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Ulrich Jasper Seetzen and the Printing Presses of the Ottoman Levant: From Documentation to Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge

1 Introduction

Research on the circulation of Arabic books in the 18th century has typically focused on the movement of manuscripts from the Ottoman Near East to Western Europe. This transfer has been examined in light of military conflicts and tensions between European states and the Ottoman Empire, but also against the background of the networks of trade and commerce in which books circulated.¹ Arabic printed books remained in the shadow of manuscripts: while the circumstances of their production and the history of printing presses have been examined,² little is known about their circulation, the reasons for their collection and purchase, and the readers and audiences that they targeted. One should also note that the movements of printed books were not following patterns as clear as those of manuscripts: the systematic large-scale collection of manuscripts by Orientalists and European travelers in the Near East caused a veritable “book drain”.³ These activities resulted in a movement of manuscripts from the East to the West. This movement is of course not the only recognizable pattern; manuscripts also circulated *within* the Ottoman Empire.⁴ In

1 See, e.g., P. Babinski, “The Formation of German Islamic Manuscript Collections in the Seventeenth Century”, in S. Mangold-Will, Ch. Rauch, S. Schmitt (eds.), *Sammler – Bibliothekare – Forscher: Zur Geschichte der orientalischen Sammlungen an der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin*, Frankfurt am Main, 2022, p. 19–44; S. Mills, *A Commerce of Knowledge: Trade, Religion, and Scholarship between England and the Ottoman Empire, c. 1600–1760*, Oxford, 2020.

2 For a history of the first presses in the Ottoman Empire that printed Arabic books for Christians, see I. Feodorov, *Arabic Printing for the Christians in Ottoman Lands*, Berlin/Boston, 2023. The printing presses founded by Athanasios Dabbās and ‘Abdallāh Zākhīr in the Levant have especially garnered scholarly interest. See, e.g., H. Kilpatrick, “From Venice to Aleppo: Early Printing of Scripture in the Orthodox World”, *Chronos*, 30, 2014, p. 46–48; J.-P. Ghobrial, “The Ottoman World of ‘Abdallah Zakher: Shuwayr Bindings in the Arcadian Library”, in G. Mandelbrote, W. de Bruijn (eds.), *The Arcadian Library: Bindings and Provenance*, Oxford, 2014, p. 192–231.

3 A. El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition*, Princeton/Oxford, 2020, p. 10.

4 See F. Krimsti, “Von Aleppo nach Gotha: Der Aleppiner Buchmarkt des 18. Jahrhunderts im Spiegel der von Ulrich Jasper Seetzen erworbenen Gothaer Handschriften”, in K. Paasch (ed.),

spite of this, the most significant large-scale transfer of manuscripts was the one from the Ottoman Empire to Europe. The transfer of printed books, by contrast, followed different courses, including a noteworthy transfer from the West to the East. Arabic books were printed in Europe – in cities like Rome, Oxford, Halle – and sent to the Levant.⁵

This chapter focuses on the creation of one of the largest collections of Arabic books printed in the 18th century by Levantine Christians established outside the Near East, which is preserved at the Gotha Research Library (Gotha, Germany). The books were collected by the naturalist and traveler Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767–1811). I argue that Seetzen's collection of Arabic printed works was created for the purpose of documenting the state of the art of printing in the Near East. Exhaustiveness was one of the main principles that guided Seetzen when acquiring printed works, unlike manuscripts, which were far too numerous for this approach. However, not only did Seetzen try to document the state of the art by gathering one copy of each printed work. I show that he developed insights into the state of printing in the Ottoman Empire and the Levant into a programmatic approach to the dissemination of knowledge through the medium of print. This program anticipated modern European discourses about the function of printing as a technology of civilizational progress that brought about modernity.

Before delving into Seetzen's collection of printed works and analyzing his agenda, some reflections on Seetzen's background and career are required. He was born on January 30, 1767, in Sophiengroden, Jever, as one of several sons of a wealthy farmer.⁶ In 1785, he left Jever to study medicine in Göttingen. Disinterested in medical practice and free of financial pressures, Seetzen turned to the study of natural history. In 1790, he left Göttingen to travel for several years across Germany and the Netherlands. When Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), a fellow student from Göttingen, set out on his journey to America in 1799, Seetzen started dreaming

Bücher bewegen: 375 Jahre Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Katalog zur Jubiläumsausstellung auf Schloss Friedenstein Gotha vom 10. April bis 19. Juni 2022, Gotha, 2022, p. 56–63.

⁵ Arabic texts have been printed in Europe for centuries. For an overview of these activities, see J. Balagna, *L'imprimerie arabe en Occident (XVI^e, XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles)*, Paris, 1984.

⁶ For biographical information on Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, see H. Stein (ed.), *Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, 1767–1811: Leben und Werk. Die arabischen Länder und die Nahostforschung im napoleonischen Zeitalter*, Gotha, 1995, especially the chapter by B. Schäßler, "Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767–1811): Jeveraner Patriot, aufgeklärter Kosmopolit und Orientreisender", p. 113–134; D. Haberland (ed.), *Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767–1811): Jeveraner – aufgeklärter Unternehmer – wissenschaftlicher Orientreisender*, Oldenburg, 2014; D. Haberland (ed.), *Der Orientreisende Ulrich Jasper Seetzen und die Wissenschaften*, Oldenburg, 2019.

of exploring “inner Africa”.⁷ Seetzen was introduced to Ernest II, the Duke of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg (1745–1804), by the astronomer Franz Xaver von Zach (1754–1832). The Duke, who was interested in astronomy, along with his successor and son August (1772–1822), funded Seetzen’s journey. In 1802, Seetzen finally set out on this journey. He travelled to Istanbul first and then to Aleppo, where he stayed for eighteen months to learn Arabic. Further stations were Damascus, Palestine, the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, Cairo, and the Hijaz. Throughout the journey, Seetzen noted down astronomical observations and collected books and artifacts for the Ducal library and collections. The journey came to a tragic end in 1811 when Seetzen died in unknown circumstances in Yemen.

Collecting books was Seetzen’s mission, but he was interested in Arabic works in both forms, manuscripts and printed books, for his own reasons. Some orientalist whom he encountered and with whom he corresponded gave him important impulses.

Among them were philologists and book hunters. In 1802–1803, he met Joseph Hammer (later, Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, 1774–1856), with whom he continued to correspond throughout his journey. Hammer gave Seetzen advice relating to his book acquisitions.⁸ Seetzen sought Arabic literary texts not only because of his patrons and acquaintances, but because they aligned with his scholarly interests. He collected works of all genres, but especially works on geography (*Erdkunde*) and ethnography (*Völkerkunde*). He was convinced that these works had the potential to expand the horizons of his academic readership in Germany.

Although Seetzen was generally interested in Arabic literature, there was one area in which he, unlike many earlier and contemporary travelers and scholars, had little interest: Christian religious literature. This is curious because he lived among Christians in the Levant and bought many books from them.⁹ Nevertheless, it reflects the ambiguous attitude many learned men of the Enlightenment had towards the Christian religion. Another reason was that Seetzen was a Freemason.¹⁰

7 On the scientific goals of Seetzen’s journey, see D. Haberland, “Ulrich Jasper Seetzen und Afrika – die entdeckungs- und wirtschaftsgeschichtliche Dimension seiner Reise”, in Haberland (ed.), *Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767–1811)*, p. 199–225.

8 See, e.g., U. J. Seetzen, *Tagebuch des Aufenthaltes in Konstantinopel und der Reise nach Aleppo. 1802–1803*, ed. V. Enderlein, Hildesheim, 2012, p. 149 (diary entry, March 1, 1803).

9 E.g., Seetzen acquired the private book collection of the Maronite physician Ḥannā al-Ṭabīb in Aleppo, possibly from a member of Ḥannā’s family. See in detail F. Krimsti, “The Lives and Afterlives of the Library of the Maronite Physician Ḥannā al-Ṭabīb (c. 1702–1775) from Aleppo”, *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts*, 9, 2018, p. 196–197.

10 U. Wallenstein, “Ein Freimaurer im Orient – Ulrich Jasper Seetzen und die Aegyptica für den Gothaer Hof”, in M. Meumann, U. Wallenstein (eds.), *Freimaurer und Mysterien Ägyptens in Gotha*, Petersberg, 2023, p. 263–275.

The number of Christian Arabic theological, liturgical, and spiritual manuscripts that Seetzen acquired amounts to no more than 47 – a little more than one percent of the approximately 2,700 manuscripts that he acquired.¹¹ The collection of religious Arabic works printed by Christians in the 18th century that Seetzen bought was, by contrast, almost exhaustive. He consequently must have had different reasons for systematically collecting these religious works printed by and for Arabic Christians, a reason that transcended their content. At present, some of these works are extremely rare, which makes the Gotha collection quite unique.¹² Seetzen's goal was not to create a collection of Christian spiritual literature printed in Arabic. Instead, he set out to document the state of the art of printing in the Levant, and this represented the starting point for the radical program of scientific reform that he envisioned.

2 Collecting and Documenting Printed Books in the Levant

Seetzen was extremely prolific. He produced an extraordinary number of written texts during his travels through the Ottoman Empire, the Near East, and the Arabian Peninsula. He kept a travel journal, mentioned above,¹³ he published scientific articles about a vast range of topics in academic journals like *Monatliche Correspondenz zur Beförderung der Erd- und Himmelskunde*, he made astronomical observations and reported them regularly, and he translated excerpts of literary works that he found important for the advancement of geography. The list of his academic contributions between 1803 and 1809 surpasses a hundred items. Luckily, this vast

¹¹ This count is based on the manuscripts listed in the chapter “Christliche Theologie” in W. Pertsch, *Die orientalischen Handschriften der Herzoglichen Bibliothek zu Gotha*, Third Part. *Die arabischen Handschriften der Herzoglichen Bibliothek zu Gotha*, 5 vols., Gotha, 1878–1892, specifically, vol. 4, p. 526–564. See also M. Hasenmüller, “Ulrich Jasper Seetzen als Sammler orientalischer Handschriften”, in D. Haberland (ed.), *Der Orientreisende Ulrich Jasper Seetzen*, p. 467.

¹² E.g., only the Gotha exemplar of a liturgical work in Garshuni entitled *Kitāb khidmat al-quddās ḥasab rutbat al-kanīsa al-suryāniya al-mārūniya al-muqaddasa*, printed at Dayr Mār Mūsā in 1789, has been preserved. No other exemplars of this book are currently known. See Appendix 2, Seetzen Damask no. 18.

¹³ Seetzen himself was not able to revise and publish his diaries. They were edited and published after his death, in the mid-19th century, as well as in the 21st century. Following the itinerary of Seetzen's journey rather than the publication date, they are: the above-mentioned Seetzen, *Tagebuch des Aufenthaltes in Konstantinopel und der Reise nach Aleppo. 1802–1803*, ed. V. Enderlein, Hildesheim, 2012; U. J. Seetzen, *Tagebuch des Aufenthalts in Aleppo. 1803–1805*, ed. J. Zepter, Hildesheim, 2011; F. Kruse (ed.), *Ulrich Jasper Seetzen's Reisen durch Syrien, Palästina, Phönicien, die Transjordan-Länder, Arabia Petraea und Unter-Aegypten*, 4 vols., Berlin, 1854–1859.

corpus of scientific works has been preserved, and we are in the fortunate position that it is available to us. It can help us understand Seetzen's scholarly pursuits in the cities in which he stayed, the choices that he made when he bought books, and his intellectual commitments in general (Fig. 1).

For his acquisitions, Seetzen focused primarily on manuscripts. The principles underlying his activities as a collector of manuscripts were carefully analyzed.¹⁴ He was later accused of collecting them “haphazardly and uncritically” (*ohne Auswahl und Kritik*),¹⁵ but Seetzen's selection was in fact deliberately broad and encyclopedic.¹⁶ He paid attention to the “variety and usefulness” (*Mannigfaltigkeit und Brauchbarkeit*) of the works he bought.¹⁷ Another criterium was the benefit the works held for the advancement of the sciences, an idea that became central to his engagement with printing. It was his goal to create a data and source basis for various fields including, but not limited to, geography, ethnography, astronomy, and history.¹⁸

Although the acquisition of manuscripts was Seetzen's principal objective, he purchased printed works in different languages, notably Arabic, both in Arabic and in Syriac script (Garshuni), Armenian, and Turkish.

He also dedicated an article to the topic of printing presses in the Levant. Since he visited major printing centers of the Ottoman Empire, like Istanbul and Aleppo, he was able to collect valuable information on the state of the art of printing. In his “Note about the Printing Presses Existing in the Levant” (published with the German title “Nachricht von den in der Levante befindlichen Buchdruckereyen”),¹⁹ written in Aleppo, Seetzen presented to his readership an overview of the works that had been printed. He explained which ones he had found and offered historical considerations on printing presses operating in the past. The article was written in Aleppo in 1805 and published in the *Intelligenzblatt* of the *Jenaische Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*.

The journal is a noteworthy choice. Seetzen published most of his articles in *Monatliche Correspondenz zur Beförderung der Erd- und Himmelskunde*, a journal specifically dedicated to astronomy and geography. The article on the

14 See Hasenmüller, “Ulrich Jasper Seetzen als Sammler”. The author also mentions Seetzen's purchases of printed books at p. 468–469.

15 Pertsch, *Die arabischen Handschriften*, vol. 1, p. X.

16 Hasenmüller, “Ulrich Jasper Seetzen als Sammler”, p. 466, *passim*.

17 U. J. Seetzen, *Reise-Nachrichten des Russisch-Kaiserlichen Kammer-Assessors Dr. U. J. Seetzen*, Gotha, 1803, p. 6. See also Hasenmüller, “Ulrich Jasper Seetzen als Sammler”, p. 465.

18 Hasenmüller, “Ulrich Jasper Seetzen als Sammler”, p. 466.

19 See U. J. Seetzen, “Nachricht von den in der Levante befindlichen Buchdruckereyen”, *Intelligenzblatt der Jenaischen Allgemeinen Literatur-Zeitung*, 76, 1805, col. 641–654.

printing presses, by contrast, appeared in a journal with a much broader audience. The *Jenaische Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* was an offshoot of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* which had operated in Jena since 1785 but whose place of publication was moved to Halle after a crisis occurred at Jena University in 1803.²⁰ This year marked the departure of several renowned chairholders who accepted positions in Würzburg and Halle. The *Jenaische Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* was founded to preserve the importance of the University of Jena, an endeavor in which even Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was involved. The new journal, to which luminaries contributed, was a real success. It was more open to contributions touching on politics and natural sciences.

When the foundation of the journal was discussed, Goethe asked Heinrich Karl Abraham Eichstädt (1771–1848), who would later become the chief editor of the new offshoot, to produce an exposé detailing his vision for the journal.²¹ Eichstädt's exposé also includes some comments on the *Intelligenzblatt*, which published Seetzen's article.²² The *Intelligenzblatt* was meant to provide literary news, advertisements by authors and booksellers as well as reviews and responses to reviews. Eichstädt specifically mentioned that literary news from correspondents abroad should be integrated into its pages. He also pondered the ways in which foreign literature could be discussed in the literary news.²³ Individuals who were abroad, he suggested, could write reviews of works in different languages, which could then be translated.

Clearly, Seetzen, as a traveler abroad who was knowledgeable about the literary production in the Levant and sought to promote the natural sciences, fit the bill of the newly founded journal. This is why his overview of the state of the art of printing in the Levant, which listed the titles of printed works in Arabic and provided abundant technical codicological information, was published in a journal read by litterateurs and intellectuals of the Goethe era.²⁴

20 On Jena University's crisis of 1803 and the foundation of the *Jenaische Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, see M. Pape, "Goethe und Johannes von Müller im Briefwechsel: Zur Gründungsgeschichte der Jenaischen Allgemeinen Literatur-Zeitung", in Ch. Perels (ed.), *Jahrbuch des Freien Deutschen Hochstifts* 1986, Tübingen, 1986, p. 158–163.

21 I. Schmid, "Die Gründung der 'Jenaischen Allgemeinen Literaturzeitung'", *Impulse*, 10, 1987, p. 195; Eichstädt's exposé is provided at p. 236–239.

22 Schmid, "Die Gründung", p. 238–239 (paragraph no. 6).

23 Schmid, "Die Gründung", p. 238 (paragraph no. 5).

24 German literati in the "Republic of Letters" were generally interested in the topic of printing in the Ottoman Empire. In the first half of the 18th century, some German newspapers and periodicals reported about the Mütteferrika press, which was founded in Istanbul. See O. Sabev, "The Mütteferrika Press: Obstacles, Circumvention, and Repercussion According to Contemporary

In Aleppo, Seetzen was able to purchase most of the printed books listed in his article. The city was a flourishing book market; he was able to find printed books not only from Aleppo, but also from the wider region, especially Mount Lebanon, and even from Europe, notably England. But he also made significant purchases of printed works in Istanbul, Damascus, and Jerusalem.

Seetzen's article provided a chronological overview of the history of printing in the Ottoman Levant as he had reconstructed it from what he had seen and learned from locals. He mentions an early printing press in Jerusalem, the press established by the Greek-Orthodox in Aleppo, the press imported to Aleppo from Wallachia, and the press at the Monastery of Mār Yūḥannā in Shuwayr (Khinshāra), on Mount Lebanon.²⁵ He also discusses presses that printed Syriac, Greek, Armenian, and Hebrew works.²⁶ The press of Constantinople and the printing activities of the French during Napoleon's Egyptian campaign are also addressed here.²⁷ Some of the information that Seetzen provided was based on conjecture and, as we know today, incorrect: the Jerusalem printing press cannot be clearly identified; some of the works printed by the Greek Orthodox in Aleppo were not printed with type from Western Europe, as he suggested, but with type transferred from Wallachia; other works that Seetzen thought were printed with type from Wallachia were actually printed in England.

Such errors notwithstanding, the article suggests a critical approach – it was “the up to then best account of the history of printing in the Arab world”.²⁸ A comparison of the information that Seetzen recorded in his diaries with the information that made it into his article demonstrates this. Seetzen sifted and evaluated the information that he received. For example, in a diary entry dated 5 October 1804, he describes his encounter with the Greek Orthodox Bishop of Aleppo and simply records what the “honorable old man” (*achtungswürdige[r] Greis*) told him about the history of printing.²⁹ In his article, in contrast, he is much more critical and expresses doubt, stating that Greek Orthodox priests were not much concerned

German Sources (1727–1741)”, in R. Dipratu, S. Noble (eds.), *Arabic-Type Books Printed in Wallachia, Istanbul, and Beyond. First Volume of Collected Works of the TYPARABIC Project*, Berlin/Boston, 2024, p. 23–25.

25 See Seetzen, “Nachricht”, col. 641, 641–642, 643–644, 644–648.

26 See Seetzen, “Nachricht”, col. 648–649.

27 See Seetzen, “Nachricht”, col. 644, 649–654 (including a French proclamation listing the printed works and their prices).

28 C. Walbiner, “The Collection, Perception and Study of Arabic Incunabula from the Near East in Europe (17th – early 19th Centuries)”, in Dipratu, Noble (eds.), *Arabic-Type Books Printed in Wallachia, Istanbul, and Beyond*, p. 199.

29 Seetzen, *Tagebuch des Aufenthalts in Aleppo*, p. 210–211 (diary entry, October 5, 1804).

with scientific topics. He suggests, based on information he received from the Roman Catholic physician, missionary, and fellow traveler Leopoldo Sebastiani (1770–1843), that the three works supposedly printed at Aleppo by the Greek Orthodox with Arabic type from Wallachia were actually printed in Leipzig.³⁰ This assumption was not actually correct, but it demonstrates Seetzen's efforts towards a correct assessment of the information that he received.

In addition to critically evaluating first-hand information, second-hand information, and information from hearsay, Seetzen adopted a documentary approach. This is revealed by his systematic recording of his purchases. He tried to document the state of the art through the purchases themselves. He repeatedly expressed his intention to send a “complete” collection of printed books to Gotha.³¹ He compiled lists of his purchases and enclosed them in the boxes that he sent home. Although most of the lists were subsequently lost, his system can still be seen on the items themselves, which were also numbered. Seetzen assigned a number to each printed book that he purchased and sent to Gotha (*Seetzen Haleb no...*, *Seetzen Damask no...*).³² He used one series of numbers for printed books and a different series for manuscripts. These numbers can help us understand which works arrived in Gotha and which ones were lost at some point. The appendices reflect the current state: only five of the twenty-one books Seetzen claims in his article to have purchased in Aleppo have not been preserved in the collection of the Gotha Research Library.³³ Four of the lost titles can, however, be identified based on his article.³⁴ Twelve books were printed in Shuwayr, five in Aleppo, and three in England.³⁵ It should be noted that the fact that the highest number Seetzen assigned to a book is 21 (*Haleb no. 21*) does not mean that he did not buy other books.

Once Seetzen had moved to Damascus, he continued to hunt for manuscripts and found some more Arabic printed books both in Damascus and on his brief

30 Seetzen, “Nachricht”, col. 644: “Da die nicht-unirte griechische Geistlichkeit sich wenig mit wissenschaftlichen Gegenständen befasst: so trage ich Bedenken, der Versicherung des hiesigen Bischofs, ohne weitere Untersuchung, Glauben beyzumessen”.

31 Seetzen, “Nachricht”, col. 645: “... welche die orientalische Sammlung in Gotha fast vollständig besitzen wird”. On the idea of completeness, see also Walbiner, “The Collection, Perception and Study of Arabic Incunabula”, p. 199.

32 For Seetzen's numbers, see the figures in Krimsti, “Von Aleppo nach Gotha”, p. 56, 61.

33 According to Appendix 1a below, six works are not found, but the first book mentioned in Appendix 1b is recorded in the article. This book must therefore be Seetzen *Haleb no. 2*, 4, 6, 10, 11, or 17; the number attributed to it by Seetzen was probably lost when a page was removed from the book.

34 See Appendix 1b.

35 See Appendices 1a and 1b.

journeys to Mount Lebanon. The period in Damascus is the last station of the journey for which it is certain that Seetzen purchased printed books. The books Seetzen acquired during his stay in Damascus (and the trips to Mount Lebanon) are mentioned in another publication, which is based on lists of his acquisitions that he sent to Gotha.³⁶ The *Verzeichniss der für die orientalische Sammlung in Gotha zu Damask, Jerusalem u.s.w. angekauften orientalischen Manuscripte und gedruckten Werke, Kunst- und Naturprodukte u.s.w.* ("Index of the Oriental Manuscripts, Printed Works, Artefacts, Natural Products, etc., Purchased in Damascus, Jerusalem, etc., for the Oriental Collection in Gotha"), prepared by Ernst Friedrich Karl Rosenmüller in Leipzig in 1810,³⁷ is a register of all the objects Seetzen acquired in Damascus, on Mount Lebanon, and in Jerusalem. One section is dedicated to "Oriental Printed Works". Unfortunately, only three of the books mentioned in the ten entries relating to Arabic books produced by Levantine presses are preserved today in the Gotha Research Library.³⁸ The *Verzeichniss* is noteworthy in another regard: it lists works printed in Europe, especially in Rome (besides some Armenian and Syriac books). These works must have been available in the book markets of Damascus, Mount Lebanon, and Jerusalem.

The article "Note about the Printing Presses Existing in the Levant" is not programmatic, but the contours of a program emerge. In the first lines, Seetzen calls printing a "means for the dissemination of scientific knowledge" (*Hilfsmittel zur Verbreitung wissenschaftlicher Kenntnisse*),³⁹ an idea that he would later express in more detail. It is noteworthy that Seetzen included an account of the printing press founded in Constantinople in 1727 in his history of printing in the Levant.⁴⁰

³⁶ A part of one such list written by Seetzen is still preserved in Gotha: Gotha Research Library, Chart. B 2047 (list of purchases by Ulrich Jasper Seetzen), accessible at https://dhh.thulb.uni-jena.de/receive/ufb_cbu_00028288. In 1835, the director of the library, Friedrich Jacobs (1764–1841), mentioned that such lists written by Seetzen had arrived in Gotha and explained that the 1810 *Verzeichniss* was based on some of them. It was printed with the financial support of Duke August. See F. Jacobs, "Zur Geschichte der Bibliothek", *Beiträge zur ältern Litteratur oder Merkwürdigkeiten der Herzogl. öffentlichen Bibliothek zu Gotha*, 1, 1835, 1, p. 57 (and n. 84).

³⁷ See [E. F. K. Rosenmüller], *Verzeichniss der für die orientalische Sammlung in Gotha zu Damask, Jerusalem u.s.w. angekauften orientalischen Manuscripte und gedruckten Werke, Kunst- und Naturprodukte u.s.w. Von U. J. Seetzen*, Leipzig, 1810. The section on "Oriental Printed Works" ("Orientalische gedruckte Werke") is found on p. 16–17. Rosenmüller's name does not appear in the *Verzeichniss*, but Gotthold Weil mentions that he was the one who compiled it. See G. Weil, "Goethes Brief an H. F. v. Diez vom 15. November 1815", in G. Abb (ed.), *Von Büchern und Bibliotheken: Festschrift für Ernst Kuhnert*, Berlin, 1928, p. 184.

³⁸ See Appendix 2.

³⁹ Seetzen, "Nachricht", col. 641.

⁴⁰ Seetzen, "Nachricht", col. 644.

Enthusiastic about the printed works produced in this press, he explains that Muslims were not allowed to print religious texts there. This offered a good opportunity for printing geographical works that contributed to the progress of the sciences. Some of Seetzen's programmatic ideas about the scientific potential of printing can be gleaned from this discussion of the press at Constantinople.⁴¹ They also manifest in his ethnographic approach to printing, which emerges principally from his discussion of the printing press that he had visited in person and with which he was most familiar, the press in Shuwayr.

3 An Ethnographic Interest in Printing: The Printing Press in Shuwayr

The printing press of the Melkite monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Shuwayr is a pivotal topic in Seetzen's article.⁴² Seetzen's account of the press demonstrates an ethnographic interest that went hand in hand with his documentary approach. This interest is also confirmed by the fact that Seetzen endeavored to acquire all the Shuwayrite printed books for the "Oriental Museum" that Duke August wanted to found in the Friedenstein Castle.⁴³ Seetzen's engagement with Shuwayr also sheds light on some of the reservations he had regarding the content of the books printed by the monks there.

In his article, Seetzen devotes considerable attention to this printing press and lists thirteen of its books. He was able to locate and acquire eleven of them. Although he praised the elegant typefaces and the quality of the paper on which the texts were printed, he was critical of the religious character of the works. He observed with disappointment that the press produced "only devotional works" (*bloss Andachtsbücher*).⁴⁴ This too points to Seetzen's view of the potential of printing, especially if contrasted with his enthusiastic account of the press at Constantinople.

41 This also explains why Seetzen commented at length on the books printed in Egypt by the French under Napoleon. See Seetzen, "Nachricht", col. 649–654.

42 On the origins of the Shuwayr press in its Ottoman milieu, see in detail Ghobrial, "The Ottoman World", especially p. 195–200.

43 U. J. Seetzen, "Fortgesetzte Reise-Nachrichten", *Monatliche Correspondenz zur Beförderung der Erd- und Himmelskunde*, 13, 1806, p. 553. On the plans for an Oriental Museum, see U. Wallenstein, "Eine schöne ägyptische Antike" – Seetzens Bedeutung als Altertumsforscher und Sammler für den Gothaer Hof", in D. Haberland (ed.), *Der Orientreisende Ulrich Jasper Seetzen und die Wissenschaften*, p. 444.

44 Seetzen, "Nachricht", col. 645.

Seetzen had first-hand knowledge of the printing press in Shuwayr because he traveled to the monastery, stayed there, and observed the printing process. In his travel journal, he included a veritable ethnographic study of the printing at the monastery. In an entry dated September 17, 1806, he recalls:

They gave me a room and a good lunch [in the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist]. Then they led me to the printing press, which is in a dedicated building. In one room, they were busy casting and filing type. In another room, they were doing the setting. A long horizontal table was covered in small boxes in which the sorts were lying; the printing frame, like a lectern, is not in use here. In the same room, there was a portrait of the one who had created the printing matrices, Sahher [‘Abdallāh Zākhir], a Maronite from Aleppo who had cut the matrices for this printing press. In a third room, they were correcting the [typeset] text; a very difficult and boring thing, because one must not only look for letters that were omitted or mixed up, but one also has to make sure that the shapes of the letters are connected. This is done so that the print is as similar as possible to a manuscript. It is therefore necessary to take out a lot of sorts, file them, smooth them, etc., until the goal is achieved. In a fourth room, there was a printing press. It was also here that the red and black ink for printing were produced. The paper, however, is purchased from Venice and France. Of every book, some 1,000–2,000 exemplars are printed. They say that about 15 books have been printed [...].⁴⁵

Seetzen’s account of the printing process at the Monastery in Shuwayr is a short ethnographic and sociological study. It points to the veneration of one of the pioneers of printing, ‘Abdallāh Zākhir (d. 1748), by the monks. Zākhir was seen as “a sort of Gutenberg of the Arab world”.⁴⁶ His portrait was displayed on a wall in the room where the sorts received their final shape. Another intriguing observation is that the monks strove to make the printed books look like manuscripts. This suggests that

⁴⁵ Kruse, *Ulrich Jasper Seetzen’s Reisen*, vol. 1, p. 251–252: “Man gab mir ein Zimmer und ein gutes Mittagmahl, und führte mich nachher in die Druckerey, die in einem besondern Gebäude ist. In einem Zimmer war man beschäftigt, Lettern zu giessen und zu befeilen; in einem andern setzte man. Ein langer horizontaler Tisch war ganz mit kleinen Fächern bedeckt, worin die Buchstaben lagen; der Druckerkasten, wie ein Pult, ist hier nicht gebräuchlich. In demselben Zimmer hing das gut gemalte Portrait des Matrizenschneiders Sahher, eines Maroniten von Halep, welcher die Matrizen für die hiesige Druckerey schnitt; in einem dritten korrigirte man die gesetzte Schrift; eine sehr beschwerliche und langweilige Sache, weil man nicht bloss auf ausgelassene oder verwechselte Buchstaben, sondern weit mehr darauf zu sehen hat, dass die Züge der Buchstaben gehörig an einander anschliessen, damit der Druck dem Manuscript so viel möglich ähnlich werde. Man muss daher eine Menge Lettern aus dem Satze heraus nehmen, sie schleifen, plätten u.s.w., bis man seinen Zweck erreicht hat. In einem vierten Zimmer war eine Presse befindlich. Auch die rothe und schwarze Druckdinte verfertigt man hier. Das Papier erhält man aber alles aus Venedig und aus Frankreich. Man zieht von jedem Buche 1000–2000 Exemplare ab. Es sollen jetzt etwa 15 Bücher gedruckt seyn [...]”.

⁴⁶ Ghobrial, “The Ottoman World”, p. 194.

printing was clearly still approached with the reading expectations and experiences characteristic of manuscript culture. It had to fulfil the aesthetic expectations of manuscript readers. Finally, and most intriguingly, Seetzen includes a list of the prices of the monastery's printed books, *Bayān thaman al-kutub al-maṭbū'a* (*Explanation of the Prices of Printed Books*). This provides the modern historian with an important puzzle piece for a potential economic history of monastic orders in the region, and of the Levantine book market.⁴⁷ The list mentions two prices for each book, one for a book with red binding and another for the version bound in black (Fig. 2).

Seetzen was not the first European traveler to visit Shuwayr and discuss the printing press of the Monastery. About twenty years earlier, the philosopher and orientalist Constantin François de Chassebœuf, Comte de Volney (1757–1820), had traveled across Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. He also visited the monastery in Shuwayr, wrote an account of the foundation of the printing press, and compiled a list of the books that had been printed there.⁴⁸

Even so, Seetzen's account distinguishes itself by the rich detail about the printing process. His thorough description of the printing process is part of an extensive assessment of the state of the art of printing in the Levant, which will be discussed later. However, before addressing Seetzen's program, some reflections on the entanglement between missionary activities, travels by Westerners, and printed religious books are required, to contextualize Seetzen's unique approach.

4 Printing and Missionary Projects

Long before Seetzen started thinking about the printing presses in the Ottoman Levant, the matter of the printed word in Arabic was entangled in various ways with Catholic and Protestant missionary activities. Besides drawing attention to local printing presses, Seetzen's book acquisitions in Aleppo and Damascus give us an idea of works printed in Europe by Catholics and Protestants that were circulating at the time of Seetzen's journey in the region. Roman Catholics had printed Arabic books on the press of the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, while

⁴⁷ Seetzen also reproduces a document advertising books printed by the French in Egypt which mentions prices. See Seetzen, "Nachricht", col. 651–654.

⁴⁸ For the history of the printing press in Shuwayr, see C.-F. Volney, *Voyage en Syrie et en Égypte, pendant les années 1783, 1784, & 1785*, vol. 2, Paris, 1787, p. 175–185. The list of books is included there on p. 180–184. For an English translation, see C.-F. Ch. B. Comte de Volney, "Some Account of the Only Printing-Press that Ever Had any Success in the Turkish Empire", *The Edinburgh Magazine, or Literary Miscellany*, 6, November 1787, 35, p. 309–312 (the list on p. 311–312). See also the chapter signed by Aurélien Girard in this volume.

others were printed by the *Typographia Medicea*, copies of which Seetzen bought.⁴⁹ He also acquired a book that was printed in London by the Anglican Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), with the support of European merchants in the Levant, local church authorities, and Levantine Christians living in Europe.⁵⁰ This book was the translation of the New Testament entitled *Al-‘Ahd al-jadīd li-Rabbīnā Yasū‘ al-Masīḥ* (*The New Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 1727), mentioned by Seetzen in his article on the printing presses but unfortunately not preserved in Gotha.⁵¹ Clearly, the Levant was starting to become a spiritual battleground in the wake of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and printing was often at the core of the fight for the Eastern Christians’ souls. Especially in the second half of the 17th century, a “shift in the balance” between the Catholic and the Protestant printing of Arabic books was visible, but Arabic books printed by Protestants circulated in the Levant in significant numbers only in the 19th century.⁵²

European missionaries brought from Europe printed religious works in Arabic and other languages. Some of the works they brought were polemical.⁵³ They also commented here and there on the printing presses and printed books of the Levant. The interests of these missionaries differed markedly from those of Seetzen. They were spiritual and linguistic rather than scientific.

49 See [Rosenmüller], *Verzeichniss*, p. 16–17, nos. 12, 13, 15, 16, etc.

50 Anglicans cultivated a relationship with the Greek Orthodox Church and supplied them with printed Arabic books. On this topic, see G. Roper, “England and the Printing of Texts for Orthodox Christians in Greek and Arabic, 17th–18th Centuries”, in *Travaux du Symposium International Le Livre. La Roumanie. L’Europe: Troisième édition – 20 à 24 Septembre 2010*, vol. 1, Bucharest, 2011, p. 436–439. On the translation and printing of the Psalter (1725) and the New Testament (1727) by the SPCK and the involvement of a European Merchant, Rowland Sherman (1662–1747), Aleppo’s Metropolitan Athanasios Dabbās (1647–1724), and two scholars from the Levant residing in Europe, Solomon Negri (1665–1729) and Carolus Rali Dadichi (1694–1734), see details in the contribution of Simon Mills to the present volume.

51 Seetzen, “Nachricht”, col. 644, no. 3. A photograph of the design of the book’s title page is included in Mills, *A Commerce of Knowledge*, p. 236.

52 Y. Ayalon, “Richelieu in Arabic: The Catholic Printed Message to the Orient in the Seventeenth Century”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 19, 2008, 2, p. 157.

53 For an example, see F. Krinsti, “A Refutation of Muslims, Jews, and ‘Heretical’ Christians, printed in Arabic: A Catholic Missionary at Work in 17th Century Aleppo”, Blog der Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, October 5, 2022, accessible at <https://blog-fbg.uni-erfurt.de/2022/10/a-refutation-of-muslims-jews-and-heretical-christians-printed-in-arabic-a-catholic-missionary-at-work-in-17th-century-aleppo/> (accessed: August 17, 2024). The refutation of Muslims, Jews, and “heretical” (i.e., non-Catholic) Christians composed by the missionary Justinien de Neuvy, born Michel Febvre, who was active in Aleppo, was printed in Arabic by the Vatican in 1680.

A particularly prominent example of a missionary whose main interest was spiritual is the Protestant Stephan Schultz from Halle (1714–1776).⁵⁴ The case of Schultz is interesting in the context of Seetzen's views of print culture in the Ottoman Levant because Seetzen knew of Schultz and dismissed his missionary efforts, as discussed in the last part of this chapter.

Stephan Schultz was born in Flatow (Złotów) in 1714 and studied theology at the University of Königsberg. Because of his linguistic talent, he was discovered by two members of the Institutum Judaicum et Muhammedicum, a Pietist missionary institution that had been founded in Halle in 1728 by Johann Heinrich Callenberg (1694–1760). It had its own press that printed books for the use of missionaries. The press produced books in Hebrew, Yiddish, Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and Greek.⁵⁵ They were primarily meant for Muslims and Jews, and since 1746, also for Eastern Christians. Schultz was successfully recruited for the Institutum.

As a member of the Institutum Judaicum et Muhammedicum, Schultz travelled widely, and he described his experiences extensively in his five-volume work *Der Leitungen des Höchsten nach seinem Rath auf den Reisen durch Europa, Asia und Africa* (*Following the Guidance of God Most High While Traveling across Europe, Asia, and Africa*). Between 1752 and 1756, one journey led him and his travel companion Albrecht Friedrich Woltersdorf (1729–1755) across the Ottoman Empire. The two traveled via Venice and Trieste to Ancona, and then via Smyrna to Constantinople. From there, they went on to Cairo, where Woltersdorf hurt his leg in an accident. The leg became infected, and they had to change their original route. They traveled to Jerusalem, Acre, and Nazareth. Woltersdorf eventually succumbed to his infection in 1755, and his tragic death meant the end of a journey that was supposed to

54 For Stephan Schultz's biography, see D. Haas, "Von Halle in den Orient: Stephan Schultz auf Reisen im Osmanischen Reich in den Jahren 1752 bis 1756", in A. Schröder-Kahnt, C. Veltmann (eds.), *Durch die Welt im Auftrag des Herrn: Reisen von Pietisten im 18. Jahrhundert*, [Halle], [2018], p. 67–79; D. Haas, "es kam mir diese Sprache etwas schwer vor": Stephan Schultz (1714–1776), Mitarbeiter und später Direktor des Institutum Judaicum et Muhammedicum in Halle, und seine Beschäftigung mit orientalischen Sprachen", in M. Häberlein, H. Zaunstöck (eds.), *Halle als Zentrum der Mehrsprachigkeit im langen 18. Jahrhundert*, Halle, 2017, p. 170–171; J. Schmidt, "The Journey of Stephan Schultz, Protestant Missionary from Halle, in the Ottoman Empire 1752–1756", *Oriens*, 39, 2011, 1, p. 19–21.

55 On the printing activities of the Institutum Judaicum et Muhammedicum, see Haas, "Von Halle in den Orient", p. 67–68; D. Haas, "The Institutum Judaicum et Muhammedicum and the Catholic Missionary Apparatus: Insights into a Largely Obscure Set of Relations", in M. Friedrich, H. Zaunstöck (eds.), *Jesuit and Pietist Missions in the Eighteenth Century Cross-Confessional Perspectives*, Halle, 2022, p. 55.

continue to Armenia, Persia, India, and Ethiopia. Schultz had to return home and, on his way back, he visited Aleppo, Mount Lebanon, and Damascus.⁵⁶

Printed works played an important part during Schultz's journey. Even before leaving Halle, he sent printed books to Alexandria in Egypt in anticipation of his stay there.⁵⁷ Schultz and Woltersdorf were not meant to try and actively convert the individuals they encountered; the journey was intended as a sort of reconnaissance mission. The two missionaries were supposed to acquaint themselves with the circumstances in the Ottoman Empire and refine their linguistic skills. They therefore had many contacts with locals, and in some of the conversations they had with them printed books are mentioned. On such occasions, they read these books to locals.⁵⁸

Besides bringing books from Halle, Schultz was also interested in the books printed in the Ottoman Empire, and in his travelogue, he commented repeatedly on the topic of printing. It is particularly noteworthy that Schultz had the opportunity to visit Shuwayr, as Seetzen would, several decades later. He also described the printing press at the Monastery in Shuwayr, although his account is clearly less detailed than Seetzen's. The description suggests that Schultz's primary concern was spiritual and linguistic.

When we returned home from church, the Pater Provincialis led me to the printing press of the monastery. There only was a press and a box for the type, just like in Europe, only it was lying flat on the table, unlike ours, which are deposited on a slanted rack. They had the sorts cast in France, but their shape was previously drawn by the founder of this printing press, a monk named Soliman who had already passed away; this is why this type is of the oriental kind. I bought the Psalter and the *Spiritual Measure of Time* [i.e., Juan Eusebio Nieremberg's *De la diferencia entre lo temporal y eterno* (1640) in its Arabic translation, *Mizān al-zamān*]. The monks in this place speak Arabic in such a clear, delicate, and pure way that it is a pleasure to be in their company, were it only for practicing the language.⁵⁹

56 Haas, "Von Halle in den Orient", p. 72.

57 Haas, "Von Halle in den Orient", p. 72.

58 Haas, "Von Halle in den Orient", p. 74.

59 St. Schultz, *Der Leitungen des Höchsten nach seinem Rath auf den Reisen durch Europa, Asia und Africa*, vol. 5, Halle, 1775, p. 452: "Als wir aus der Kirche nach Hause kamen, führte mich der Pater Provincialis in die Druckerey des Klosters, woselbst nur eine Presse und ein Schrift-Kasten war, welcher eben so eingerichtet ist wie die in Europa, nur daß er gerade auf einem Tisch lag, und nicht so wie unsere, auf einem schiefen Gestelle ruhte. Die Buchstaben haben sie in Frankreich giessen lassen, die Form aber hat der Urheber dieser Druckerey, ein nun schon verstorbener Mönch Namens Soliman, vorgemahlet; daher dieser Typus recht nach orientalischer Art ist. Ich kaufte den Psalter und den geistlichen Zeitmesser. Die hiesigen Mönche reden das Arabische, so deutlich, zierlich und rein, daß es ein Vergnügen ist, auch nur zur Uebung der Sprache mit ihnen

This short comment on the printing press in Shuwayr suggests that Schultz was less well informed than Seetzen. For example, the reference to a monk named Soliman as the supposed founder of the printing press is certainly a mistake. Seetzen identified the person correctly as the monk ‘Abdallāh Zākhir. Schultz’s admiration of the “clear, delicate, and pure way” in which the monks spoke, in the context of his discussion of printed books, suggests that his principal interest was to acquire religious literature that could be of value for the missionaries at the Institutum Judaicum et Muhammedicum, both by acquainting them with Eastern Christian spiritual literature and for the study of Arabic. It is significant that Schultz cared little whether the literature that formed the material basis for his linguistic training was Protestant, Orthodox, or Catholic. As a matter of fact, Stephan Schultz had visited Rome together with Woltersdorf in 1750, attended church services with Uniate Eastern Christians, and purchased books printed by the Propaganda Fide.⁶⁰ Schultz later used these books for language studies.⁶¹

As Daniel Haas has emphasized, it would be a mistake to characterize Schultz’s journey through the Ottoman Empire merely as “missionary travels”. Indeed, the director of the Institutum Judaicum et Muhammedicum, Callenberg, was opposed to the designation “missionaries” for the members of his institute.⁶² Nevertheless, Arabic printed books served Schultz as a resource for conversation about religious matters.

5 Printing and the Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge

Seetzen was by no means the only 18th-century traveler who criticized the religious content of the works printed by the Levantine printing presses. He was preceded by Volney, who commented on the printing press in Shuwayr:

As for the inconsiderable sale of the books, this must be attributed to the bad choice they have made of them; instead of translating works of real utility, calculated to awaken a taste for the arts indiscriminately among all the Arabs, they have only translated mystic books peculiar to the Christians, which, by their misanthropic morality, are formed to excite a disgust for all science, and even for life itself.⁶³

umzugesehen”. Schultz’s eyewitness report about the Shuwayr press is also mentioned in Walbiner, “The Collection, Perception and Study of Arabic Incunabula”, p. 197.

⁶⁰ On Schultz’s stay in Rome and his activities there, see Haas, “The Institutum Judaicum et Muhammedicum”, p. 65–74.

⁶¹ Haas, “The Institutum Judaicum et Muhammedicum”, p. 73.

⁶² Haas, “Von Halle in den Orient”, p. 74.

⁶³ Volney, *Voyage en Syrie*, vol. 2, p. 179, cited here according to the English translation in Volney, “Some Account of the Only Printing-Press”, p. 311. On Volney’s account of the history of the press and

In the chapter “On the Arts, Sciences, and Ignorance” of his work *Voyage en Syrie et en Égypte*, Volney depicts manuscript culture in the Levant as an obstacle to the dissemination of scientific knowledge. He contrasts the insufficient impact of manuscripts with the print culture of a developed Europe:

In these countries every book is a manuscript, the writing of which is necessarily slow, difficult, and expensive. The labor of many months produces but one copy. It is impossible therefore for books to multiply, and consequently for knowledge to be propagated. If we compare this state of things with what passes among ourselves, we cannot but be deeply impressed with the advantages of printing. We shall even be convinced, on reflection, that this art alone is possibly the main spring of those great revolutions, which, within the last three centuries, have taken place in the moral system of Europe. The press, by rendering books common, has diffused a more equal share of knowledge through every class; and, by rapidly communicating ideas and discoveries, has produced a more speedy improvement and more universal acquaintance with the arts and sciences.⁶⁴

As Dana Sajdi has argued, the observation that there were few printing presses in the Near East constituted an “explanatory paradigm for an imagined stagnation”. The technology of printing emerged as “the instrumental dividing line between the two geographies”, namely that of a progressive and enlightened Europe, on the one hand, and a backward and benighted “Orient”, on the other.⁶⁵ There are clear lines of continuity between Volney’s reflections and those held by modern scholars in the wake of Elizabeth Eisenstein’s *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, first published in 1979. Eisenstein’s idea that printing brought about the advent of modernity was later severely criticized for a variety of reasons.⁶⁶

Seetzen held views very similar to Volney’s, and even developed them into a programmatic approach. His perspectives are informed not only by his influential predecessor, but also by his training at the University of Göttingen. Seetzen was neither a philologist, nor a missionary, nor a member of the European diplomatic and commercial network in the Levant. During his years in Göttingen, Seetzen was a member of a circle of students around the famous physician, naturalist, and

its current state, see also Walbinder, “The Collection, Perception and Study of Arabic Incunabula”, p. 191.

⁶⁴ Volney, *Voyage en Syrie*, vol. 2, p. 412–413. The passage is translated and discussed in D. Sajdi, “Print and Its Discontents: A Case for Pre-Print Journalism and Other Sundry Print Matters”, *The Translator*, 15, 2009, 1, p. 106. It is also discussed in Walbinder, “The Collection, Perception and Study of Arabic Incunabula”, p. 198.

⁶⁵ Sajdi, “Print and its Discontents”, p. 107.

⁶⁶ For an analysis of the impact of Eisenstein’s work on Middle Eastern book history and the criticism it garnered, see Sajdi, “Print and its Discontents”, p. 115–118; K. A. Schwartz, “Book History, Print, and the Middle East”, *History Compass*, 15, 2017, p. 3–5.

anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840). Blumenbach influenced the entire generation of naturalists (and travelers) that he trained.⁶⁷

As a naturalist, Seetzen's interests resembled those of the brothers Alexander and Patrick Russell. Alexander Russell (1715–1768) was a physician for the Levant Company's Factory at Aleppo from 1740 to 1753. He was joined by his brother Patrick Russell (1727–1805) in 1750. Alexander Russell wrote a monumental *Natural History of Aleppo*, which was later expanded by his brother.⁶⁸ Long before arriving in Aleppo, Seetzen wrote his dissertation about plant diseases.⁶⁹

Seetzen collected manuscripts and printed books not only because he was supposed to do so for the enlightened monarchs who funded his travels. He wanted to make geographical knowledge available, alongside ethnographic, astronomical, botanical, biological, and geological knowledge. He saw himself as a mediator who provided the academic readership in Germany with knowledge included in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish manuscripts, and wrote a programmatic article on this facet of his agenda as well.⁷⁰ This article was authored during the same stretch of Seetzen's journey as the one devoted to printing. In Seetzen's eyes, printed books offered also a unique opportunity to disseminate scientific knowledge among the "Orientals" in the Ottoman Empire and the Near East at large. He therefore emphasized its potential, as Volney had done before him. According to Seetzen, the absence of printed works was a serious obstacle to the development of the natural sciences in the Ottoman Empire and the Near East. In the early stages of his travels, after his stay in Istanbul, he noted:

One of the most important instruments of intellectual culture is still lacking, the printing press. The imperial printing press, which is now in Scudâr [Üsküdar], is by far unable to satisfy this urgent need. There should be more of them, throughout the entire Empire, so that within a short period of time the most important manuscripts of the Orient would be printed. One would also have to take care to translate individual European classical works from all sciences and enrich Turkish literature with them. This would make it easier to get used to

67 For Blumenbach's impact on Seetzen's agenda during his travels, see F. Krimsti, "Silent Helpers: The Role of Locals in Ulrich Jasper Seetzen's Scholarly Work", in C. Rauch (ed.), *Proceedings of the Conference "Oriental Manuscripts in Germany. Collection History between the Academic Thirst for Knowledge, Antique Trade across the Globe, and Imperial Claims to Power"* (forthcoming).

68 See A. Russell, P. Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo: Containing a Description of the City, and the Principal Natural Productions in its Neighbourhood. Together with an Account of the Climate, Inhabitants, and Diseases, Particularly of the Plague*, 2 vols., London, 1794 (2nd ed.).

69 U. J. Seetzen, *Systematum generaliorum de morbis plantarum brevis diiudicatio*, Göttingen, 1789.

70 See U. J. Seetzen, "Nachrichten von einigen Arabischen, Persischen und Türkischen Reisebeschreibungen, Topographien und anderen geographischen Werken und Landkarten", *Monatliche Correspondenz zur Beförderung der Erd- und Himmelskunde*, 12, 1805, p. 101–125.

printed works. Presently, manuscripts are still preferred, but they are hard to obtain, and they can only be purchased by wealthy people because they are so expensive.⁷¹

What distinguishes Seetzen from Volney is the fact that Seetzen developed his ideas into a program for the dissemination of knowledge through printed works in the Ottoman Levant, along the lines of a *mission civilisatrice*. This program is formulated most explicitly in his essay “Die wissenschaftliche Propagande: Ein Werk des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts” (“Scientific Propaganda: A Nineteenth-Century Work”) written in 1808 in Cairo.⁷² “Propaganda” is a term that Seetzen had already used, as demonstrated by diary entries related to printing in which the word occurs.⁷³ In his essay, Seetzen embeds the “propaganda” that he envisions in an account of the activities of the Propaganda Fide in Rome, which used the printing press for the dissemination of the Catholic faith. This project was predisposed to end in failure: Roman Catholic missionaries were not and would not be able to establish Catholicism as a universal religion.⁷⁴ In fact, all Christian missionary activities in the Ottoman Empire were doomed to fail – Seetzen specifically mentions Stephan Schul[t]z.⁷⁵

Not only is the essay a piece of explicit religious skepticism, but it also opposes Europe and the Orient in terms of scientific progress and develops the concept of a “scientific mission”: Europe, Seetzen argues, had made considerable scientific progress, whereas the Orient had not. The most significant technical achievement that facilitated this progress was, unsurprisingly, printing.⁷⁶ Seetzen made a case for

71 Seetzen, *Reise-Nachrichten*, p. 16: “Noch immer fehlt zu sehr das wichtigste Hülfsmittel der Geistescultur, die *Buchdruckerey*. Denn die kaiserliche Buchdruckerey, die jetzt in *Scudâr* ist, ist bey weiten nicht im Stande, diesem dringenden Bedürfnisse abzuheffen. Es müssten mehrere durch das ganze Reich verbreitet seyn, damit in kurzer Zeit die wichtigsten Manuscripte des Orients im Druck erschienen, und vorzüglich müsste man dahin sehen, durch Übersetzungen einzelner classischer Werke der Europäer aus allen Wissenschaften die Türkische Literatur zu bereichern. Dadurch würde man sich schneller an die Lecture der Druckschriften gewöhnen, statt dass man jetzt noch immer den Handschriften Vorzug gibt, die nur mit Mühe zu erlangen sind, und die ihrer Kostbarkeit wegen nur von den Wohlhabenden angeschafft werden können”.

72 See U. J. Seetzen, “Die wissenschaftliche Propagande: Ein Werk des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts”, in the Landesbibliothek Oldenburg, Nachlass von Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, Varia aus dem Nachlaß, Cim I 88 l, Konvolut 5, Nr. 12. I am grateful to Merle Logge for transliterating the article. An edition of this important programmatic text is currently in preparation. Henceforth I cite Seetzen’s essay, which has no pagination or foliation, in the likely order in which it was authored.

73 E.g., Seetzen, *Tagebuch des Aufenthalts in Aleppo*, p. 211: “Die vormalige Propaganda würde sich um die Wissenschaft sehr verdient gemacht haben”.

74 Seetzen, “Die wissenschaftliche Propagande”, p. 1–2.

75 Seetzen, “Die wissenschaftliche Propagande”, p. 3.

76 Seetzen, “Die wissenschaftliche Propagande”, p. 9.

sending out missionaries who would spread scientific knowledge and called for the creation of an institution that would prepare them for such a task.⁷⁷ The “scientific missionaries” Seetzen imagined were to travel to the East to study the sciences and acquire important literature, especially travelogues and geographical works, for Europe.⁷⁸ But they were also to “give back”:

A scientific Propaganda is greatly beneficial for two reasons: on the one hand, it would acquaint us with the state of the literature of all educated peoples of the Orient as well as with the opinions, practices, and customs of those who are not yet benefiting from a scientific training; on the other hand, it would convey to the former by way of an exchange beautiful and important selections from the literature of the Europeans, and to the latter the first seeds of a scientific education.⁷⁹

Seetzen advanced concrete suggestions for the foundation of commercially successful oriental printing presses in European cities, listed specific works that were to be printed in Europe, and described in detail how they were to be prepared, to reflect the tastes of a potential oriental readership.⁸⁰ A font like that used in Silvestre de Sacy’s *Chrestomathy* had to be selected for printing, but the letters had to be connected carefully – Seetzen here praises the Shuwayrite monks for their accurate work, as “the example most worthy of imitation” (*das nachahmungswürdigste Beyspiel*).⁸¹ These printed books would generate an interest that would result in the establishment of printing presses in the Near East.⁸²

It is obvious that Seetzen imagined himself as just the sort of “scientific missionary” whom he described in his manifesto. His scattered observations on the printing presses of the Levant in scholarly publications and in his diary, accordingly, can be perceived as part of an endeavor to assess the situation in preparation of a *mission civilisatrice* through printed works, especially in Arabic. Orientalist discourse

77 Seetzen, “Die wissenschaftliche Propagande”, p. 11: “We are just lacking a place of gathering where these disciples of the sciences can prepare for their mission” (“Es fehlt uns nur an einem Vereinigungspunkt, wo diese Jünger der Wissenschaften sich zu ihrer Mission vorbereiten”).

78 Seetzen, “Die wissenschaftliche Propagande”, p. 12, 14.

79 Seetzen, “Die wissenschaftliche Propagande”, p. 13: “Der ausgebreitete Nutzen einer wissenschaftlichen Propagande lässt sich auf zwey Punkte zurückführen; einmal nämlich, indem sie uns mit dem Zustande der Litteratur aller gebildeten Völker des Orients, und mit den Meinungen, Sitten und Gebräuchen derjenigen bekannt macht, bey welchen noch keine wissenschaftliche Bildung statt findet; und dann, indem sie Jenen zum Tausch das Auserlesenste, Schönste und Wichtigste von der Litteratur der Europäer, und Diesen die erste Saat zu einer folgenden wissenschaftlichen Bildung mittheilt”.

80 Seetzen, “Die wissenschaftliche Propagande”, p. 16–21.

81 Seetzen, “Die wissenschaftliche Propagande”, p. 17.

82 Seetzen, “Die wissenschaftliche Propagande”, p. 19.

pervades Seetzen's manifesto, for example, when he assigns to each European state its respective "scientific terrain" in the Orient.⁸³ Some passages are characterized by blatant racism:

Yes! Destiny seems to have decided that us Europeans of the Motherland will enlighten the savage and wild nations of our planet with the flame of the sciences. One day, the negro peoples in Inner Africa will write in their annals in our script, they will relate to their offspring that a [Seetzen here strikes the word "white"] people from another land came to them and planted the first seed of the sciences there.⁸⁴

This racist discourse about the peoples in Inner Africa oddly contrasts with other passages in which Seetzen insists on the importance of "oriental literature" (*orientalische[n] Litteratur*), specifically Arabic, Persian, and Turkish works.⁸⁵

A decade after Seetzen's death, his manifesto was rediscovered by the physicist and chemist Johann Salomo Christoph Schweigger (1779–1857), who used it to promote his own vision of the Academies of Sciences.⁸⁶ Schweigger studied philosophy but switched to physics and chemistry after his habilitation. He was professor in Erlangen before moving to Halle. He was the founder of the Association for the Diffusion of Knowledge of the Natural World and a Higher Truth ("Verein zur Verbreitung von Naturkenntniß und höherer Wahrheit"), whose goal was to support naturalists sent to East India.⁸⁷ Schweigger built on Leibniz and Seetzen, whose manifesto he had rediscovered,⁸⁸ to intervene in a debate about the purpose and role of Academies – he saw the potential of the Academy in serving precisely for the "scientific propaganda" that Seetzen had described. He continued to strive to connect his Association to a University or Academy until it became part of the

⁸³ Seetzen, "Die wissenschaftliche Propagande", p. 25–26.

⁸⁴ Seetzen, "Die wissenschaftliche Propagande", p. 23: "Ja! Vom Geschick scheint es beschlossen zu seyn, dass wir Europäer des Mutter- und Tochterlandes mit der Fackel der Wissenschaften die rohen und wilden Nationen unsers Planetens erleuchten. Einst werden die Neger-Völker des innern Afrika's in ihren Annalen, geschrieben mit unserer Schrift, ihrer Nachwelt erzählen, ein weisses [crossed out] Volk aus einem fernen Lande sey zu ihnen gekommen, und habe die erste Saat zu den Wissenschaften bey ihnen ausgestreut".

⁸⁵ Seetzen, "Die wissenschaftliche Propagande", p. 13.

⁸⁶ On Schweigger's rediscovery of Seetzen's idea of a "scientific propaganda", see M. Kaasch, J. Kaasch, "Wissenschaftliche Propaganda im Sinne von Leibniz und Seetzen: Johann Salomo Christoph Schweigger und die Akademien", in S. Splinter, S. Gerstengarbe et al. (eds.), *Physica et historia: Festschrift für Andreas Kleinert zum 65. Geburtstag*, Halle, 2005, p. 373–386.

⁸⁷ Kaasch and Kaasch, "Wissenschaftliche Propaganda", p. 374.

⁸⁸ Kaasch and Kaasch, "Wissenschaftliche Propaganda", p. 375.

University of Berlin in 1842–1843.⁸⁹ He also continued to fight for the reformation of the Academies.

It must be noted that Schweigger's program differed noticeably from Seetzen's in that he advocated the dissemination of religion through scientific propaganda, thus emphasizing a Protestant religious purpose incompatible with Seetzen's vision. The example points to different iterations of the concept of a "scientific mission", which excluded or included religious purposes.

6 Conclusion

On January 14, 1809, Ulrich Jasper Seetzen visited the Egyptian astronomer Shaykh ʿUthmān al-Mīqāṭi ("Schech Osman el Mikāṭy") at his home. In a conversation about a work on astronomy, the following exchange occurred between the two scholars.

He inquired what was going to happen to the Arabic manuscripts in Europe. The French had arguably carried away 30 camel loads from the deserted houses. I assured him that excerpts would be taken from all the works, especially the historical and geographical ones, but also the theological ones, or that full translations would be produced and disseminated in print. This was remarkable to him. [...] I had told him about our large public libraries where big collections of oriental works can be found. "Indeed!", he said. "Your rulers do more than ours; none of our despots and pashas cares about the sciences".⁹⁰

Whether or not the dialogue took place in the very form recalled by Seetzen, it certainly highlights his own ideas about the crucial role printed books could potentially play in the exchange of scientific knowledge between the East and the West. In this conversation he does not specifically address printing in the Levant, but in the discussion the same general themes are brought up as in Seetzen's written reflections on the printing presses of the Levant: the advancement of history, geography, and all the areas of knowledge production, the dissemination of knowledge

⁸⁹ Kaasch, Kaasch, "Wissenschaftliche Propaganda", p. 382, *passim*.

⁹⁰ Kruse, *Ulrich Jasper Seetzen's Reisen*, vol. 3, p. 386–387 (diary entry, January 14, 1809): "Er erkundigte sich, was man mit den arabischen Manuscripten in Europa anfangte, indem die Franzosen wohl 30 Kameel-Ladungen aus den verlassenen Häusern mitgenommen hätten. Ich versicherte ihm, dass man aus allen Werken, besonders den historischen und geographischen, aber auch aus theologischen, Auszüge mache, oder vollständige Uebersetzungen davon veranstalte. Dies war ihm sehr auffallend. [...] Ich hatte ihm von unsern grossen öffentlichen Bibliotheken gesagt, wo auch grosse Sammlungen von orientalischen Werken anzutreffen. 'Wahrlich! sagte er, ihre Fürsten thun mehr, als die unsrigen; von unsern Gewalthabern und Paschen bekümmert sich keiner um die Wissenschaften'". The diary entry is also cited in El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics*, p. 15.

through translations and printed books, and the fundamental scientific superiority of the European side in this exchange.

It was Seetzen's goal not only to select and purchase a representative sample of manuscripts that captured the state of all the sciences for his readership in Germany, but he had a second agenda that revolved around the printed word in the Ottoman Levant. It might be surprising that a scholar disinterested in Christian spiritual literature created one of the most compelling collections of early Arabic religious works printed by and for Levantine Christians. His attempt to purchase all the books printed in the Levant, especially, but not exclusively, the Arabic works, was an exhaustive survey that was meant to provide the foundation for the introduction of printing among the "Orientals".

If one compares Seetzen's views about the printing presses of the Levant to the ideas earlier travelers like Stephan Schultz expressed, the change in perspective immediately becomes obvious. Schultz was interested in printed religious literature for two main reasons: to improve his linguistic skills and to prepare for future missionary activities. Seetzen decidedly turned away from this religious impulse and later developed the concept of a scientific "propaganda" that he contrasted with the religious missionary propaganda. It is remarkable that the physicist Johann Salomo Christoph Schweigger, when thinking about the structure of the German Academies a couple of decades later, used Seetzen's ideas to return to a missionary impulse like Schultz's and combine it with scientific aspirations. Despite their differences, however, all three scholars negotiated the relation between reformed Christianity, on the one hand, and the aspiration for the knowledge of the world, on the other.

What would have happened if Seetzen had not perished in Yemen under mysterious circumstances in 1811? Would he have translated European classics for the Arabs of the Levant and made sure that they were printed on a Levantine press? Would he have translated excerpts of European historical and geographical literature to be disseminated in print in the Levant? We do not know where Seetzen's peregrinations would have led him, but he was clearly willing to act as a pioneer of the "scientific missionaries" whom he so vividly imagined in his essay on scientific propaganda.

Appendix 1a

Arabic Printed Books Purchased by Ulrich Jasper Seetzen during his Stay in Aleppo (Numbered)

Seetzen Haleb no.	Shelfmark Gotha Research Library	Book title, place and date of publication	Seetzen article p./no.
1	Theol 8° 227/15	<i>Kitāb yud'ā ṣakhrat shakk</i> , Oxford, 1721	p. 643, no. 1
2	not identified		
3	Theol 4° 20/16	<i>Kitāb al-Zabūr al-sharīf</i> , Aleppo, 1706	not mentioned
4	not identified		
5	Theol 8° 320a/18	<i>Mukhtaṣar al-ta'lim al-maṣīhī</i> , Shuwayr, 1756	p. 647, no. 7
6	not identified		
7	Theol 8° 619d/4	<i>Kitāb Murshid al-khāṭi' fī sirr al-tawba wa-l-i'tirāf</i> , Shuwayr, 1747	p. 646, no. 5
8	Theol 8° 715/15	<i>Kitāb wajiz yashtamilu 'alā ta'ammulāt rūḥiya li-ayyām al-usbū'</i> , Shuwayr, 1735	p. 646, no. 3
9	Theol 2° 58/1	<i>Kitāb al-Injīl al-sharīf al-tāhir wa-l-miṣbāḥ al-munīr al-zāhir</i> , Aleppo, 1706	p. 642, no. 2
10	not identified		
11	not identified		
12	Theol 4° 799/6	<i>Mizān al-zamān wa-qisṭās abadīyat al-insān</i> , Shuwayr, 1733–1734	p. 645, no. 1
13	Theol 8° 58/14	<i>Kitāb al-Zabūr al-ilāhī li-Dāwūd al-nabī</i> , Shuwayr, 1764	not mentioned
14	Theol 8° 619d/6	<i>Kitāb al-Uktū'ikhūs al-mushta- mil 'alā al-thamāniya al-alḥān li-l-qiyāma</i> , Shuwayr, 1767	p. 647, no. 8
15	Theol 8° 715/14	<i>Kitāb Ta'ammulāt jahannam</i> , Shuwayr, 1769	p. 647, no. 9
16	Theol 8° 619d/5	<i>Kitāb Qūt al-nafs</i> , Shuwayr, 1772	p. 647, no. 10
17	not identified		

18	Theol 8° 58/9	<i>Kitāb Zabūr Dawūd al-malik wa-l-nabī</i> , London, 1725 (Salomon Negri)	p. 643, no. 2
19	Theol 8° 328/3	<i>Risāla wajīza tūđiḥu kayfiyat al-tawba wa-l-i'tirāf</i> , Aleppo, 1711	p. 642, no. 4
20	Theol 2° 281/3	<i>Kitāb al-Nubuwwāt al-kanā'isī</i> , Shuwayr, 1775	p. 647, no. 11
21	Theol 2° 58/3	<i>Kitāb al-Injil al-sharīf al-tāhir wa-l-miṣbāḥ al-munīr al-zāhir</i> , Aleppo, 1706	p. 642, no. 1

Appendix 1b

Arabic Printed Books likely Purchased by Ulrich Jasper Seetzen during his Stay in Aleppo (Not Numbered)

Seetzen Halep no.	Shelfmark Gotha Research Library	Book title, place and date of publication	Seetzen article p./no.
none	Theol 8° 58/15	<i>Kitāb al-Zabūr al-ilāhī li-Dāwūd al-nabī</i> , Shuwayr, 1735	p. 645–646, no. 2
none	not preserved	<i>Kitāb al-Durr al-muntakhab min maqālāt al-Qiddīs Yūḥannā Famm al-Dhahab</i> , Aleppo, 1707	p. 642, no. 3
none	not preserved	<i>Al-'Ahd al-jadīd li-Rabbīnā Yasū' al-Masīḥ</i> , London, 1727 (Salomon Negri)	p. 644, no. 3
none	not preserved	<i>Iḥtiqār abāṭil al-'ālam</i> , Shuwayr, 1739–1740 (only vols. 1 and 4 were printed)	p. 646, no. 4
none	not preserved	<i>Kitāb Tafsīr sab'at Mazmūrāt min Mazāmīr Dāwūd al-nabī</i> , Shuwayr, 1753	p. 646, no. 6

Appendix 2

Arabic Printed Books Purchased by Ulrich Jasper Seetzen during his Stay in Damascus⁹¹

(Numbered = [Rosenmüller], *Verzeichniss*, p. 16–17, section “Orientalische gedruckte Werke”)

Seetzen Damask no.	Shelfmark Gotha Research Library	Book title, place and date of publication
1	Theol 2° 58/2	<i>Al-Injīl al-sharīf al-ṭāhir wa-l-miṣbāḥ al-munīr al-zāhir</i> , Shuwayr, 1776
2	not preserved	<i>Qatf al-azhār</i> , Shuwayr, 1797
3	not preserved	<i>Īdāḥ al-taʿlīm al-masīḥī</i> , Shuwayr, 1768
4	not preserved	<i>Al-Abraksīs</i> , Shuwayr, 1792 (4 th edition)
5	not preserved	<i>Al-Sawāʿī</i> , Shuwayr, 1787
6	not preserved	<i>Sharḥ al-taʿlīm</i> , Shuwayr, 1802
7	Theol 8° 715/13	<i>Al-Burhān al-ṣarīḥ fī ḥaqīqat sirray dīn al-Masīḥ</i> , Shuwayr, 1764
8	not preserved	<i>Irshād ilā muʿallimī al-iʿtirāf</i> , Shuwayr, 1804
18	Theol 8° 314b/3	<i>Khidmat al-quddās ḥasab rutbat al-kanīsa al-suryānīya al-mārūnīya al-muqaddasa</i> , Dayr Mār Mūsā al-Ḥabashī, 1789
19	not preserved	Prayers in Garshuni, Quḏḥayā

⁹¹ Books printed in Armenian and Syriac, as well as books printed in Rome without the involvement of Levantine Christians, were omitted from this list.



Fig. 1: Frederik Christiaan Bierweiler, Portrait of *Ulrich Jasper Seetzen*, mezzotint, 1818. The artist may not have met Seetzen; the portrait was created based on recollections of contemporaries (Friedenstein Stiftung Gotha, inventory no. G 69,35,2. By permission of the Friedenstein Stiftung Gotha).

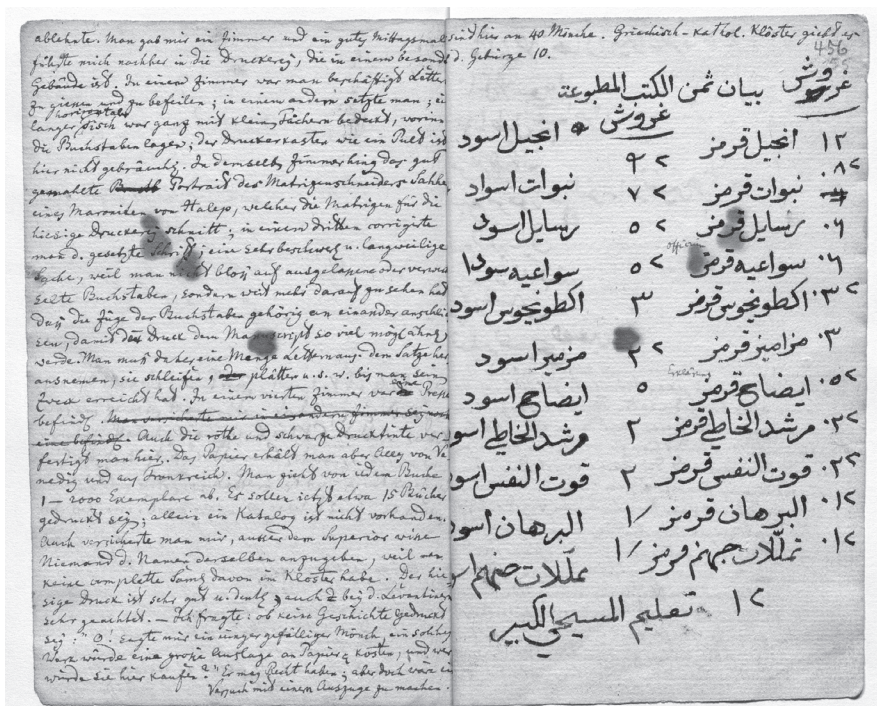


Fig. 2: Excerpt of a diary entry written by Ulrich Jasper Seetzen on September 17, 1806, describing a visit to the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist in Shuwayr and its printing press. A list of Arabic books printed by the monks, probably by a different hand, mentions their prices (Landesbibliothek Oldenburg, Cim I 88 h: 6, fol. 155r. By permission of the Library).

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