



by the German Research Foundation (DFG). This information is accessible via the web portal „Qalamos: Connecting Manuscript Traditions“. The web portal allows users to search data relating to 55.000 manuscripts from Asian and African scribal traditions preserved in German libraries.

RESEARCH LIBRARY

The Research Library aims to preserve and restore the partly heavily damaged oriental manuscripts for researchers, the interested public and the next generations, to catalogue them according to the latest codicological standards, to make them accessible online and to present them in exhibitions. Several sponsors and partners support the Gotha Research Library in this regard.

CONTACT

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OPENING HOURS

Library:
Monday to Friday: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Special reading room:
Monday to Friday: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

The manuscripts can be consulted in the special reading room after registration. For conservation reasons the library provides in some cases only digital scans.



University of Erfurt
Gotha Research Library
Friedenstein Castle
Schlossplatz 1
99867 Gotha
Germany

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illustration outside:
Zakariyyā al-Qazwīnī: 'Ajā'ib al-
makhluqāt wa-gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt.
Probably late 17th century. Scene: A
scholar observes the night sky and
its constellations. Gotha Research
Library, Ms. orient. A 1507, 29r.

inside: Zakariyyā al-Qazwīnī: 'Ajā'ib
al-makhluqāt wa-gharā'ib al-
mawjūdāt. Probably late 17th century.
Calculation method for determining
the beginning of the months of the
Islamic calendar. Gotha Research
Library, Ms. orient. A 1507, 56v.

**UNIVERSITY
OF ERFURT**
Gotha Research
Library

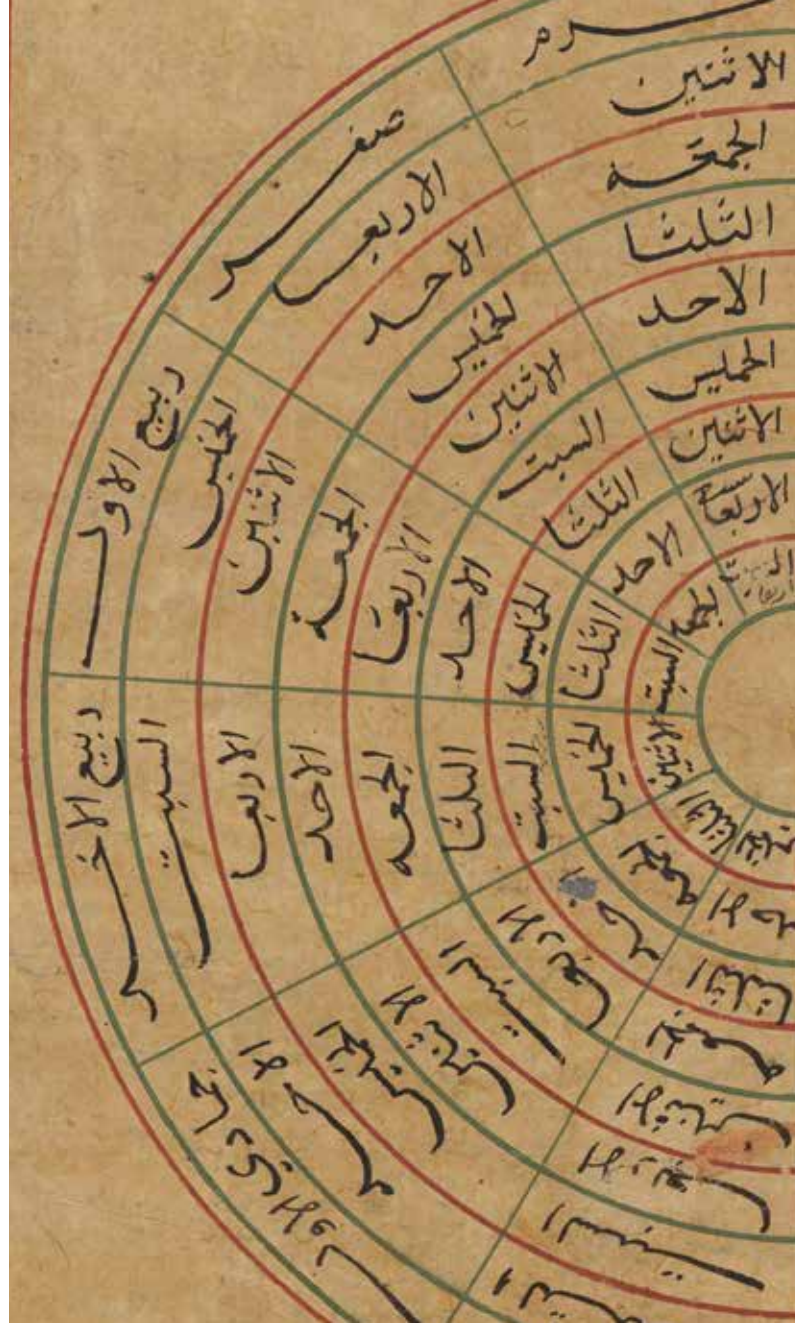
GOTHA RESEARCH LIBRARY
Oriental Manuscript Collection

HISTORY OF THE ORIENTAL MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

The Gotha Research Library ranks among the most prominent historical libraries in Germany. It preserves the country's third largest oriental manuscript collection comprising more than 3,400 codices. The roots of the collection date back to the second half of the 17th century when the first manuscripts were entrusted to the library of the Duchy of Saxe-Gotha(-Altenburg) founded in 1640. In 1678 Duke Frederick I (1646–1691) acquired the Bibliotheca Gerhardina, the scholarly library of the Jena theologians Johann and his son Johann Ernst Gerhard (1582–1637; 1621–1668), which contained a few Arabic, Persian and Ottoman-Turkish manuscripts. In the early 18th century, the small collection mainly consisted of Qurans and prayer books.

This emphasis shifted when Duke Ernest II of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg (1745–1804) commissioned the explorer Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767–1811) to purchase oriental manuscripts, antiquities and objects of natural history in the Middle East. Seetzen set out on his journey in the summer of 1802 heading to Istanbul and Syria where he began studying the Arabic language. His expedition took him not only to Istanbul and Syria, but also to Asia Minor, Lebanon, Jerusalem and Palestine, Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula. There, he purchased approximately 2,700 predominantly Arabic manuscripts for the library in Gotha.

Seetzen also acquired old South Arabian inscriptions and diverse objects of natural history and cultural artefacts during an expedition to Yemen. Unfortunately, all these materials, including a large number of manuscripts, were lost after he died under mysterious



circumstances while travelling to Sanaa in 1811. Due to Seetzen's efforts, the Gotha collection of oriental manuscripts no longer consists merely of theological works, unlike in its beginnings in the late 17th century. It now encompasses historical and biographical treatises as well as jurisprudential, medical, grammatical, lexicographical and poetical codices representing a broad spectrum of Islamic knowledge and sciences. In the second half of the 19th century, the library acquired some 40 oriental manuscripts mainly via auctions, but all in all large-scale purchases are no longer made. Currently the library only acquires individual manuscripts occasionally.

After World War II, the former ducal library was transported to the Soviet Union as spoils of war, but most of the holdings, including the oriental manuscript collection in its entirety, were returned to Gotha's Friedenstein Castle in 1956. Although this collection was considered to be the largest of its kind in the German Democratic Republic, it received little attention due to the political events surrounding the division of Germany and the discrepancy between the character of the collection and the focus of Islamic Studies in Eastern Germany. More recently the collection has received renewed interest both nationally and internationally.

CATALOGUING THE COLLECTION

Endeavours to catalogue the holdings of the oriental manuscript collection have a long history. In the beginning of the 18th century, the library director Ernst Salomon Cyprian (1673–1745), a theologian, made the first attempt to publish a catalogue of the codices in

the ducal library. It included 38 oriental manuscripts. Seetzen's voluminous purchases made a comprehensive survey of the collection necessary. The Orientalist and librarian Johann Heinrich Möller (1792–1867) took on this challenge, cataloguing 965 manuscripts in 1825/1826 and thereby completing the fragmentary inventory lists that Seetzen had attached to his book parcels from the Middle East.

The Indologist and philologist Wilhelm Pertsch (1832–1899) set new standards when he catalogued the collection in detail: for the very first time, he catalogued the manuscripts according to the languages represented, namely Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish. Pertsch did not only identify authors and titles of the respective manuscripts, but he also added comprehensive content-based descriptions to his entries based on several manuscript catalogues that the Orientalists Fleischer, Hammer-Purgstall, Sprenger, Flügel and others had composed. Due to his achievements, Pertsch enjoyed such an excellent reputation among his colleagues that he was entrusted with cataloguing further oriental manuscript collections in Germany, such as those held by the Royal Library of Berlin, the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft (DMG) and the University Library of Göttingen.

THE ORIENTAL MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Today, Pertsch's manuscript catalogue is accessible online via the homepage of the Research Library. These manuscripts as well as more recent acquisitions have recently been described and recorded in the framework of the project "Orient-Digital", funded