



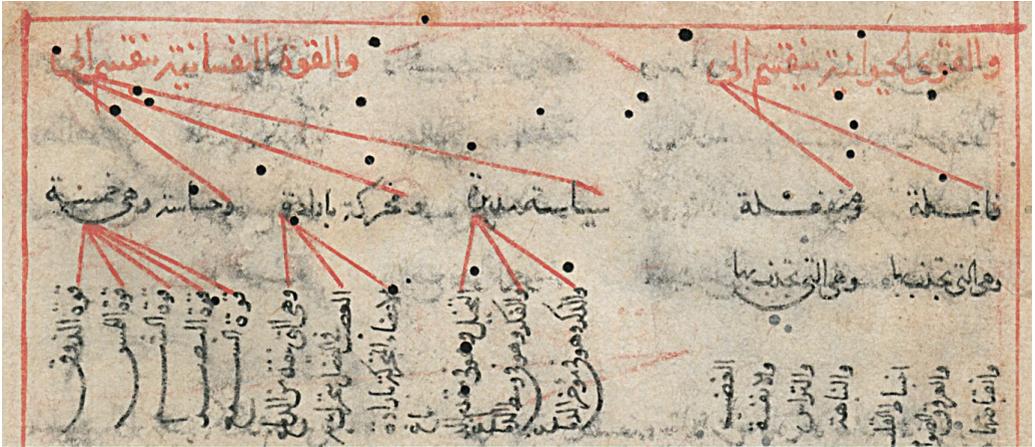
University of
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UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO

DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE
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Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies – Islamic Studies
University Research Priority Program (URPP) Asia and Europe



Putting the House of Wisdom in Order

The Fourth Islamic Century and the Impulse
to Classify, Arrange and Inventory

Conference

University of Zurich, February 19–20, 2016

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Extract from Ḥunayn b. Ishāq, *Masā'il fi l-ṭibb*,
Sprenger 1885:2r, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin

Outline

The fourth Islamic century (roughly the tenth century CE) witnessed a proliferation of texts that aimed in one way or another to codify and render accessible the scientific and literary production of the preceding Islamic centuries and of the pre-Islamic cultures whose intellectual heritage had entered the purview of Arabic scholarly tradition. In an age that combined consolidation with renewed scientific ingenuity, many authors sought comprehensiveness in compiling, arranging, editing and commenting upon the products of discrete, well recognised domains of scholarly endeavour. Others, however, were involved in a more novel project of surveying the whole sweep of human knowledge, mapping the topology of its distinct parts and describing their contents. This effort ranged in manifestation from the more pragmatically inclined composition of inventories and categorisations of books and the authors who had composed them, through to theoretical attempts to classify knowledge on a fundamental level, delineating its forms and structures and defining the relationship between them. Somewhere between the two lies a cluster of works, often referred to as ‘encyclopaedic’ and emanating largely from the cadre of state bureaucrats, that both lay out taxonomies of the sciences and present summaries of their contents, providing a sort of ‘state-of-the-art’ of a wide range of disciplines of knowledge.

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This workshop aims at a more chronologically focused effort to understand the specifics of the new drive to classify and arrange that we see in the fourth century, and seeks understand the motivations for, and manifestations of the phenomenon from a variety of perspectives:

- i) The fourth century witnessed the increasingly rapid dissolution of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate. Should we understand the new preoccupation with classifying and summarising previous knowledge as a project to conserve something that was in danger of being lost, or might it perhaps better be connected with a consciousness of a growing intellectual efflorescence in the former provinces as more sources of patronage became available to scholars from wealthy, local ruling dynasties?

- ii) Technology-change in the form of the ever greater availability of paper had led to an explosion in book production that began much earlier but gathered speed from the late third century. To what extent is the 'classification and arrangement' phenomenon a response to an ever larger literary environment that was increasingly difficult to manage and understand?
- iii) Might we conceive of this phenomenon as bound up with the 'coming of age' of so many disciplines of Arabic-Islamic scholarship and the increasing professionalization of their practitioners, reacting to and bolstering a growing disciplinary consciousness even in fields that already had well established identities?
- 4 iv) Many classifications contain more or less explicit valorisations of types of knowledge. To what extent can we see a recognition of, a change in, or an argument for hierarchies of, for example, practical vs. theoretical, Arabic vs. non-Arabic, ancient vs. modern, religious vs. secular, linguistic vs. numerate sciences?
- v) The classificatory act is often normative in intention, but to what extent do these classifications reflect the classifiers' experiences of the actual relationships between disciplines and their practitioners in the fourth century?

Program

Day 1: Friday, 19th February 2016

13:30–14:30 **Welcome and Introduction**

14:30–16:00 **Panel 1: Curricula**

Discussant: Regula Forster (Free University Berlin)

Godefroid de Callataÿ (Université Catholique de Louvaine)

Encyclopaedism on the fringe of Islamic orthodoxy: the *Rasāʿil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, the *Rutbat al-ḥakīm* and the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* on the classification of the sciences

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Johannes Thomann (University of Zurich)

The renaissance of encyclopedic education: the revival of lectures and commentaries in astronomy by al-Fārābī, al-Qabīṣī and Ibn al-Haytham

16:00–16:30 **Coffee Break**

16:30–18:00 **Panel 2: Standards**

Discussant: Hilary Kilpatrick (Independent Scholar)

James Weaver (University of Zurich)

On the composition of *Maqdisī's Kitāb al-bad' wa-t-ta'rikh* and the 'encyclopaedias' of the East

Antonella Ghersetti (Università Ca'Foscari Venezia)

Systematizing the description of Arabic: the case of Ibn al-Sarrāġ

Day 2: Saturday, 20th February 2016

9:30–11:00 **Panel 3: Knowledge and Emotions**
Discussant: Ulrich Rudolph (University of Zurich)

Hinrich Biesterfeldt (Ruhr-Universität Bochum)

An unknown treatise of Avicenna on “the parts of the sciences of the ancients”

6 **Lale Behzadi (University of Bamberg)**

Story-telling as encyclopedic activity: Aspects of classification and arrangement in *al-faraj ba'd al-shidda* texts as exemplified by al-Tanūkhī (d. 384/994)

11:00–11:30 **Coffee Break**

11:30–13:00 **Panel 4: Eastern (Hi)stories**
Discussant: Konrad Hirschler (University of London, SOAS)

Sarah Savant (Aga Khan University, London)

Making good use of past texts: Book copying and the creation of new forms and meanings in the 10th and 11th century Eastern Islamic world

Julia Bray (University of Oxford)

Classifying the exotic: al-Tanūkhī on Indians and their elephants

13:00–14:00 **Lunch**

14:00–15 :30 Panel 5: Practical Matters

Discussant: Henning Sievert (University of Zurich)

Maaïke van Berkel (Radboud University Nijmegen)

The scribes of the 'Abbasid administration putting their knowledge and documents in order

Hugh Kennedy (University of London, SOAS)

Archives and archival practice in tenth and eleventh century Islamic government

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15 :30–16:00 Coffee Break

16:00–17:00 Regards Obliques

Alessandra Lavagnino (Università degli Studi di Milano)

Peter Burke (University of Cambridge)

17:00–18:00 Final Discussion

General Information

Location	University of Zurich Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies Room RAA E-08 Rämistrasse 59 CH-8001 Zurich
Convenors	Prof. Dr. Ulrich Rudolph (University of Zurich) Dr. Letizia Osti (Università degli Studi di Milano) Dr. James Weaver (University of Zurich)
Registration	Registration required by February 15, 2011: james.weaver@aoi.uzh.ch
Internet	www.asienundeuropa.uzh.ch/events/conferences/house.html

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