Review Article

The ‘Author’s Hand’ Examined

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Frédéric Bauden and Élise Franssen (eds), *In the Author’s Hand. Holograph and Authorial Manuscripts in the Islamic Handwritten Tradition*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020.

1 The Context

On 10–11 October 2013, a conference was held at Liège University, Liège, Belgium, on the subject of ‘Autograph/Holograph and Authorial Manuscripts in Arabic Script’. Of the seventeen participants, nine have their contribution published in the edited volume that is under discussion here.¹ The book, which was eventually published in 2020, is an important contribution to Arabic manuscript research. The original conference² programme was quite different from

1 *In the Author’s Hand* contains three contributions in French (c. 187 pp.) and six in English (c. 274 pp.). A table of contents is given at <https://brill.com/view/title/56044> (consulted on October 18, 2020). The book, which contains xx + 454 pp. and costs €129, both for the hard-back and as an E-book in pdf, is not in open access. Chapters are also sold separately by the publisher. Bibliographical references that are already given in the book under review are not repeated here.

2 The official programme of the conference can be consulted at: <http://web.philo.ulg.ac.be/islamo/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2014/11/programme2013.pdf>. The same programme in another format is here: https://www.academia.edu/4535069/Autograph_holograph_and_authorial_manuscripts_in_Arabic_script_10-11_October_2013_-_University_of_Li%C3%A8ge_B

the table of contents of the book that grew out of it. We focus here on those texts that eventually did find their way into the present volume.

The editors of the volume have largely followed Adam Gacek's definition of holograph and autograph. Gacek etymologically defines the former as: 'The holograph is a manuscript *wholly* written by the author, an autograph can mean a person's own signature or a short statement signed by him' (p. 3). However, as Gacek also writes, in common practice, the two terms have become interchangeable, and the difference between them remains debatable. I have the impression that the term 'holograph' has never become very popular in scholarly usage. Gacek has a contribution to the present volume in which he elaborates on holographs and autographs. Bauden and Franssen have added a third, related concept, the 'authorial manuscript'. With this they mean manuscripts 'copied by a scribe and then revised by the author of the text' (p. 3).

Bauden's extensive work on al-Maqrīzī's autographs in numerous publications may have led him to distinguishing the category of 'authorial manuscripts' because he knew such a manuscript very well, MS Leiden Or. 560. Many shorter texts in that volume were written out by a scribe and corrected by the author, al-Maqrīzī (see Bauden's description of the manuscript on p. 231, where he calls this convolute volume an 'authorial manuscript'). An image of al-Maqrīzī's handwriting, neither autograph, nor holograph but authentic nevertheless that was taken from this Leiden manuscript is found on p. 219 of the book. Al-Maqrīzī's involvement had already been recorded by Rinck in 1790,³ and possibly others, but only more than half a century later, in 1847, Dozy was the first to really capitalize on it.

According to Gacek's definition, these texts are simply autograph copies. However, in the present volume (pp. 57, 62, 72), Gacek also uses the term 'authorial', but rather to indicate any intervention by the author of a text. For 'authorial', see also the 'Index of Technical Terms' at the end of the volume (pp. 450–454). To keep things simple, I prefer to use the term 'autograph' for reference to the variants that are so meticulously distinguished by Bauden and Franssen,

elgium_ (both sites accessed on July 17, 2020). As a member of the scientific committee, I was asked, in March–May 2013, to give a review of some of the abstracts. I cannot remember that I did. Anyhow, as I have not really been involved in the organization of the conference, nor did I attend, I feel no conflict of interest writing here about its proceedings. Élise Franssen has published a short account of the conference, 'Autograph/Holograph and Authorial Manuscripts in Arabic Scripts' in: *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies Newsletter* 7 (January 2014), pp. 9–10.

3 *Macrizi Historia Regum Islamiticorum in Abyssinia. Interpretatus est et una cum Abulfedae Descriptione regionum nigritarum e codd. Biblioth. Leidensis*. Ed. Fridericus Theodorus Rinck. Leiden: Sam. & Joh. Luchtmans, 1790, p. vii.

and their co-authors. Sometimes, however, one can observe that the more precise one tries to be by inventing special terminologies, the greater the lack of clarity becomes.

Three contributions to the volume, Chapters 2, 4, and 10 (together accounting for more than half of the content of the volume), treat 'holographs whose author is unknown' (p. 29). How these artifacts would fit into the definitions of 'holograph', 'autograph', and 'authorial manuscript' as discussed in the introduction, is not made clear. For me this is not a problem, but perhaps the editors could have chosen a more inclusive title for their volume.

Authorial interventions that can be gleaned from the manuscripts have a much wider scope than what the 'authorial manuscript' that is presented in the present book, stands for. A comparative approach on the idea of 'authorial' would have given the editors a wider and more promising perspective than they have now adopted for themselves. In fact, 'authorial philology' has been invented quite a while ago and is described as:

... a specific branch of philology related to the study of the variants introduced by authors on their own manuscripts or print editions. Only recently this particular kind of philology has been recognized as a subject in its own right, different from traditional philology (or philology of the copy, which studies transmission variants), with its own history and methods, capable of providing refined research tools and a deeper knowledge of specific texts through the analysis of their internal development, thus reaching fundamental critical results.⁴

It becomes clear from this volume that the two editors (authors of the introduction and chapters 5 and 4, respectively) have been influenced by the methods of script analysis that were developed by the French graphologist Marie-Jeanne Sedeyn. Franssen's conclusion (p. 111) reads as an opening to Bauden's work on the autographs of al-Maqrīzī, the next-following chapter. Even if graphology in its vulgarized form is as controversial as astrology is in its relationship to modern astronomy, that does not automatically mean that all its approaches to the phenomenon of script are misguided. However, caution must be exercised in this matter. While applying graphological methods to scripts other than those for which they were originally developed, the Latin script, Franssen and Bauden

4 See the dedicated website, moderated by Paola Italia (University of Bologna), according to the ideas developed on the subject by Dante Isella (1922–2007) <http://www.filologiadautore.it/wp/> (last accessed January 28, 2021). Even if Isella worked with relative recent material, his ideas are relevant on a scale wider than that.

have silently assumed Sedeyn's method to be applicable to the Arabic script as well. This assumption of applicability remains without base. Sedeyn's method has many interesting, maybe even promising features, but it is not automatically a universally valid approach to the idea of script in general, nor, by the way, was it designed as such by its inventor. Would Sedeyn's work be the only source nowadays for a rational discussion on handwriting? I cannot believe it, but the two editors fail to tell their readers *why* they have chosen to use Sedeyn's method out of alternatives, nor do they argue *why* her method can be adopted for Arabic without further ado. More ideas than Sedeyn's have been formulated about script, and certainly quite a few are more pertinent to Arabic than hers. In this connection, Thomas Milo's idea of 'script grammar', which exclusively focusses on the structure of Arabic script, may be mentioned here as a potentially fertile approach.⁵ The work of Dimitrios Meletis,⁶ who has developed the general idea of the grapheme as a universal unit of writing, is yet another approach, and not the only one.

If producing a critical edition of a text, certainly in classical studies, is an attempt at the reconstruction, with the strict application of a number of well-described techniques, of the archetypal version of a certain text, to have an author's own copy at hand is an ideal situation. In textual criticism of the classical languages, the autograph copies are usually considered to be lost, and that unfortunate circumstance has caused the philologists to develop complex methods to come as close as possible to that ever elusive author's text. Reconstructing the archetype, as a sort of Platonic idea of the autograph, became their next-best solution.⁷ However, the availability of an autograph, as is the case in both medieval East and West, is not always the solution for overcoming text-critical obstacles. What, for instance, are we to think of a circumstance in which more than one autograph manuscript of the same text is available, but whereas these have variant readings between them?⁸ And how should one

5 Thomas Milo, 'Towards Arabic Historical Script Grammar through Contrastive Analysis of Qur'ān Manuscripts', in Robert M. Kerr & Thomas Milo (eds.), *Writings and Writing: Investigations in Islamic Text and Script* [...]. Cambridge: Archetype, 2013, pp. 249–292.

6 Dimitrios Meletis, *The Nature of Writing. A Theory of Grapholinguistics*. Brest: Fluxus Editions, 2020. Online available at <http://www.fluxus-editions.fr/meletis-the-nature-of-writing-2020.pdf> (accessed January 27, 2021).

7 After my 'Establishing the stemma' of 1988, which the editors mention in their introduction (p. 18), I have further developed this theme in my 'The Philologist's Stone. The Continuing Search for the Stemma', in: *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies Newsletter* 6 (July 2013), pp. 34–38.

8 An example out of many of a more-than-one-autograph text tradition in Arabic literature is the work by Ibn Sūdūn (c. 810/1407–868/1464). It was described by Arnoud Vrolijk in his *Bring-*

handle evident authorial and/or copyist's mistakes that have found their way into the text of the autograph? What is the significance of variants if an author has continued to work on his text over a long period, Ibn Khaldūn's life-long revision of his own work being a case in point? The 'earliest Oriental version' of the *Muqaddima* is not preserved as an autograph copy. It was copied by the Ottoman polymath Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Ma'rūf (1521–1585) from an exemplar of which we now have lost sight, and Redjala's edition of it is based on MS Leiden Or. 48. As that manuscript now seems to be the only copy preserved of this version, one wonders how it fits into the categories of textual transmission discussed in the present book.⁹

To all such questions, the authors of this volume have come up with interesting answers and enlightening discussions. Here below, I succinctly discuss the articles of the book one after the other.

2 The Texts

1 – The 'Introduction' (in English, unsigned, the two editors of the volume are assumed to be its authors, pp. 1–37) contains two parts. First, it provides an introduction to the field of Islamic manuscript studies, which is always useful. This is followed by a survey of the contents of the present volume. Important themes connected with autograph manuscripts are treated: authorship; terminology; bibliographical control; palaeography; holographs as collectibles (with reference to al-Maqrīzī [of course] and Ibn Khaldūn); textual criticism; and digital humanities. Memorable in this introduction is the great extent to which Oriental codicological and palaeographical methodology are connected with practices and methods that originally were developed for Western manuscripts.¹⁰ The editors' comparative approach adds value. The contents of the present volume are summarized on pp. 25–29.

ing a laugh to a scowling face: A study and critical edition of the Nuzhat al-nufūs wa-muḍḥik al-'abūs by 'Alī Ibn Sūdūn al-Bašbuḡāwī. Leiden: CNWS, 1998.

- 9 See Ibn Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddima. Première version orientale*. Éditée par Mbarek Redjala. Aix-en-Provence: Éditions universitaires, 1981–1983 (2 volumes), and see also M'barek Redjala, 'Un texte inédit de la *Muqaddima*', in *Arabica* 22 (1975), pp. 320–323, with comment by Azzedine Guellouz in *Arabica* 23 (1976), pp. 308–309.
- 10 Sometimes, I ask myself whether 'Western' palaeographers and codicologists will ever refer to advanced methodical work done by their 'non-Western' counterparts. So far, I have not seen it happen, and I am afraid that this moment still lies far beyond the horizon of our imagination.

2 – In her ‘Comment reconnaître un autographe parmi les papyrus littéraires grecs? L’exemple du P. Oxy. 74.4970’ (pp. 38–54), Marie-Hélène Marganne is the odd one out in this volume. Her article does not adhere to the subject of the volume. While her article is an excellent piece of work—indeed, I read it with pleasure—it is clear that it is out of place here. The editors of the present volume would have rendered the author a much better service if they had found her a more fitting vehicle for her work. However, Marganne is a leading figure of the ‘Centre de documentation de papyrologie littéraire’ (CeDoPaL) at the University of Liège, so the editors of the volume, who are from the same university, may not have wished to exclude their colleague. CeDoPaL provides a universal system of reference for papyrological studies. In the context of autograph papyri, the author uses several distinguishing characteristics: ‘*auteur, oeuvre, date, provenance, forme, matériau, mise en page, main*’ (p. 47). Ultimately, the general question formulated in the title of the article is not answered by the author’s treatment of her example. At best, the Greek text that she analyses is a draft version, but why it would be a draft version *in the author’s hand* does not become clear.

3 – Adam Gacek, in his ‘Arabic Holographs: Characteristics and Terminology’ (pp. 55–77) provides his readers with an elementary and thorough overview of the terminology. Gacek’s work, and especially his *Vademecum* of 2012, is of such great value that it should be on the desk of anyone who is seriously involved in the study of Islamic manuscripts. In his contribution to the present volume, Gacek elaborates on his earlier work and provides his readership with sound and clear definitions. These are elementary and unavoidable. One would wish, generally speaking, for more students of Islamic manuscripts to familiarize themselves with Gacek’s work. His subtitles reveal his systematic approach: 1. Holograph versus autograph; 2. Drafts; 3. Fair copies; 4. Arabic terminology; 5. Fraudulent and authentic attestations; 6. Some questions to consider; 7. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī and his holographs; and 8. The author’s signature. Together, these issues tell a story, which is illustrated with a well-chosen array of illustrations from an impressive diversity of origins. The article looks like an extended version of his *Vademecum*. Essential reading!

4 – In “*Bi-khatt mu‘allifihi*” ... Vraiment?! L’apport de l’analyse judiciaire d’écritures à l’étude des manuscrits arabes. Méthodes et étude de cas: la recension égyptienne des *Mille et une Nuits*’ (pp. 78–135), Élise Franssen offers a different approach to the study of handwriting, that of graphology, which term literally means ‘study of writing’, but the term is not neutral anymore. Franssen quickly discards graphology as a method for learning more about someone’s character, and rightly so, as that cannot be a modern science. Her contribution consists of two parts: an extensive description of the ‘Standard Handwriting

Objective Examination' (SHOE), a method developed in 1999 by Marie-Jeanne Sedeyn, a French graphological expert whose work is largely unknown in academic writing, nor very much available online. The other half is the application of Sedeyn's method to a group of manuscripts of the Arabian Nights.

Franssen's approach to Arabic script, in particular her description of graphics (p. 85, figure 4.1), shows her simplified outlook on script. She could at least have cared for other approaches, such as the font anatomy that was devised by graphic designer Smitshuijzen.¹¹ Consequently, she lacks the formal approach marking the relationship between the part of the letter that is realized in the area of the n-height (a typographical term), and the ascenders and descenders. A study of Meletis' *Grapholinguistics* would have offered more alternatives.

5 – Frédéric Bauden, in 'Maqriziana xv: The Characteristics of al-Maqrīzī's Handwriting' (pp. 136–231), begins with autobiographical details about his own discovery of al-Maqrīzī's autographs and takes his readers on an unsurpassed palaeographical adventure. He offers a detailed descriptive analysis of al-Maqrīzī's handwriting. His study material represents over fifty years of that scholar's life and is available in many thousands of pages of autograph text, preserved in collections in four continents.¹² The article is a huge job—it takes the author almost a hundred pages—and, in fact, there does not exist a great number of Arab authors with whom one could organize a similar research. It is a bit disappointing, therefore, that, when Bauden finally tries to extrapolate his data to the future, he admits, after a short discussion on artificial intelligence, 'that, ultimately, the human eye remains the best tool in this field, though clearly, confirmation from a program will be helpful, particularly in cases where an expert is not (anymore) at hand.' (p. 218). What then, one asks oneself, is the value of this detailed descriptive approach?

With all the praise that Bauden's work in this volume deserves, I permit myself a few remarks that go beyond praise. Firstly, there is his creation of a private frame of reference to his study materials, consisting of a system of sigla (twenty-four are given). I can understand why he does so (it saves space), but this makes his argument less accessible for the general reader. His work becomes a sort of microcosmos, a walled community to which one only has access if one accepts his lingo of abbreviative formulae. Secondly, Bauden's modern approach of script opens the door to anachronisms. At several

11 Edo Smitshuijzen, *Arabic Font Specimen Book*. Amsterdam: De Buitenlant, 2009, p. 19.

12 I would like to mention here my study on the earlier provenance of MS Leiden Or. 14.533, yet another Maqrīzī autograph: 'Reflections on al-Maqrīzī's Biographical Dictionary', in Obada Kohela (ed.), *History and Islamic Civilisation. Essays in honour of Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid*. Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣriyya al-Lubnāniyya, 2014, pp. 93–114.

instances he introduces the concept of speed of writing (pp. 158, 181–183, 188) without making clear whether or not this has ever crossed al-Maqrīzī's mind. In numerous examples of al-Maqrīzī's handwriting (e.g. figures 5.8 (p. 167), 5.11 (p. 170), 5.12 (p. 178), 5.13 (p. 185), 5.18 (p. 198)), I saw that he uses *Ihmāl* signs.¹³ *Ihmāl* is a largely redundant script feature, and it is problematic to let it concur with a preoccupation of speed. Writing *Ihmāl* signs only takes more time, not less.

6 – In 'The Art of Copying: Mamlūk Manuscript Culture in Theory and Practice' (pp. 232–259), Elias Muhanna discusses 'strategies of collation, edition, and source management used to produce large compilations' (p. 232), of which the Mamlūk era abounds. He is the only author in the present volume who quotes Rosenthal's seminal *Technique and Approach*, a work that everybody should have within reach of hand.¹⁴ Muhanna's focus is on the Egyptian secretarial encyclopedist al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333) and his huge *Nihāyat al-Arab*, of which several volumes are said to be 'holographs', even if some of these assumed holographs show different styles of script. Muhanna, who is also the author of a successful translation of parts of the *Nihāyat al-Arab*,¹⁵ aptly guides his readers through this labyrinth, and he treats his readers to yet another of his findings, a copy of al-Bukhārī's *al-Ġāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* in al-Nuwayrī's hand.

7 – Kristina Richardson, in her 'The Holograph Notebooks of Akmal al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muflīḥ (d. 1011/1603)' (pp. 260–276), treats the phenomenon of the *Tadhkira*, the notebook or commonplace book, with the example of three manuscripts, all autograph copies, originating from the sixteenth-century Damascene scholar Ibn Muflīḥ. Richardson investigates these three volumes in particular for their potential as sources of family history. After introductory sections on Ibn Muflīḥ and the genre of the *Tadhkira*, the author examines three manuscripts of Ibn Muflīḥ's *Tadhkiras*. These are preserved in Oxford, Berlin, and Beirut. They are full of interesting and highly readable details on the private and professional life of Ibn Muflīḥ and members of his family, all gleaned from these very personal copies of Ibn Muflīḥ's work.¹⁶

13 See my description of the phenomenon of *Ihmāl*: 'The Neglect Neglected. To Point or Not to Point, That is the Question', in *Journal of Islamic manuscripts* 6 (2015), pp. 376–408. *Ihmāl* is almost completely ignored in the present volume (the notable exceptions are on pp. 347, 392).

14 Franz Rosenthal, *The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship*. Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1947.

15 Elias Muhanna, *The World in a Book. Al-Nuwayri and the Islamic Encyclopedic Tradition*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018.

16 Details to be corrected: al-Nahrawānī should read al-Nahrawālī, and what is mentioned as his history of Mecca and of Yemen are, in fact, two separate texts (p. 262).

8 – In ‘Al-‘Aynī’s Working Method for His Chronicles: Analysis of His Holograph Manuscripts’ (pp. 277–299), Nobutaka Nakamachi describes the content of three holograph volumes with text by the Egyptian historian Badr al-Dīn al-‘Aynī (d. 855/1451). The author focuses on three holograph/autograph manuscripts, which are kept in Istanbul and in Paris. Extensive comparative tables (pp. 282–288, 289–291, 292) illustrate the author’s research, and, therefore, al-‘Aynī’s working method. The events treated by al-‘Aynī are mostly of two kinds: happenings of all sorts (*Hawādith*) and obituaries (*Wafayāt*). Al-‘Aynī’s working method is convincingly analysed (pp. 292 ff.). This is illustrated in micro-format by the account of the circumstances of the death of Sultan Barqūq in 801/1399 (p. 294). At the end of his contribution, Nakamachi provides a short survey of elements of intertextuality between al-‘Aynī and al-Maqrīzī (pp. 297–298).

9 – Retsu Hashizume discusses the complex textual transmission history of Ibn Khaldūn’s *al-Ta’rīf* in ‘Textual Criticism of the Manuscripts of Ibn Khaldūn’s *Autobiography*’ (pp. 300–322). He calls his research ‘textual criticism’, although he adduces little internal textual evidence from the manuscripts by him. He focuses on the *Ta’rīf*, without further involving the textual history of other works by Ibn Khaldūn, which makes his entire argument problematic. He sets out to ascertain ‘which is Ibn Khaldūn’s holograph of *al-Ta’rīf*’ (p. 300). In his conclusion, after a discussion clothed in a terminologically confusing discourse (all these archetypes!), he identifies that holograph as MS Istanbul Aya-sofya 3200. He does so with philological considerations rather than on palaeographical evidence. However, Hashizume’s remarks hardly exceed the scope of Muḥammad b. Tāwīt al-Ṭanḡī’s notes in his edition of the *Rihla* of 1951.¹⁷ In 1952, Walter J. Fischel, without knowing of Ibn Tāwīt’s work, published on the same subject and also came to the conclusion that the Ayasofya manuscript was ‘the oldest and most reliable’. So, what is new under the sun?

10 – Julien Dufour & Anne Regourd discuss ‘Les *safīnas* yéménites’ (pp. 323–435). At first view, this article seems to have the size of a small monograph. This is not the case, however. The text of the article, in which six *Safīnas* (notebook, scrapbook, ‘calepin’ in French) are treated, occupies pp. 323–354. These six *Safīnas* are manuscripts in Paris (No. 1), Ṣan‘ā’, Dār al-Makhṭūṭāt (No. 2), Ṣan‘ā’, private collection (No. 3), and Princeton (Nos. 4, 5 and 6). Most of the remaining space (pp. 358–435) is used for an Appendix with a detailed tabular description of the content of the three Princeton *Safīnas*. The contents of Nos. 1–3 had

17 I used the edition by Muḥammad b. Tāwīt al-Ṭanḡī that was re-edited by Nūrī al-Ġarrāḥ and published in Beirut in 2003 by al-Mu‘assasa al-‘Arabiyya lil-Dirāsāt wal-Nashr.

already been described in the course of the article itself. Notebooks and convolute volumes, both in the form of a *Safīna* and a 'normal' rectangular book, are a common phenomenon in the Yemeni literary tradition, and a detailed description of the contents of several such volumes as the authors provide here, is an important addition to our knowledge of this genre. The article opens with a most enlightening description of the *Safīna* format and its history. To this could have been added a reference to the term *junk*, the Chinese sailing vessel. The authors do mention the Persian *ǧung* (see about it Dehkhodā, *Lughatnāma*, s.v.¹⁸) or *jong*, which means both 'ship' and 'collective volume of smaller pieces', therefore one could even call it 'a shipload full of a variety of pieces'. Of particular value are the authors' remarks on the *ḥumaynī* texts, texts in non-classical Arabic, in Yemeni scrapbooks (pp. 329–331).

3 By Way of Conclusion

I have a few more points of general criticism, which concern presentation, rather than content.

The list of quoted manuscripts, an important item in any manuscript study, lacks references to the pages in the book where these manuscripts are mentioned. Thereby the list loses much of its practical value.

In many instances, the editors have permitted 'their' authors not to give the numerous illustrations meaningful captions. The essentials (bibliographical references) are always there but a few lines of text explaining the choice of a particular illustration are dearly missing. In captions an author should tell his readers what they are looking at. The publisher should have taken this to heart, as most academic editors with all their talents lack the experience to look after such details and the publisher could have taken better care, or promote such a feature to his house style.

Finally, the fact that not all methods proposed by some of the authors are beyond doubt, does not diminish the value of their collective effort. This is an important volume and a giant step forward in the research on Arabic manuscripts.

Leiden, February 7, 2021

18 'Alī Akbar Dihkhudā, *Lughatnāma*. Ed. Muḥammad Mu'īn. Tehran 1337 Sh (1958), vol. 15.