

Nuria de Castilla

Princes' Readings: The Poetry in Mūlāy Zaydān's Collection at El Escorial

Abstract: Sultan Mūlāy Zaydān's (r. 1603–1627) library was captured at sea by the Spaniards in 1612 and his books, except for those which burned in 1671, have remained mostly untouched until now. They reflect an acquisition process which started with his father Aḥmad al-Manṣūr (r. 1578–1603) and carried on by his sons, Abū Fāris and above all Mūlāy Zaydān. Poetry ranks roughly third in the library holdings as far as the number of volumes is concerned. Most had been produced in the Middle East rather than in Morocco and mirror the tastes of the princes who read them. The comparatively high amount of religious poems reflects directly a local evolution of the period. Classical Abbasid poetry is also present, as well as a more limited number of compositions originating in al-Andalus. In this section, texts on prosody are comparatively numerous: the reason may be found in the courtly practice of poetry and the need of a technical training in this field. Contemporary authors actually transmit poems composed by Aḥmad al-Manṣūr.

1 Mūlāy Zaydān's library

The Saadian sultans' library kept in the Royal Library of San Lorenzo de El Escorial (RBME) following its capture in 1612 under the reign of the Moroccan sultan Mūlāy Zaydān (1603–1627) is an exceptionally preserved 'time capsule'. In contradistinction with other medieval or early modern manuscript libraries in the Islamic world, its contents were not altered to the point of making a reconstruction of the original holdings completely impossible. Although no list or catalogue of the collection in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century has been preserved, we can still examine the books, retrace their history and sometimes identify their readers. They mirror the interests and the tastes of the Saadian rulers and of the elite at large. This situation is almost unique in the Islamic world, with the exception of the Ottoman Empire.

We do not possess the complete Saadian library as it may have stood in 1612, before Mūlāy Zaydān had to relinquish Marrakech as a revolt led by Ibn Abi Mahallī was reaching the city. The sultan took with him most of his library to the coastal city of Safi, but it seems that some volumes were left behind. The latter are now scattered among various libraries. It comes as no surprise to find some of

them in Morocco, for instance in the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco.¹ Some surfaced in other countries: a copy of the *Kashshāf* by al-Zamakhsharī with Aḥmad al-Manṣūr's ownership statement penned on its first folio is part of the Cambridge University Library collections.² Most of the books were however loaded onto a French boat, the *Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde*.³ The trip was to prove fateful for Mūlāy Zaydān's library: as the sultan was unable to pay for the transportation, the captain decided to sail towards France in order to sell the cargo. On her way, the *Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde* was captured by a Spanish fleet and the books were taken to Spain, then to the Spanish Royal library in the monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial. When the Saadian library reached the Escorial, it was incorporated into the small Arabic manuscripts collection that began to be assembled under Philip II's rule.⁴ They are still kept there, although many were lost during a fire in 1671.⁵

While in Marrakech, the library was – at least at some moment – under the custody of a librarian, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥajj al-Andalusī, who left a note on one of the manuscripts.⁶ However, there is no sign that he, or another librarian, ever prepared a catalogue or an index of the Saadian library. In the Escorial, the identification of the topics of each manuscript was started as early as 1617 by David Colville, well before the 1671 fire, but no inventory of the Arabic manuscripts in the Escorial during the seventeenth century seems to have survived.⁷

From an early date, the Arabic manuscripts kept in the San Lorenzo de El Escorial monastery played a role in the study of Arabic literature in Europe,⁸ but this exceptional collection did not elicit so far any study of its contents as such or of their relationship with Saadian Morocco. In the frame of the SICLE project, a research was started on the intellectual culture of that period, trying to understand what the people were reading and how it was related to their culture.

1 Hajji 1976, 224 indicates that 'thousands of books [from the sultan's library] are scattered in Morocco's libraries until today'; he gives as example the copies of *al-'Awdū Aḥmad* in the Ḥasaniyya library in Rabat, no. 4911 (174, n. 75) and 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Fishtalī's *Tartīb Dīwān al-Mutanabbi* in the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco 609 G (175, n. 82).

2 Cambridge, UL, Add. 815 (Browne 1900, 178). The owner's name, Aḥmad al-Manṣūr, has not been identified.

3 Déroche 2016, 43–48.

4 On the history of the collection, see Justel Calabozo 1987, 133–169.

5 Justel Calabozo 1987, 188–190.

6 RBME 1730, fol. 1a. References to manuscripts in the El Escorial collection are directly to the shelfmark; for manuscripts in other collections, the location and name of the library are indicated.

7 Antolin 1921, 80–81; Cano 1996–2004, I, 29.

8 Casiri's catalogue was an important source of information in this regard.

Muhammad Hajji's important research on the intellectual culture of Saadian Morocco is a key source on this subject and especially on the intellectual production of that time.⁹ The texts circulating were partially known to him through various *fahrasa*, the record of a scholar's training, listing the texts he had learned from his various masters – which does not always imply books physically present in Morocco.¹⁰ Libraries were obviously also a source of knowledge that was put to use by scholars and the cultivated elite as well, but Hajji did not fully include them in his study. In fact, many libraries of Saadian times have disappeared or are only known through a few items that have come down to us. Luckily, the sultans' library has been in good part preserved and is a primary witness of the culture of this period.

A better understanding of the collection through its manuscripts provides fresh views about the history of the library itself. It developed under Aḥmad al-Manṣūr (r. 1578–1603) who rose to power after the 'Battle of the three kings' in 1578 and strove to establish his figure as that of the 'caliph of the scholars and scholar of the caliphs' according to a formula coined by a contemporary scholar, Aḥmad al-Manjūr (d. 1587 CE).¹¹ The library survived the internal strife that broke out between Aḥmad al-Manṣūr's sons after their father's death. Abū Fāris who became sultan in Marrakech at that moment also collected books that were taken by Zaydān when he succeeded in conquering Marrakech. As could be expected, many volumes bear a handwritten mark stating that they belonged to Zaydān, but it comes as no surprise that many also bear his father's ownership statements. The latter are almost as numerous as those mentioning Abū Fāris.

Aḥmad al-Manṣūr was keen on establishing his figure as a scholar and the sources concerning his reign, notably the chronicle by al-Fishtālī, tell much about his efforts in that direction.¹² He took pains to abide by the procedure of traditional Muslim scholarship and some of the manuscripts in his collection have actually preserved the licences (*ijāza*) he received from contemporary scholars. A *munāwala* in which Aḥmad al-Manjūr gives his permission to the sultan to transmit a treatise he had written has already been published.¹³

His intellectual *coquetteries* set apart, Aḥmad al-Manṣūr was very conscious of his position and his library reflects also his political vision. As a member of

⁹ Hajji 1976.

¹⁰ See for instance al-Manjūr 1976.

¹¹ Smith 2006; García-Arenal 2009; Mouline 2009.

¹² al-Fishtālī, *Manāhil al-ṣafā fī ma'āthir mawālīnā al-shurafā*, ed. Kurayyim 1972, 266–294; Mouline 2009, 82–90.

¹³ Déroche 2012.

a dynasty claiming descent from the Prophet Muḥammad and bearing for this reason the title of caliph and *amīr al-mu'minīn*, he established himself as an equal of those who, before him, claimed that title. One of the handwritten marks of Aḥmad al-Manṣūr can be compared to another one that has been attributed to an Almohad prince.¹⁴

Aḥmad al-Manṣūr was emulating his predecessors, but also contemporary rulers. Although his relationship with the Ottoman sultans was somewhat strained and he was vying with them, he was impressed by Ottoman culture and took over Ottoman manners, for instance in the organization of his army.¹⁵ His books also show that he imitated the habit, well established in the Eastern part of the Muslim world but quite unusual in the West, to have his seal stamped on one of the first folios of a manuscript. The inscription engraved on the seal takes over his (still undeciphered) official signature, but the shape and layout are probably an imitation of an Ottoman model, probably Sultan Beyazıt's own seal (Figs 1a–1b). His son, Mūlāy Zaydān, followed suit: in addition to the handwritten marks already mentioned, a seal impression with his name in the central circle is found on a few manuscripts in the Escorial. However, its style does not conform to Eastern canons.



Fig. 1a: Seal of Aḥmad al-Manṣūr. © San Lorenzo de El Escorial, RBME 48, fol. 3a.



Fig. 1b: Seal of Sultan Beyazıt's. © Private collection.

¹⁴ See Paris, BnF, Arabe 6090, fol. 2a, with the name of 'Ibrāhīm b. amīr al-mu'minīn b. amīr al-mu'minīn b. amīr al-mu'minīn b. amīr al-mu'minīn'. It has been suggested that he could be an Almohad prince, son of al-Manṣūr.

¹⁵ Mouline 2009, 151, about the army; Hajji 1976, 63 provides a sample of Turkish loan words in Moroccan Arabic.

The sixteenth century witnesses a technical and aesthetic change in the decoration of the bindings that is contemporary with the Saadian rule. Instead of tooling the covers with small tools requiring to be stamped many times in order to produce an ornament, Moroccan binders began to use engraved plates that allowed to print directly a complete composition. The technique as well as the style of the decoration are clearly borrowed from Ottoman binders, a new element in our appreciation of the taste for Ottoman fashions in Saadian Morocco.¹⁶

As stated before, the Saadian manuscripts have been incorporated into the Spanish royal library in the Escorial monastery. In its present state, the collection has been arranged according to subject matter. Of course, the classification is not a clear cut one and texts that belong to another field are often found within another section, especially in the case of multiple-text manuscripts. Aurora Cano's index provides some help when one wants to get a broader view of the collection contents,¹⁷ but it relies heavily on previous catalogues without always correcting their mistakes, keeping for instance the reading *Aḥmad al-Munjūz* instead of *al-Manjūr*,¹⁸ and failing to record texts that have not been described previously, like a *qaṣīda* found in multiple-text manuscript RBME 788.¹⁹ Anyhow, the classification by subject matters makes things easier when one wants to assess the contents of the Moroccan sultans' library on a thematic basis in an historical-quantitative perspective. As an example of the intended approach of the collection, I shall focus here on the section of poetry manuscripts.

2 Poetry manuscripts

In the Escorial library, the poetry manuscripts are gathered between numbers RBME 270 to 490, then arranged according to their size. As a first step, it is however necessary to disentangle the various components of the Arabic manuscripts collection that are nowadays present side by side on the shelves. Two copies, RBME 290 and RBME 303 were clearly not part of the Saadian library²⁰

¹⁶ See de Castilla 2019.

¹⁷ Cano Ledesma 1996–2004.

¹⁸ The author's name had been read incorrectly as 'al-Moundjoūz' by Dérenbourg (Dérenbourg 1884–1903, I, 163) and his mistake was not corrected by Cano Ledesma (Cano Ledesma 1996–2004, II, 54, no. 75 and 57, no. 3). See also Déroche 2012, 1219.

¹⁹ See Déroche 2019, 169. The text on fol. 175 b is not described by Dérenbourg (Dérenbourg 1884–1903, II, 78).

²⁰ Both were part of Diego Hurtado de Mendoza's library purchased by Philip II in 1572, see Cano Ledesma 1996–2004, I, 19.

and manuscripts RBME 400, 401, 485 and 490 are either Persian or Ottoman Turkish poetry – or both. They will not be taken into account in the following remarks. Six entries in the catalogue are indicated as missing.²¹ The 208 remaining manuscripts were part of the Saadian collection and constitute the basis of the present study. Among them are 52 multiple-text manuscripts (MTM), that is to say a quarter of the total. In many instances (22), these manuscripts include only two texts;²² they are conversely fifteen in RBME 470 which is quite exceptional within the group under study. As a result, the number of texts involved is larger than that of the volumes.²³ The total of poetical texts present in the collection (257) is however smaller than the total of codicological units since some items are found in different copies.²⁴

Forty-eight texts are found in two, three or even four different copies, which asks the question of the control by the librarians over the purchase of duplicate items. The accession process is actually largely escaping us as we still do not have a precise idea of the way in which the books were acquired. Some were certainly bought locally. The description of the book market in Morocco written by Nicolas Clénard, a Belgian scholar in search of manuscripts who visited Fez towards the middle of the sixteenth century, sounds somewhat gloomy: according to him, few were available and often only parts or fragments of a text, ‘so that one is often forced to buy various times the same thing if one wants to get the complete text and this can take years’.²⁵

More possibilities were obviously available to the sultans than to a Westerner. The former were actually able to secure one way or another books that were part of local scholars’ libraries,²⁶ a procedure that is also known in other parts of the Islamic world.²⁷ We may surmise that most if not all the copies in a Maghribi hand were produced in the Western part of the Islamic world, al-Andalus and North Africa: this is the case for 52 of them. Although one cannot fully exclude that they

21 RBME 319, 402, 403, 447, 478 and 486.

22 In the *waqf* deed published in this volume by Déroche and Tahali, the miscellanies with two texts are not seen as the other multiple text manuscripts.

23 Miscellanies and composite will be considered as a whole.

24 For instance Arabe 288₃, 330₅ and 396₁ with Ibn al-Saqqāt’s *Muqaddima fī al-‘arūd* (a text on prosody, see below). It seems to happen mostly with multiple-texts manuscripts.

25 Le Tourneau 1934, 58.

26 Volumes part of a family *waqf* established by Aḥmad al-Manjūr are found in the collection (see RBME 1302 for instance).

27 See for instance Uluç 1999, 88–89.

may have been transcribed outside of this area, there is a very high possibility that they were actually produced there and never left North Africa.²⁸

However, most of the manuscripts that were part of the Saadian collection of poetry were produced in the Middle East: almost three quarters (153) are written in a script typical of the Eastern part of the Islamic world, a point that is sometimes confirmed by dated notes of Eastern owners or readers. If we only take into account the dated manuscripts (101), the distribution remains identical: 27 (26,5%) are in a Maghribi hand and 74 (73,5%) were produced in the Eastern part of the Islamic world. One cannot absolutely exclude that copyists originating from the Middle East worked in the Western Islamic world, but one may assume that this has been a marginal feature.²⁹ Conversely, a copy in a Maghribi hand, RBME 357, was at some moment in the East as indicated by notes by various Eastern owners, the latest being dated 1564–1565. The imbalance between 'imported' and locally produced manuscripts is less noticeable when it comes to the multiple-text manuscripts: 23 of them are in a Maghribi hand against 29 in an Eastern script. The latter is not the only feature that could strike as the hallmark of a foreign provenance: two volumes in *safīna* format made their way to that part of the Saadian library.³⁰

The study of the history of the collection can throw some light on the accession process: in a very few cases only, it will be possible to reconstruct the way in which manuscripts were acquired in the East.³¹ The data available show that the importation process to Morocco could be quite fast. In the section under study, the most recent colophon with an Eastern provenance is dated 1015 AH/1606 CE, that is to say only six years before the library was captured.³² A general overview of the dated manuscripts indicates that many of the volumes that have been brought to Morocco from the Eastern Islamic lands were purchased under the reigns of Aḥmad al-Mansūr and of his son. When looking at the table below,³³ the chronological distribution is quite meaningful:

²⁸ See below an exception with RBME 357.

²⁹ Hajji 1976, 82–84 states that some scholars from the Near East used to visit Morocco during the period, but he does not provide names.

³⁰ RBME 481 and 488.

³¹ 'Abdallāh Gannūn ed., 1954, 78–81 and 179–183; I owe this reference to Dr. M. Zouihel who has been able to identify an important source in Egypt.

³² RBME 446, dated 1015 AH/1606 CE.

³³ Three multiple-texts manuscripts (RBME 328, 410 and 419) include texts of various periods; in the table, only the latest item has been taken into account. The copies produced between 1601 and the capture of the library are included into the sixteenth century.

Table 1: Distribution of dated poetry manuscripts in the Saadian collection.

	12th century		13th century		14th century		15th century		16th century	
	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.
Unitary	6	2	5	3	5	2	17	2	23	4
Coll.	1	0	3	2	1	6	2	0	11	8
Subtotal	7	2	8	5	6	8	19	2	34	12
Total	9 (9%)		13 (12.5%)		14 (13.5%)		21 (20%)		46 (45%)	

As could be expected, the sixteenth century manuscripts are more numerous and account for almost half of the total. A closer look at the corpus of dated and datable poetry manuscripts shows that a conspicuously high proportion among those produced in the East were brought to North Africa after 1550. This conclusion can be reached by combining two groups of manuscripts in an Eastern hand: the first one includes all those bearing a colophon (74 items) and the second one includes those containing a dated note in an Eastern hand later than 1550 (18 items),³⁴ which strongly supports the hypothesis that they had not yet reached Morocco at the moment when the note was added. When taking together the copies that were completed after 1550 according to their colophon and those of the second group, it appears that 47 manuscripts representing more than half of the corpus (54% of a total of 87 manuscripts) reached Morocco after 1550. The implication is that the constitution of the Saadian library relied on an important movement from East to West over a comparatively short period of time. The proportion may actually be even higher as many manuscripts that do not bear any indication that they left the Eastern Islamic world after 1550, like a colophon or a dated note in an Eastern hand, may have also been included in this movement.

Full conclusions about book trade and the history of the library will have to wait for the end of the study of the collection when it will be possible to compare the results about its various components. However, I would like to draw the attention to the high proportion of multiple-text manuscripts among the sixteenth century copies.

Verses are ubiquitous in the collection since in addition to the texts we subsume under the heading ‘poetry’ we come across many didactic poems (it will be suffi-

³⁴ Twelve manuscripts bear a note in an Eastern hand with a date later than 1550 and are therefore presumed to have reached Morocco after that date; six manuscripts belonged to one of the al-Mallāḥ brothers who sold many items to Aḥmad al-Manṣūr. Among those 18 manuscripts, some do not have a colophon; conversely, those with a colophon prior to 1550 were not included in the first group but in the second – hence the total of 87 manuscripts in our corpus.

cient to mention here the *Alfiyya* by Ibn Mālik, a poem on grammar)³⁵ that I shall not take into account here. Apart from these texts, almost half of the 257 texts found in the poetry section of the Escorial collection are either *diwāns* (i.e. collected works of an author) and single poems, or anthologies of various extant. The rest is made up of commentaries on specific poems or treatises related with prosody.

When looking into more detail at the poems present in the collection, some features draw the attention. Religious poetry is well represented, with 61 texts, more than half of them being poems in praise of the Prophet Muḥammad or their commentaries. The importance of this group within the Saadian library can be related to what Muḥammad Hajji called the 'religious character' of Moroccan thought in Saadian times.³⁶ The advent of a dynasty claiming a sharifian origin gave more weight to the devotion to the Prophet. A look at the dated manuscripts, covering 35 texts, supports Hajji's observation since they indicate a steep rise of interest for these poems during the sixteenth century (Table 2).³⁷

Table 2: Religious poetry.

	12th century		13th century		14th century		15th century		16th century	
	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.
Unitary	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	10	1
Coll.	1 (1)	0	1 (2)	1 (5)	0	3 (4)	0	0	3 (4)	2 (4)
Subtotal	1	0	1	1	0	3	3	1	13	3
Total	1		2		3		4		16	

The significantly higher proportion of sixteenth century copies of religious poetry, in comparison with the other dated manuscripts of that group, is not paralleled at the level of the dated poetry manuscripts (Table 1). This observation will receive further support when these results will be compared with other parts of the poetry collection in the library.³⁸ A closer look at the manuscripts containing a poem in the praise of the Prophet highlights the importance of this specific genre (Table 3):

³⁵ See RBME 92z, 135, 248s, 547a.

³⁶ Hajji 1976, 72–73.

³⁷ On this table and the next one, the number of texts in the multiple-text manuscripts that are related to the topic dealt with (here for instance: religious poetry) is indicated between parenthesis after the number of copies.

³⁸ RBME 304 (1000 AH/1592 CE), 315 (1005 AH/1597 CE), 367 (962 AH/1554–1555 CE), 385 (967 AH/1559 CE), 414 (984 AH/1576 CE), 417 (994 AH/1586 CE), 420 (1004 AH/1595 CE and 1009 AH/1601

Table 3: Praise of the Prophet.

	12th century		13th century		14th century		15th century		16th century	
	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.
Unitary	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	7	1
Coll.	1 (1)	0	0	1 (4)	0	3 (4)	0	0	1 (2)	2 (2)
Subtotal	1	0	0	1	1	3	2	1	8	3
Total		1		1		3		3		11

With a total of 24 texts in 19 dated copies, this genre is well represented. It is no surprise to find among the texts of two very popular devotional poems, the *Burda* by al-Būṣīrī (d. 1294 CE)³⁹ and the *Bānat Su‘ād* by Ka‘b b. Zuhayr⁴⁰ – mostly in commented form. Actually, commentaries of both works are known to have been produced in Saadian times.⁴¹ However, only one text comes in various copies, the *Minaḥ al-samī‘ bi-sharḥ tamliḥ al-badī‘ bi-madiḥ al-shafī‘* by al-Ḥumaydī (d. 1596 CE).⁴² These extracts from a poem by a contemporary of Aḥmad al-Manṣūr, are found in four manuscripts: three are in an Eastern hand (Fig. 2), one of them being a copy by the author.⁴³ They are another indication of the way in which the collection relied on the importation of manuscripts from the Near East at a late date, but also of the interest shown by the library’s owners for recent compositions.

CE), 421 (1000 AH/1592 CE), 422 (994 AH/1586 CE), 423 (994 AH/1586 CE), 440 (944 AH/1537 CE), 446 (1015 AH/1606 CE) and 487 (910 AH/1504 CE) are sixteenth century copies in Eastern script; RBME 318 (983 AH/1576 CE), 361 (993 AH/1585 CE) and 384 (914 AH/1508 CE) were written in a Maghribi hand during the same period.

³⁹ See GAL I, 264–267, particularly 265–266; S I, 467–470. The text or its commentaries are found in manuscripts Arabe 282 (s.a.), 283 (s.a.), 304₂ (1000 AH/1592 CE), 316 (s.a.), 318 (983 AH/1576 CE), 390₂ (s.a.), 413 (881 AH/1476 CE), 414 (984 AH/1576 CE), 470₅ (s.a.) and 487₁ (910 AH/1504 CE). In addition, it also appears in manuscripts that are not included in the section on poetry, for instance in Arabe 248₁ (970 AH/1562 CE).

⁴⁰ See GAL I, 38–9; S I, 68–69. The text or its commentaries are found in manuscripts RBME 270₁ (799 AH/1397 CE), 304₁ (1000 AH/1592 CE), 305 (s.a.) and 470₆ (s.a.).

⁴¹ Hajji 1976, 175, n. 84 (*Bānat Su‘ād*) and 85 (*Burda*).

⁴² See GAL II, 272, no. 7; S II, 383.

⁴³ RBME 354 (s.a., after 993 AH/1586 CE), 421 (1000 AH/1592 CE), 422 (994 AH/1586 CE) and 423 (994 AH/1586 CE, in the author’s hand); RBME 421 is in a Maghribi hand.



Fig. 2: al-Ḥumaydī, *Minah al-samī bi-sharḥ tamliḥ al-badī bi-madiḥ al-shafī*.

© San Lorenzo de El Escorial, RBME 422, fol. 88a).

In various multiple text manuscripts, a poem in the praise of Muhammad comes first in the sequence: this disposition occurs in twelve manuscripts found in the poetry section of the Escorial collection, most of them being Maghribi copies (8).⁴⁴

The distribution of the texts related to Abbasid poetry (30 in total) according to their date is notably different from the previous example (Table 4). In Hajji's words, 'Muḥammad al-Mahdī aš-Šayḥ était un lettré, ayant appris par cœur le *dīwān* d'al-Mutanabbī. De même ses fils Muḥammad al-Mutawakkil et Aḥmad al-Manṣūr, ainsi que ses petits-fils Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Qādir et Zaydān étaient tous des savants, des écrivains et des poètes'.⁴⁵

In the library of sultans who were cultivating the image of princes fond of poetry, it is no wonder to find the works of the most famous poets of that period, like the *dīwāns* of al-Mutannabbī (d. 965 CE),⁴⁶ Abū Tammām (d. 846 CE),⁴⁷ al-Ma'arrī (d. 1057 CE)⁴⁸ or Abū Nuwās (d. c. 810 CE) to name only the most famous.⁴⁹ However, there is no similar gap between the sixteenth century copies and those that were produced earlier as observed in the case of religious poetry. The picture offered is that of a rather steady distribution.

Table 4: Abbasid poetry.

	12th century		13th century		14th century		15th century		16th century	
	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.
<i>Diwan</i>	1	1	3	2	2	0	0	0	3	1
in Coll.	0	0	0	0	1 (1)	0	0	0	1 (1)	1 (2)
Com- mentary	1	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	3	1
in Coll.	0	0	0	1 (1)	0	0	0	0	2 (4)	0
Subtotal	2	1	3	3	3	0	2	0	6	2
Total		3		6		3		2		8

⁴⁴ RBME 304 (1000 AH/1592 CE), 399 (s.a.), 436 (s.a.) and 442 (562 AH/1167 CE) are in Eastern script; Arabe 270 (s.a.), 361 (993 AH/1585 CE), 362 (742 AH/1342 CE), 363 (771 AH/1370 CE), 384 (914 AH/1508 CE), 404 (666 AH/1268 CE and 676 AH/1278 CE), 470 (s.a.) and 487 (910 AH/1504 CE) are in Maghribi script.

⁴⁵ Hajji 1976, 65.

⁴⁶ GAL I, 86–89; S I, 138–141. RBME 272 (699 AH/1300 CE) and 394 (588 AH/1192 CE).

⁴⁷ GAL I, 84–85; S I, 134–137. RBME 291 (1188 CE according to Dérenbourg) and 415 (556 AH/1161 CE).

⁴⁸ GAL I, 254–255; S I, 449–454. RBME 273 (s.a.) and 435 (s.a.).

⁴⁹ GAL I, 75–77; S I, 114–118. RBME 311 (1002 AH/1593 CE).

Among the thirteen dated manuscripts of Abbasid poems (Table 4),⁵⁰ seven are copies from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,⁵¹ a situation contrasting sharply with what has been observed about the religious poetry. By contrast, only four are dated to the sixteenth century.⁵² This distribution might indicate a preference for trustworthy manuscripts – two of them having been previously in a princely library (Fig. 3).⁵³ Conversely, among the nine dated manuscripts with commentaries of Abbasid poetry included in this group,⁵⁴ the proportion of copies of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, more frequently produced in the East, is higher.⁵⁵

Within the manuscripts of Abbasid poetry, the various copies, dated or undated, of collected works by al-Mutanabbī or commentaries of his poems confirm Hajji's observation about the taste for his poetry during the Saadian period.⁵⁶ A commentary of his work by 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Fishtālī, the *Tartīb Diwān al-Mutanabbī*, was actually 'composé sur ordre d'Aḥmad al-Manṣūr, classé d'après l'alphabet marocain, avec une belle introduction littéraire et des titres attrayants. De nombreuses gloses ont trait à la lexicographie, la rhétorique, les plagiats poétiques, etc.'⁵⁷

The manuscript 609 G with this text is kept in the Bibliothèque nationale du Royaume du Maroc in Rabat and is a witness of the great value the sultan attached to this poetry: 'c'est une copie royale ayant appartenu à Aḥmad al-Manṣūr, dont elle porte les notes séchées à l'aide de poudre d'or'.⁵⁸

50 On this table and the next one, the number of manuscripts containing either *diwans* or commentaries is shown on the first line of each category; on the next line, the number of multiple text manuscripts and the number of texts concerned is indicated for information.

51 RBME 415 (556 AH/1161 CE), 394 (588 AH/1192 CE), 320 (640 AH/1242–1243 CE), 277 (652 AH/1254 CE), 435 (653 AH/1255 CE), 344 (694 AH/1295 CE) and 272 (699 AH/1300 CE). RBME 415, 344 and 272 were copied in a Maghribi hand.

52 Arabe 369₃ (1002 AH/1594 CE) is in a Maghribi hand; Arabe 311 (1002 AH/1593 CE), 375 (984 AH/1577 CE) and 420₂ (1009 AH/1601 CE) were transcribed in the East.

53 Arabe 277 (652 AH/1254 CE) and 320 (640 AH/1243 CE).

54 Arabe 476₁ (619 AH/1222 CE) and 321 (970 AH/1563 CE) are in a Maghribi hand; Arabe 308 (529 AH/1134–1135 CE), 309 (736 AH/1335–1336), 322 (844 AH/1440 CE), 323 (876 AH/1471 CE), 324 (1004 AH/1595 CE), 325₁ (1005 AH/1597 CE) and 361 (1004 AH/1595 CE) were transcribed in the Near East.

55 This is the case for manuscripts Arabe 308 (529 AH/1134–1135 CE), 309 (736 AH/1335–1336 CE), 322 (844 AH/1440 CE), 323 (876 AH/1471 CE), 325 (1005 AH/1597 CE) and 480 (881 AH/1476 CE), Arabe 312 (700 AH/1300–1301 CE) and 321 (1004 AH/1563 CE) being Maghribi copies.

56 In addition to the two copies of his collected works, commentaries are found in manuscripts Arabe 306₁ (s.a.), 307 (s.a.), 308 (529 AH/1134–1135) and 309 (736 AH/1335–1336 CE).

57 Hajji 1976, 175, n. 82. About the author, see GAL S II, 680.

58 Hajji 1976, 175, n. 82.

أَمْ أَسْرَدَ قَدْ أَخْبَأَ الْبَطْنُ مِنْهُ لَيْسَ بِكَ بَرَكٌ حِينَ قَامَا
يُؤَيِّدُكَ لِلدَّرَاهِمِ لَا لَشَيْءٍ وَتِلْكَ نَدْوَى عَشَقَا وَاهْتِمَامَا

وَقَالَ بَيْتًا مَفْرُكًا

إِقَامَةُ الدُّفْلِ الْبَصْنِي تَكْلِفُهَا وَلَا إِقَامَةُ ابْنِ هَذِهِ الْهَرَمِ

قَافِيَةِ النُّونِ

وَقَالَ

فِي أَبِي الصَّقَرِ اسْمِعِينَ بَرْبِلِيلَ

ذَلِكَ

أَجْنَتْ لَكَ الْوَجْدَ اغْصَانُ وَهَاجَ نَوْعَانِ نَفَاحٍ وَدِيَانِ
وَنُوقَ نِيكَ اغْنَابٌ مَهْدَلُهُ سُودٌ لَهْنٌ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاءِ الْوَاكِ
وَحَتَّهَا نَبْلُ غَنَابٍ بُلُوعٌ بِهَا أَطْرَافُهُمْ قُلُوبُ الْقَوْمِ قَبُولُ
غُصُونِنَا زَعْلِيهَا الدَّهْرُ قَاكُهُ وَمَا الْفَوَاكِي قَامَا لِحُلِّ الْبَانِ
وَنَرْجِسُ بَاتٍ سَارِي الطَّلُفِ بَصِيرُهُ وَالْحَوَازِ بَيْتُ الْوَرْدِ بَيَانِ
الْفَنِّ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ طَيِّبٍ حَسَنٍ نَهْنُ نَاكُهُ شَتَّى وَرَنَاحَاتِ
ثَمَارِ صِدْقٍ ذَا عَائِدَتٍ طَائِرٍ هَالِكٍ نَهْجٍ تَلَوَا الطَّعْمَ خَطْبَانِ
بَلْ حَاوَاهُ مَرَّةً طَوْرًا يُقَالُ لَهَا شَهْلٌ طَوْرًا يَقُولُ النَّاسُ دَنْفَانِ

Fig. 3: Ibn al-Rūmī, *Dīwān*. © San Lorenzo de El Escorial, RBME 277, fol. 167a.

One should however note that the poems of al-Ṭughrā'ī (d. after 1121 CE),⁵⁹ especially his *Lāmiyat al-‘ajām*, are particularly well represented in the collection: in addition to an early copy of his *dīwān*,⁶⁰ five commentaries of his most famous poem were kept in the Saadian library,⁶¹ the abridged version of al-Ṣafadī's by al-Damīrī (d. 1405 CE) being found in three sixteenth century copies.⁶²

Hajji devotes a few pages to the Andalusī component in the Saadian cultural and intellectual life, but he does not mention the afterlife of the poetry of al-Andalus in Saadian Morocco – except for songs and music.⁶³

Table 5: Poetry from al-Andalus and strophic poetry.

	12th century		13th century		14th century		15th century		16th century	
	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.
Classical	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	2
in Coll.	0	0	1 (1)	1 (1)	0	1 (2)	0	0	0	2 (3)
Strophic	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
in Coll.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2 (2)
Subtotal	0	1	1	1	0	2	1	0	0	4
Total		1		2		2		1		4

The classical poetry from al-Andalus and the *muwashshah* and *zajal* genres are actually not represented by a large number of manuscripts, but they were nevertheless of special interest for their princely readers. According to the evidence available, the collection covers a wide spectrum of the production, with poets like Ibn Khafāja (d. 1139 CE),⁶⁴ Ibn Sahl al-Ishbīlī (d. 1251 CE)⁶⁵ or Ibn Khātima al-Anṣārī (d. c. 1369 CE).⁶⁶ Anthologies are also found in the collection, for instance the *Qalā'id al-‘iqyān wa maḥāsīn al-a'yān* compiled by Ibn Khāqān (d. 1134 CE) and

⁵⁹ GAL I, 247; S I, 439–440.

⁶⁰ RBME 320 (1242–1243 CE).

⁶¹ RBME 321 (970 AH/1563 CE), 322 (844 AH/1440 CE), 323 (876 AH/1471 CE), 324 (1004 AH/1595 CE) and 325 (1005 AH/1597 CE to 1004 AH/1596 CE, with three commentaries).

⁶² RBME 321, 324 and 325₂. For al-Damīrī, see GAL II, 138; S II, 170–171.

⁶³ Hajji 1976, 77–80.

⁶⁴ GAL I, 272; S I, 480–481; RBME 378 (s.a.).

⁶⁵ GAL I, 273–274; S I, 483; RBME 379 (s.a.).

⁶⁶ GAL II, 259; S II, 369; RBME 381 (738 AH/1338 CE).

preserved in a twelfth century Maghribi copy that was at some moment in the East, at least until 1564–1565, before it was acquired by the Saadian library.⁶⁷ Most of the copies are actually in Maghribi script: among the dated manuscripts, there is only one in an Eastern script.⁶⁸

The Andalusian strophic poetry, *muwashshaḥ* and *zajal*, are also found in the Saadian collection, represented by four texts.⁶⁹ Their distribution according to the region of copy is in itself interesting of the exchanges between the two parts of the Mediterranean. The only dated volume in an Oriental hand is a fifteenth century copy.⁷⁰ The two Maghribi manuscripts were completed in the second half of the sixteenth century, one of them a few months only after the ‘Battle of the three kings’ and the accession to the throne of Aḥmad al-Manṣūr in 1578.⁷¹

Three of the manuscripts of this group witness the keen interest of the Saadian élite for these specific genres.⁷² RBME 455 contains the *al-Siḥr wa-l-shiʿr* by Lisān al-dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 1374 CE)⁷³ followed by a part of the *al-Muqṭaṭaf min azāhir al-ṭuraf* by Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Ibn Saʿīd al-Magistri al-Andalusī (d. 1286 CE)⁷⁴ and bears notes relating it directly to Aḥmad al-Manṣūr, a clear indication of his appreciation of Ibn al-Khaṭīb (Fig. 4). The *al-Siḥr wa-l-shiʿr* is found again in RBME 456, prepared for the library of an unidentified Ḥasanī sharif in the second half of the sixteenth century. The third copy, Arabe 369, has been written by Idrīs b. ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm b. ‘Alī b. Rāshid al-Ḥasanī between 998 AH/1590 CE and 1002 AH/1594 CE: a member of another branch of the Ḥasanī *sharifs*, he was living in Marrakech under Aḥmad al-Manṣūr’s reign but fell into disgrace and had to leave the city.⁷⁵ It may be in the aftermath of this episode that his books were incorporated into the sultan’s library. The uncommon layout of the first and second texts in RBME 369 (Fig. 5) is similar to that of two examples pointing to an Andalusian fashion: the first is RBME 344, transcribed in Granada, and the other a fourteenth-century Andalusian copy of Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī’s *Dīwān* (now in a private collection in Tiznit).⁷⁶ The

67 GAL I, 339; S I, 579; RBME 357 (591 AH/1194 CE).

68 RBME 408 (657 AH/1259 CE).

69 RBME 369₁ (999 AH/1591 CE), RBME 434 (863 AH/1459 CE), RBME 438 (s.a.) and RBME 455₂ (986 AH/1578 CE). On the *muwashshaḥ*, see Rosen 2000, 165–189.

70 RBME 434 (863 AH/1459 CE); the other Oriental copy is not dated (RBME 438).

71 RBME 369₁ (999 AH/1591 CE) and RBME 455₂ (s.a., but the first text of this copy bears a date of 986 AH/1578 CE).

72 RBME 356 (990 AH/1582 CE), RBME 455 (986 AH/1578 CE) and RBME 456 (s.a.).

73 For *al-Siḥr wa-l-shiʿr*, see GAL II, 263, no. 14; S II, 373.

74 The text has been identified by ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Ahwanī, see al-Ahwanī 1948.

75 al-Maqqarī 1983, 188–189. I am indebted to Dr. M. Zouïhal for this reference.

76 I am indebted to Prof. L. Tahali for this reference.



Fig. 4: Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī al-Andalusī, *al-Muqtaṭaf min azāhir al-ṭuraf*.
© San Lorenzo de El Escorial, RBME 455, fol. 115a.

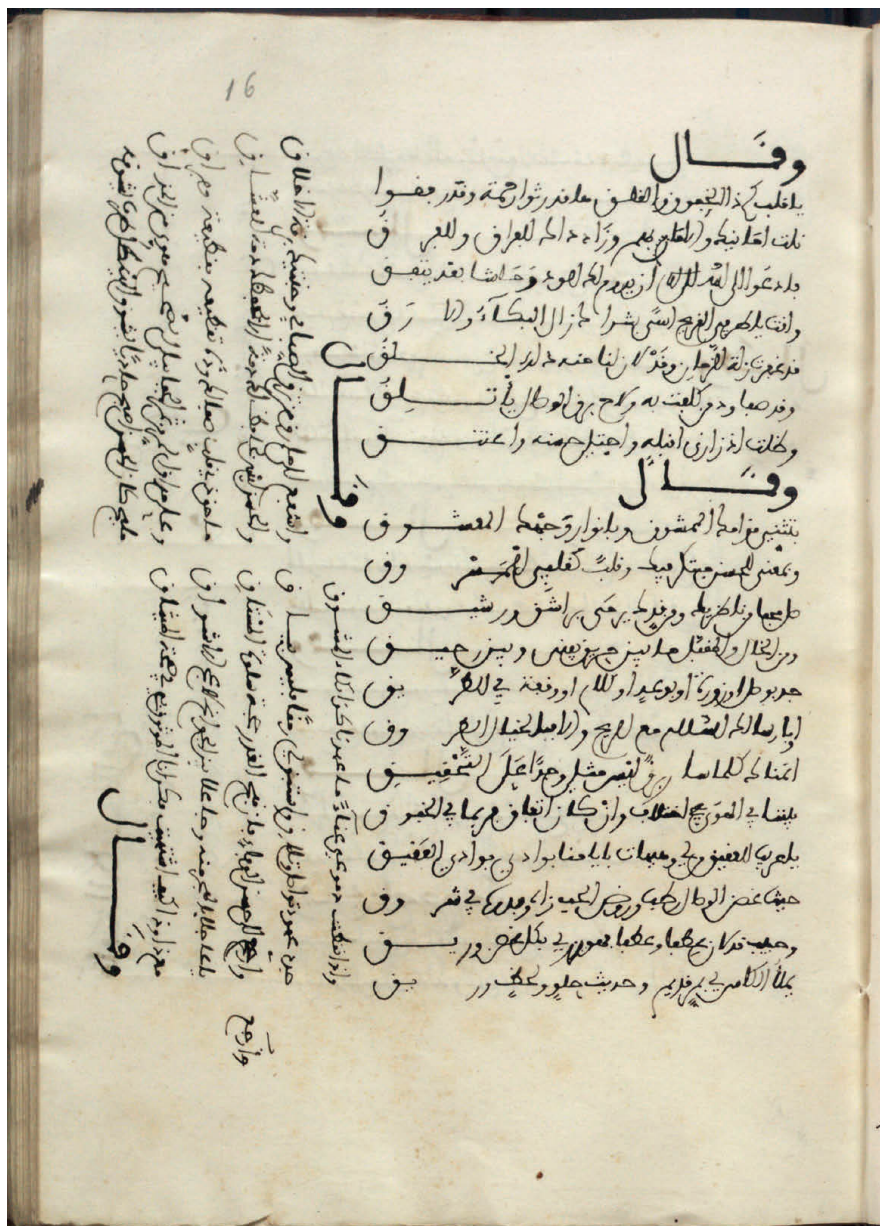


Fig. 5: Acephal collection of muwashshah. © San Lorenzo de El Escorial, RBME 369, fol. 16a.

latter was also part of Mūlāy Zaydān's manuscripts. This uncommon layout might be indicative of a specific taste for Andalusian models in Saadian times.

The Andalusian poetry certainly had a special appeal for the Saadian élite since a fourth manuscript can be added to the list: RBME 356, a princely copy with two anthologies of Andalusian poetry, the first one by al-Tujībī (d. 1202 CE)⁷⁷ and the second one by al-Bulfiqī, has been transcribed for the sultan's library (Fig. 6). The connection with Aḥmad al-Manṣūr and the Saadian élite is clear, a situation that we did not come across previously in this survey of the poetry manuscripts, except for 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Fishtālī's *Tartīb Diwān al-Mutanabbī*. Actually, the Saadian library contains only a very few copies commissioned by the sultans. Many volumes bear a statement of ownership, more infrequently the seal of Aḥmad al-Manṣūr or that of his son, Mūlāy Zaydān. This quite unusual number of volumes specifically connected with the sultan or the contemporary élite are indicative of a strong interest which cannot fail to remind of a comment by Hajji:⁷⁸

Madad al-ḡayš de 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Faštālī, pour lequel l'auteur fait la réplique de *Ġayš at-tawšīḥ* de Lisān ad-dīn Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb, rappelant à ce dernier un ensemble de *muwašṣaḥs* andalous omis et ajoutant une grande quantité de *muwašṣaḥs* composés par les poètes marocains sous les Sa'dides, dont ceux consacrés à l'éloge d'Aḥmad al-Manṣūr dépassant les trois cents [...]. A la suite vient un *muwašṣaḥ* d'al-Faštālī sur le vin, la nuit et l'aube, y employant allégoriquement les couleurs noire et blanche qui sont les emblèmes des deux dynasties 'abbaside et sa'dide.

Because poetry was an important part of the traditional culture, a technical knowledge of prosody was part of the curriculum and various treatises related to the technical and theoretical aspects of this topic were part of the Saadian library.

Table 6: Prosody.

	12th century		13th century		14th century		15th century		16th century	
	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.	Or.	Maghr.
Unitary	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	1	1
Coll.	1 (1)	0	0	0	0	1 (4)	1 (1)	0	1 (1)	1 (6)
Subtotal	1	0	0	0	1	2	3	0	2	2
Total		1		0		3		3		4

⁷⁷ GAL I, 273; SI, 482.

⁷⁸ Hajji 1976, 178.

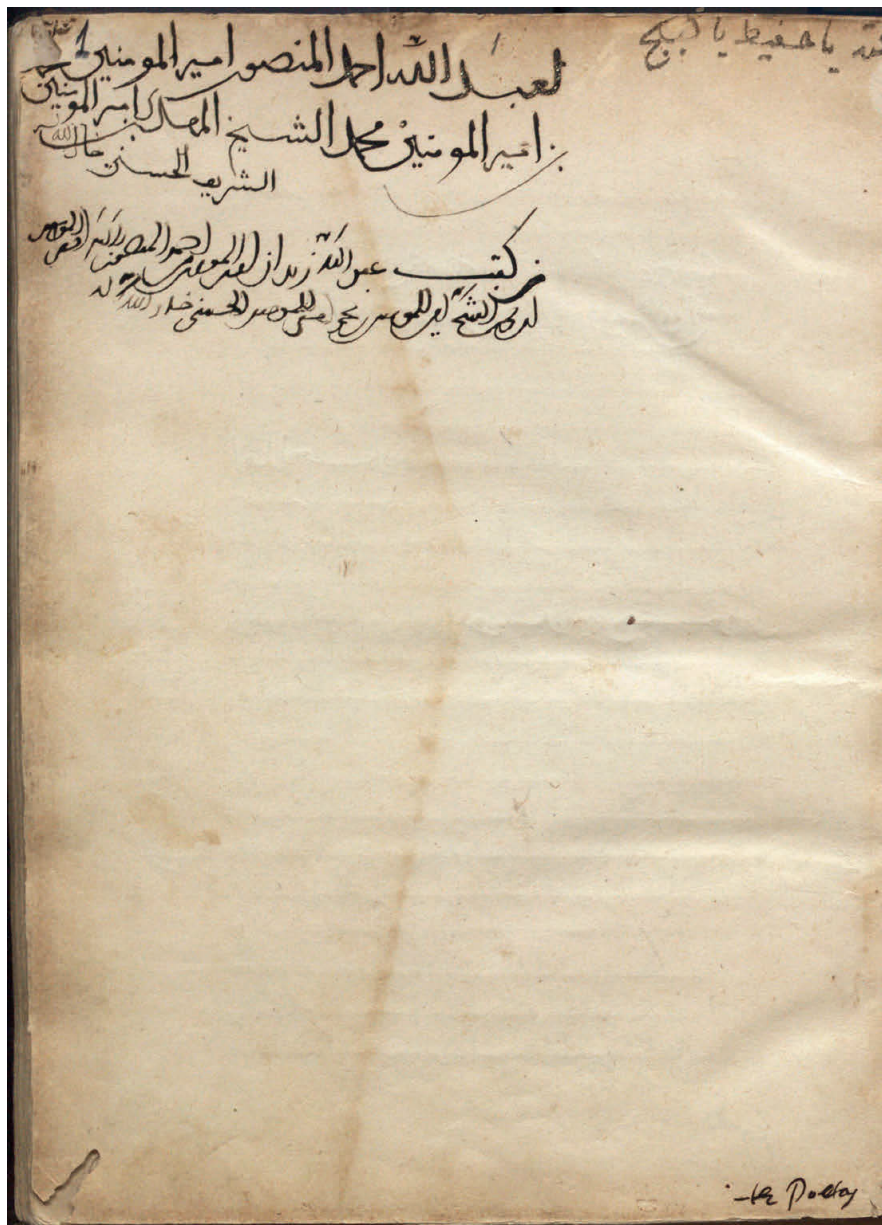


Fig. 6: al-Bulfiqī's anthology prepared for Aḥmad al-Manṣūr.
© San Lorenzo de El Escorial, RBME 356, fol. 50a.

Significantly enough, al-Khazraji's (fl. towards 1250) *al-Rāmiza al-shāfiyya fī 'ilm al-'arūd* is part of the miscellany RBME 248 that was transcribed in 1562 for a Saadian prince, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Qādir (d. 1567 CE).⁷⁹ The manuscript is of particular interest since its contents coincide with what we know about Aḥmad al-Manṣūr's education – and he also read al-Khazraji's treatise which is found as well as its commentaries in various manuscripts, including outside of the section devoted to poetry.⁸⁰ Al-Khazraji is with Ibn al-Saqqāṭ among the authors on prosody most present in the Saadian library,⁸¹ a fact that can be related to the information found in sources about various scholars of this period who are reported to have written their own commentary of a work by either al-Khazraji or Ibn al-Saqqāṭ.⁸² Al-Khazraji's work is found in various commentaries.⁸³ In the section with poetry, eight texts are either one of their compositions, or a commentary. The proportion of Maghribi copies containing texts about prosody and related matters (6) is higher than is the case usually (Table 6);⁸⁴ six copies are written in a Maghribi script against ten in a hand typical of the Eastern part of the Islamic world. Multiple-text manuscripts are also more common: seven manuscripts, containing 36 texts, against 9 single-text copies. As far as dated copies are concerned, many were written during the sixteenth century, indicating a strong and enduring interest for this topic.⁸⁵ Many treatises are found in multiple-text manuscripts. Three of these are of special interest: one is a collection including material from the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, the other two being miscellanies dated to the sixteenth century. A special mention should be made of RBME 288, probably more representative of contemporary trends. First, it bears Aḥmad al-Manṣūr's *ex libris*, followed by that of his son, Mūlāy Zaydān, a sequence that is not very frequent in the collection and tends to single out works considered as important. Second, it includes three texts on *dubayt*, a quatrain that became popular in Saadian times – notably for devotional compositions.

⁷⁹ See Déroche 2014; Déroche 2019.

⁸⁰ See RBME 248₁₄ (1562 CE), 330₂ (1582 CE), 332 (1598 CE), 489₃ (1598 CE), 679₃ (1393–1394 CE), 788₁₁ (1409 CE) and 964₁₂ (1554 CE). See GAL I, 312; S I, 545.

⁸¹ See manuscripts RBME 186₂ (1414 CE), 288₂ and 3 (s.a.), 330₅ (1582 CE), 396₁ (s.a.), 410₃ (1569 CE) and 788₁₀ (1409 CE). See GAL I, 282; S I, 495.

⁸² Hajji 1976, 177 and n. 100.

⁸³ RBME 330₄ (text no. 2 in the volume is dated 990 AH/1582 CE), 332 (1007 AH/1598 CE), 333 (899 AH/1493–1494), 334 (908 AH/1502 CE), 410₄ (977 AH/1569 CE), 416 (s.a.) and 489₃ (1007 AH/1598 CE).

⁸⁴ The information on this table is shown according to the same principles as on Table 2.

⁸⁵ Five out of nine manuscripts: RBME 330₄ (990 AH/1582 CE), 332 (1007 AH/1598 CE), 334 (908 AH/1502 CE), 410₄ (977 AH/1569 CE) and 489₃ (1007 AH/1598 CE).

3 Conclusion

The present study is a first step into a broader research on the history of the Saadian library and reading in the Saadian period. It is too early to draw general conclusions – and in addition we know that we don't possess the whole library. However, a few facts draw the attention. As could be expected, sixteenth century copies are more numerous than the older ones (see Table 1). It is however quite striking that, when looking at specific areas, the proportion varies greatly: the religious poetry stands clearly apart and shows a surge in interest during the sixteenth century.

The presence in the Saadian library of various copies of the same work is puzzling. We expect to find duplicates the works of famous poets, the *diwān* of Mutanabbī (d. 965 CE) for instance.⁸⁶ The four copies of al-Ḥumaydī's *Minaḥ al-samī' bi-sharḥ tamliḥ al-badī' bi-madiḥ al-shafī'* could be the result of the interest for new compositions –perhaps combined with a lack of coordination between agents buying for the sultan's library. But how can we explain that three copies of the *Muqaddima fī al-'arūḍ* (a text on metric) by Ibn al-Saqqāṭ were part of the collection?⁸⁷ Various sources confirm that it was a very popular handbook on prosody, and the same also applies to Ibn al-Qaṭṭā's *al-'Arūḍ al-bāri'*,⁸⁸ but we would not expect so many copies of elementary treatises in a sultan's library. The multiple-text manuscripts may explain this situation, or at least partly, since their contents were more difficult to handle during a process of acquisition which, as we have seen, involved long distance. In addition, the contents of a multiple-text manuscript are often described with reference only to the first one as can be seen in documents related to books.⁸⁹

As was hoped, the interests of contemporary readers begin to emerge. The para-textual data found on the manuscripts is of enormous importance in our assessment. The copies with Andalusian poetry, both classical and strophic, provide some support to the conclusion that Aḥmad al-Manṣūr was very interested in this specific tradition. In a similar way, the holdings of the collection and the copy of al-Fishtalī's *Tartīb Diwān al-Mutanabbī* show that al-Mutanabbī's poems enjoyed a particular place in the sultan's literary culture. On the other

⁸⁶ RBME 272 (699 AH/1300 CE) and 394 (588 AH/1192 CE).

⁸⁷ RBME 288₃ (s.a.), 330₅ (s.a., text no. 2 dated 990 AH/1582 CE) and 396₁ (s.a.), all Maghribi copies.

⁸⁸ RBME 328₃ (s.a.), texts no. 2 dated 877 AH/1472 CE and no. 5 dated 750 AH/1349 CE, 330₃ (s.a., text no. 2 dated 990 AH/1582 CE) and 331, the first being an Eastern copy.

⁸⁹ See in this volume the paper by F. Déroche and L. Tahali, 'Collecting Books in Eighteenth-Century Morocco: the Bannānī Library in Fez'.

hand, there is no trace of any earlier Saadian library: the names of 'Abd Allah al-Ghalib (r. 1557–1574) and of his son Muḥammad al-Mutawakkil (r. 1574–1576) may have been erased in a *damnatio memoriae*, but those of Aḥmad al-Manṣūr's father, Muḥammad al-Shaykh (r. 1529–1557), and brother 'Abd Allāh (r. 1576–1578) should have been preserved. In his ownership statements the sultan quite systematically names his father and grandfather. Did such a library exist? Or was it Aḥmad al-Manṣūr's initiative to establish a princely library which went further than a collection of some books? The research on the library is only at its beginning, but our first findings provide at least some answers about the holdings of a late Medieval or early Modern library in the Islamic world and shed a new light on the culture of Saadian Morocco.

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Abbreviations

GAL = Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, 2 vols, Weimar: Felber, 1898–1902.
S = Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur. Supplement-Band*, 3 vols, Leiden: Brill, 1937–1942.

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