Bringing Up Underground Corpora: Ethics and Manuscripts in an Age of Digital Reproduction

Ingrid Austveg Evans

Abstract

While methodological considerations of positionality and disciplinary reflexivity have long been standard components of ethnographic studies, this is still not the case in codicology. Within the field of Arabic and Islamic manuscripts, recent debates on provenance and the use of digital archives have once again emphasised the need for increased awareness of issues tied to the individual researcher's access to and use of collections located in both the Global North and Global South. This article draws on my experience of working with digital reproductions of premodern Arabic manuscripts from my living room in Berlin during the COVID-19 pandemic. Beginning with the notion of unauthorised underground manuscript corpora that circulate among researchers, I provide an overview of current debates on the ethical dimensions of digital codicology in Arabic and Islamic Studies. Pointing out the need for a synoptic consideration of colonial history and researcher positionality, I ultimately argue for the methodological value of including an "epistemic politics" at the forefront of manuscript research.

Keywords: digital humanities, research ethics, Arabic manuscripts, codicology, provenance, reflexivity, research methodology, archives

In recent years, manuscript collections from all over the world have been increasingly disseminated and shared through digitisation, a process that radically transforms both the provenance of manuscripts and the ways in which they can be accessed by readers.[1] Provided that the resulting collections are not hidden behind a paywall, manuscript digitisation is a process that allows anyone with an internet connection and digital literacy to access them. In line with this democratising tendency, the contemporary landscape of digitisation by no means reflects a monolithic top-down approach, with only state-funded institutions providing access to individual users. In the case of manuscripts originating from

outside a European or North American context, neither does the increased access involve a unidirectional flow of digital repatriation from the Global North to the Global South. Rather, the world of digital manuscript circulation is populated by a diverse cast of actors. In addition to the institutionalised digital reproductions of collections shared by libraries and universities, individual researchers and readers also engage in many forms of digital file-sharing among themselves. Some of these forms of file-sharing skirt existing paywalls and copyright laws.

The field of Islamic Studies and its more philologically inclined sister discipline, Arabic Studies, have been eager to embrace the opportunities of the evolving field of digital humanities (cf. Muhanna 2016, Miller et al. 2018, van Lit 2020). Discussions of the ethical dimensions of the new possibilities brought by digitisation have, however, lagged behind the rapid proliferation of text encoding, optic character recognition and multilingual text databases. In a parallel observation, while considerations of researcher positionality and disciplinary reflexivity have long been standard components of studies based on ethnographic methodologies, this is far from being the case within the artefact-oriented discipline of codicology, or the study of manuscripts. The discrepancy between the rapid expansion of the digital circulation of premodern manuscripts and the comparative scarcity of reflection on its ethical and epistemological dimensions is of urgent importance to Arabic and Islamic Studies, particularly because of the colonial-era origins of many manuscript collections held in state and university libraries in the Global North.

Responding to this gap, the present article aims to spur increased reflection on the use and circulation of digital Arabic-Islamic manuscripts as an organic part of any research project engaging with them. My aim with this discussion is to broaden and connect disparate strands of ongoing conversations among scholars rather than to offer definitive answers in the face of a diverse and rapidly evolving field. I contend that as researchers, we must constantly ask ourselves how we should approach manuscripts and reflect on our approach to them at a time when we are accustomed to having easy access to them on our laptops. Seeking to answer this question inevitably involves adopting a comparative perspective on the practices of various actors involved in the circulation of digital manuscripts. Concretely, how does non-institutional file-sharing on social media channels compare with the state-funded digitisation projects of major European university libraries, many of which built the bulk of their collections during the colonial period? More broadly, to rephrase the title of Walter Benjamin's celebrated essay (Benjamin 2015), what happens to individual manuscripts in an age of digital reproduction? How does our changed interaction with them force us to rethink our positionality as researchers?

---

1   The field of archaeology distinguishes between "provenience" (the place where an object was discovered) and "provenance" (its subsequent travels up to the collection in which it is currently kept); cf. Mazza 2016: 16.

This article offers two provisional answers to these questions. First, I argue that researchers in our field should always be transparent about how they have accessed digital manuscripts, for both ethical and epistemological reasons. This transparency is essential both for the reconstruction of methodology and for historicising our interaction with physical artefacts whose current location was often determined either by European men of means during the colonial period or by high-standing officials of the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, transparency is required to ensure that modern-day actors based in the Global South and/or operating outside an academic setting are properly credited for their work in making manuscripts available. Secondly, I argue that as researchers, we need to rethink our relationship to libraries and archives in the face of the massive diversification of actors engaged in the circulation of manuscripts in the digital age. This involves reflection not only on our own positionality as researchers working on manuscripts, but also on the democratising potential of this proliferation of actors.

Accordingly, this article is structured as follows. I begin with an anecdote from my own research experience by recounting my discovery, early during my PhD studies, of what I will call "underground corpora" of manuscripts. This term refers to manuscript collections that are formed, shared, and circulated by researchers who often bypass the rules of the libraries where those manuscripts are currently located. To exemplify a typical segment of such circulation processes, I detail the trajectory of one manuscript that became key to my research, tracing its journey from a sultanic library in Ottoman Istanbul to its reproduction on a laptop screen in my living room in Berlin. Building on this vignette from my own research, I provide an overview of current methodological, epistemological and ethical debates that speak to that experience.

The three ongoing debates within Arabic and Islamic Studies that I perceive as most relevant to the travels of underground corpora are: first, the increased focus on material philology, or the study of manuscripts as objects with their own biographies; next, the related trend of studies delving into particular collections of manuscripts with a shared provenance history (also referred to as manuscript corpora); and, finally, the ongoing discussions on ethical dimensions, which have hitherto been conducted mostly on blogs rather than in research articles. Ultimately, this overview of the state of the art emphasises the need to strengthen the conversations between these three trends by fostering a synoptic reading of the colonial legacy of Arab-Islamic codicology with considerations of researcher positionality. In the final section of this article, I end by calling on the individual archival researcher to historicise their own scholarly practices, drawing on Sheldon Pollock's (2009) notion of an "epistemic politics" for a philology (and codicology) of the future.

From sultanic libraries to a living room in Berlin

When I first started my PhD at Freie Universität Berlin in 2018, my intention was to write a thesis on fourteenth-century literary culture in Greater Syria that would draw primarily on the tried-and-true philological method known as close reading (cf. Pollock 2009: 934). My research centred on the prose works of the poet and author Ibn Nubāta al-Miṣrī (d. 1366), a prolific writer on the premodern literary scene in Damascus who employed various creative strategies to make a name for himself both among his peers and for posterity. Taking Ibn Nubāta's prose works as a representative case study, I aimed to investigate how these strategies were manifested in different forms of literary practice, particularly centred on authorial self-promotion. I thereby sought to contribute to the fields of fourteenth-century Islamic intellectual history and the history of the Arabic book by combining philological analysis with the social history of book culture.

It became clear early on during my archival research that manuscripts would have to play an important role in my project, for the pragmatic reason that most of Ibn Nubāta's works are not available in print. Fortunately, the abundance of manuscripts of his works that have been preserved from the precolonial period meant that there was no lack of primary sources to draw upon. Among the most important sources for my thesis were two autographs, or manuscripts of works by Ibn Nubāta written entirely in his own hand. After orienting myself among the corpus of manuscripts and the printed primary sources, I realised that if I was to have any hope of providing an adequate account of Ibn Nubāta's literary practices, I would have to combine a philological with a material approach to the nitty-gritty of the manuscripts, and especially to the intimacy of the two autographs.

As circumstances would have it, the archival phase of my research coincided almost entirely with the lockdowns occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Fortunately for me, however, I quickly discovered that there was a network of researchers willing to share digitised PDFs of manuscripts to such an extent that the need to travel to a real-world archive and examine original manuscripts with the help of gloves and a magnifying glass was all but obviated. A concrete example of how I was able to benefit from the trend of file-sharing among colleagues is my use of a manuscript classified under the shelfmark of Ayasofya 4045 at the Süleymaniye library in Istanbul, Turkey's largest collection of Arabic manuscripts and one of the most important collections in the world for Arabic and Islamic manuscripts overall (cf. Erünsal 2022: 66–70).

This manuscript landed in my inbox one day, sent to me by a Berlin-based colleague who was well acquainted with my research. Like many manuscripts,

MS Ayasofya 4045 has a rich social history, segments of which can be traced from the manuscript notes jotted down by various readers on its title page. These notes tell us that long before a digital copy of it landed in my inbox, the manuscript passed through the hands and ownership of noted poets, scholars and book collectors in Mamluk and later Ottoman Syria, before ending up in sultanic libraries in Istanbul. The front page carries the stamps of two Ottoman sultans, Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512) and Maḥmūd I (r. 1730–1754), informing us that these sultans kept the copy in their libraries following the Ottoman conquest of its Arab provinces. Thanks to another precious source, an early sixteenth-century catalogue inventory of Sultan Bayezid II's library in Istanbul, we know that the manuscript was classified by the royal librarian ʿAtufi in a collection containing books of similar genres (Markiewicz 2019: 670). By pin-pointing the manuscript's location to Istanbul in the early sixteenth century, Bayezid II's library stamp dates its arrival in the Ottoman capital from Greater Syria before the Ottoman Empire's conquest of Mamluk Egypt in 1517.

Since I wanted to publish images of the autograph (as well as of other pages of manuscripts kept in the Süleymaniye library) in my thesis, I needed to obtain the library's permission to do so. Although it became clear that the lockdowns were lifting and I would be able to travel to Istanbul before completing my thesis, it seemed wasteful to book a round-trip flight with the sole purpose of obtaining permission to publish images of manuscript folios I had already identified and selected. When it turned out that it was possible to purchase the relevant reproductions in PDF form by sending an email to the library, the decision to order them online rather than go through the identical process at the collection's physical location in Istanbul became clear. Here it is important to note that just viewing the manuscripts on the on-site computers of the Süley-maniye is free of charge. For this reason, the process of purchasing a repro-duction in person – browsing the manuscripts through the on-site catalogues, identifying the reproductions to be purchased and finally paying for them at the front desk – would have been essentially the same as the remote process. The only difference was that I had not originally viewed the manuscript at the library itself, but rather via a colleague in Germany.

My experience with MS Ayasofya 4045 became emblematic of the methodo-logical approach of my PhD research, which relied exclusively on digital re-productions of manuscripts. As may be imagined, I was thrilled to have the chance to zoom in on the handwriting of the fourteenth-century hero of my thesis at leisure in my living room. At the same time, my experience of receiving digital files raised several disconcerting questions to which I failed to find satis-factory answers in the existing methodological literature on codicology. The following section discusses the wider context of digital file-sharing, of which my experience was a part, as well as current viewpoints on this practice.

Researchers, readers and uploaders

My initial experience with MS Ayasofya 4045 – which I obtained from a researcher with access to the Süleymaniye collection – was far from unique. Major collections kept in libraries in the WANA (West Asia and North Africa) region circulate among researchers in zip-files, are kept on portable hard drives or migrate through social media platforms like Telegram or WhatsApp. The quality of these digitised archives is highly variable. Some collections circulate in the form of microfilm pictures that were taken several decades ago, while other PDFs contain high-resolution photographs taken recently by library staff, presumably the very files that can be consulted at the on-site computers of these libraries, and have either been purchased and subsequently shared by other researchers or circulated by librarians themselves.

Researchers are often loath to admit to their own shortcuts in the archival process. It is therefore impossible to know exactly how widespread the use of unauthorised digital file-sharing is. What is clear is that there is a difference between simply viewing digital reproductions of a manuscript and publishing these reproductions. Since libraries must be properly credited by any serious publication using pictures of books from their holdings, researchers must document their permission to reproduce them. Accordingly, a method available to researchers eager to keep up with their colleagues but not wishing to endanger their academic integrity by risking accusations of copyright infringement is to gain an initial overview of the necessary documents and texts with the help of these circulating online underground corpora of manuscripts. Having identified which documents they need, researchers can then take a quick and cost-efficient trip to the library in question and pay for the permission to depict in their forthcoming publications just those pages that they have already identified ahead of time. Some libraries also offer to sell access to the relevant reproductions online, again obviating the need to physically visit the archive. This, as recounted above, was what I did in the case of the manuscripts from the Süleymaniye library.

Having paid the required fee, researchers can properly credit the libraries and rest assured that they have fulfilled their duty as far as the legal issues are concerned. They might justify this practice to themselves on the ethical level by the fact that most European university libraries (with important exceptions) have made parts or all of their manuscript holdings digitally accessible by now (cf. van Lit 2020: 73–76), and that keeping digital collections behind paywalls hinders the principle of scientific open access, itself a democratising approach to the dissemination of knowledge that carries considerable ethical weight (Hemmungs Wirtén 2020: 366–367). It can also be argued that as long as reproductions are paid for, greater circulation of manuscripts online might actually

increase library revenues, while also benefitting the climate – by reducing unnecessary travel to libraries in person – and simultaneously sparing the manuscripts themselves, by protecting them from excessive handling. The value of increasing library revenues is not to be underestimated at a time when decreased funding means that libraries struggle to find the means required for the expensive enterprise of digitising, and therefore making accessible, their collections of manuscripts (cf. Riedel 2016: 76–77).

My experience with MS Ayasofya 4045, as described above, is an example of the proper acknowledgement of a library by paying for the reproduction of a particular source. The uploading and downloading of such individual manuscripts is, in fact, a more common method of sharing digital reproductions, rather than the circulation of the digital holdings of entire libraries, such as the Süleymaniye in Istanbul or the equally famous (at least among researchers into Arabic and Islamic manuscripts) Dār al-kutub al-Miṣriyya (national library) in Cairo.

To understand the epistemological implications of the circulation of entire collections versus reproductions of individual manuscripts, we must first clarify the term "corpus" (plural "corpora") of manuscripts. In codicology, a "corpus" refers primarily to a collection of manuscripts or printed books that share a provenance history, typically because they were all once housed by a particular individual, group of individuals or library (cf. Hirschler 2020: 6–7). However, archival researchers also commonly employ the term "corpus" in a looser sense to refer to the sum of their chosen primary sources. In this sense, a corpus of manuscripts is delineated by the individual researcher and their research project and might refer, for example, to the collected works of a particular author, gathered on the basis of all the sources the researcher was able to locate both through the use of institutional archives and the shared files of fellow researchers and readers. My chosen term of "underground corpora", therefore, refers not only to the circulation among researchers of entire library collections, but also to new collections resulting from the reconfiguration of a manuscript's provenance through digitisation and circulation. This issue falls under the rubric of the epistemological consequences of quick and easy forms of sharing.

When the provenance of a manuscript is not properly accounted for because a reproduction was acquired online, a researcher risks undermining principles of epistemological and methodological transparency (cf. Palombo / Kristiansen 2019, van Lit 2020: 51). In other words, if the metadata on individual manuscripts provided by libraries in person to researchers are severed through the circulation of individual digital reproductions, it becomes difficult or impossible to situate the manuscript in its preceding context of provenance. Another epistemological consequence of insufficiently acknowledged digital filesharing is that the resulting picture of research practices will remain inaccurate. If researchers fail to fully reveal how they acquired reproductions of individual manuscripts,

it becomes difficult to reconstruct social practices surrounding research, including exchange and cooperation between researchers of various nationalities and institutional backgrounds.

This last issue is not purely epistemological; rather, it constitutes an ethical concern. As pointed out by Matthew Thomas Miller, Maxim G. Romanov and Sarah Bowen Savant (2018: 104–105), digital archives such as the massive online Arabic text corpus known as Shamela (*al-maktaba al-shāmila*) have become indispensable research tools for researchers of the Islamic textual tradition in the Global North (Shamela, n.d.). Text depositories like Shamela are typically compiled by actors in the WANA region who remain unacknowledged for their role in the knowledge production of the Global North when researchers fail to mention the digital archives that they first used to gain an overview of their sources (Miller / Romanov / Savant 2018: 105). This type of inequality between actors in knowledge production underscores the need to critically reflect on our own positionality as researchers acting in the context of global textual and codicological exchange (cf. Michel et al. 2024: 3). I will return to the question of positionality more thoroughly below. Because this question is closely linked to the issue of provenance, however, I will first delineate three current strands of research that engage critically with the historical trajectories of manuscripts.

Current research trends in codicology

The field of Arabic-Islamic codicology has witnessed at least three notable trends that engage with issues of provenance. The first of these is an increased attention to the materiality and particularity of manuscript copies, and especially to manuscript notes written in the margins and on the flyleaves of the main texts (see for example Görke / Hirschler 2011, Liebrenz 2016, Franssen 2022). The main goal of research into manuscript notes is to increase understanding of the social history of manuscripts through methodological approaches that draw on material philology (cf. Nichols 1990, Hirschler 2020: 13).

This goal is pursued by focusing on such questions as the readership, ownership and travels of text copies. The most common types of manuscript notes that reveal such social history are so-called endowment statements, ownership notes and consultation marks. Reconstructing which hands the manuscript in question has passed through enables us to reconstruct the trajectory of the manuscript itself. In turn, foregrounding a text's social history makes an implicit argument about what is worth studying. While nineteenth-century philologists working in European libraries could ignore the need to discuss how exactly a manuscript had ended up in the collection they happened to be working in, the rising interest in marginalia and manuscript notes is a trend within the field of the history of the Arabic book that seeks to include all moments of a

manuscript's past. In this sense, the attention to manuscript notes underscores the importance of striving to grasp the full material and historical context of manuscripts as objects of cultural heritage, worthy of their own "biographies of things" (cf. Koptyoff 1986, Mazza 2019).

An overlapping research trend is the investigation of the history of selected text corpora in the first sense of the term delineated above, namely that of a collection of manuscripts or printed books with a shared provenance history. Because the focus here is not primarily on texts themselves, but rather on collections of manuscripts as a whole, this trend can be considered a specialised offshoot of material philology. In some cases, these studies rely on collections of manuscripts that are still kept in one place today (for example, Liebrenz 2016), while other researchers travel to archives to locate manuscripts that were once kept in a single collection, geographical area or cultural sphere, and also rely on tips from colleagues to help them to reconstruct that set of manuscripts (for example, d'Hulster 2021, Wynter-Stoner 2022, Hinrichsen 2024).

The studies in material philology cited in the preceding paragraphs provide careful expositions of manuscript provenance without primarily being concerned with research ethics. More explicit discussions of the accompanying ethical issues have hitherto been most pronounced in the academic blogosphere and on various university websites wrestling with the thorny question of how to deal concretely with manuscripts as specific cultural artefacts, in either digital or physical form (see for example Palombo / Kristiansen 2019, Mazza 2019, Michel et al. 2024). As the connection between manuscript provenance and cultural heritage might suggest, these discussions within codicology have been influenced by a longer tradition of provenance and restitution debates within the disciplines of art history and archaeology (see for example Savoy 2018, 2021; Förster 2022). Ethical discussions within archival research environments are also slowly moving towards institutionalisation, as we can see for example from the ethical guidelines directed at archival researchers and codicologists posted by the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures at the University of Hamburg (Michel et al. 2024).

One of these guidelines mentions the need to always obtain consent from "relevant institutions or, where applicable, communities of origin, especially when working with culturally sensitive objects such as sacred material" (Michel et al. 2024: 2). Although these guidelines nowhere mention the word "positionality", which still seems to be taboo among textually oriented disciplines like Islamic Studies and related philological fields, the message contained in the guidelines amounts to a textbook application of the concept.[2] The gist of the guideline is that, as a researcher most likely trained and based at a European university,

2   To be fair, the guidelines almost mention the concept: "The CSMC recognises the importance of synergic approaches to the protection of written artefacts and the importance of researchers' contribution in this regard. On account of the *position* of CSMC and its researchers in the international academic community, it is mandatory to provide clear guidelines on this issue" (Michel et al. 2024: 4; my emphasis).

conducting your research with the help of European funding, you would do well to remember that you are dealing with an artefact endowed with a particular cultural heritage. This artefact does not exist in a vacuum that you yourself are free to delimit, but rather is a part of a greater whole that predates your own research project and institutional background.

As pointed out by Cecilia Palombo and Birte Kristiansen in their post on the "Embedding Conquest" blog at the University of Leiden, it is especially easy to lose sight of the issue of provenance and the importance of engaging with it on an ethical level when manuscripts are digitised (Palombo / Kristiansen 2019). In certain cases, digitisation can even serve to "whitewash" the origins of artefact collections gathered under ethically and/or legally dubious circumstances. Christopher Prescott and Josephine Munch Rasmussen provide examples of such a case in their article (2020) on the much-scrutinised Norwegian manuscript collector Martin Schøyen and his associates, who were accused of not providing sufficient information on the provenance of artefacts. Ultimately, objects from the collection were impounded by the Norwegian government and returned to Iraq following a request from Iraqi authorities, in line with the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (cf. Regjeringen 2022, UNESCO n.d.).

In the case of academic and expert justification of, for example, a European responsibility to preserve objects deemed to be valuable "world heritage" from politically less stable regions in the face of the inability of those regions to do so themselves, self-serving and politically harmful arguments can serve to facilitate the illegal trafficking of artefacts (Prescott / Rasmussen 2020: 73). In response to obviously Orientalist or Eurocentric statements claiming a "European responsibility" towards the preservation of a global cultural heritage, it seems straightforward to say that an ethical minimum is to refrain from conducting research on any manuscript or artefact whose provenance has not been established to a satisfactory degree. This ethical baseline, again taken from archaeology, is becoming more established among researchers working with written artefacts as well (cf. Bagnall 2011: 143–144, Palombo / Kristiansen 2019). One example of this can be seen in the 2021 "joint resolution on the papyrus trade", issued by the American Society of Papyrologists and the Association Internationale des Papyrologues (Benaissa et al. 2021).[3] The statement recommends 1970 as the cut-off date for acquisitions with a murky provenance that can legitimately serve as objects of research, basing this recommendation on the UNESCO 1970 convention cited in the preceding paragraph.

In the case of Arab-Islamic manuscript studies conducted at European universities, the historical circumstance that most urgently calls for a synoptic

---

3   For a note on dealing with the issues of provenance, the antiquities trade and looting in the context of classical philology, see also the similar statement released by the Society for Classical Studies (Society for Classical Studies 2019).

consideration of these three trends in research is the overhanging spectre of colonialism. As Ahmed El Shamsy has recently described in an important book, many collections of manuscripts in European and North American university libraries today are the result of a nineteenth-century "book drain" from Greater Syria and Egypt initiated by a motley variety of book collectors, who "often in collaboration with or in the role of colonial administrators and consuls, made careers and fortunes out of the systematic, large-scale acquisition of Arabic manuscripts for the libraries of Europe, and later, North America" (El Shamsy 2020: 10).

Although it is essential not to underestimate the significance of colonialism for the current location of many manuscript collections in Europe and North America, it is equally important not to lose sight of the agency of Arab and Ottoman actors in colonial-era Arabic book circulation (cf. Hirschler / Erbay 2020). Focusing exclusively on European agency in the colonial period would yield a woefully incomplete picture of the book scene at the time (cf. Hirschler 2025). Rather, the power relations governing book circulation were complex, mirroring in their intricacy the interconnected worlds of researchers working today with written artefacts dating from the colonial and precolonial periods. The following section will delve into the second part of this equation, namely the issue of researcher positionality.

Towards a positionality of digital codicology

The tangled history of philology and colonialism has figured in the consciousness of a wider public at least since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* sent a storm raging through the humanities in 1978. However, the extent to which postcolonial and, more recently, decolonial debates have percolated into methodological discussions in the textual, as opposed to ethnographic, branches of Islamic and Arabic Studies is variable, but unfortunately not very striking (cf. Hammer 2016: 655).[4] As pointed out by Shahab Ahmed in his highly influential 2016 book *What Is Islam?*, serious theoretical and methodological discussions that engage with the very foundation of the discipline remain rare (2016: 114–115).

I suggest that even if we are acting in a legal manner and providing a full discussion of the provenance of the manuscripts being studied (cf. Mazza 2016: 24), the global nature of digital archives calls for a culture of sustained discussion of reflexivity and positionality in codicological studies. Here Islamic and Arabic Studies still have much to learn from disciplines such as anthropology, where a discussion of the researcher's positionality has long been a standard

---

4   Recently, this point was made in a Call for Papers for a conference within the field of Islamic theology at the Humboldt University of Berlin (Berliner Institut für Islamische Theologie 2023).

methodological component (cf. Clifford / Marcus 1986, Abu-Lughod 1996, Vassos 2002). In the following, I discuss some of the questions related to positionality that the digital methodology I employed during my archival research led me to reflect upon during the course of my PhD.

While I was conducting my archival research during the COVID-19 pandemic, I became increasingly conscious of how my experience of browsing digital archives from the solitude of my living room differed from the traditional embodied adventure of "going to the archives" (cf. Muhanna 2016b: 8). As pointed out by Olly Akkerman in a rare[5] discussion of how the positionality of the archival researcher affects the studies that emerge from their research activities, a feature of going to the archives that is usually neglected in research accounts is that they inevitably demand "an encounter with the social" (Akkerman 2022: 23). Akkerman mentions "librarians, shrine caretakers, custodians of mosques, archivists, antique dealers and collectors" (ibid.) as examples of the traditional types of actors that the fieldwork researcher would have social encounters with throughout their search for books and documents. When research takes place online, that process is turned on its head. In the digital world, the gatekeepers to collections are no longer the custodians of local shrines or small libraries, but rather the global research community, sharing files through online depositories. In this way, the files you end up with access to are the ones at the disposition of the researchers you happen to already be acquainted with.

In addition to the importance of knowing the right people, having the right gender expression often plays a key role in allowing a researcher access to a traditional physical archive. An example of this is provided by Akkerman in the context of her research on the Bohra Alawi "secret archive" in Gujarat (2022: 24, 35–38). While Akkerman's study is one of the few to explicitly discuss the relationship between elements of a researcher's positionality (including gender) and archival research, a glance at the history of European manuscript acquisition in the WANA region reveals the heavily gendered atmosphere that encompassed the enterprise. European manuscript collectors operating within a colonial context in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are sometimes referred to as Orientalist "manuscript hunters", a bellicose designation that carries associations with adventurous males acquiring books through stealth and know-how.[6]

If we now consider present-day practices of digital file-sharing, it becomes evident that conducting research digitally significantly alters the gendered dimension of codicology, along with all other facets of a researcher's individual positionality. This is because the faceless, anonymous character of digital ac-

---

5   For an edited volume that engages with questions of the positionality of archival researchers and how this shapes the studies resulting from their activities, see Burton 2006a.

6   For a discussion of the concept of book hunting among Renaissance humanists, see Gaisser 2020. For an account of selected European manuscript collectors operating in the WANA region in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see El-Ghawaby forthcoming. For a university website dedicated to "the great manuscript hunters", see Manuscript Hunters n.d.

cess demands nothing of its user other than an internet connection and digital literacy. Any obstacles previously posed by gatekeeper discrimination based on ethnicity or gender, or access barriers arising, for example, from a physical disability or lack of funds to travel, fall away. In this way, the anonymisation and connectivity of the internet permit a democratisation of knowledge transmission, but this benefit also carries with it certain dangers. Notably, unhampered digital access can erase the need to reflect on how one's own positionality affects access to the desired documents. In the same way that digitisation can "whitewash" the problematic provenance of a manuscript, the ability to access virtually any document from the safety of the home office can increase the temptation to hide behind a disembodied and unsituated "gaze from nowhere" – what Donna Haraway identified as a traditionally masculine illusion of disembodied and thus objective knowledge, as opposed to the perceived subjective and inevitably embodied forms of feminine knowledge (Haraway 1988: 581).

Again, both specifying the provenance of the manuscript in question and providing transparency about the digital form in which that manuscript has been accessed by the individual researcher can serve to counteract a careless attitude towards the historical context in which the manuscript is embedded, as well as the historical context of researchers themselves (cf. Palombo / Kristiansen 2019). Reflecting on one's own positionality involves an individual researcher contemplating the embodied and historicised experience of their relationship to a manuscript that comes with its own idiosyncratic trajectory. However, reflexivity about the archive must encompass more than just the positionality of the individual researcher. It also involves historicising knowledge production on the disciplinary level. The following section provides one example of how this might be done by drawing on a notion of "epistemic politics".

Democratising the digital archive

Due to its diversity of actors and sources, digitised book culture is inherently global in nature. This is quite different from many manuscript cultures of the past, which were often local in scope (cf. van Lit 2020: 13). The contrast between the historical perspective and the rapid developments of digitisation and open access should urge us to reflect on how we, as researchers, conceive of our discipline in light of that discipline's history. In an article on the future of the "threatened" science of philology, the scholar of Sanskrit Sheldon Pollock has argued eloquently for certain requirements that "successful applicants for admission into the sacred precincts of twenty-first-century disciplinarity will have to meet". Among these requirements are:

historical self-awareness, universality, and methodological and conceptual pluralism. First, twenty-first-century disciplines cannot remain arrogantly indifferent to their own historicity, constructedness, and changeability – this is an epistemological necessity, not a moral preference – and accordingly, the humbling force of genealogy must be part and parcel of every disciplinary practice. Second, disciplines can no longer be merely particular forms of knowledge that pass as general under the mask of science; instead, they must emerge from a new global, and preferably globally comparative, episteme and seek global, and preferably globally comparative, knowledge. Last, coming to understand by what means and according to what criteria scholars in past eras have grounded their truth-claims must be part of – not the whole, but part of – our own understanding of what truth is and a key dimension of what we might call our epistemic politics. (Pollock 2009: 948)

Pollock's emphasis on the "humbling force of genealogy" and its connection to "epistemic politics" can serve as a guiding thread to codicologists, themselves involved in "making sense of texts" (Pollock 2009: 934) as particular things endowed with idiosyncratic histories (cf. Mazza 2019). Building on Pollock's manifesto for the field of philology as a global form of knowledge production, I make the following suggestion: for a codicologist working with Islamic manuscripts in a European academic context in the twenty-first century, whether in a digital or analogue format, it seems imperative to explicitly grapple with two forms of genealogy. The first of these concerns the concrete social histories and current locations of the manuscripts under discussion, while the second is that of the history and politics of the discipline itself. This would ideally be a form of reflexivity that recognises the historicised nature of our own activities as researchers in the face of the legacy of manuscript hunters and European colonialism.

Discussing the global character of online archives brings us back to the question of the ethical issues of digitising manuscripts and sharing files and the question of the democratisation of knowledge production. Here I would like to introduce an example of an Arabic-language public chat group on the messaging app Telegram that goes by the name of *al-turāth al-ʿarabī al-makhṭūṭ* ("Arabic manuscript heritage"). Any user who has joined the group can upload manuscripts, while downloading them does not require user status. In their description of the chat group, the moderators state that they are "an endowment group that concerns itself with Arabic manuscript heritage and safeguards manuscripts for researchers, editors, and seekers of knowledge, as a service to heritage and to humanity".[7] This brief explanation encapsulates a digital version of an Islamic ideal of knowledge that stretches back centuries. Religious endowments, known in Arabic as *awqāf* (sg. *waqf*), are charitable trusts that have financed countless institutions, including mosques, madrasas and libraries, since the early days of Islam (Peters et al. 2012). The term "seekers of knowledge"

---

7   التراث العربي المخطوط. مجموعة وقفية تهتم بالتراث العربي المخطوط وتؤمن المخطوطات للباحثين والمحققين وطلبة العلم خدمة للتراث والإنسانية. (Telegram group chat, accessed 7 November 2024).

(*ṭalabat al-ʿilm*) draws on the expression *riḥla fī ṭalab al-ʿilm* ("a voyage in search of knowledge"), referring to the idea of travelling to acquire knowledge from the most eminent teachers that can be found, wherever they are to be found.

In this digital version of travelling in search of knowledge, the users are free to travel through cyberspace to the digital repositories of libraries that can be difficult to access in their physical manifestations, whether the al-Assad national library in Damascus or one of the European university libraries that is either restricted to on-site access or remains behind a paywall. Thanks to the Arabic manuscript heritage chat group, and to many others like it, access to these libraries becomes possible irrespective of borders, as long as another user in the group is willing to lend a helping hand in the enterprise. In this sense the group is an example of a "more democratic vision of the archive" (Burton 2006a: 5). Systematically striving to give proper credit to this type of initiative can serve to counteract, at least to a small extent, existing imbalances in global knowledge production. In other words, the ethics of file-sharing depends on the circumstances of the actors who are making the manuscripts accessible. As the highly politicised history of the notions of copyright and intellectual property makes clear, there is no one-to-one equivalence between the legal and the ethical (cf. Hemmungs Wirtén 2020).

Continuing to address the question of power relations between researchers and readers in the Global North and the Global South, it might at first glance seem evident that increased open access to dispersed corpora always contributes to evening out the disparities that are deeply rooted in historical events. However, it is crucial to remember that large-scale institutional digitisation practices inevitably reframe existing collections in a new context that must itself be historicised. In other words, projects that may seem to involve a purely democratising impulse can bring new, unforeseen complications to questions of repatriation and access. An example of this can be seen in the differing viewpoints on the Yemeni Manuscript Digitization Initiative (YMDI), now hosted by Princeton University Library with grant support from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). As Sabine Schmidtke argues in her case study of the digitisation of the Yemeni Zaydi manuscript heritage, a textual tradition that was long spread out across libraries all over the world, the "digital repatriation" of these manuscripts can contribute to a democratisation of the knowledge about these manuscripts within Yemen itself, providing Yemeni scholars with "unlimited access to their own intellectual, cultural, and religious heritage as reflected in the Zaydi manuscripts preserved in Europe, North America[ ], and the Middle East, alongside scholars based in other parts of the world" (Schmidtke 2018: 128).

However, Schmidtke's view is modified by Nancy Um, who considers how the "meaning and significance" of the Yemeni manuscripts have been transformed, rather than sustained, through the YMDI. Um argues that, because the resurgence of Zaydism is also associated with the oppositional Houthi

movement, the digitisation project must be considered within the framework of the ongoing devastating civil war in Yemen (Um 2020: 8). Extreme examples like these illustrate that questions of cultural heritage and digital repatriation must always be considered within their present-day political contexts.

If we compare the Islamic manuscript holdings of an average university library in Europe or North America to digital file-sharing practices among individuals, we see that the ethical questions that can be asked about who has the right to disseminate digital copies of premodern manuscripts have no obvious answers. Rather, these questions are part of a constantly evolving debate that should be placed at the heart of any major branch of philology and codicology, all of which are, by virtue of the diversity of both their historical trajectories and the research communities working on them, global in scope. This debate must grapple with legacies from the colonial period, with encounters between notions of cultural heritage and intellectual property, and with the difference between digital and physical copies of manuscripts.

Fortunately, as we have seen above, these questions are now increasingly being addressed within various environments that work with manuscripts and conduct historical research on them, as we can see in particular from the discussions taking place in the blogosphere, which were referenced above. Consequently, variants of the "epistemic politics" referred to by Pollock in his manifesto for a philology of the future are beginning to penetrate further into the text-based branches of Islamic Studies, branches that have a long tradition of avoiding the ethical implications of the historical research they are conducting. It is a development that should be welcomed and encouraged. Here it is imperative for each and every researcher to determine which questions should arise in the context of their encounters with particular artefacts.

Conclusion

This article has raised selected ethical and epistemological issues tied to the circulation of digital manuscript reproductions and suggested that these issues be brought to the forefront of codicological research. Questions of ethics and positionality cut to the heart of the history of the textual branches of Islamic and Arabic Studies and are central to developing the "historical self-awareness" (Pollock 2009: 948) of these disciplines. The growth of online research and the expansion of digital archives, with their inherent tendency to distort and dissimulate the physical location of both artefacts and researchers, have only rendered this need more pressing.

The examples of digital file-sharing discussed in this article demonstrate the need for individual reflexivity when conducting digital research, whether by

trawling through underground manuscript corpora or by uploading digital copies of manuscripts on social media platforms. The present ownership of many historical artefacts remains a contested issue, where various national legal regulations remain a poor yardstick for ethics. Consequently, the individual researcher's approach to discussing the trajectories of the manuscripts they work on must go beyond the act of simply noting which library those manuscripts are housed in today. Rather, researchers should consider manuscripts as physical artefacts imbued with their own social histories, as well as reflect upon how their own access to them is mediated through digital file-sharing.

Finally, a disclaimer. Arabic and Islamic Studies as they are taught and studied in various institutional settings today are vastly more interconnected than their disciplinary precursors were at the height of the colonial period, making it impossible to subsume every student or researcher into the category of either the Global North or the Global South. Among other reasons, this makes it futile to suggest any absolute rules for the circulation of manuscripts from the precolonial period. Rather than to establish a fixed set of guidelines, my goal in this article has been to broaden the institutional conversations currently unfolding on the intersection of manuscript provenance and researcher positionality. One way to deepen this conversation further is to integrate post- and decolonial perspectives on digital file-sharing, drawing on more established debates on the inequalities of global knowledge production (cf. Spivak 1988, Ahmad 2008, Mignolo 2018). Another issue that calls for more discussion is that of how the historical transfer of manuscripts from the Arab provinces to Anatolia and the Ottoman capital of Istanbul at the hands of Ottoman statesmen can be integrated into postcolonial debates on manuscript circulation (cf. Sayyid 1996: 17, Erünsal 2014: 25–28, Hirschler 2016: 50, Wynter-Stoner 2022: 134). The historical background and the present digital circulation of manuscripts are interrelated and should be considered synoptically. In other words, expanding our understanding of how manuscripts ended up where they are today should go hand in hand with a constant questioning of our own practices as researchers.

References

Abu-Lughod, Lila (1996): Writing against Culture. In: Richard G. Fox (ed.): *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, pp. 137–162.

Ahmad, Aijaz (2008): *In Theory: Nations, Classes, Literatures*. London: Verso.

Ahmed, Shahab (2016): *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Akkerman, Olly (2022): *A Neo-Fatimid Treasury of Books. Arabic Manuscripts among the Alawi Bohras of South Asia*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Bagnall, Roger (2011): *Everyday Writing in the Graeco-Roman East*. Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press.

Beniassa, Amin / Hickey, Todd / Mazza, Roberta / Salem, Noha / Schubert, Paul / Urbanik , Jakub (2021): Resolutions on the Papyrus Trade: The ASP–AIP Joint Resolution on the Papyrus Trade. Approved by the ASP Membership on January 15, 2021. Papyrology.org, https://www.papyrology.org/resolutions.html (accessed 7 November 2024).

Benjamin, Walter (2015): *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*. Berlin: Suhrkamp. Originally published in 1935.

Berliner Institut für Islamische Theologie (2023): Call for Paper for an International Conference "Positionality in the Study of Islamic Theology." Berliner Institut für Islamische Theologie, https://www.islamische–theologie.hu–berlin.de/de/datenbank/call–for–paper–for–an–inter-national–conference–positionality–in–the–study–of–islamic–theology201d (accessed 12 October 2024).

Burton, Antoinette (2006a): Archive Fever, Archive Stories. In: Antoinette Burton (ed.): *Archive Stories. Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 1–24.

Burton, Antoinette (ed.) (2006b): *Archive Stories. Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Clifford, James / George E. Marcus (eds) (1986): *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

D'hulster, Kristof (2021): *Browsing through the Sultan's Bookshelves. Towards a Reconstruction of the Library of the Mamluk Sultan Qāniṣawh al-Ghawrī (r. 906–922 / 1501–1516)*. Bonn: Bonn University Press.

El-Ghawaby, Farid (forthcoming): "Local"-izing Johann Gottfried Wetzstein and other "Western" Actors of Translocation Processes in the 19th and early 20th Century. In: Ute Pietruschka / Christoph Rauch / Torsten Wollina (eds): *Oriental Manuscripts in Germany: Collection Histories between Academic Curiosity, Commercial Ambitions and Imperialism*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

El Shamsy, Ahmed (2020): *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics. How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Erünsal, İsmail E. (2014): Fethedilen Arap Ülkelerindeki Vakıf Kütüphaneleri Osmanlılar Tarafından Yağmalandı mı? *Osmanlı Araştırmaları – The Journal of Ottoman Studies* XLIII, pp. 19–66.

Erünsal, İsmail E. (2022): *A History of Ottoman Libraries*. Boston: Academic Studies Press.

Förster, Larissa (2022): Talking and Going about Things Differently. On Changing Vocabularies and Practices in the Postcolonial Provenance and Restitution Debates. In: Sharon Macdonald (ed.): *Doing Diversity in Museums and Heritage. A Berlin Ethnography*. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 57–76.

Franssen, Élise (ed.) (2022): *Authors as Readers in the Mamlūk Period and Beyond*. Venice: Edizioni Ca'Foscari.

Gaisser, Julia Haig (2020): Poggio and Other Book Hunters. In: Roberta Ricci (ed.): *Poggio Bracciolini and the Re(dis)covery of Antiquity: Textual and Material Traditions*. Florence: Firenze University Press, pp. 173–188.

Görke, Andreas / Hirschler, Konrad (eds) (2011): *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*. Würzburg: Ergon.

Hammer, Juliane (2016): Gender Matters: Normativity, Positionality, and the Politics of Islamic Studies. *The Muslim World*, pp. 655–670.

Haraway, Donna (1988): Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies* 14(3), pp. 575–599.

Hemmungs Wirtén, Eva (2020): Globalization. In: James Raven (ed.): *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Book*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 348–368.

Hinrichsen, Laura (2024): *The Lost Libraries of Tunis. Book Culture of Hafṣid Ifrīqiya and Arabic Manuscripts in Europe after the Sack of Tunis (1535)*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Hirschler, Konrad (2016): *Medieval Damascus: Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library: The Ashrafīya Library Catalogue*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Hirschler, Konrad (2020): *A Monument to Medieval Syrian Book Culture. The Library of Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Hirschler, Konrad (2025): A (Mostly) Local Story: The Translocations of al-Jazzār's Books in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. In: Said Aljoumani / Guy Burak / Konrad Hirschler (eds): *The Library of Aḥmad Pasha al-Jazzār. Book Culture in Late Ottoman Palestine*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 144–167.

Hirschler, Konrad / Cüneyd Erbay (2020): Writing Middle Eastern Agency into the History of the Qubbat al-khazna. The Late Ottoman State and Manuscripts as Historical Artefacts. In: A. D'Ottone Rambach / Konrad Hirschler / R. Vollandt (eds): *The Damascus Fragments: Towards a History of the Qubbat al-khazna Corpus of Manuscripts and Documents*. Beirut: Nomos, pp. 151–178.

Koptyoff, Igor (1986): The Cultural Biography of Things. Commoditization as a Process. In: Arjun Appadurai (ed.): *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 64–91.

Liebrenz, Boris (2016): *Die Rifāʿīya aus Damaskus. Eine Privatbibliothek im osmanischen Syrien und ihr kulturelles Umfeld*. Leiden: Brill.

Manuscript Hunters (n.d.): Manuscript Hunters, https://www.manuscripthunters.gwi.uni–muenchen.de (accessed 7 November 2024).

Markiewicz, Christopher (2019): Books on the Secretarial Arts and Literary Prose. In: Gülrü Necipoğlu / Cemal Kafadar / Cornell H. Fleischer (eds): *Treasures of Knowledge. An Inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library (1502–3, 1503–4)*. Volume 1: Essays. Leiden / Boston: Brill, pp. 657–672.

Mazza, Roberta (2019): The Green Fiasco in Context. Special Issue on the Papyrus Thefts. https://eidolon.pub/the–green–fiasco–in–context–f6f6d2c87329 (accessed 7 November 2024).

Mazza, Roberta (2016): Papyrology and Ethics. In: Alberto Nodar / Sofía Torallas Tovar (eds): Proceedings of the 28th Congress of Papyrology. Barcelona 1–6 August 2016. Barcelona: Scripta Orientalia 3, pp. 15–27.

Michel, Cécile / Friedrich, Michael / Gippert, Jost / Hirschler, Konrad / Huber, Patrick / Mac Laren, Davidson / Melzer, Sylvia / Möller, Ralf / Russo, Maria Luisa / Schröter, Doreen / Thiemann, Stefan (2024): Ethical and Responsible Research at CSMC. Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Universität Hamburg. http://doi.org/10.25592/uhhfdm.14757 (accessed 7 November 2024).

Mignolo, Walter (2018): The Conceptual Triad: Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality. In: Catherine E. Walsh / Walter Mignolo: *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Durham, NC: Duke University, pp. 135–152.

Miller, Matthew Thomas / Romanov, Maxim G. / Bowen Savant, Sarah (2018): Digitizing the Textual Heritage of the Premodern Islamicate World: Principles and Plans. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50, pp. 103–109.

Muhanna, Elias (ed.) (2016a): *The Digital Humanities and Islamic and Middle East Studies*. Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter.

Muhanna, Elias (2016b): Islamic and Middle East Studies and the Digital Turn. In: Elias Muhanna (ed.): *The Digital Humanities and Islamic and Middle East Studies*. Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter, pp. 1–9.

Nichols, Stephen G. (1990): Philology in a Manuscript Culture. *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* LXV/1, pp. 1–10.

Palombo, Cecilia / Kristiansen, Birte (2019): "It Belongs in a Museum"… Or Does It? Embedding Conquest Project, University of Leiden, https://emco.hcommons.org/2021/03/19/it–belongs–in–a–museum–or–does–it/ (accessed 7 November 2024).

Pollock, Sheldon (2009): Future Philology? The Fate of a Soft Science in a Hard World. *Critical Inquiry* 35(4), pp. 931–961.

Peters, R. / Behrens-Abouseif, Doris / Powers, D. S. / Carmona, A. / Layish, A. / Lambton, Ann K.S. / Deguilhem, Randi / McChesney, R. D. / Kozlowski, G. C. / Hooker, M. B. / Hunwick, J.O. (n. d.): Waḳf. In: P. Bearman / Th. Bianquis / C. E. Bosworth / E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs (eds): Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573–3912_islam_COM_1333 (accessed 7 November 2024).

Prescott, Christopher / Josephine Munch Rasmussen (2020): Exploring the "Cozy Cabal of Academics, Dealers and Collectors" through the Schøyen Collection. *Heritage* 3(1), pp. 68–97. https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage3010005 (accessed 7 November 2024).

Regjeringen (2021): Report with Assessment and Recommendations Concerning Objects Impounded August 24, 2021. Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, March 2022. Regjeringen Norge, https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/report–with–assessment–and–recommendations–concerning–objects–impounded–august–24–2021/id2903280/ (accessed 7 November 2024).

Riedel, Dagmar (2016): Of Making Many Books There Is No End: The Digitization of Manuscripts and Printed Books in Arabic Script. In: Elias Muhanna (ed.): *The Digital Humanities and Islamic and Middle East Studies.* Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter, pp. 65–91.

Savoy, Bénédicte (2021): *Afrikas Kamp um seine Kunst. Geschichte einer Postkolonialen Niederlage.* Munich: C.H. Beck.

Savoy, Bénédicte (2018): *Die Provenienz der Kultur: Von der Trauer des Verlusts zum universalen Menschheitserbe.* Berlin: Matthes und Seitz.

Sayyid, Ayman Fuʾād (1996): *Dār al-kutub al-miṣriyya: Tārīkhuhā wa-taṭawwuruhā.* Beirut: Awrāq sharqiyya.

Schmidtke, Sabine (2018): The Zaydi Manuscript Tradition: Virtual Repatriation of Cultural Heritage. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50, pp. 124–128.

Shamela (n. d.): Al–maktaba al–shāmila. Shamela, https://shamela.ws (accessed 7 November 2024).

Society for Classical Studies (2019): Society for Classical Studies Statement on Professional Ethics, Section III: Scholarship and Research. Society for Classical Studies, https://classical-studies.org/about/scs–statement–professional–ethics (accessed 7 November 2024).

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1988): Can the Subaltern Speak? In: Cary Nelson / Lawrence Grossberg (eds): *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture.* Basingstone: Macmillan, pp. 271–313.

Um, Nancy (2020): Yemeni Manuscripts Online: Digitization in an Age of War and Loss. *Manuscript Studies* 5(1), pp. 1–44.

UNESCO (n. d.): Fight Illicit Trafficking (1970 Convention). UNESCO, https://en.unesco.org/fighttrafficking/1970 (accessed 7 November 2024).

van Lit, L. W. C. (2020): *Among Digitized Manuscripts. Philology, Codicology, Paleography in a Digital World.* Leiden: Brill.

Vassos, Argyrou (2002): *Anthropology and the Will to Meaning: A Postcolonial Critique.* Sterling: Pluto Press.

Wynter-Stoner, Kyle (2022): The Maḥmūdīyah: The History of a Library, its Books, and its Readers. PhD thesis, University of Chicago.