN NOOSHIN:

*Iranian Classical Music: The Discourses and Practice of Creativity.* (SOAS Musicology Series.) xiv, 242 pp. Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015. £65. ISBN 978 0 754 60703 8.  
doi:10.1017/S0041977X15001111

This book represents the culmination of more than two decades of research by the author on Iranian classical music. It stems from an initial period of fieldwork in Iran between 1987 and 1990 as well as more recent research trips, and draws on interviews with leading Iranian performers such as Shahram Nazeri, Hossein Alizadeh and the late Parviz Meshkati. In addition, the book includes transcriptions and musical analyses of a wide range of recordings, excerpts of which are included on an accompanying CD. As indicated by the title, Nooshin focuses on the concept of creativity, particularly in connection with improvisatory practices in Iranian music and the discourses surrounding them. Her central argument is that notions of creativity are ideologically freighted and shaped both by scholarly paradigms and by wider socio-political factors, most importantly the forces of modernization and the influence of “Western” modes of thought. Nooshin contends that the binary opposition between “improvisation” and “composition” is closely related to a host of other dualisms – East/West, oral/written, simple/complex and so on. Based on her research into the processes of learning and performing Iranian classical music, she argues that we should reconsider these “somewhat rigid noun-based categories, and recognise the complex interpolation of the compositional and improvisational” (pp. 155–6).

The opening chapter considers previous approaches to improvisation and creativity, dealing with an impressive range of literature from ethnomusicology, historical musicology, folklore studies and post-colonial studies. Here, Nooshin demonstrates her intention not simply to describe the practices and concepts of Iranian classical music, but also to offer “a reflective critique of the conceptual and discursive frameworks which underpin ethno/musicological approaches to and understandings of creativity” (p. 4). This broad contextualization allows her to make instructive comparisons with other musical traditions, such as South Indian music, jazz or eighteenth-century keyboard performance, and to show how ethnomusicology can contribute new perspectives to recent discussions about creativity in mainstream musicology, which, as Nooshin points out, often reinforce the binary opposition between improvisation and composition, with its attendant ideological associations.

Chapters 2 and 3 concentrate on notions of creativity within the context of Iranian classical music, drawing on sources in Persian and European languages as well as interviews with Iranian musicians. Nooshin describes shifting conceptions of creativity and improvisation in Iranian music during the twentieth century, arguing that these changes were linked to broader processes of socio-political transformation. Thus, contact with Europe from the mid-nineteenth century onwards led to efforts to modernize the Iranian musical tradition by, for example, the introduction of notation and the institutionalization of teaching. These and related developments, including the emergence of public concerts and recording technology, contributed to