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# A Preliminary Appraisal of Marginalia in West African Manuscripts from the Mamma Haïdara Memorial Library Collection (Timbuktu)

**Abstract:** This article presents an introductory incursion into the field of marginalia — otherwise known as paratext or annotations — in the West African Arabic manuscript tradition. Marginalia, often under-studied and marginalised, can be a valuable source in a number of fields, including the history of ideas, the transmission of knowledge, to social and economic history, and the production, circulation and reception of texts and manuscript collections. In order to locate West African marginalia in the broader context of Arabic manuscript production, and to provide a comparative perspective, the article begins with a brief outline of common types of marginalia found on Arabic manuscripts from other regions. The article then continues with its central contribution, the tentative classification and appraisal of marginalia found in a selection of West African manuscripts from a private family collection from Timbuktu, the Mamma Haïdara Memorial Library. Marginalia related to the text, such as corrections, addenda, clarifications, commentaries and highlights are quite common and share certain characteristics. *Signes-de-renvoi* and symbols — frequently letters, groups of letters, or words — indicate the nature of the notes in the margin. Some of these symbols are found in Arabic manuscripts from other regions, while others seem peculiar to West African manuscripts. Other common marginalia are independent textual fragments and ownership notes, found in manuscripts both from the Islamic East and West. The article, though preliminary in scope, may serve as an informal definition of the characteristics of marginalia in the region's manuscript tradition, thus providing a useful comparative device and hinting at the fruitful potential of related studies.

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An earlier version of this article was presented at the conference, *The Arts and Crafts of Literacy: Manuscript Cultures in Muslim Sub-Saharan Africa* (see Molins Lliteras 2013b), and forms part of Chapter 4 of my doctoral dissertation, Molins Lliteras 2015b.

# 1 Introduction

Over the last few years, marginalia have received increasing attention thanks to the growing significance of the history of the book and studies of reading practices in various disciplines. The study of marginalia is a subject of research in its own right, and not simply an ancillary source for the study of the texts in which they are found. As Heather Jackson contends: ‘Given the recent shift of attention from the writer to the reader and to the production, dissemination, and reception of texts, marginalia of all periods would appear to be potentially a goldmine for scholars. And so they are, but they are a contested goldmine.’<sup>1</sup> Some scholars, such as Robert Darnton, a pioneer in the discipline of book history, emphasise the importance of notes as evidence not only of events contemporaneous with the marginalia but also their utility in the re-creation of a history of reading and other textual practices.<sup>2</sup> For example, as William Sherman has shown, a shift of perspective from the producers to the users of books, demonstrates the considerable links that bridge the supposed gap between manuscript and print culture: ‘there are significant continuities across the “Medieval-Renaissance” divide — not only in the visual forms of books but in the transformative techniques employed by their readers.’<sup>3</sup> Thus, in spite of the critique of some scholars who point to the anecdotal nature of marginalia and question their reliability as sources to access the mentalities of those who left them,<sup>4</sup> they retain incontestable value as testimonies of the traces of readers and as intimate reflections of textual production practices in different contexts.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, I use the term ‘marginalia’, as it is universally understood across a range of manuscript cultures, and alternatively described as annotations or paratext. In addition, I draw on the definition of the ‘manuscript note’ as offered in a recent collection edited by Andreas Görke and Konrad Hirschler entitled *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*: ‘The term will refer to any written material that is found on a manuscript that does not belong to the main text(s), irrespective of whether it refers to the main text and the legal status of the manuscript or is entirely unrelated to text and manuscript itself.’<sup>6</sup> Marginalia contain a wide range of subject matter, thus they are a rich source for a number of research

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1 Jackson 2001, 6.

2 Darnton 1990, 154–187.

3 Sherman 2008, 7.

4 Kintgen 1996, 214.

5 Jackson 2001, 234–258.

6 Görke/Hirschler 2011a, 9–10.

fields, from the history of ideas, reading practices and transmission of knowledge, to social and economic history, and biographical and library studies.

In the case of Arabic manuscripts and the different societies that produced them, little scholarly attention has been devoted to marginalia as sources in their own right. Nevertheless, Görke and Hirschler demonstrate that manuscript notes are of considerable importance as an additional set of documentary sources for the study of Middle Eastern societies, due to the rich information they contain. For example, ‘book owners applied their *ex libris*, readers signalled that they had read the text — or at least claimed that they had done so — some readers “corrected” the text or commented upon it, scholars wrote certificates of transmission, copyists left verses, owners used empty space for unrelated notes etc.’<sup>7</sup> Therefore, they argue that the study of manuscript notes as a genre sheds new light on many aspects of pre-modern Middle Eastern societies, which until recently only had recourse to letters and endowment deeds as documentary sources.<sup>8</sup>

Marginalia as sources have not only been under-used and under-studied, but have long been disregarded. The fact remains that most text editions and catalogues, with some exceptions, simply ignore the notes. Editions and catalogues are still limited to the “main” text, devoting only scant attention to other textual elements.<sup>9</sup> For example, looking at the existing catalogues of West African manuscripts on which this article focuses, the majority — published by the al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation and representing the most up-to-date knowledge of these manuscripts — contains no reference to marginalia, with the recent notable exception of the catalogue of a small collection, the Fonds de Gironcourt.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, codicological and palaeographic manuals and books on Arabic manuscripts have in recent years paid more attention to marginalia, in particular, with a view to the utilisation of such notes in order to date or to provide more detail on the history of a manuscript. Significant here are the pioneering works of François Déroche in *Manuel de codicologie des manuscrits en écriture arabe*<sup>11</sup> and Adam Gacek’s volumes, especially the essential *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for*

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7 Görke/Hirschler 2011a, 10.

8 Görke/Hirschler 2011a, 13.

9 Görke/Hirschler 2011a, 15.

10 The exception is Nobili 2013. The al-Furqan has published a number of catalogues from the region, including Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. For Timbuktu, the largest is the state collection, the Ahmad Baba Institute (IHERI-AB, formerly CEDRAB): Ould Ely et al. 1995–1998.

11 Déroche et al. 2000.

*Readers*,<sup>12</sup> which provide detailed descriptions and examples of the physical characteristics of marginalia in Arabic manuscripts and explanations of some of their roles in the textual history of Arabic literate societies.

If marginalia found in Arabic manuscripts from the Middle East are already under-studied and under-utilised, the situation is even more pronounced when considering the comparatively much less studied Arabic manuscripts from West Africa. In fact, this disregard for marginalia is part of a more substantial disqualification of these documents as “artefacts.” As Shamil Jeppie states, ‘paper and writing instruments, how texts circulated, how books were held together, and the chain of people involved in the production of texts — from merchants trading in paper, to writers and copyists, through communities of readers — are not found in even modest terms in general or specialist works about Africa.’<sup>13</sup> The tendency to see manuscripts exclusively as texts, as transparent vehicles for their intellectual content only, and ignoring them as objects with their own physical characteristics and idiosyncrasies, has led to the marginalia being overlooked. As Graziano Krätli argues, there is an urgent need to shift our primary focus away from the significance of the intellectual content of manuscripts to a more holistic view in which the manuscript as a physical object, ‘artefact, commodity and collectible’ is centrally addressed.<sup>14</sup>

This long avoidance of marginalia has entailed a loss through which we have missed opportunities in our collective research on manuscripts. Therefore, this article, although preliminary in scope, offers an introductory incursion into the field, outlining the main characteristics of West African marginalia and emphasising the potential insights that in-depth studies on the topic might provide. In order to locate West African marginalia in the broader context of Arabic manuscript production, and to provide a comparative perspective, the article begins with a brief outline of common types of marginalia found on Arabic manuscripts from other regions, highlighting studies that demonstrate the fruitfulness of such research. The article then continues with its central contribution, the tentative classification and appraisal of marginalia found in a selection of West African manuscripts from a private family collection from Timbuktu, the Mamma Haïdara Memorial Library. This library consists of one of the largest, better-known, and organised private manuscript collections in the city, including several volumes

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<sup>12</sup> Gacek 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Jeppie 2014, 94.

<sup>14</sup> Krätli 2011, 341.

of catalogues.<sup>15</sup> The article ends with a conclusion summarising the main characteristics of the various types of marginalia found in West Africa, which may serve as an informal definition of such characteristics in the region's manuscript tradition.

## 2 Mapping the field: Marginalia in Arabic manuscripts

Starting in the 1990s, manuscript notes became the focus of a number of studies of Arabic manuscripts. In particular, scholars such as Stefan Leder drew attention to audition and transmission certificates (*samā'āt* and *ijāzāt*) for their roles in the history of education and the intellectual history of a particular period. Ownership statements and marks (*tamallukāt*) also began to take centre stage, instead of being used simply as an additional source for the study of an individual manuscript.<sup>16</sup> This section describes the better-studied categories of marginalia found on Arabic manuscripts and some of the research which has placed these notes at their core. Apart from the notes already listed, study or reading records and collation notes (*muṭāla'āt* and *muqābalāt*) as well as independent textual fragments are also analysed here. The section ends by reflecting on the few publications that take marginalia seriously in the context of West African manuscript studies, in the hope that the contextualisation offered here can provide a useful comparative basis for the analysis of this latter tradition.

### 2.1 Certificates of transmission and licences for transmission (*samā'āt* and *ijāzāt*)

*Samā'āt* and *ijāzāt* notes are perhaps the marginalia that have been studied the most in the Arabic manuscript tradition. These certificates of transmission and licences for transmission are closely related to each other, as often a certificate of transmission may serve as the basis for a licence for transmission. These notes are usually found near the colophon or on the title page. They confer upon the recipient the right to transmit a text, to teach it, or to issue legal opinions. They

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<sup>15</sup> For the Mamma Haïdara Library see Haïdara 2008 and the more recent Haïdara 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Görke/Hirschler 2011a, 14.

also bear witness to attendance at a reading session. Some studies have emphasised the function of the *ijāzāt* as a kind of symbolic and social capital, and their importance in analysing scholarly and social networks in Islamic societies.<sup>17</sup> Others have emphasised their role as sources for the biographical study of particular scholars, since apart from details on the dates and places of their studies — which may not be documented elsewhere — these notes may also contain information about their interests and the books they read and thus help provide a better view of their lives.

Stefan Leder, for example, has studied certificates of transmission in Damascus emphasising their usefulness, especially for studying the history of education and urban history. He shows that *samā'āt* notes not only testify to the authorised transmission of a fixed text, they also determine to a large extent the value of a manuscript and play a vital role in the question of its dissemination or disappearance. In particular, he underlines the important role of the practices of transmission, which often involve oral performance in the constitution of the text.<sup>18</sup> In another study, Jan Just Witkam highlights the human element in the transmission of texts to which these certificates bear witness. For a better understanding of the *ijāzāt*, it is also important to be aware of the individual and personal element in the transmission of Muslim scholarship.<sup>19</sup> Finally, Hirschler argues that although reading certificates have been studied for decades, their full implications for social and cultural history have only recently been understood. These certificates are one of the few pre-fifteenth century documentary sources that are available in significant numbers for Arabic-speaking lands. They provide historians of the region with a unique source for a variety of issues, including the history of textual reception, which is not available to the same extent for other world regions.<sup>20</sup>

## 2.2 Marks of ownership/ ownership statements (*tamlīkāt*, *tamallukāt*)

Marks of ownership and ownership statements (*tamlīkāt*, *tamallukāt*) in Arabic manuscripts have been the subject of several studies. They are usually to be found at the beginning of a manuscript, or at the end next to the colophon; some-

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<sup>17</sup> Görke/Hirschler 2011a, 16–17.

<sup>18</sup> Leder 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Witkam 1995.

<sup>20</sup> Hirschler 2012, 6.

times they provide a date. They have been used to reconstitute the history of manuscript collections and of their successive owners as well as to retrace and date the circulation and itinerary of a particular manuscript. If celebrated scholars leave signs or marks of their ownership on a manuscript, it can testify to the value assigned to that particular copy of the text.<sup>21</sup> Such marks can also serve as a possible source of identification of a given work. For example, Boris Liebrez shows that it is possible to reconstruct the contents of a library — that of the eighteenth/nineteenth century Syrian merchant Aḥmad al-Rabbat — from ownership statements. In addition, his notes sometimes mention the prices of some of his books, and thus constitute an important documentary source for information on book prices, and therefore on the book market. Al-Rabbat's manuscripts are also filled with readers' notes, dating from his lifetime but not in his hand, which shows that the collection was publicly accessible beyond his circle of personal friends. Furthermore, the marginalia show that his collection was also shaped by requests of books from friends.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.3 Study or reading records and collation notes (*muṭāla'āt* and *muqābalat*)

Study or reading records (*muṭāla'āt*) are closely related to ownership notes. They are often very short statements to the effect that a given person read a certain book or a part thereof. The study-notes often begin with the words *ṭāla'a*, *ṭāla'a fī*, and *naẓara fī*.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, collation notes (*muqābalat*, *balāghāt*) denote the establishment of the correct transmission of the copied text, either by the scribe comparing the copy with the model, or by the student reciting the text back to the author or teacher. Collation with the model by a scribe was one of the primary ways of ensuring an authoritative transmission of texts. The aural collation of a text was usually done over the course of a number of sessions and the marginal notes mark both where the collation was interrupted (*balāghāt*, *tablighāt*) but also the mode of the collation i.e. *samā'an* (by audition) or *qirā'atan* (by reading, recitation).<sup>24</sup> These notes are useful for studies looking at intellectual history, book curriculum and learning practices of Arabic-literate societies.

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<sup>21</sup> Sayyid 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Liebrez 2011, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Gacek 1987.

<sup>24</sup> Gacek 2009, 65–69.

## 2.4 Autographs

Other marginalia connected to ownership notes and study and reading records are autographs, or notes containing a person's own signature or a short statement signed by him.<sup>25</sup> Autographs can be found on marginalia bearing personal signatures, including colophons, certificates of transmission, ownership statements, and study and reading records. Often, they are found on holographs, or manuscripts — in fair or draft versions — written by the authors themselves and not by scribes.<sup>26</sup> Holograph manuscripts were considered especially valuable for various reasons and were sought after by scholars. In this case marginalia—or their absence — can offer information about the status of a manuscripts and its latter uses.<sup>27</sup> Witkam studied the autographs and holographs left by the famous Egyptian historian Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442), some of which were recopied by his secretary. The author himself took care to fix, increase and improve the copies, and then wrote his confirmation in the margin of the manuscript at the end of each text, as a colophon. Al-Maqrīzī's autographs — signed to confirm the authorised copy or holograph — were sometimes dated.<sup>28</sup> This type of marginalia shows that texts were transmitted orally, in other words, they were read out loud by scholars authorised to do so, and who in turn transmitted the authorisation, thereby guaranteeing the authenticity of the texts. The names listed on the margins around a text evoke the presence of scholars grouped around the manuscripts to see and touch them, to read them as well as to listen to them.<sup>29</sup>

## 2.5 Other notes: independent textual fragments

Several studies concentrate on notes that have no direct relation to the main text of the manuscript. Among these, notes found in the margins of Quranic manuscripts are informative. Qurans were often highly valued and protected manuscripts, and thus their notes are likely to be preserved. A common practice was that of recording births and deaths of family members on the flyleaves or margins of some copies of the Quran; other notes record extraordinary natural phenomena.<sup>30</sup> Just like other notations, these marginalia, besides proving highly useful in dating a manuscript,

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<sup>25</sup> Gacek 2009, 14–16.

<sup>26</sup> Gacek 2009.

<sup>27</sup> Sublet 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Witkam 1994.

<sup>29</sup> Sublet 2001.

<sup>30</sup> Déroche et al. 2000, 335.



may also provide clues into the familial or social context of a particular period. One study of marginalia in Qurans from a Dāghistān collection shows that the marginal notes contain official records such as trade deals concerning allotments, which points to the use of Quranic manuscripts also as *qāḍī* registration books. H. Omarov argued that they acted as guarantors and provided infallibility and safety of property deals made under Sharia.<sup>31</sup> Other Quranic manuscripts from the region serve as family records giving a variety of names and dates. They are notary records of varied registration acts, land rentals, purchases and sales of land and houses and property inheritance as well as lists of bridal dowries and registers of credit operations. They are often found on broad margins, at an angle to the main text; the earliest date to 1138/1726–27.<sup>32</sup> The richness of the content of marginalia found in Quranic manuscripts highlights the inherent value of marginalia.

Claus-Peter Haase shows how the study of inconspicuous and seemingly unimportant marginalia can enhance our knowledge of social life in Islamic societies. A nineteenth century *qāḍī* in Anatolia used a manuscript as a personal notebook, writing letters and commentaries in the margins and other blank spaces. Not only do his notes give an interesting view into his life, they also indicate his social links, interests and beliefs, providing a unique perspective on Ottoman provincial life.<sup>33</sup> Other studies highlight the role of marginalia for what they reveal of the strategies and practices of manuscript production. For example, Gacek brings to light the presence of invocations or magical formulae such as *kabikaj* or *budūḥ* on the margins of manuscripts as a protection against being eaten by insects or to safeguard them from the elements.<sup>34</sup>

The studies mentioned above provide an overview of the type of marginalia prevalent in the Arabic manuscript tradition. They include transmission certificates and licences, ownership statements and marks, reading, audition and collation notes, and finally independent textual fragments. In addition, they illustrate the large scope of thematic fields for which manuscript notes can be used — including social history, procedures of teaching and transmission of knowledge, the social role of manuscripts, and biographical and archival studies.

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<sup>31</sup> Omarov 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Rezvan 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Haase 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Gacek 1986.

## 2.6 Marginalia in West African manuscripts

In contrast, studies devoted only to marginalia found in West African Arabic manuscripts are rare, with the notable exception of those marginalia containing ‘*ajamī* glosses.<sup>35</sup> However, in a recent volume on manuscript culture in the trans-Saharan region edited by Graziano Krätli and Ghislaine Lydon,<sup>36</sup> marginalia appear in some articles which emphasise the nature of manuscripts as objects of production, circulation and consumption. For example, Murray Last remarks that in Northern Nigeria most manuscripts that survive have no personal marginal notes made by readers, except for occasional definitions of words on the margin in ‘*ajamī* or Arabic, especially in poetry works.<sup>37</sup> He wonders, ‘Was there a convention that texts be kept “clean” (especially if they were borrowed from colleagues or one’s teachers); or did copyists ignore marginal addenda and re-copy only the main body of the text? . . . Were books in northern Nigeria usually too scarce — or too precious, too authoritative — to “personalise” with marginalia? Were readers reluctant ever to “quarrel” with the book’s author?’ Whatever the case, it does seem that in Sokoto books were not “used” by readers as they were, say, in Timbuktu where marginal addenda in works of local history were more common.<sup>38</sup>

Despite this en passant mention of marginalia in relation to Timbuktu, there are not many concrete studies that illustrate that claim. Murray Last here refers to John Hunwick’s work, and indeed, in a broad, non-specialist overview of the manuscript tradition of the region the latter states: ‘Scholars from Timbuktu often wrote in the margins of manuscripts. These notes are generally of two types: comments relating to the original text or previous annotations; and comments which are totally divorced from the text, where the writer used the margins to record external events, presumably simply for lack of paper . . . other times these notes provide us with some of the most important historic information from the region.’<sup>39</sup> Throughout his scholarship which spans over forty-years, Hunwick made frequent use of marginalia for his studies, although he did not analyse marginalia in themselves systematically. Nevertheless, he wrote an article on two glosses

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<sup>35</sup> For examples of Kanuri and Fulfulde glosses see respectively Bondarev 2006 and Robinson 1982.

<sup>36</sup> Krätli/Lydon 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Last 2011.

<sup>38</sup> Last 2011, 192–193.

<sup>39</sup> Hunwick/Boye 2008, 94.

and a couple of articles on colophons<sup>40</sup> — that though not strictly marginalia, incorporate characteristics of the latter — in addition to presenting and translating, in a brief contribution, a now-famous marginal note from the Fondo Kati collection.<sup>41</sup>

At this point, the question of the Fondo Kati, another manuscript collection in Timbuktu that has now become synonymous with marginalia,<sup>42</sup> becomes relevant. In fact, I undertook the analysis that follows for comparative purposes in the context of a larger project on the Fondo Kati and the peculiar marginalia contained in its manuscripts. In the absence of comprehensive studies of marginalia in West African manuscripts,<sup>43</sup> I needed some comparative guidelines to analyse the marginalia from the Fondo Kati, so I selected manuscripts from a collection that resembles the Kati collection to some extent. Thus, after establishing the broader context of marginalia in the Arabic manuscript tradition, the analysis in the following section — the central contribution of this article — offers a basis on which to compare and evaluate the marginalia of the West African region. Some possible comparative questions to keep in mind include: Did regional traditions develop that led to the use of specific genres of notes, to local forms of how to write these notes, and to functions of notes that we would not find in other regions?

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**40** These articles were originally published in the journal *Fontes Historiae Africanae*, *Bulletin of Information* in different years, but republished together later in *Sudanic Africa* (13): O'Fahey/Hunswick/Lange 2002, Hunswick 2002a, and Hunswick 2002b.

**41** Hunswick 2001.

**42** On the Fondo Kati see Molins Llitas 2013a, 2015a, and 2015b.

**43** However, I draw from some interesting unpublished codicology-oriented works by the traditional Timbuktu scholar Mahmoud Mohammed Dédéou dit Hamou entitled *al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-'arabiya wa al-makṭūba bi al-ḥarf al-'arabī fī manṭiqat al-sāḥil al-ifrīqī* and *al-Khaṭṭ fī Timbuktu* (copies provided by the author). In addition, Saadou Traoré, a Malian researcher previously affiliated to the IHERI-AB, also completed a codicological *Mémoire* on the manuscripts of Timbuktu, to my knowledge the first of its kind, under the supervision of François Déroche at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris (Traoré 2011).

### 3 The marginalia from the Mamma Haïdara collection

The Mamma Haïdara Library was the first private family library established in Timbuktu in 1999, and also the first to make the move towards opening its collection to selected outsiders, to “go public” at a certain level.<sup>44</sup> It is currently directed by Abdel Kader Haïdara, son of Mamma Haïdara (c. 1895–1981), a traditional scholar and bibliophile who founded and reorganised the existing library, adding many volumes collected during his travels as well as others copied in his own hand. According to the family, the core of the historical collection dates from the sixteenth century and originated in the village of Bamba, about two hundred kilometres east of Timbuktu, with Muḥammad al-Mawlūd, a direct ancestor of the current owners.<sup>45</sup> The collection is composed of about 9,000 manuscripts and 1,200 recently acquired modern Arabic printed books; it was housed in a large library building in Timbuktu funded by the American Andrew Mellon and Ford Foundations and the Juma al-Majid Heritage and Culture Centre in Dubai, among others.<sup>46</sup> In the early 2000s, the al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation published a catalogue of the collection in four volumes, which, as with similar catalogues of West African libraries, contains no references to marginalia in the manuscripts.<sup>47</sup> During the political crisis in Northern Mali in 2012/13, the Mamma Haïdara collection was transported to Bamako — along with a couple of dozen other libraries — and is currently housed in the capital where it is being reorganised, and where measures are being taken for its conservation, digitisation and improved cataloguing.<sup>48</sup> Thus, it is perhaps the largest, most organised, and best-funded private family manuscript collection from Timbuktu.

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<sup>44</sup> Haïdara 2011.

<sup>45</sup> Haïdara 2011, 242–243

<sup>46</sup> Haïdara 2011, 246–247. The numbers reported here reflect Haïdara’s own count in 2011; however since then, the numbers seem to have increased dramatically, according to new unpublished handlists. However, until these new numbers are confirmed, I quote the last published information.

<sup>47</sup> Haïdara/Sayyid 2000–03. The Grand Library of the *Āyatu’Llāh al-‘Uẓmā* al-Ma’rashī al-Najafī in Iran, also published a more recent volume of the catalogues of the Mamma Haïdara Library (Haïdara/Moujani 2011).

<sup>48</sup> These efforts, under the auspices of the NGO SAVAMA-DCI (Sauvegarde et Valorisation des Manuscrits pour la Défense de la Culture Islamique) are being funded by a host of international donors including the German Federal Foreign Office and the Gerda Henkel Foundation, and co-ordinated under the project ‘Safeguarding the manuscripts of Timbuktu’ run and directed by the

The collection of West African marginalia presented in this section was taken from a sample of just over one hundred manuscripts from the Mamma Haïdara Library and reflects a range of dates, provenances and themes. The sample of manuscripts was selected from available digitised manuscripts in the Tombouctou Manuscripts Project files,<sup>49</sup> and thus it is neither a comprehensive nor a fully representative sample of manuscripts from the wider collection, or region. However, this survey of the marginalia offers a preliminary appraisal of the different marginalia contained in this collection, many of which are likely to be found in other collections throughout the region. Of the one hundred manuscripts surveyed, about thirty-nine of them, or approximately two fifths, contain marginalia of some kind.

A preliminary classification of Timbuktu marginalia:<sup>50</sup>

### 3.1 Addenda to the text

A significant number of the marginalia in these manuscripts are addenda to the text written in many cases by the scribe (in the same hand), or by one or more readers (different hands), by adding the section of a sentence which has been left out, or by inserting the omitted words. From these notes, one can assess the quality and experience, or lack thereof, of the copyist or scribe. Some of these addenda are marked by different symbols showing the location of the addendum, or its nature, although more inexperienced hands do not necessarily add these symbols. For example, (Fig. 1) an addendum may be indicated in the main text by a *signe-de-renvoi* in the form of a curved stroke and then completed in the margins. In this case, the addendum is located in the left margin and ends with the term *ṣahḥa*, to indicate the text is now correct.

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Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC) at the University of Hamburg. See website for updated details: [http://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/timbuktu/index\\_e.html](http://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/timbuktu/index_e.html)

<sup>49</sup> The Tombouctou Manuscripts Project entered into an agreement with the Mamma Haïdara Library for the digitisation of a selection of about one-hundred manuscripts in January 2004 for research purposes. In addition, from 2007, we collaborated with Aluka, an international initiative formed to build an online digital library of scholarly resources from and about Africa (which became part of JSTOR in 2008) on the digitisation of another three-hundred manuscripts from the SAVAMA-DCI libraries. The images in this section are all courtesy of the Mamma Haïdara Library.

<sup>50</sup> This survey of the marginalia was conducted with the assistance of Mahmoud Mohammed Dédéou *dit* Hamou, traditional Islamic scholar and manuscript expert from Timbuktu. His insights and extensive knowledge of the subject is hereby gratefully acknowledged.

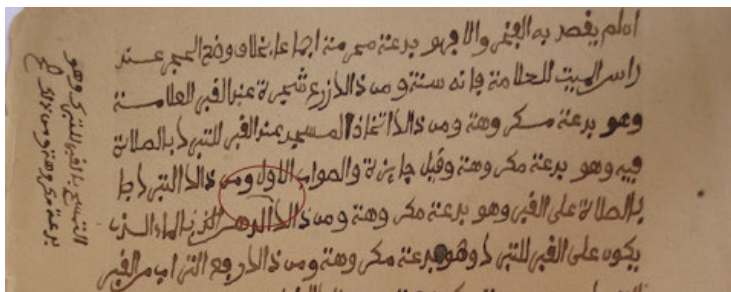


Fig. 1: *Bayān al-bida' al-shayṭāniyya* by 'Uthmān b. Fodiye (d. 1817), MMHT 188, fol. 6r.

Figure 2 provides an additional example of a term added to the marginal note to indicate that the text with the addenda is now correct. Here, the note ends with *ṣaḥḥa wa-raj'a* indicating that it was corrected and checked with a source. In another instance, at the end of the note the scribe repeats the term *ṣaḥḥa* (correct) three times for emphasis.

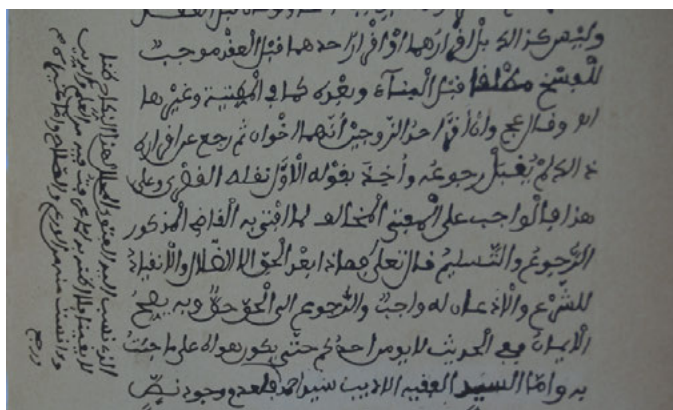


Fig. 2: *Naṣarā al-ḥaqq* by Aḥmad Bābā b. Abī 'l 'Abbās (b. c. 1860), MMHT 354, fol. 2r.

Figure 3 provides another example of a simple *signe-de-renvoi*, a curved stroke above and between words indicating the location of the addendum. In this instance, we can deduce that the scribe started the addition on the lower margin, but erased it and continued on the left margin, possibly because the lower margin is preferably left blank, as that is where a person holds a manuscript to read it.



Fig. 3: *Jawāb ‘ulamā’ Tinbuktū* by Muḥammad b. ‘Ābidīn (late nineteenth c.), MMHT 191, fol. 17r.

Often, we see that confusion in the copying occurs when a word is repeated in the text, causing the scribe to skip the sentence or words immediately following which ended with the repeated word.

### 3.2 Corrections to the text

Another frequently observed source of marginalia, closely related to the former in form, is corrections to the text, known as *bayān*. This word is often indicated by an elongated letter *bā’* found above the correction in the margin (Figs 4, 6). The nature of the corrections is manifold: it involves grammar, spelling, or cacography (scribal

errors which can occur when a word is written illegibly or smudged)<sup>51</sup>, or even the complete replacement of a passage or sentence. The corrected word or sentence in the main text is indicated by a variety of symbols and *signes-de-renvoi*, such as crosses (Fig. 4), small circles (Fig. 5), a reversed *mīm* (Fig. 6), or a simple stroke (Figs 6, 7) on or above the words to be deleted in order to conceal them while at the same time preventing the manuscript from looking ugly or untidy.

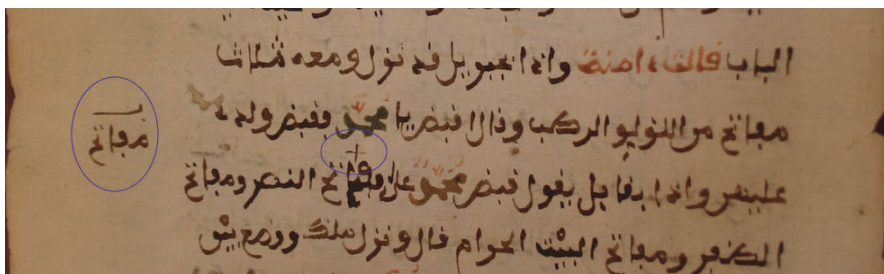


Fig. 4: *al-Shamā'il al-muḥammadiyya*, MMHT 52, fol. 17r.

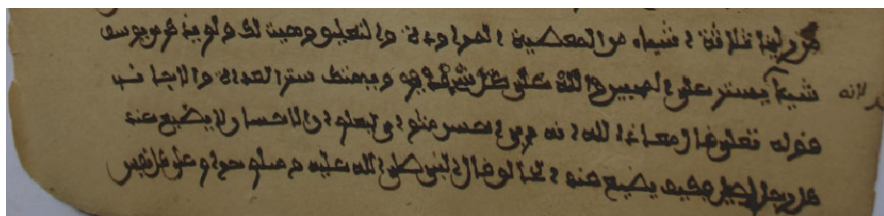


Fig. 5: *al-Ẓuhur al-'anyaq* by Ghālīb 'Abd al-Salām al-Qayrawānī, MMHT 3781, fol. 23r.

Figure 6 demonstrates that the same scribe working on one manuscript may not necessarily be consistent in the use of these symbols: in the first instance, the scribe uses reversed *mīm* to indicate the incorrect word, while in the second example in the same folio, the mistaken word is simply crossed with a stroke.

<sup>51</sup> Gacek 2009, 40.



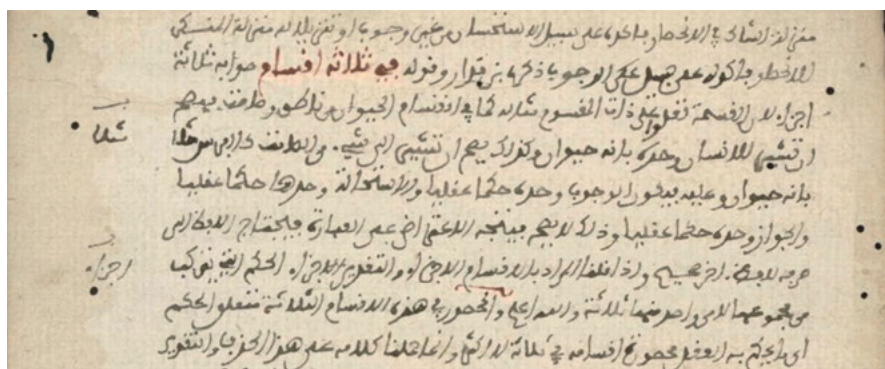


Fig. 6: *Bughyat al-ṭālibīn* by Muḥammad al-Miṣrī, MMHT 3077, fol. 12r.

Copyists or scribes were not the only ones to use these methods, terms and symbols when correcting a manuscript. Fig. 7 is an example of a holograph, or draft by the author, where he is correcting the text, adding and removing sections. Note the method of cancelation used in the last few lines of the text: a line with a slightly curved end (like an inverted, un-pointed *bā'*) through the main text.<sup>52</sup>

Another common symbol used when correcting the text is the letter *ṭā'* meaning *ṭurra*; the term is often translated as 'gloss', but in West Africa is also used to define or clarify the text. In Fig. 8, the incorrect Quranic verse is indicated by the symbol *ṭā'* above the length of the verse, while the correction is given in the right margin.

52 See Gacek 2009, 48.

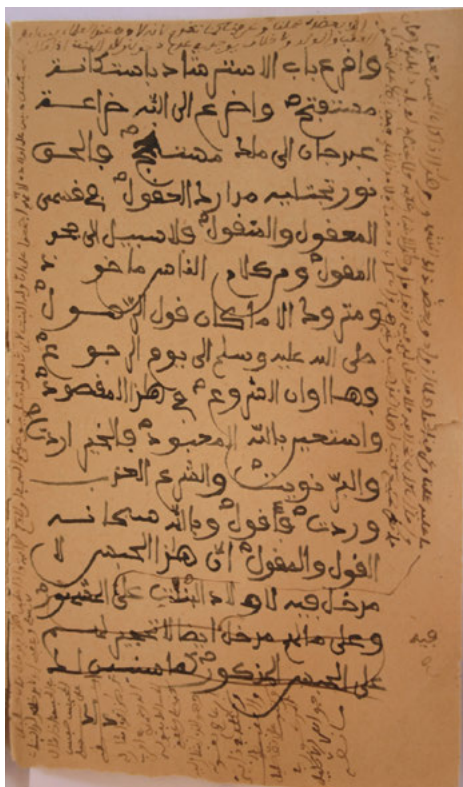


Fig. 7: *Jawāb al-masā'il* by Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd b. al-Shaykh (d. 1973), MMHT 641, fol. 1v.

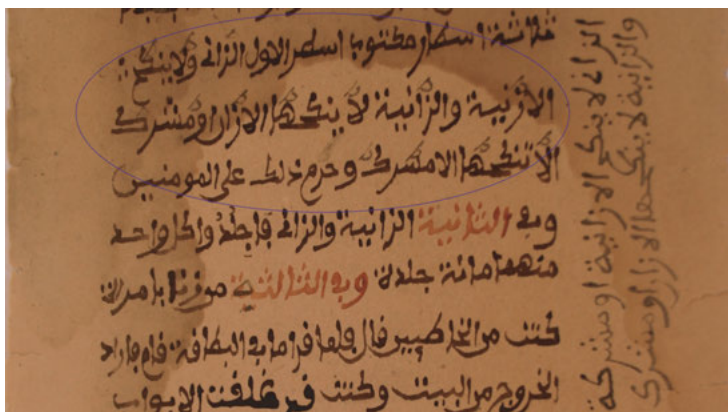


Fig. 8: *Qiṣṣat Sayyidinā Yūsuf*, MMHT 105, fol. 4v.

### 3.3 Clarification and commentary of text

Other notes with characteristics similar to addenda and corrections are marginalia used to clarify, expand and comment on the content of the text. These notes often provide additional information so that the reader of the text is able to understand its contents more fully or in greater depth. This category of marginalia includes definitions of words, both in Arabic (Fig. 10) and ‘*ajamī*’ (Fig. 11), as well as clarifications such as giving names of people mentioned in the text and who they were (Fig. 9).

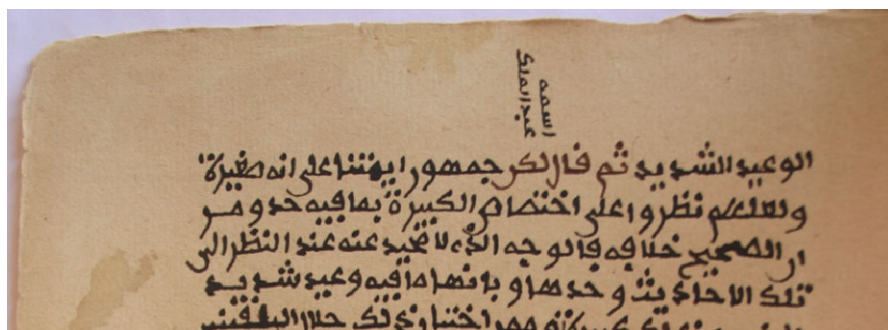


Fig. 9: *Taḥdhīr ahl al-īmān* by 'Uthmān b. Fodiye (d. 1817), MMHT 99, fol. 5r.

Figs 10 and 11 are good examples of marginalia as definitions of words. In the first case, the *signe-de-renvoi* of a reversed *mīm* is used to indicate the word to be translated and its definition is given on the top margin in Arabic, indicating the source (*al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* of al-Firūzābādī [d. 1414]). The second example also shows several words being defined, one in ‘*ajamī*’ (Songhay) in the bottom left margin.

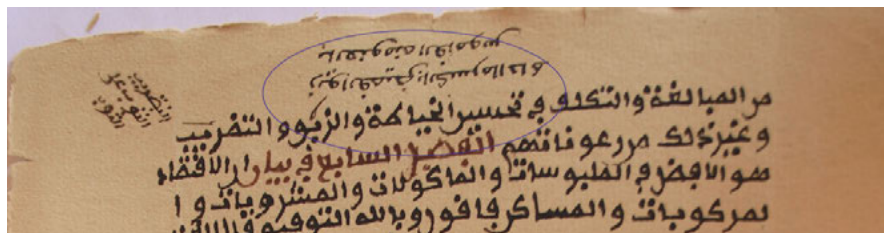


Fig. 10: *Taḥdhīr ahl al-īmān* by 'Uthmān b. Fodiye (d. 1817), MMHT 99, fol. 7r.

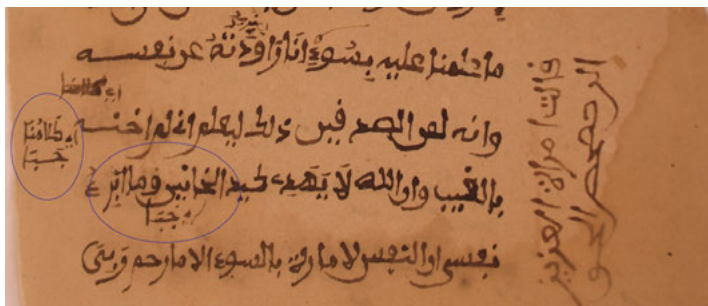


Fig. 11: *Qışşat Sayyidinā Yūsuf*, MMHT 105, fol. 12v.

Furthermore, this category also includes notes by the scribe or by different hands taken from other sources used to enrich the text, as well as commentaries (Figs 13 and 14), and *ṭurra* (gloss, scholia), indicated by the letter *ṭā'* (Fig. 12); as seen above, some of these categories overlap, for example, a *ṭurra* is also used to indicate a correction. The use of the latter term for “gloss” is a characteristic of Arabic manuscripts from the West, as in the East *ḥāshiya* is employed.<sup>53</sup> In Fig. 12, the scribe employs an elongated *ṭā'* as a superscript in the left margin to mark the *ṭurra*, which in this case is used to clarify and comment on an important point in the text.

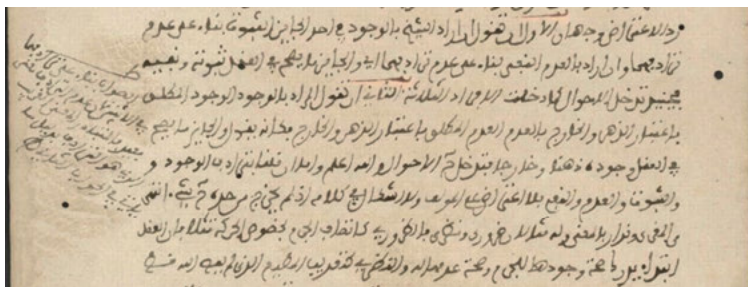


Fig. 12: *Bughyat al-ṭālibīn* by Muḥammad al-Miṣrī, MMHT 3077, fol. 14r.

Figures 13 and 14 are examples of type of commentary on poetry widespread in West Africa. This commentary on a poem is preceded by *اي*, called the *ḥarf tafsīrīn* (letter of commentary) in the left margin (Fig. 13). The poem in this manuscript is commented on in great detail in the subsequent folio (Fig. 14).

<sup>53</sup> Gacek 2009, 114–117, 315.

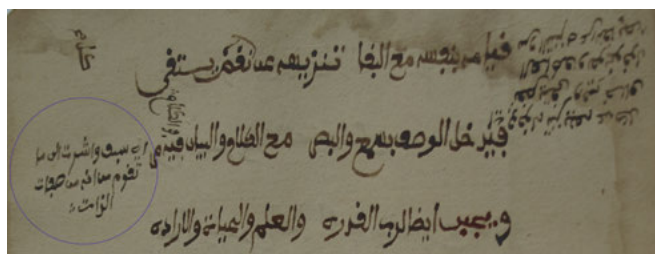


Fig. 13: *Mawāhib al-Jalīl fī sharḥ mukhtaṣar Khalīl b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ujhūrī al-Misrī* (d. 1655/6), MMHT 1204, fol. 3v.

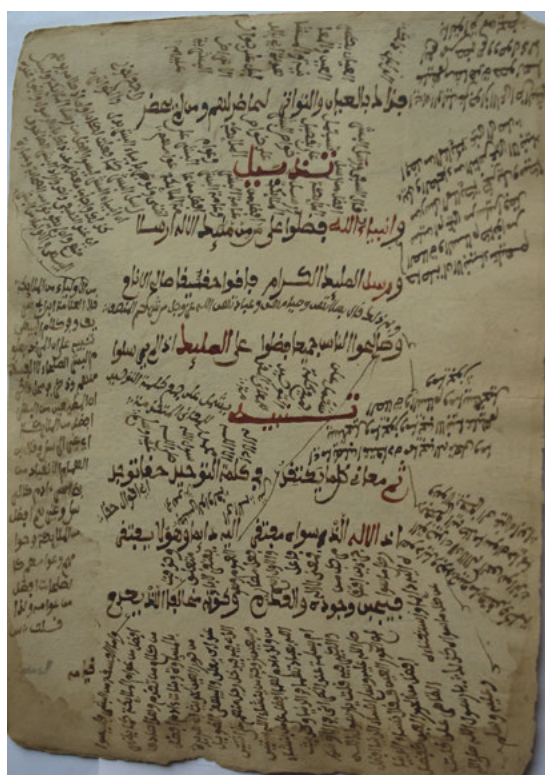


Fig. 14: *Mawāhib al-Jalīl fī sharḥ mukhtaṣar Khalīl b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ujhūrī al-Misrī* (d. 1655/6), MMHT 1204, fol. 4r.



### 3.4 Highlighting the text

These notes draw attention to certain passages or sentences in a text, and can be made either by the author, scribe or reader of the text. Words such as *qif* (Fig. 15) or *unzur* are used to emphasise the relevant section, and some are highlighted even further by the use of patterns (Fig. 16) or ornamented marginalia (Fig. 17) to draw attention to a particular section. In some cases the word *qif* is elongated and used as a frame (superscript and subscript) to enclose a comment or a summary of the relevant section (Fig. 15).

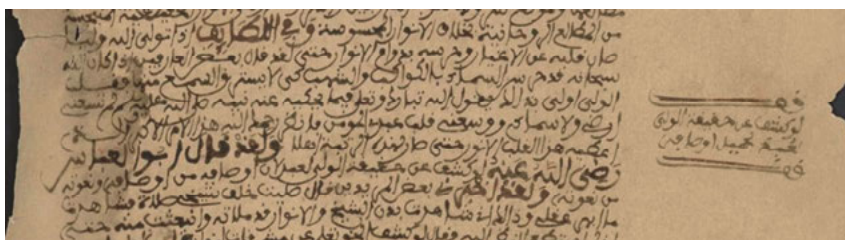


Fig. 15: *Jadhwat al-anwār* of Mukhtār al-Kuntī (d. 1811), MMHT unnumbered, fol. 8v.

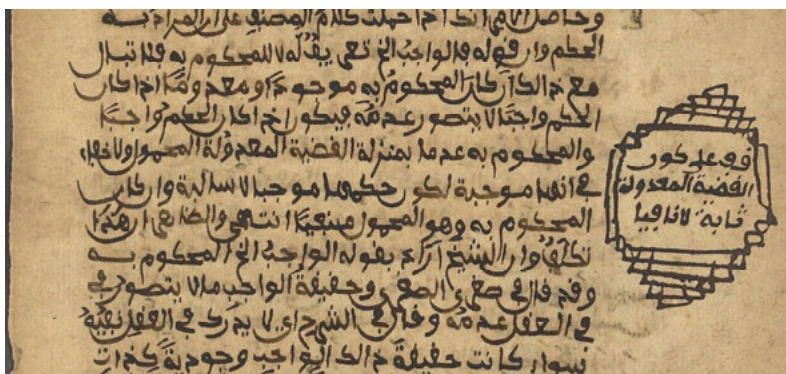


Fig. 16: *Qīṣṣat Dhī al-Qarnayn*, MMHT unnumbered, fol. 33r.

Figure 17 is an example of a manuscript in which the different characteristics of the *qif* point to the degrees of relevance and significance accorded to different passages by the reader or annotator. In this page, the ornamented *qif* is composed of an enclosed rounded section with patterns used to highlight importance and to add emphasis.

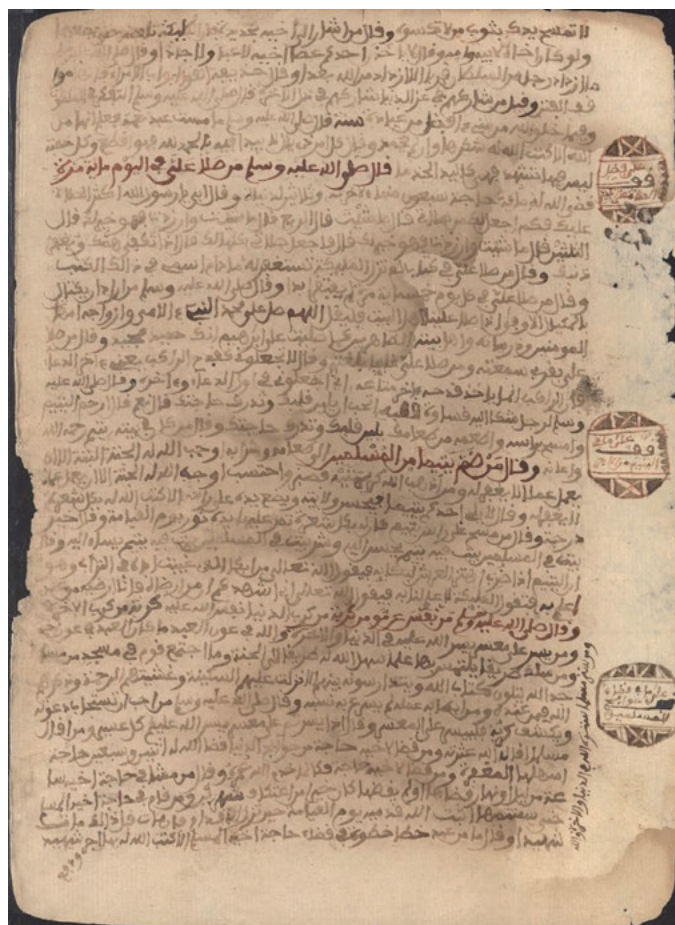


Fig. 17: *Kitāb al-baraka*, MMHT unnumbered, fol. 10r.

### 3.5 Independent textual fragments

Some notes have no direct relevance to the text. Such marginalia are often found in the first folio of a manuscript, which is often left blank, or in the last folio, or close to the colophon, although they can also be found elsewhere in the manuscript. Thematically, the topics of such marginalia vary significantly, and their physical characteristics also show great variation. Examples of independent textual fragments found on the “interior” of a manuscript — not on the first or last folios of a manu-

script — include: a reader's note evoking something he was reminded of when reading the text; in Figure 18, the main text is the story of Yūsuf, and the marginalia, written in the right margin perpendicular to the main text, comments on a bird of paradise. In another example (Fig. 19), the note located horizontally in the upper margin consists of a prayer for the protection of the manuscript.

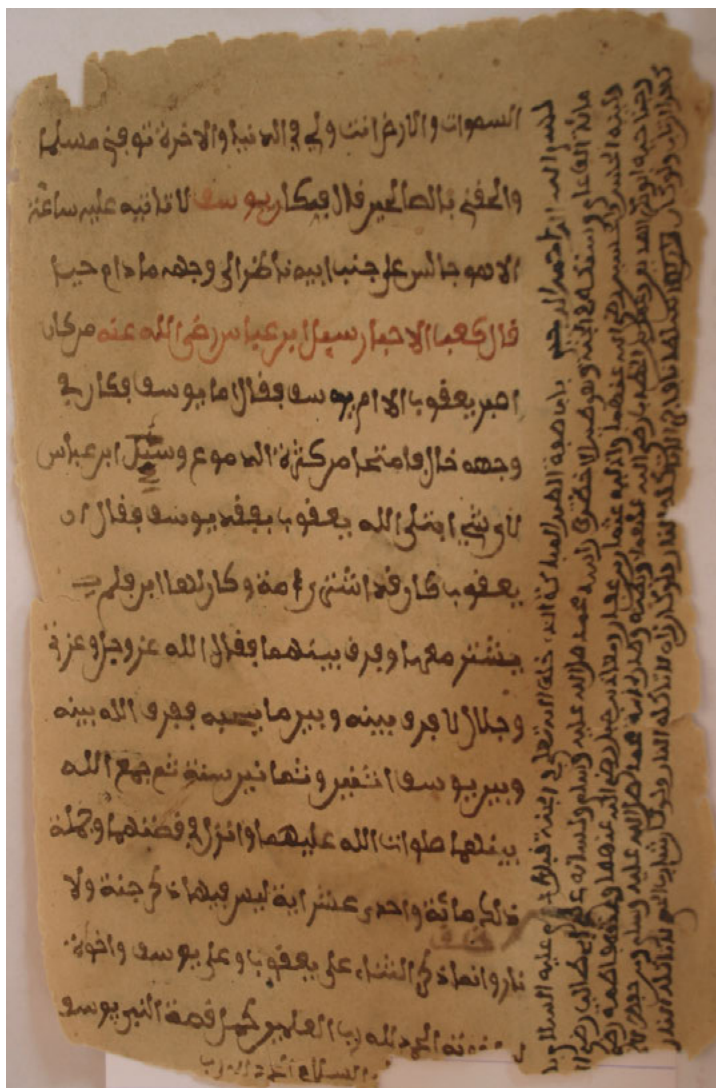


Fig. 18: *Qışşat Sayyidinā Yūsuf*, MMHT 105, fol. 35v.



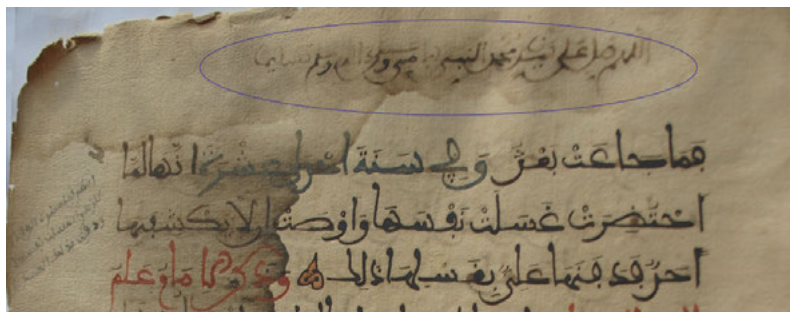


Fig. 19: *Talkhīṣ min kitāb* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505), MMHT 579, fol. 5v.

However, the vast majority of independent textual fragments are located on the first and last folios of a manuscript. In the sample under review, the final folio was not as replete with notes as the first. Examples of such marginalia in the final folio include notes on the blank surface of the verso of the last folio of a manuscript offering an explanation of the *abjad* system for the Islamic West<sup>54</sup> (Fig. 20), or a note on the verso of the last folio next to the colophon, concerning the appropriate way for a man to behave with his wife so as not to become impotent (Fig. 21).

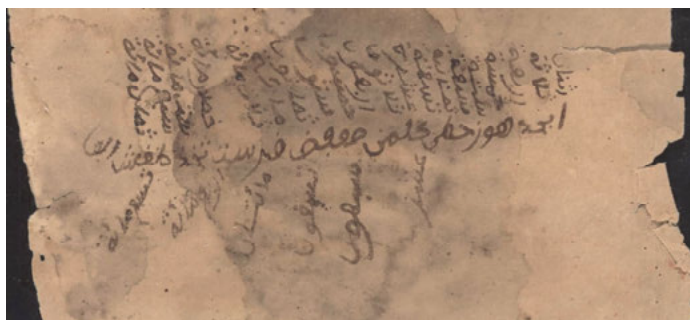


Fig. 20: *Kashf al-ghumma fī naf' al-umma* by Abū al-'Abbās al-Tuwātī (d. c. late eighteenth c.), MMHT 2248, fol. 48v.

<sup>54</sup> Numeral system in which the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet are assigned numerical values. The system, consisting of eight mnemotechnical terms, varies substantially in the Islamic East and West. See Gacek 2009, 11–13.

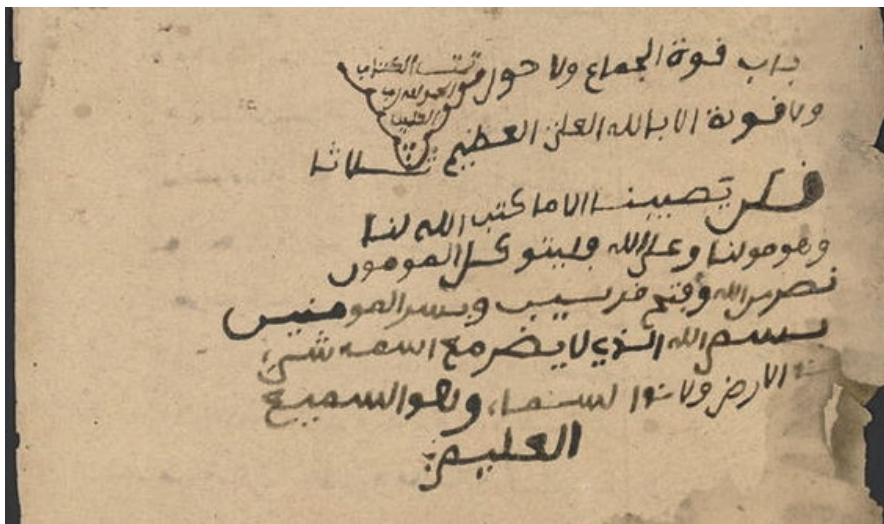


Fig. 21: *Naẓm sullam al-aṭfāl* by Aḥmad b. Būd b. Muḥammad al-Fulānī, MMHT 3415, fol. 4v.

Often, a manuscript may include independent textual fragments on both the first and final folio of the manuscript, as is the case of the manuscript illustrated in Fig. 21, showing the last folio. The recto of the first folio of this manuscript (Fig. 22) contains an array of different notes: in the top right corner written horizontally is a prayer to be recited before reading the manuscript; the upper half of the page contains a commented poem — marginalia within a marginalia so to speak—of Aḥmad Bābā with an explanation of the solar months and their calculations; the ‘poem of the ant’, still recited in Timbuktu today to ask for rain, is located on the bottom right of the page and written perpendicularly; finally, on the bottom left of the page and also written perpendicularly is a commentary on fathers and sons.

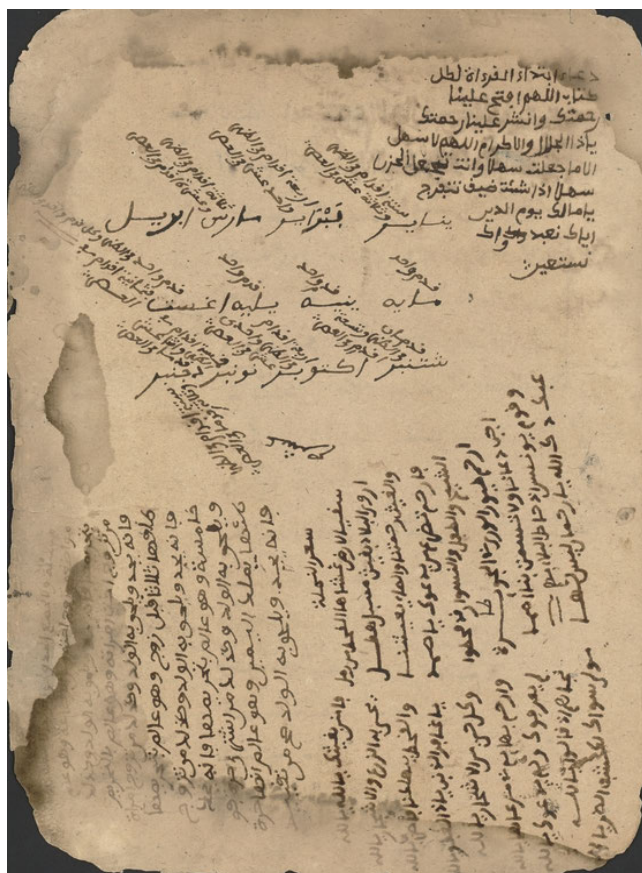
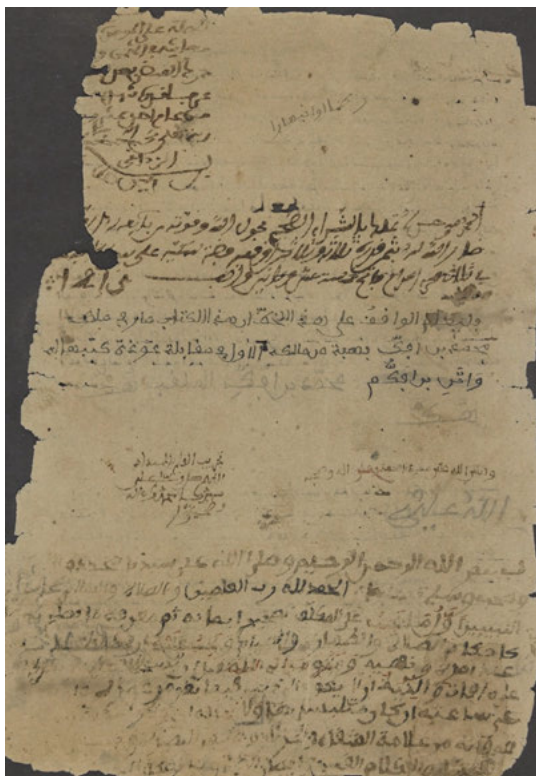


Fig. 22: *Naẓm sullam al-atfāl* by Aḥmad b. Būd b. Muḥammad al-Fulānī, MMHT 3415, fol. 1r.

Another example of the recto of the first folio of a manuscript containing a variety of notes is Fig. 23. In this manuscript, the page provides ample space for a range of marginalia clearly written by different hands: beginning at the top left corner and written horizontally, the first owner of the manuscript gives a date but no name; in the upper middle of the manuscript, written horizontally across the whole of the page are two other ownership notes by different hands denoting a change of ownership and the sale of the manuscript indicating its value (the last written in pen); in a small note in the lower half of the page on the left, the copyist simply tests his *qalam* (reed pen) and ink; finally, a completely separate text by Abd al-Raḥman al-Akhḍarī (d. 1575) is copied by a different hand in the bottom margin of this manuscript, namely on each folio beginning with the first.



**Fig. 23:** *Sharḥ ‘alā manẓūmat Abī ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-‘Arabī* of Ḥasan b. Yūsuf Ziyātī, MMHT unnumbered, fol. 1r.

### 3.6 Ownership statements

As illustrated by the last example in the category of independent textual fragments, ownership statements are a common type of marginalia found in West African manuscripts. Although usually categorised separately, they share many of the features of independent fragments, such as their frequent placement on the first (Fig. 23) or last folios of a manuscript next to the colophon (Figs 24 and 26). Ownership statements may consist of simple marks of possession just giving the name of the owner (Fig. 24) or a date of purchase (Fig. 23); they may offer more details, such as from whom the manuscript was purchased (Fig. 25) and at what price or in exchange for what (Fig. 23). When a manuscript changed ownership, the previous mark of possession was often erased (Fig. 24, on the left) or made unreadable (Fig. 25, on the left).





Fig. 24: *Wafāt al-Rasūl*, MMHT 164, fol. 8r.

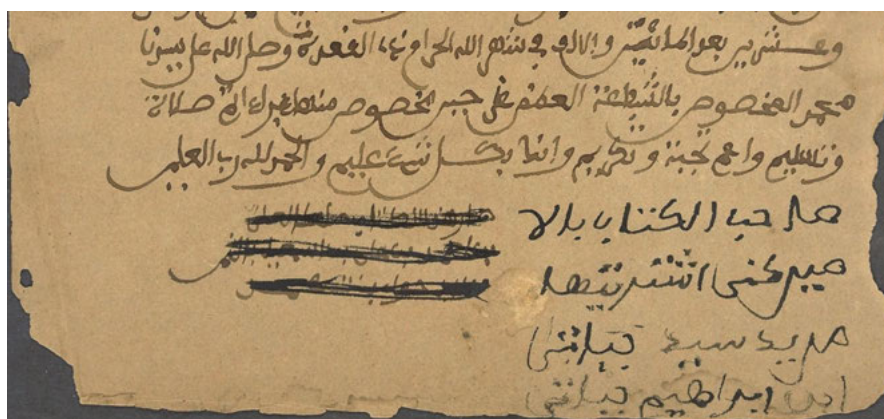


Fig. 25: *Sharḥ ‘alā ḥāshiya* by Ibn Zakūr Ibrāhīm al-Fulānī, MMHT unnumbered, fol. 22r.

Nevertheless, previous marks of possession were not always erased and in many cases we find multiple ownership notes following one another (Fig. 23), or located on either side of the colophon and written perpendicular or horizontal to the main text as illustrated by Figure 26.

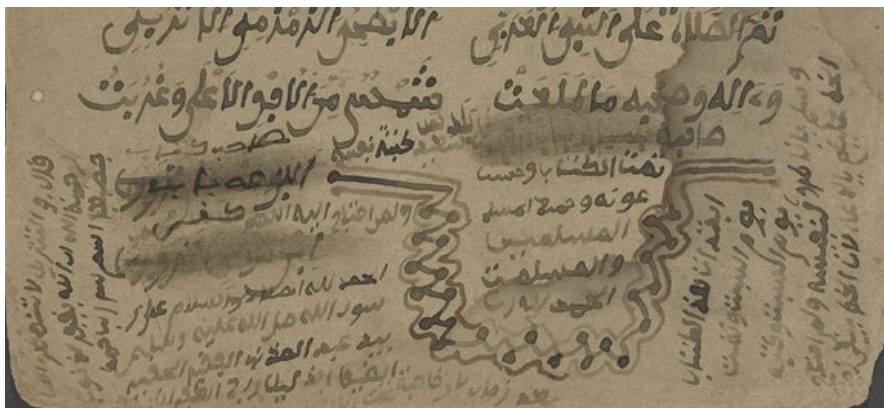


Fig. 26: *al-Durr al-manẓūm* by Yūsuf b. Saʿīd al-Qīlālī, MMHT 1059, fol. 3v.

### 3.7 Other notes

Although other types of notes, particularly those indicating the transmission or reading of a text — such as reading, audition, and collation notes and certificates and licences of transmission — are, as we saw previously, very common and widespread in Arabic manuscripts of other regions, in this survey only one such example was found. However, it is probable that these types of notes would emerge in a larger study of West African marginalia as some examples have been cited in other studies of manuscripts from the region.<sup>55</sup> In this sample, one example of this type of marginalia was a *samāʾāt* note found in the bottom margin of the manuscript and positioned at one hundred and eighty degrees to the main text (Fig. 27). The note reads: ‘I read this poem from my teacher who heard it from Aḥmad Bābā [d.1627].’

<sup>55</sup> See among others: Molins Lliteras 2015a, 2015b.

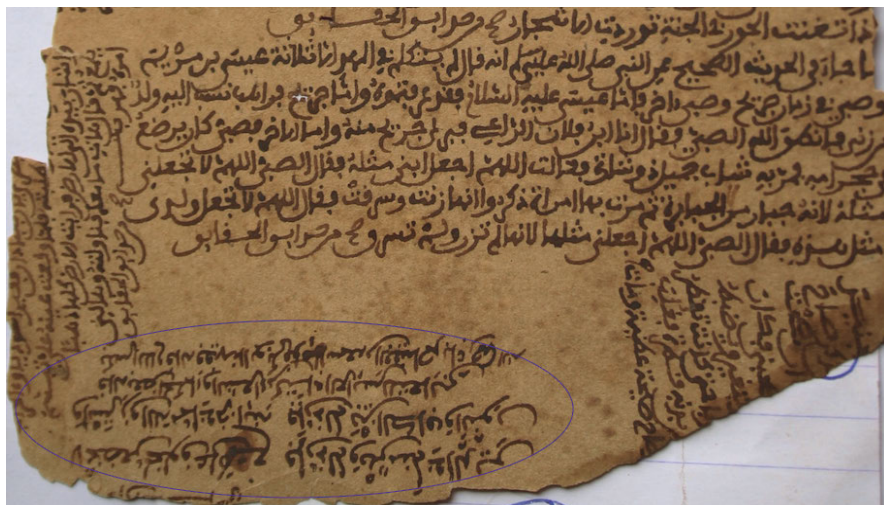


Fig. 27: *al-Mubīn fī mukhtaṣar* by Sayf al-Dīn 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Taḡlabī al-ʿĀmidī (d. 1233), MMHT 3689, fol. 1v.

## 4 Conclusion

This preliminary survey of marginalia on manuscripts from the Haïdara collection of Timbuktu, although limited and restricted in scope, points to some interesting characteristics of the notes found in manuscripts from the region. Marginalia related to the text, such as corrections, addenda, clarifications, commentaries and highlights are quite common and share certain characteristics. *Signes-de-renvoi*, such as a curved stroke and a reversed *mīm*, are common markers for a word to be corrected or for the placement of addenda, indicating the precise location of these notes in the main text. Symbols, frequently letters, groups of letters, or words indicate the nature of the notes in the margin — for example *ṣaḥḥa* is used to show that the text is now correct and an elongated *bā'* (*bayān*) above the note in the margin indicates the correction. Some of these symbols are found in Arabic manuscripts from other regions, while others seem peculiar to West African manuscripts. For example, the use of the letter *tā'* (*turra*) to designate both gloss and correction is characteristic of the Islamic West, as well as the frequent use of elongated letters or words — such as *qif* to highlight something in the main text — as superscripts or subscripts in the margin, above the corrected, added or highlighted text.

Independent textual fragments and ownership notes are also common marginalia found in manuscripts both from the Islamic East and West. They are often located in the first or last folio of a manuscript — ownership statements next to the colophon — although not exclusively. These notes display a wide range of topics, and are rarely marked by symbols, and previous marks of possession were often erased. The position and arrangement of the marginal notes in relation to the main text varies, although they are more often found on the inner and outer margins of a manuscript, possibly because the lower margin is preferably left blank, as that is where a person holds the manuscript to read it. The marginalia themselves are written in a variety of positions: they may be horizontal, perpendicular, slanted, diagonal or at one hundred and eighty degrees to the main text.

This preliminary study may serve as a useful comparative device with which to assess other marginalia from the region. In particular, the marginal notes from the Fondo Kati collection — which are often cited as examples from the region<sup>56</sup> — stand in marked contrast to many of the general characteristics of West African marginalia described in this article. The manuscripts from the Kati collection contain a range of marginalia by different people, scribes and readers; however, those purportedly written by the Kati family in particular stand out in a number of ways. In terms of content, the Kati family marginalia consist of either marks of possession or independent textual fragments, although there are also a few reading, audition and collation notes. Interestingly, my study of that collection did not find any correction, addition, or clarification notes by the Kati family members, or the use of symbols or *signes-de-renvoi*, which were the most common types of marginalia from the Haïdara collection.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, the ownership statements in the Kati collection share many characteristics with those of the Haïdara collection: they are also often found on the first folio of the manuscript, next to previous mark of possession or on the last folio, next to the colophon, or standing on their own. However, the majority of the Kati family marginalia I studied are independent textual fragments, signed and sometimes dated. These marginalia of the family in particular are easily distinguishable from other marginal notes found on the manuscripts on the basis of their layout and script.<sup>58</sup> The vast majority of the notes of the Kati family are written on the left or right margins of the manuscripts and oriented vertically and parallel to the main text. Occasionally, some notes are found in the top or bottom margins of a manuscript; in this

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<sup>56</sup> For example see Hunwick 2001, and Hunwick and Boye 2008.

<sup>57</sup> Molins Lliteras 2015b, Chapter 4.

<sup>58</sup> Details on the aspect of script lays outside of the scope of this paper; see Molins Lliteras 2015b, (Chapter 4) for details.



case, they are written horizontally and parallel to the text. This is in stark contrast to other marginalia from scribes or readers outside the Kati family, both in manuscripts of the Fondo Kati and the Haïdara collection, which are found in any of the margins and often slanted diagonally, or found at ninety or one hundred and eighty degree angles to the main text. In addition, unlike those analysed in this article, these marginal notes are not found on the first and last folios of the manuscripts, but instead are found in the inner folios of the manuscripts following one another from page to page.<sup>59</sup>

This preliminary comparison of marginalia found in two similar collections from Timbuktu demonstrates the necessity of additional, in-depth studies of this aspect of the local and regional manuscript tradition before further conclusions can be drawn. It is hoped that the newfound impetus of scholarship on the history of the book will set in motion a change of perspective that will lead to detailed studies on the marginalia of the region and to their inclusion in source materials. This survey is a first small step in that direction, and will have borne fruit if it whets the appetite of scholars to take a serious look at the possibilities unlocked by such studies.

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59 Molins Lliteras 2015b, (Chapter 4).

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