

# Introduction

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Once you have learnt to read, you read all the time. Whether for utilitarian reasons or for pleasure, we read so frequently that we do not even know how many times a day we do so. Part of what we read is books, and the books we choose to read tell much of our tastes and interests: browsing through someone's bookshelves can reveal much of the owner's personality, activities, and likes and dislikes. It also gives general information about the circulation of information, especially when the library observed is old: the given time and place it was possible to read the texts in question under this form.<sup>1</sup>

Authors do read as well, and they are special readers. They are creators: litterateurs are artists whose medium is language. The scholarly production also has a hint of creativity: the only fact to produce a new text about a certain subject is an act of creation. The way we treat a particular topic, the moment we decide to treat it, the perspective we adopt, the links we tie with other realities, data or ideas... all these circumstances contain a varying degree of creativi-

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**1** For the Islamic world, with the notable exceptions of Hitzel 1999 and Strauss 2013, about the Ottoman period, we are lacking studies of average individuals' libraries. D'Hulster 2020 is the study of the library of a person of exception: sultan Qanşūh al-Ġawrī. The volume about Topkapı palace library at the same period is very instructive as well: see Necipoğlu et al. 2019, but their book concerns again exceptional book owners. Hirschler (2012) and Hirschler (2016) do not deal with personal libraries, but gather information about unexceptional readers. Behrens-Abouseif's texts (2018) is more general, but worth consulting, especially for its material approach to the libraries (physical structure, architecture...). Outside Islam, for Byzantium, see Cavallo, Carrié 2010; for Europe, see Hermand et al. 2014 and Cavallo, Chartier 2001 (notably Grafton 2001) and their bibliography.

ty. Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed: we only reshuffle material seen, heard, read, or lived elsewhere. Thus, authors' libraries are extremely informative: the books owned by a certain author tell a lot of his/her tastes and subjects of predilection, but also of his/her past, present and future (possible) works.<sup>2</sup>

How can we approach an author's library? Sometimes, lists of books are known: this is the case for Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī's (d. 744/1343), for instance.<sup>3</sup> Some authors' biographies also include indications about their library. Another source of information about an author's readings is the marks he/she left on the books read: consultation notes, comments, marginalia, ex-libris... The mere presence of these "paratexts"<sup>4</sup> is already a source of information at least at two different levels. The first level is the information provided by the mark: this author owned/read/studied this book. It is already very useful and can be put in relation with the bio-bibliography of the author in question. The second level is the importance given to the record of this information. For the ex-libris, a first explanation is straight-forward: when lending or losing a book, one can more easily find it again when one's name is on it. The way to express one's ownership can be meaningful: the example of Poliziano citing his friends in his ex-libris is eloquent (see chapter 3): it inscribes himself in a network of litterateurs.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the vocabulary used by al-Ṣafadī or al-Maqrīzī to indicate their consultation and note-taking of a certain manuscript is interesting as well (see chapters 3 and 5): the terms chosen imply the reading, and sometimes the note-taking, the excerpting, or the extracting of the book read. The analysis of such short inscriptions opens a window on their scholarly methods. Many authors leave traces of their reading in the margins of the books. These marginalia can be of many different types:<sup>6</sup> comments, sometimes disparaging for the text or its author (see al-Maqrīzī in chapter 6), thoughts, links with other information or readings, even first drafts for a new book; in the latter case, reading the marginalia is like attending the formation of a new idea, the fertilisation of one mind by an idea, a text, or, more precisely, the reading of a text. Indeed, as noted by Ferrer,<sup>7</sup> the marginal note is the reference to the moment of the

<sup>2</sup> Several examples of authors' libraries will be cited in the next pages. Let us begin with Açıllı 2015; Haarmann 1984; Kohlberg 1992; Liebrecht 2018; Mejcher-Atassi 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Hirschler 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Term forged by Genette to designate any peripheral text with regard to the actual text of the book or manuscript in presence. Among others, see Genette 1982.

<sup>5</sup> Grafton 2001, 259-60.

<sup>6</sup> Jackson 2002 offers a wide panorama and reflection on English-language marginal annotations on books, dating back to the period between 1700 and 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Ferrer 2001, 21.

reading, in the present, soon past, but it is oriented towards the future – the re-reading of the note –, and hence becomes the materialisation of this past moment of reading, of this fecund “meeting between [an author]’s disposition of mind and a text, and it carries in itself the sprout of a new text”.<sup>8</sup>

Traces of reading experiences, but also of what we saw, heard, or lived remain in our brain and integrate our memory, a reservoir that I imagine as a great inner library, with shelves and boxes, arranged according to specific classifications (subjects, rhymes or sonorities, ideas, but also circumstances of one’s life when reading something...) that constitute the basis for our new ideas, and this is even more true for authors. It enters what Ferrer calls “authors’ virtual library”: the intertextual references found under an author’s pen in any writings of his/her, attesting his reading of a certain text.<sup>9</sup> From these references, the researcher can reconstruct a collection of titles and texts of which the author in question was aware. These intertextual references can be found in published texts, but also in ‘genesis documents’, like notebooks, reading journals, drafts etc.

Indeed, next to the “marginalists” who write directly on the book pages, there are the “extractors” who dismantle the text and write down part of it elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Because they feel they have to sustain their memory, or fear not to remember perfectly what they have just read or heard, these readers write down what they deem important to be recorded, for instance in a reading journal or in a commonplace book, an in-between place to store someone else’s words in order to remember them and perhaps use them oneself. We will see examples of such tools for pre-modern and modern Islam in the coming pages (especially in chapters 3 and 8); they were already used in Antiquity; examples of similar sorts of compendia are sporadically known in Europe from the twelfth century, and were in favour during the Renaissance and still during the Enlightenment but with more reluctance.<sup>11</sup> Such collections of excerpts are meant to meet several requirements: we already mentioned the demand for memory; second, writing down something read (or heard) is also a way to study it and appropriate it; third, it is the place where an author can find an argument, an example, or a thesis developed by someone else (and their more or less precise bibliographical references), in order to use it in

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**8** “[La note] est le mémorial d’une rencontre entre le texte et une disposition d’esprit, mais aussi l’épure embryonnaire d’un nouvel événement de pensée – et en dernier ressort, d’un nouveau texte qui sera dérivé du premier” (Ferrer 2001, 21; transl. by the Author).

**9** Ferrer 2001, 15-6; 2010; for an eloquent illustration, see Van Hulle 2016.

**10** These two categories were elaborated and described, with examples, by Ferrer 2001, 16-21.

**11** Hamesse 2001, 140, 149 *et passim*; Décultot 2003, 7-38, partic. 8-11; Blair 1996.

his/her own writings after all; fourth, such collections, personal, at first, often came to be readers' digests for others: the tendency to read only the commonplace books and not the original works anymore came to be lamented upon during the Enlightenment.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the writers resorting only to their books of excerpts to compose their own books were mocked and disregarded during the same period, especially in France; but the wind-up merchants kept one as well: they had an ambiguous relation to these tools, ashamed to need one, but at the same time jealous of it and dependent on it.<sup>13</sup> In fact, such tools appeared each time the sum of knowledge available in a certain culture became too heavy and wide for the human brain.<sup>14</sup> This is a cultural convergence.<sup>15</sup>

When preserved, such reading journals are a goldmine of information. Sadly, they are not often identified as such, and thus are not studied.<sup>16</sup> As it happens, they are not easy to study, though. Their contents are often so varied that it can be hard to find an angle of approach. If a mere list of the contents is already useful,<sup>17</sup> it is not sufficient. What is interesting to my eyes is the links between the readings and the writing process. Indeed, for an author, the reason why it is important to record something is sometimes the project, more or less concrete, of writing something (a book, an essay, a poem...) in relation to what was just read. The reading can be the source of inspiration, or the project can condition the reading. Being able to determine what comes first (project of writing or reading) is meaningful and helps retrace the mental process of the author. Generally speaking, reconstructing the *avant-texte*, that is: gathering and organising all the documents in relation to the birth of a text (including the reconstitution of an author's library, physical or virtual) brings us behind the scenes of the writing process and make the genetic interpretation of the creation progress possible:<sup>18</sup> it is one of the main steps of ge-

<sup>12</sup> Hamesse 2001, 141.

<sup>13</sup> Décultot 2003, 10-11, 23-7. For instance, Montaigne, Voltaire or Diderot mocked the German scholars following the tradition of excerpting but they did it themselves as well.

<sup>14</sup> Blair 2003; 2010. Examples are known in the Chinese culture as well: the *leishu* are commonplace books, collections of excerpts, see Blair 2007; Elman 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Concept especially used in Prehistory studies, to characterise identical behaviours of different populations that cannot be explained by a direct influence of one population on the other. For instance, see Otte, Noiret, Remacle 2009, *passim*. It has nothing to do with Henry Jenkins' theory about past and present media contents' convergence, which he called "Convergence Culture" (see Jenkins 2006).

<sup>16</sup> This is valid for Islamic manuscripts, and for European manuscripts as well. See Décultot 2003, 26.

<sup>17</sup> Like the one established by Arberry 1961 for several volumes of al-Şafadī's reading journal (his *taḍkira*).

<sup>18</sup> De Biasi 2011, 62, 68-70.

netic criticism. Notions of endogenesis (*endogenèse*) and exogenesis (*exogenèse*) were also coined in the frame of genetic criticism.<sup>19</sup> The subject of this book concerns exogenesis: the term is defined as the “selection and appropriation of the sources”<sup>20</sup> while the endogenesis is the writing process, in its different stages of drafting and reviewing. In fact, the genetic criticism aims at analysing the written work in light of its gestation, as a process, documented by a series of documents attesting to it: drafts, but also notebooks, preliminary notes, reading journals, or titles of works read. In the end, with the genetic approach, the birth of the work studied is fully contextualised.

Indeed, when compared to the author’s production, the information about an author’s readings complements our knowledge of his/her work. For instance, we get to know if the reading of the sources is concomitant to their use or if an intermediate step is implied, like a notebook or a reading journal (*taḍkira*) as a depository of information or quotations waiting to be used in a future work, like al-Ṣafādī and Es’ad Efendi did (see chapters 3 and 8). It also provides information about the level of ‘digestion’ of the sources by the author in question: are the texts read cited *verbatim*, as al-Maqrīzī does for the *Testament of Ardašīr* (see chapter 6), or are they paraphrased? Are the original work and actual manuscript cited or not, and if yes, with which degree of precision are they cited?

To do justice to such documents, and to present most of the information available, digital tools prove extremely useful. Two specific projects come to mind as eloquent examples in this regard: the BDMP (Beckett Digital Manuscript Project), which aims at digitally presenting Beckett’s manuscripts, together with the documents of the avant-texte and other useful tools;<sup>21</sup> and the BVH (Bibliothèques Virtuelles Humanistes), which gathers together digitalised documents, books and personal manuscripts of the Renaissance, as well as their digital editions and search tools.<sup>22</sup> These examples are inspiring and could be a great source of inspiration for the Arabic manuscript tradition.

If studying authors as readers amounts mostly to dealing with case studies – each author is different and his/her readings can only be dif-

**19** Debray-Genette 1979, cited by De Biasi 2011, 190-1; Van Hulle 2016, 192. The issue 51 of *Genesis* (2020), entitled “Intertextualité-Exogenèse”, is worth consulting, notably De Biasi, Gahungu 2020.

**20** De Biasi 2011, 190 (transl. by the Author).

**21** Directed by Dirk Van Hulle and Marc Nixon, see <https://www.beckettarchive.org/>.

**22** Directed by Chiara Lastraioli, see <http://www.bvh.univ-tours.fr>.

ferent as well – ,<sup>23</sup> it is still possible to widen the scope.<sup>24</sup> What we tried to do with this volume is to show the common points of different authors in their reading practices across time and space to see if general trends and peculiarities would appear.

This is not the first collection of articles about authors' libraries: at least three excellent publications come to mind when thinking of the topic.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, this thematic volume is different in various regards. First, its scope of study is not limited to modern writers: most of the authors tackled here date back to the pre-modern period. A straightforward consequence of this is the lack of documents. When scholars working on Flaubert or other authors of the twentieth century complain about the immensity of their documentation and the great number of preparatory documents at their disposal for one book, we, scholars working on the pre-modern period in Islam, are extremely lucky if we have both a draft and final stage of a text, or a mention in a reading journal and a quotation in a published work. Second, since we study pre-press societies, the status of fixed text is less evident than in the modern period: even after its publication – in the first sense of the word: after having been rendered public, as attested by audition certificates, for instance – , the text of a given book could change, be augmented, and/or corrected. Third, as already said, multi- and inter-disciplinarity are distinctive features of this volume. Indeed, the idea was to confront authors' practices in terms of reading across time and space. Observing the relation between the reading author and the author read, while reading ourselves the production of the reader-author offers a rich and inspiring *mise en abyme*. It is also the occasion to reflect on our own practices as readers and authors.

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We have already mentioned several contributions in the course of this introduction, but I would like to sum up more systematically each of them. After a short glimpse into the antique world by Tiziano Dorandi in his preface, the volume follows a chronological order. Hence, the reader will find as first chapter a contribution about Saladin's state secretary, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil (d. 596/1200). Stefan Leder brilliantly shows that al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil was not simply a clerk composing stereotyped texts for the sultan's chancery, but that he was a real creative author. al-Şafadī would have agreed: he was an admir-

<sup>23</sup> This is what the bibliography of European authors show; see D'Iorio, Ferrer 2001; Knoche 2015; Van Hulle, Nixon 2013.

<sup>24</sup> A good example, for the Ottoman world, is Hitzel 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Belin et al. 2018; D'Iorio, Ferrer 2001; Knoche 2015.

er of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil's poetry and gathered a collection of his verses (*Muḥtār šī'r al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil*, Selections from the Poetry of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil"). The readings of al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil scrutinised here are the letters to which he responded: these are a real source of inspiration for him and the refined style he implemented in his letters of reply resonates with the letter received. In addition, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil mentioned other readings of his in his letters, his reply letters becoming both a source of information about his skills as an author and his tastes as a reader.

The mere analysis of an author's production can also provide a wealth of information about his readings. For instance, in chapter 2, Mehdi Berriah offers an analysis of Ibn Taymiyya's (d. 728/1328) readings and of his uses of the latter. The great scholarly culture of Ibn Taymiyya is shown by the wide variety of sources mastered and used wisely by him. The focus is methodological here: the reading is approached through its results in the theologian's works. This contribution shows different things. First, Ibn Taymiyya's tremendous knowledge of the texts is revealed by several examples. Second, we see his exceptional capacity in using any text if it is useful for his argumentation: Ibn Taymiyya did not confine himself to the *ḥanbalī* corpus; on the contrary, he pulled out all the stops to make his point. It shows his independence and his critical and analytical ability. It also implies that he was reading a lot. These matters of fact make Berriah think Ibn Taymiyya must have used tools like *taḍkiras* (reading journals), notebooks, summaries, and/or indexes. We hope to discover any material trace of them one day.

In the case of al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363), several volumes of his *taḍkira* reached us, both holograph manuscripts and scribal copies. al-Ṣafadī's *taḍkira* is the subject of the second part of the third chapter of this volume, devoted to the scholar al-Ṣafadī as a reader (by the Author of this introduction). al-Ṣafadī's *taḍkira* is contextualised in the Islamic tradition. Its extent and contents are described. The various types of texts featured in it are excerpts of readings, texts heard (mainly poetry or riddles), first drafts of his works, or parts of the latter, and documents composed in the frame of his professional activity as chancery secretary. The first part of the article deals with the ownership and consultation marks that al-Ṣafadī left on the title page of various manuscripts. These number fifteen in the current state of research. All of them are described, as well as the manuscripts bearing them and the use al-Ṣafadī did of these readings and note-takings. al-Ṣafadī's son's library is also tackled, since, as far as we know now, it is only composed of books inherited from his father. The third part of the article concerns al-Ṣafadī's inner library, materialised by the manuscripts of other authors' texts he copied and by his own holograph manuscripts. All of this information provides us with a clearer image of al-Ṣafadī, a scholar whose methodology

is not so different from ours, a scholar who takes notes and cites his sources, whose reading agenda is dictated by scholarly and professional activities.

al-Şafadī's working method is also approached by Yehoshua Frenkel, in his article about Tāġ al-Dīn al-Subkī's and Ḥalīl b. Aybak al-Şafadī. What should be the historian's methodology according to al-Subkī is explained and examples of cooperation between al-Subkī and al-Şafadī are displayed. The master-disciple relationship is thus put forward and the book is shown as 'an open enterprise': it can be emended and/or augmented by others in the course of study sessions.

With chapter five, we cross the Mediterranean. Michèle Goyens leads us to the court of King Charles V (d. 1380) where a skilful and conscientious translator, the king physician Evrart de Conty, was busy with the Middle-French translation of a pseudo-Aristotelian text: the *Problemata*. The draft of the second version of his translation has been preserved. This manuscript is extremely rich, since it contains various marginalia showing the translator at work. These demonstrate his critical mind towards the source text (the Latin translation by Bartholomew of Messina) and its commentary by Pietro de Abano at his disposition, and his struggles, hesitations, and creativity to render the technical terms and concepts in a non-intellectual language. Besides, it is the occasion to mention the diglossia at stake in the Middle Ages. In the end, Evrart de Conty appears not only as a careful and creative translator but also as an author of various comments inspired by his reading of the source text and above all, by Pietro de Abano's commentary. Some of these comments were introduced inside his translation thus forming part of the text for the later reader. Goyens finally underlines the usefulness of digital editions to render the richness of this kind of document.

Chapter six returns to the Arabic world, and more specifically, to the Mamlūk sultanate. Frédéric Bauden continues his exploration of al-Maqrīzī's (d. 845/1442) writings, , life and activities investigating this time al-Maqrīzī's readings and their relation to his contemporary scholarly production, as well as his marginalia. This study sheds light on a variety of subjects: book circulation (which works were accessible to al-Maqrīzī?), author's methodology (when did al-Maqrīzī consult the books? What did he retain from them? How did he use them?) and networking (from whom did he borrow the books?). The marginalia consist of corrections, additions or comments, and provide information about his understanding and rating of the texts he read. The article is richly illustrated and documented.

al-Maqrīzī is the author studied in chapter seven as well. Jaako Håmeen-Anttila offers us the analysis of al-Maqrīzī's account of the *Testament of Ardašīr* in his *Ḥabar 'an al-bašar*. Since we have the very manuscript al-Maqrīzī read – Miskawayhi's *Taġārib* – as a source of information for this event, and the holograph of the vol-



ume of the *Habar* where the event is featured, we can see al-Maqrīzī at work. It appears in this case that, in general, al-Maqrīzī quoted his source *verbatim*, as a faithful transmitter of the text read, except when the source text was corrupted and did not make sense, or when al-Maqrīzī misunderstood it; then, his rewriting of the text read is illuminating and provides great information about his way of thinking.

In the last chapter of this volume, Nazlı Vatansever leads us to the nineteenth-century Ottoman sultanate. We follow the readings of an important intellectual and statesman of the time, Es'ad Efendi, thanks to his *mecmū'a*. This personal notebook gathers excerpts of texts he read, but also first drafts of works of his and lists of books used to compose some of his own works. It is the perfect tool to approach Es'ad Efendi as a reader and to follow his writing activity, in parallel to his readings. Besides, his readings are influenced by the evolution of his career and the *mecmū'a* thus appears as a mirror of various facets of the man.

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