

Preface

The year 2013 was a surprisingly busy one for a slim Arabic text from the superb collection of Oriental manuscripts at Schloss Friedenstein in Gotha. The volume orient. A 114, after laying dormant for roughly two centuries without any scholarly attention, caught the eyes of two researchers on their independent pursuits. Kristina Richardson was attracted by the sign alphabet which is found on its opening pages, recognizing it as the only description of a pre-colonial finger alphabet, and wondered about its applicability to studies of historical linguistics. She was also struck by Kamāl al-Dīn's inclusion of "the language of Gypsies" as a tongue that he could encounter in Aleppo. In the course of our work, Richardson independently published studies on the finger alphabet and on the "language of the Gypsies" mentioned by Kamāl al-Dīn.⁽¹⁾ Boris Liebrecht was perusing the collection to catalogue its manuscript notes.⁽²⁾ He recognized immediately the rarity of many of

(1) See Richardson: "New Evidence" and "Tracing a Gypsy Mixed Language". Her monograph entitled *Gypsies in the Medieval Islamic World: A History of the Ghurabā'* is under contract with I. B. Tauris Press, Early and Medieval Islamic World Series.

(2) The manuscript notes of owners, readers, donors and other people that shed a light on the history of the books and texts are being presented in an online database:
<http://www.manuscripts-gotha.uni-jena.de/indexpage?searchclass=secentry&XSL.lastPage.SESSION=%2Findexpage%3Fsearchclass%3Dsecentry>