

Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Archiving Project 2009

The MIAS archiving project has the aim of creating an online catalogue for the historic manuscripts of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi and his school. The catalogue builds on the pioneering work of Osman Yahia in the 1960s, and seeks to establish the real corpus of Ibn 'Arabi's writings that has survived. In so doing, it will provide a solid and comprehensive basis for future researchers by clarifying those works written by Ibn 'Arabi, resolving the many anomalies in Osman Yahia's work, and including new manuscripts which have come to light in the last 50 years and research done by various scholars in the field.

The archiving project had two separate components for 2009: a field-trip to Turkish libraries (19 days), and working on the archiving database to produce a final catalogue (16 days).

The field-trip to Turkey (20/06 to 10/07)

The primary aim of the three-week trip was to complete the cataloguing of all Ibn 'Arabi works held in the Istanbul University library and to continue work on texts held in the Suleymaniye library. The Istanbul University collection is one of the larger in Turkey, with several early manuscripts including the precious original copy of the *R-∅ al-quds*, and as a private library with its own means of access, is little visited or studied. The Suleymaniye library, which houses the largest manuscript collection in Turkey, has digital access to all the state libraries in Istanbul; however, the computer system which was in place (it has now been updated) and is preferred to the actual viewing of manuscripts, is notoriously unstable and can cause delays in accessing materials.

Prior to going, we received an invitation from the Konya library director as they had recently acquired many manuscripts of Ibn 'Arabi's works from provincial libraries in Turkey and other countries. The vast digital archive in Konya has copies of most of the smaller libraries in Turkey, including the important collections of Manisa, Kastamonu, Amasya, Bursa, Çorum and Kutahya. In general, these have been poorly catalogued in the past, and there is always the opportunity of new finds. However, the Bolge only holds digital copies of part of the collections: these were catalogued and the remainder requested for future research.

The work was divided between the three major libraries: 7 days at the Suleymaniye library, 4 days at the Istanbul University library, and 3 days at the Bolge library in Konya. Originally we had planned to visit the Beyazit library in Istanbul, but this was precluded by the trip to Konya, which was not in the original estimate. Although the Beyazit collection has been digitised, it is not viewable at the Suleymaniye and can only be seen at the Beyazit itself (requiring separate permission). This is to be included in the 2010 project.

Suleymaniye library: 38 collections viewed, 212 entries catalogued

University library: 63 collections viewed, 145 entries catalogued

Bolge library (Konya): 35 collections viewed, 102 entries catalogued

The Bolge library director is currently engaged in a huge expansion programme that includes several other countries (eg digitising 16,000 mss from Dubai, private Syrian collections and the libraries of Rhodes), as he seeks to make the Konya library the largest digital collection of mss in the world, with a special emphasis on Sufism and the heritage of Ibn ‘Arabi. Another visit to catalogue these is planned for 2010.

Database

The database, which has been developed over a period of eight years, holds all the information about the manuscripts we have investigated in over 40 separate fields, and from this basic template different kinds of catalogue can be generated. The manuscripts which are considered historically valuable have been digitised: currently 1,139 separate works, totalling some 29,000 folios.

As the database can be held on a portable computer, manuscript details are inputted *in situ*, i.e. whilst in the libraries. Initially entered in a fairly basic fashion in order to maximise time, the information is subsequently refined and correlated with other details from digital copies. This is an ongoing task, as there is a wealth of detail on many of the manuscripts: for instance, in addition to basic information such as title, date, scribe, place of writing, quality of text, there are numerous side-notes and *samā‘a* containing names of followers, additional texts and commentaries, poems, etc. Each manuscript has to be assessed in terms of authenticity, accuracy and historical value, and whether it is worthwhile copying; in many cases it has to be compared to other texts to verify its identity.

Therefore it was necessary to identify some clear aims for the first stages of the project as follows:

- 1) To refine and complete the fields necessary to produce three sets of reports. These will list:
 - a) the separate works of Ibn ‘Arabi, each with the manuscripts of the text which can be considered historic, giving information on Date, Library reference, Page numbers, Single line summary;
 - b) the manuscript collections in which the works are found, giving information about Order of collection, Title of works, Author, Page numbers, Date and Copying;
 - c) the individual texts with information on Date, Library reference, Scribe, Place of writing, and Summary of main features including, where possible, a detailed transcription of the important notes and *samā‘a*.

- 2) To cross-reference between works in order to correct errors, omissions and duplications in Osman Yahia’s bibliography and establish a more accurate and up-to-date bibliography of Ibn ‘Arabi’s works.

- 3) To establish two general fields called ‘Description’ and ‘Bibliographical Comments’, summarising the information we have gathered and including comments by other scholars.

4) To assess each of the works according to the following categories:

- Verified as definitely written by Ibn ‘Arabi (either on the basis of the historic manuscripts or the internal evidence of the text)
- Probably written by Ibn ‘Arabi
- Unverified (i.e. insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion)
- Not written by Ibn ‘Arabi (with information on the real author where known)
- Extract (i.e. not a complete work)
- Commentary (plus information on the author and work)
- Osman Yahia Duplicates (i.e. works which were mistakenly listed several times in his original bibliography)

In order to fulfil these four aims, the relevant database fields have had to be set up, refined, standardised and proofread. In most cases this has also required going back to the manuscripts themselves to double-check information. Many early entries have needed amending in the light of later information. In addition, there are some fields which have to be filled in but will not appear in the final catalogues, e.g. first-line identifiers.

It was originally anticipated that the timetable laid out in the original proposal would be sufficient to complete the above aims. However, the unexpectedly large number of additions gathered in the field trip in June has meant that there are still around 50 collections to complete, comprising 235 works. Most of these come from the Veliyuddin and Yusuf Aga library references, and are particularly rich in information.

The present catalogue comprises the following:

No. of collections: 225 (175 fully catalogued)

No. of individual Ibn ‘Arabi manuscripts: 1580 (1345 fully catalogued)

The complete catalogue contains not only works by Ibn ‘Arabi, but also those of his followers and other authors whose works appear alongside his in collections. Although these are catalogued in detail and represent a further 1065 individual manuscripts, there has been no attempt yet to classify them systematically. There are no standard bibliographies of the principal early followers such as al-Qunawi, al-Jandi, al-Kashani, etc., and such a task could be covered by an extension to this project in the future.

About 70 texts have been examined but not yet identified.

As regards the updating of the bibliography, Osman Yahia identified 841 works by Ibn ‘Arabi, many of them without a surviving manuscript (and several scholars have used his listings to claim

that he wrote 300–700 works). Our figures for the different categories listed above, based upon the 1580 Ibn ‘Arabi manuscripts that we have investigated, are as follows:

Verified: 83

Probable: 12

Unverified: 66

Not IA: 79

Extracts: 33

Commentaries: 26

Osman Yahia duplicates: 28

This constitutes a radical amendment to current conceptions of Ibn ‘Arabi’s output and surviving corpus.

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