

Casey A. Wood's Islamic Manuscripts in the McGill Libraries

Les manuscrits islamiques de Casey A. Wood dans les Bibliothèques de McGill

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Rare Birds and Rare Books: Casey Albert Wood and the McGill Libraries

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article vise à démontrer comment la passion pour les livres rares et l'enthousiasme pour l'histoire de l'ophtalmologie de Casey Albert Wood ont mené à des contributions significatives au développement des collections des Bibliothèques de McGill. Les deux premières parties de l'article présenteront les processus d'acquisition des collections Ivanow et Meyerhof, mettront en évidence certaines caractéristiques codicologiques et paléographiques des objets dans ces collections, et expliqueront comment naviguer et accéder à ces dernières aujourd'hui. La troisième partie sera consacrée à une analyse de la traduction de Wood vers l'anglais de l'arabe d'un traité du onzième siècle intitulé « Tadhkirat al-Kaḥḥālīn » (Livre de mémoires d'un oculiste du dixième siècle pour l'utilisation de l'ophtalmologiste moderne) [1], une œuvre souvent considérée comme une de ses plus importantes contributions au domaine de l'histoire de l'ophtalmologie. La quatrième et dernière partie décrira la collection unique et remarquable de manuscrits originaux du Tadhkirat al-Kaḥḥālīn, rassemblés et présentés à la Bibliothèque de McGill par Casey A. Wood.

[1] Traduction de Casey A. Wood.

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Casey A. Wood's Islamic manuscripts in the McGill Libraries

Anaïs Salamon

Abstract

This paper aims to show how Casey Albert Wood's passion for rare books and strong interest in the history of ophthalmology resulted in significant contributions to the development of the McGill Libraries' collections. The first two parts will document the acquisition processes of the Ivanow and Meyerhof collections, highlight some of the codicological and paleographical characteristics of items in these collections, and explain how to navigate and access them today. The third part will focus on Wood's Arabic-to-English translation of an eleventh-century eye treatise entitled *Tadhkirat al-Kahhālīn* ("Memorandum Book of a Tenth-Century Oculist for the Use of Modern Ophthalmologist")^[1], often recognized as one of his greatest contributions to the field of the history of ophthalmology. The fourth and concluding part will describe the unique and remarkable collection of original manuscripts of the *Tadhkirat al-Kahhālīn* collected and presented to the McGill Library by Casey A. Wood.

^[1] Casey Wood's translation.

Résumé

Cet article vise à démontrer comment la passion pour les livres rares et l'enthousiasme pour l'histoire de l'ophtalmologie de Casey Albert Wood ont mené à des contributions significatives au développement des collections des Bibliothèques de McGill. Les deux premières parties de l'article présenteront les processus d'acquisition des collections Ivanow et Meyerhof, mettront en évidence certaines caractéristiques codicologiques et paléographiques des objets dans ces collections, et expliqueront comment naviguer et accéder à ces dernières aujourd'hui. La troisième partie sera consacrée à une analyse de la traduction de Wood vers l'anglais de l'arabe d'un traité du onzième siècle intitulé « *Tadhkirat al-Kahhālīn* » (*Livre de mémoires d'un oculiste du dixième*

siècle pour l'utilisation de l'ophtalmologiste moderne)^[1], une œuvre souvent considérée comme une de ses plus importantes contributions au domaine de l'histoire de l'ophtalmologie. La quatrième et dernière partie décrira la collection unique et remarquable de manuscrits originaux du *Tadhkirat al-Kahhālīn*, rassemblés et présentés à la Bibliothèque de McGill par Casey A. Wood.

[1] Traduction de Casey A. Wood.

Introduction

In 1925, upon retirement from professorship and medical practice, Casey Albert Wood became “in spite of his old age an undefatigable wanderer through many lands!”¹ While visiting South and Southeast Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East, he seized every opportunity to collect unique materials not only for himself, but also for his *alma mater's* library.

The McGill Libraries' collection of manuscripts in Arabic scripts² consists of 650 codices and over 281 fragments and calligraphy panels. Among these, 265 volumes and two hundred calligraphy panels are in Arabic, 334 volumes and eighty-one fragments are in Persian, thirty-five volumes are in Ottoman Turkish, and the few remaining items are in Malay, Urdu, and Hindustani. Most of these manuscripts have been at McGill since 1926,³ and were collected by Sir William Osler (1849–1919), Casey A. Wood (1856–1942), Russian Orientalist⁴ Wladimir A. Ivanow (1886–1970), and German physician and Arabist Max Meyerhof (1874–1945). Wood alone enriched the Osler Library of the History of Medicine and Blacker Wood collections with 279 codices from India and the Middle East, which fall into two groups.

¹ Casey A. Wood, *Letter to Dr. W.W. Francis, Osler librarian* (Montreal: Osler Library of the History of Medicine, 7 June 1938).

² Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and Urdu use the Arabic script.

³ Gacek, Adam. *Persian Manuscripts in the Libraries of McGill University: Brief Union Catalogue* (Montreal: McGill University Libraries, 2005), ix.

⁴ In his 1978 book, Edward Said defines Orientalism as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.” Orientalism emerged from European colonial representations of the East and became in the late 18th century a legitimate academic tradition (and artistic trend) that lasted until the 1950s. Today, Orientalism is commonly understood “as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said, 1978), and as such has become pejorative.

The “Ivanow collection,” the first group, includes Persian and Urdu manuscripts collected by Ivanow in Iran and Northern India in the late 1920s, and now belongs to the Blacker Wood and Osler Library of the History of Medicine collections. The second group, named the “Meyerhof collection” for the purpose of this paper, includes Arabic manuscripts acquired primarily in Egypt by Meyerhof⁵ in the 1930s, and now belongs to the Osler Library of the History of Medicine collection.

This article aims to show how Wood's passion for rare books and strong interest in the history of ophthalmology resulted in significant contributions to the development of the McGill Libraries' collections. The first two parts will document the acquisition processes of the Ivanow and Meyerhof collections, highlight some of the codicological and paleographical characteristics of items in these collections, and explain how to navigate and access them today. The third part will focus on Wood's Arabic-to-English translation of an eleventh-century eye treatise entitled *Tadhkirat al-Kahhālīn* (“Memorandum Book of a Tenth-Century Oculist for the Use of Modern Ophthalmologist”),⁶ often recognized as one of his greatest contributions to the field of the history of ophthalmology. The fourth part will describe the unique and remarkable collection of original manuscripts of the *Tadhkirat al-Kahhālīn* collected and presented to the McGill Libraries by Wood.

I - The Ivanow Collection

Wladimir Alekseevich Ivanow was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, on 3 November 1886⁷ to a father of “native Petersburgian”⁸ lineage and a Ukrainian mother. He spent his childhood between St. Petersburg and Moscow, and joined the Faculty of Oriental Languages at the University of St. Petersburg to study Arabic and Persian in 1907. After graduating in 1911, he became assistant manager of the Birjand (Iran) branch of the State Bank of Russia. In 1913, he

⁵ Adam Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts in the Libraries of McGill University: Union Catalogue*, vii.

⁶ Casey Wood's title for his translation of the text; this is not a direct translation of the original title.

⁷ Farhad Daftary, *Vladimir Alekseevich Ivanow* (London: The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2010), 1.

⁸ Wladimir Ivanow, *Fifty years in the East: The memoirs of Wladimir Ivanow*, edited by Farhad Daftary (London, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2015), 39.

joined the Asiatic Museum of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg as the Oriental manuscripts collector in Iran and Central Asia. In 1918, unable to return to Russia because of the October Revolution, he started working as a translator for the Anglo-Indian forces in Iran and moved with them to India. He then settled in Calcutta and became the cataloguer of Persian manuscripts for the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and in this capacity travelled through Iran in 1927 and 1928 collecting manuscripts. After 1930, he moved to Bombay, where he started researching the literature, history, and teachings of Ismailis for the Agha Khan, and over the years became a pioneer in modern Ismaili studies. He moved back to Tehran in 1959, where he spent his final years, passing away in 1970.

Wood met Ivanow while travelling in Kashmir and Northwestern India in the mid-1920s and commissioned him to collect Islamic manuscripts for both himself and the McGill Libraries. Letters they exchanged between 1927 and 1938, now archived at McGill, show a sincere friendship, initially based solely on a common passion for old books, growing and deepening over the years. Wood's intention was to collect "a small but representative sampling of manuscripts available in Muslim India"⁹ that would give McGill students "some idea of important branches of learning and knowledge among Indian Muslims"¹⁰ in a variety of languages. Between 1926 and 1928, in Lucknow and Sandila (Northeastern India), Ivanow collected 238 manuscripts that include 317 individual works. These works, which cover a wide range of topics,¹¹ follow the modes of thought, branches of learning, and styles and genres of classical Arabic and Persian scholarship that Indian Muslims considered part of their own history.¹² The fact that three-quarters of the titles (167) are in Persian, only sixty-one are in Arabic, and none are in Urdu reflects the place that each language occupied in Northern India at the time. Indeed, Persian was the official language of Muslim courts in the area

⁹ William J. Watson, "The C.A. Wood collection of Oriental manuscripts," in *A dictionary catalogue of the Blacke-Wood library of zoology and ornithology* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1966), 681.

¹⁰ Ibid, 681.

¹¹ Topics include lexicography and grammar, language and literature, sciences such as astronomy, mathematics, alchemy or magic, theology and law, philosophy and ethics, etc.

¹² William J. Watson, "The C.A. Wood collection of Oriental manuscripts," in *A dictionary catalogue of the Blacker Wood library of zoology and ornithology* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1966), 682.

from the twelfth century until the British colonization (1850) and subsequent promotion of English as the official language; Arabic was limited to religious matters, and the everyday popular language that later developed into Urdu and Hindi was not considered fit for formal or literary writing.¹³ According to Ivanow,¹⁴ the collection consists of both well-known classical works—making up three-quarters of the collection—and works that are “either rare or ... entirely unknown in Western Libraries.”¹⁵ As such, it was in the 1920s, and remains to this day, of primary importance for the study of Muslim South Asian scholarship.

In a fascinating section of the essay preceding the bibliographical description of books in Ivanow's accession list, he describes the South Asian book market and his methods for acquiring manuscripts. He writes: “The study of theological and other literatures of Muhammadan people is being rapidly replaced by an elementary education along European lines; and it is not difficult to forecast the time when ‘antiquated’ books will be completely abandoned and replaced by modern publications.”¹⁶ Later, among a full page of rather condescending comments on booksellers—typical of the Orientalist and colonial mindset of the time—he continues: “A stranger would be quite helpless ... without the assistance of another set of idlers ... who, belonging to a literate but impoverished family [...] is willing to earn some money by searching for books.”¹⁷ He concludes by pointing out that interesting and affordable manuscripts can generally be acquired from people “in need of money” who are “selling the property of their ancestors,” or on the illegal market.¹⁸

From codicological and palaeographical points of view,¹⁹ most of the volumes are copied on Oriental paper characterized by a pulp made primarily of hemp, old rags, and ropes, sized with rice or

¹³ Ibid, 682.

¹⁴ Wladimir Ivanow and Casey A. Wood, *Annotated Catalogue of the Casey A. Wood Collection of Persian, Arabic and Hindustani Manuscripts*, 1927.

¹⁵ Ibid, 1.

¹⁶ Wladimir Ivanow and Casey A. Wood, *Annotated Catalogue of the Casey A. Wood Collection of Persian, Arabic, and Hindustani manuscripts*, 9.

¹⁷ Ibid, 10.

¹⁸ Ivanow explains that low-priced books often contained a seal of “waqf,” indicating that they belonged to a Mosque and could therefore not be sold/purchased.

¹⁹ Based on Ivanow's accession list (1927), William J. Watson's list (1964), and Adam Gacek's Union Catalogues of Arabic manuscripts (1991) and Persian manuscripts (2005).

wheat starches in a wide range of colours. Although “the best paper was manufactured in Samarkand and in Central Asia,”²⁰ as of the 16th century, South Asia became an important centre of production of fine quality paper.²¹ Ivanow adds that “India was the earlier to discover the secret of bleaching [paper]” and “invented [...] the hand-colouring of ordinary paper.”²² The collection includes samples of these various types of Oriental papers, as well as a few specimens of paper produced in Western regions of the Islamic World commonly used in Egypt, Turkey, and the Arabian Peninsula. Manuscripts in the Ivanow collection are written mostly in *Nasta’liq* and *Shikastah Nasta’liq*, two calligraphic scripts used for Persian. Although most of the text blocks’ frames are a simple red line, a few combine two or three lines of different colours. The collection includes a small number of richly ornamented manuscripts, mainly literary texts, most probably commissioned by or destined for wealthy and important people. Two types of bindings are present in the Ivanow collection: elegantly embossed leather bindings, and richly painted lacquerwork bindings. The oldest codex in the collection is a well-known commentary of the Qur’an, copied in 1384 A.D., entitled *al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq al-tanzīl* (The truths about the Quranic Revelation)²³ by the famous Persian scholar Al-Zamakhshari (d. 1144 A.D.). A rather unique work in the collection is the anonymous *Bāz-nāmah* [Book of Birds],²⁴ a short treatise about falcons’ diseases and their treatment, copied in the eighteenth century in Indian *Nasta’liq* and displaying a beautifully decorated headpiece as well as twelve colourful illustrations.

The Ivanow collection initially went to the Redpath Library, was later integrated into the Blacker Wood Library of Zoology and Ornithology, and is currently preserved in the Rare Books and Special Collections Library (Blacker Wood collection). Some medical works by Indian and non-Indian physicians who practiced medicine in India went to the medical library and are now part of the Osler Library of the History of Medicine collection. Four documents are necessary to navigate the collection: Ivanow’s accession list, compiled in 1927; a list by McGill Islamic Studies Librarian William J. Watson,

²⁰ Wladimir Ivanow and Casey A. Wood, *Annotated Catalogue of the Casey A. Wood Collection of Persian, Arabic, and Hindustani manuscripts*, 3.

²¹ Nigel Macfarlane, *Handmade Papers of India* (Winchester: the Alembic Press, 1987), 15.

²² Ibid, 3.

²³ Author’s translation.

²⁴ Author’s translation.

compiled in 1964; and two Union Catalogues of Arabic and Persian manuscripts authored by the former Head of the McGill Islamic Studies Library, Adam Gacek, published respectively in 1991 and 2005. Ivanow's accession list remains unpublished, despite several attempts to do so between 1927 and 1929 (as documented in the Wood-Ivanow correspondence), but both a handwritten version and a typewritten version annotated by Wood are available in digital format on the McGill Library website.²⁵ The Ivanow list provides a wealth of general and detailed information on the collection. Opening with a twelve-page essay on the Islamic manuscript tradition, it describes each codex in detail. A few items that were already in the McGill collection "as they seem[ed] to fall within the scope of this catalogue as defined by Mr. Ivanow"²⁶ are included. Watson's list, published in the *Dictionary catalogue of the Blacker Wood Library of Zoology and Ornithology*,²⁷ was intended to "provide a preliminary sketch of the collection"²⁸ and "incorporate the results of scholarship that ha[d] become available since 1927."²⁹ Watson's list is much shorter than the 1927 inventory—it describes only sixty-three codices—and is carefully curated, focusing on "items in the collection [that] are worth [sic] of special mention" and drawing attention "only to the most important features."³⁰ As such, it is an indispensable tool to identify the rarest and most significant volumes in the collection. The two Union Catalogues offer systematic and detailed descriptions of each codex authored by a contemporary leading scholar in the field of Islamic codicology.³¹

²⁵ Wladimir Ivanow and Casey A. Wood, *Annotated Catalogue of the Casey A. Wood Collection of Persian, Arabic, and Hindustani manuscripts*, 1927.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁷ Blacker Wood Library of Zoology and Ornithology, *A Dictionary Catalogue of the Blacker Wood Library of Zoology and Ornithology* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1966).

²⁸ William J. Watson, "The C.A. Wood collection of Oriental manuscripts," 681.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 686.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 686.

³¹ Adam Gacek is an accomplished and internationally renowned scholar specializing in Islamic codicology and paleography. A number of his publications are considered definitive references in the field: *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition: A Glossary of Technical Terms and Bibliography*. Leiden, Boston, Köln, Brill, 2001; *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition: A Glossary of Technical Terms and Bibliography — Supplement* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008); *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009). During his tenure as Head of the McGill University Islamic Studies Library (ca. 1983–2009), he described most of the McGill Islamic manuscript and lithograph collections and published three catalogues: *Arabic Manuscripts in the Libraries of McGill University: Union*

II - The “Meyerhof” collection

Max Meyerhof was born in Hildesheim, Germany, on 21 March 1874 to a Jewish family of distinguished scientists and physicians. One of his cousins, Otto Meyerhof (1884–1951), received the Nobel Prize in medicine in 1922 for his research on the chemistry of enzymes. During his studies in Hanover, Heidelberg, Berlin, and Strasbourg, Meyerhof attended several lectures by a maternal cousin, Wilhelm Spielberg (1871–1930), professor of Egyptology, and was constantly reminded of how important Egypt was for the study of eye diseases. In 1900, he travelled to Egypt for the first time, beginning what would become a lifelong exile,³² to practice ophthalmology and research the history of medicine. Due to the rise of antisemitism, Meyerhof never returned to Europe, and “after Hitler came to power in Germany [...] resigned German and acquired Egyptian nationality in 1935/36.”³³ He died in Cairo on 20 April 1945. A very prolific scholar, Meyerhof published 262 articles over the course of his career, among which were sixty-two original articles on ophthalmology, 109 original articles on the history of science and medicine, and a number of reports and book reviews. His research touched on a variety of topics, such as the eye diseases endemic to North Africa in general and Egypt in particular, as well as the history of medieval Arab ophthalmology. In recognition of his outstanding services as an oculist and historian of Arab medicine and science, Meyerhof received numerous honours and distinctions from medical societies and universities worldwide.³⁴

Casey A. Wood met Meyerhof in Egypt in the early 1930s, and a shared passion for manuscripts and a fascination for the history of ophthalmology quickly led them to collaborate on a number of scholarly projects. Wood relied on Meyerhof’s expertise to collect Islamic medical manuscripts, and on his strong command of the Arabic language to translate an eleventh-century Iraqi eye treatise into English. Wood’s correspondence with Meyerhof and others, now

Catalogue (McGill University Libraries, 1991); *Arabic Lithographed Books in the Islamic Studies Library, McGill University: Descriptive Catalogue* (McGill University Libraries, 1996); *Persian Manuscripts in the Libraries of McGill University: Brief Union Catalogue* (McGill University Libraries, 2005).

³² Apart from a short interruption during WWI (1914–1922) when he served as a doctor in the military, according to Joseph Schacht, “Max Meyerhof,” *Osiris*, vol. 9 (1950), 9.

³³ Joseph Schacht, “Max Meyerhof,” *Osiris*, vol. 9 (1950), 8.

³⁴ Joseph Schacht, “Max Meyerhof,” *Osiris*, vol. 9 (1950), 7–32.

archived in the Osler Library of the History of Medicine, provides great insight into the provenance of this collection of Islamic medical manuscripts. In a letter addressed to the McGill medical librarian dated 7 February 1935, Wood writes:

"I have had several talks with Dr. Max Meyerhof, who as you know has the finest Oriental library in the Near East. He is a German Hebrew who served his country during the war and—poor fellow—lost all his rather large fortune in that barbarian conflict. When the British allowed him to resume practice in Cairo, he is and was by far the best-known ophthalmologist in these parts. He soon regained his position as Court Surgeon. He still intended to will his famous library to a German University—until his country went crazy and began their stupid pogrom that affected many of his scientific friends and relatives. Now his plans are changed to this extent: he has promised to sell me the large majority of the books and MSS on my list of desiderata ... a great opportunity for us!"³⁵

Wood's close relationship with Meyerhof resulted in the significant acquisition of 371 rare ophthalmological works, among which are forty-one Islamic manuscripts and five reproductions of originals (photostat and microfilms) containing fifty-eight individual works. In addition, there are thirty-seven works in Arabic, seven in Persian, one in Turkish, and one bilingual work in Arabic and Persian. Since almost three-quarters of the manuscripts (twenty-nine) contain Meyerhof's bookplate and/or bibliographical notes, this collection is referred to as the "Meyerhof collection" in this paper. The remaining twelve codices came from Wood himself; Dr. Asad Rustum, a history professor at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon and book collector; and Dr. Thomas Hall Shastid,³⁶ a historian of ophthalmology and heavy contributor to the *American Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Ophthalmology* edited by Wood.³⁷ The Meyerhof collection's uniqueness comes from its exclusive focus on the eye, its diseases and their treatment, forming an unequalled corpus of medieval Middle Eastern ophthalmological works. One title worthy of special attention is the already mentioned *Tadhkirat al-Kahhālīn*

³⁵ Martha Benjamin, "Dr. Casey Albert Wood and the McGill Medical Libraries," *Osler Library Newsletter*, no. 5 (December 1970), 2.

³⁶ Frank. W. Newell, "Thomas Hall Shastid (1866–1947): America's forgotten historian of ophthalmology," *Documenta Ophthalmologica*, vol. 81, no. 1 (1992), 53.

³⁷ Casey A. Wood, *The American Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Ophthalmology* (Chicago: Cleveland Press, 1913).

(“Memorandum Book of a Tenth-Century Oculist for the Use of Modern Ophthalmologists”),³⁸ of which the Osler Library of the History of Medicine owns five original manuscript copies, one photographic reproduction from a Vatican manuscript, and one original manuscript commentary on the text.

From codicological and palaeographical perspectives,³⁹ most volumes in the Meyerhof collection are made of European paper, either laid—characterized by pronounced laid and chain wire marks—(thirty-three codices) or woven (eight codices). Four manuscripts display a watermark in the form of three crescents, also called “Tre Lune” due to its popularity among Venetian papermakers “marketing their products to the lands of the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.”⁴⁰ Arabic manuscripts are all written in common Egyptian and Syrian hands, while Persian manuscripts are written in a variety of popular Persian and Indian scripts (*Nasta’liq*, *Shikastah*, *Naskh*). A fair number of codices have marginal notes, sometimes written obliquely in double or triple columns. Ornamentation in these manuscripts is rare, and usually limited to tables or diagrams rather than richly coloured illustrations. Similarly, the bindings—when they exist at all—are rather simple, made of leather or cloth covers without any ornament. Most volumes in the collection are half-bound or completely disbound, which could indicate either that the original bindings were fragile, or that the books were heavily used. The two oldest codices in the collection are copies of the ninth-century *Kitab Hunayn Ibn Ishaq fi Tarkib al-ayn wa-ilaliha wa-ilajih* (The Book of Hunayn b. Ishaq on the structure of the eye, its diseases and treatments),⁴¹ respectively dated 1156 and 1196 A.D.

Accessing and navigating the Meyerhof collection requires three documents: the complete inventory list⁴² reproducing shelf list cards originally prepared by Dorothy Stehle, daughter of Honourary

³⁸ Casey Wood’s title for his translation of the text; this is not a direct translation of the original title.

³⁹ Based on Dorothy Stehle’s inventory list and Adam Gacek’s *Union Catalogues of Arabic manuscripts* (1991) and *Persian manuscripts* (2005).

⁴⁰ Evyn Kropf, “Watermark Wednesdays: Three crescents,” *Beyond the Reading Room: Anecdotes and other notes from the U-M Special Collections Research Center* (blog). 27 August 2014.

⁴¹ Author’s translation.

⁴² The Osler Library of the History of Medicine, Osler Library Archive Collections. *P145 Casey A. Wood Collection Complete Inventory List*. Montreal, McGill University, [n.d.].

Medical Librarian and language expert R. L. Stehle,⁴³ and the two Union Catalogues compiled by Adam Gacek that provide additional information. Initially presented to the McGill Medical Library in the 1940s, the Meyerhof collection was integrated into the Osler Library of the History of Medicine collection in 1960. It is now available for consultation in the Osler Library of the History of Medicine.

III - The “memorandum book of a tenth-century oculist for the use of modern ophthalmologists”

Tadhkirat al-Kaḥḥālīn (“Memorandum Book of a tenth-century Oculist for the Use of modern Ophthalmologists”)⁴⁴ by ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā al-Kaḥḥāl (fl. 1010 A.D.) is considered the most complete textbook on ophthalmology of that period, and is the “oldest work on this branch of medicine ... available to us in its complete form and in the original language.”⁴⁵ Al-Kaḥḥāl (the Oculist)⁴⁶ was a well-established physician and ophthalmologist in Iraq. His treatise was based not only on Greek and Roman sources, many of which have since been lost, but also on what he learned from experience. “The most remarkable fact is that this work is the first to recommend the general anaesthetizing of the patient by drug inhalation during long and painful operations.”⁴⁷ *Tadhkirat al-Kaḥḥālīn* is divided into three *maqalat* (books),⁴⁸ subsequently divided into *bab* (chapters).⁴⁹ The twenty-one chapters of the first book focus the anatomy of the eye; the seventy-three chapters of the second book cover the external (visible) diseases of the eye and their treatments; and the twenty-seven chapters of the third book are dedicated to the internal (non-visible) diseases and their treatments. This treatise remained the authoritative ophthalmological work in the Arab world until the nineteenth

⁴³ The minutes of the 28th meeting of the Board of Curators of the Osler Library (8 May 1958) read: “All the Arabian material in the Medical Library had been well catalogued by Miss Stehle.”

⁴⁴ Casey Wood's title for his translation of the text; this is not a direct translation of the original title.

⁴⁵ ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā al-Kaḥḥālīn, *Tadhkirat al-Kaḥḥālīn*, ed. Ghawṭh Muhḥyī Al-Dīn Al-Qādirī Al-Sharafī, [Facsimile] Islamic Medicine, vol. 82 (Frankfurt am Main: Institut für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften, 1997), 1.

⁴⁶ Author's translation.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 1.

⁴⁸ Ghawṭh Muhḥyī Al-Dīn Al-Qādirī Al-Sharafī's translation.

⁴⁹ Ghawṭh Muhḥyī Al-Dīn Al-Qādirī Al-Sharafī's translation.

century,⁵⁰ but received very little attention and consideration in Europe. Despite a Hebrew translation in the thirteenth century and two Latin translations in the fourteenth century (reprinted several times at the end of the fifteenth/beginning of the sixteenth century), it was only after the publication of the German translation⁵¹ in 1904 that Al-Kaḥḥāl's treatise finally caught the attention of Western ophthalmologists and historians of science.

In 1929, Casey A. Wood decided to translate this text into English. To do so, he started studying Arabic at the age of seventy-three, but despite great efforts, he was unable to overcome the many difficulties of the Arabic language. Far from being discouraged, he decided to rely on prior translations, particularly Julius Hirschberg's and Julius Lippert's, and to take advantage of his colleague and friend Meyerhof's knowledge of Arabic. Hence, the "Memorandum Book of a Tenth-Century Oculist for the Use of Modern Ophthalmologists: A Translation of the Tadhkirat of Ali ibn Isa of Baghdad (Cir. 940–1010 A.D.), the most complete practical and original of all the early textbooks on the eye and its diseases," published in 1936, closely follows the German version while still rendering the meaning of the Arabic text. Wood added an introduction with a summary of the main Arabic treatises on the eye written between the ninth and the fourteenth century, as well as a note about the life of 'Alī ibn 'Isā al-Kaḥḥāl and the different names he was known by in the West ("Jhesu Filius" and "Jesus Ali," among others). Wood's "Memorandum Book of a Tenth-Century Oculist for the Use of Modern Ophthalmologists" was well received upon publication, as attested by numerous excellent book reviews, and remains until today a major contribution to the history of ophthalmology. Meyerhof wrote "[w]e have to thank the famous and venerable author for having made the English speaking world acquainted with one of the best scientific works of the Arabic Middle-Ages. We hope that he will continue his indefatigable activity

⁵⁰ 'Alī ibn 'Isā al-Kaḥḥāl, *Tadhkirat al-Kaḥḥālīn*, ed. Ghawṭh Muḥḥyī Al-Dīn Al-Qādirī Al-Sharafi, [Facsimile] *Islamic Medicine*, vol. 82 (Frankfurt am Main: Institut für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften, 1997), 12.

⁵¹ 'Alī ibn 'Isā al-Kaḥḥāl, *Erinnerungsbuch Für Augenärzte*, trans. Julius Hirschberg and Julius Lippert, *Die Arabischen Augenärzte*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Veit & Comp, 1904). This publication by Julius Hirschberg (1843–1925), historian of medicine and ophthalmologist, and Julius Lippert (1866–1911), Orientalist, included a critical edition of the Arabic text based on the only ten known copies of the text at the time.

for long years to come, for the benefit of the history of science.”⁵² The *Journal of the American Medical Association's* reviewer stated:

“Two hundred and twenty eight [sic] pages of translation of medieval medicine sounds like difficult reading, but to one interested in the subject it is fascinating. The ophthalmology of ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā al-Kaḥḥāl was only what could be seen with the naked eye ..., it is a piece of fine book making of which we may all well be proud. Casey Wood has again distinguished himself.”⁵³

IV - McGill's unique collection of *Tadhkirat Al-Kaḥḥālīn*

While working on the translation, Wood collected numerous copies of the *Tadhkirat al-Kaḥḥālīn*. If Hirschberg and Lippert had identified and located only ten manuscripts of the text while working on the German translation, Wood was able to acquire five original copies, a Photostat copy of the manuscript Codex *Vaticanus Arabicus* 313,⁵⁴ and a commentary on the treatise. In addition to Arabic manuscripts, Wood and Meyerhof collected the 1845 edition of Carolus Augustus Hille's Latin translation,⁵⁵ as well as reproductions of the 1499 and 1500 editions of the Latin translation.⁵⁶ All of these materials were eventually donated to the McGill Medical Library with the rest of the Meyerhof collection, and are now housed in the Osler Library of the History of Medicine collection.

The McGill collection of *Tadhkirat al-Kaḥḥālīn* original manuscripts consists of five original manuscripts of ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā al-

⁵² Max Meyerhof, “Review of Memorandum Book of a Tenth-Century Oculist by Casey A. Wood,” *Isis*, vol. 27, no. 1 (May 1937), 72–75.

⁵³ JAMA, “Memorandum Book of a Tenth-Century Oculist for the Use of Modern Ophthalmologists: A Translation of the *Tadhkirat* of Alī ibn Isā of Baghdad (Cir. 940–1010 A.D.), the Most Complete, Practical and Original of All the Early Textbooks on the Eye and Its Diseases,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 107, no. 6 (1936): 452.

⁵⁴ ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā al-Kaḥḥāl (d. 1038 or 1039), *Tadhkirat al-Kaḥḥālīn*, 1934. https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-osl_robe_0389-22-v1-20045/page/n14/mode/2up & archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-osl_robe_0389-22-v2-20060

⁵⁵ ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā al-Kaḥḥāl, *Alīi Ben Isā Monitorii oculariorum: s. compendii ophthalmiatrici ex cod. arab. mst. Dresdens, latine redditi, specimen, praemissa de medicis arabibus oculariis dissertatione*, trans. Carolus Augustus Hille (Dresdae: Sumptibus Arnoldi, 1845).

⁵⁶ ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā al-Kaḥḥāl, *Cyrrurgia Guidonis de cauliaco*, trans. Guy de Chauliac (Venetiis: Simonem de Luere, 1499); ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā al-Kaḥḥāl, *Cyrrurgia parva Guidonis*, trans. Gherardo da Cremona (Venetiis: Bonetum Locatellum, 1500).

Kahhāl's text and one manuscript of an anonymous commentary on the treatise, copied between the sixteenth and nineteenth century in Egypt and Syria. This small corpus of materials is one of Casey A. Wood's important contributions to the McGill Libraries collections. In 2018, the manuscripts were fully catalogued and digitized, and they are now available on the Internet to scholars worldwide. Bibliographical descriptions taken from Adam Gacek's catalogues and reproductions of the title pages are provided below.



Figure 1. Al-Kahhāl, 'Alī ibn 'Isā (d. 1038 or 1039).

Kitāb Tadbkirat al-Kahhālīn, 914 [1508 A.D.].

Manuscript 389/27, Osler—Robertson.

Online version: <https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-108940-448>

Description from Adam Gacek's catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts (1991), entry no. 227/1, p. 203.

This early sixteenth-century codex counts 157 folios of laid European, most probably Italian,⁵⁷ paper with a watermark in the

⁵⁷ Evyn Kropf, "Watermark Wednesdays: Anchor," *Beyond the Reading Room: Anecdotes and other notes from the U-M Special Collections Research Center* (blog). 21 January 2015.

form of an anchor within a circle. The text is written in a Syrian hand, sixteen lines per page, with catchwords on the verso of each leaf. The text is rubricated, and some words are overlined in red. The foliation appears halfway down the left-hand margin in red ink. Ibn Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf Muḥammad al-Ḥallāq al-Jāmī al-Ṣuqābādī, known as Al-Ṣaqqāf, is identified as the copyist on folio 157a, and Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn al-Karbala'ī is identified as the former owner on folio 1a (dated 999 A.H. [1580 or 1581 A.D.]). The volume is half-bound, and the original Persian leather covers displaying laid-on embossed medallions on the front are preserved inside a new binding. The codex includes a number of inserts:

- A one-page letter, dated 1 October 1936, addressed to Wood from Meyerhof, who purchased the manuscript in Cairo

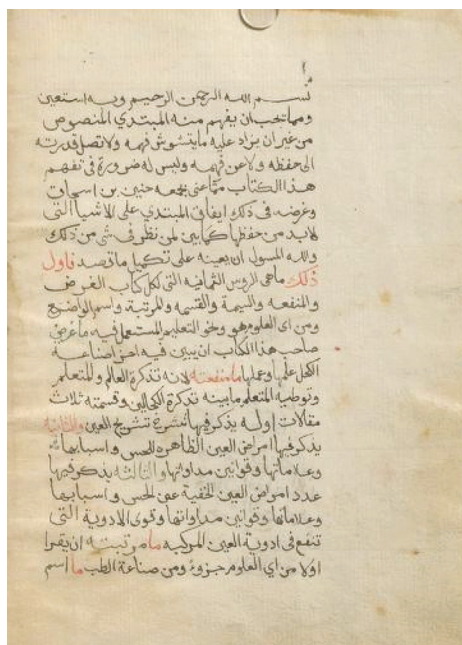


Figure 2. Al-Kaḥḥāl, 'Alī ibn 'Isā (d. 1038 or 1039). *Tadhkirat al-Kaḥḥālīn*, early 12th century [18th century A.D.].

Manuscript 389/25, Osler—Robertson.

Online version: https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-osl_ms389-25_004145124-18055

Description from Adam Gacek's catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts (1991), entry no. 227/3, p. 204.

- A note from Wood, dated 20 December 1936, explaining his wishes to integrate this manuscript into his collection at McGill, along with a short bibliographical description by Meyerhof
- A postcard addressed to Dr. C.J. Wyld, dated May 1937
- Wood's pictorial bookplate, with the motto *Irrideo tempestatem*, pasted on the back flyleaf

This eighteenth-century codex includes 133 folios made from laid European paper with a watermark in the form of a dove in a circle perched on three mounts or eggs, which was popular among Italian papermakers. The text block counts twenty-one lines per page, written in an Egyptian or Syrian hand, in black, red, and green ink. ‘Abd al-Latif bin Ismā‘il al-Ḥusaynī (early twelfth-century A.H. [eighteenth-century A.D.]) is identified as the copyist. The volume is bound in a half-leather cover with a flap. An ownership statement, noted on

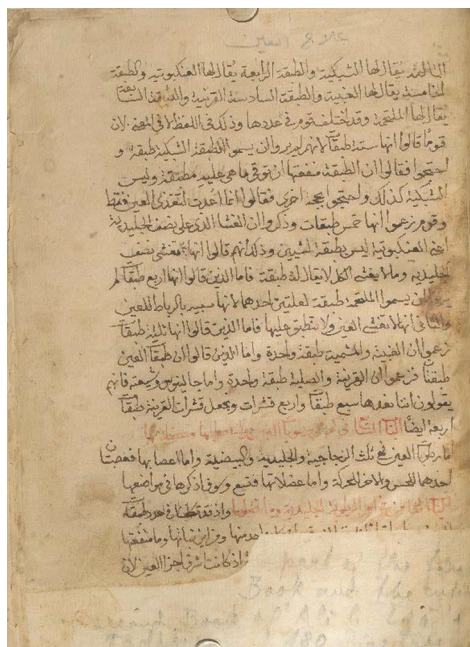


Figure 3. Al-Kahhāl, ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā (d. 1038 or 1039). *Tadhkirat al-Kahhālīn*, Jabal Lubnan, 1179 [1765 A.D.].

Manuscript 389/39m, Osler—Robertson.

Online version: https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-osl_ms389-39_004145226-18058

Description from Adam Gacek's catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts (1991), entry no. 227/4, p. 204.

a flyleaf, is dated 1118 A.H. [1706 A.D.]. The manuscript includes the *Tadhkirat al-Kahhālīn*, abridged in the form of questions and answers (folios 1–49); extracts from Johannitius' *al-Mi'atay masalah* (The two-hundred questions)⁵⁸ (folios 49–56); an alphabetical list of simple medicaments for the eye (folios 56–65); a list of compound medicaments for the eye (folios 66–67); and diagrams of the eye (folios 130 and 133).

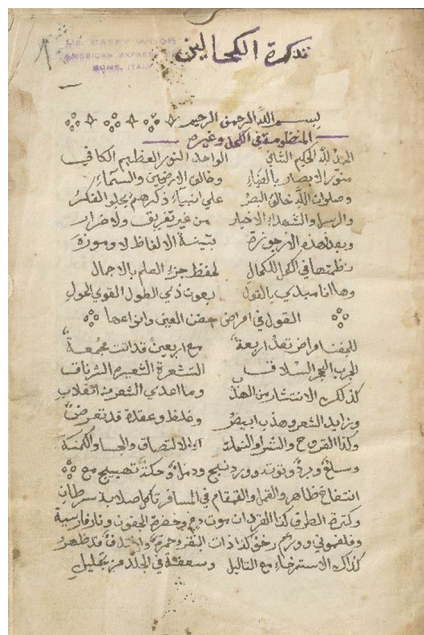


Figure 4. Al-Kahhāl, 'Alī ibn 'Isā (d. 1038 or 1039). *Tadhkirat al-Kahhālīn*, 12th century [18th century A.D.].

Manuscript 389/26, Osler—Robertson.

Online version: https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-osl_ms389-26_004145223-18057

Description from Adam Gacek's catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts (1991), entry no. 227/2, p. 204.

This mid-eighteenth-century codex contains fifty-three folios made from laid European paper, most probably French, with a watermark in the form of a crown and grapes.⁵⁹ The text is written in a Syrian

⁵⁸ Author's translation.

⁵⁹ Evyn Kropf, "Watermark Wednesdays: Grapes," *Beyond the Reading Room: Anecdotes and other notes from the U-M Special Collections Research Center* (blog). 27 July 2016.

hand, twenty lines per page, and rubricated. Irmīyā Muṭrān Dimashq al-Kāthūlikī al-Ḥimsī bi Bayt Shabāb min Jabal Lubnān is identified as the copyist. The volume is half-bound. Large portions of the text are either missing or incomplete: chapters 1–6, the end of chapter forty-three, all of chapter forty-four, and the beginning of chapter forty-five from the first *maqalah* (book); chapter seventy-three of the second *maqalah* (not completed by the copyist); and all of the third *maqalah*, with the exception of chapter twenty-seven. A note in Wood's hand, dated 16 July 1935, reads: "From Max Meyerhof's collection."

This is most likely an eighteenth-century codex, although a date supplied in a different hand reads 1030 A.H. [1620–21 A.D.]. It includes sixty-two folios of laid European paper with an unidentified coat of arms watermark. The text is written in a Syrian hand with certain features of *Tawqī*⁶⁰ and rubricated. The copyist is not identified. 'Abd al-Qādir 'Udah al-Ṭabīb bi-Dimashq is identified as a former owner on folio 62a. The volume is enclosed in a blind stamped red leather binding with a flap. Some folios with verses on ophthalmology and prescriptions (1–2 and 62) do not belong to the original work. The manuscript includes the *Tadhkirat al-Kahḥālīn*, abridged in the form of questions and answers (folios 3–44); extracts from Johannitius' *al-Mi'atay masalah* (The two-hundred questions) (folios 44–47); alphabetical lists of simple medicaments for the eye (folios 47–53) and compound medicaments (folios 53–60); and a diagram of the eye (folio 61).

This 1844 manuscript is comprised of 150 folios made from laid European paper with the "Tre Lune" watermark. The text is written in a Syrian or Egyptian hand, mostly in black ink, with fourteen lines per page. The half-bound codex is composed of quires signed on the verso of each opening folio. Chapters four and five of the first *maqalah* are missing, perhaps omitted by the copyist. Originally copied in 1260 A.H. [1844 A.D.] for Muḥyī al-Dīn Daqqāq, this manuscript was later owned by Professor Naguib Chaker (as indicated by the English translation of the title, a colophon, and marginal notes in his hand). In a covering note dated 11 February 1935, Wood explains that "this copy of (...) Taḍkirat al Kahḥālīn (...) was purchased in Damascus for me by Prof. Rustum of the American University of Beirut about Sept. 1934."

⁶⁰ As explained by Gacek in his Arabic Manuscripts *Vademecum* (2009), "The *tawqī* is a smaller version of the *ṭhuluth* script" that "was rarely used for full texts" but rather as "display script, in chapter headings."

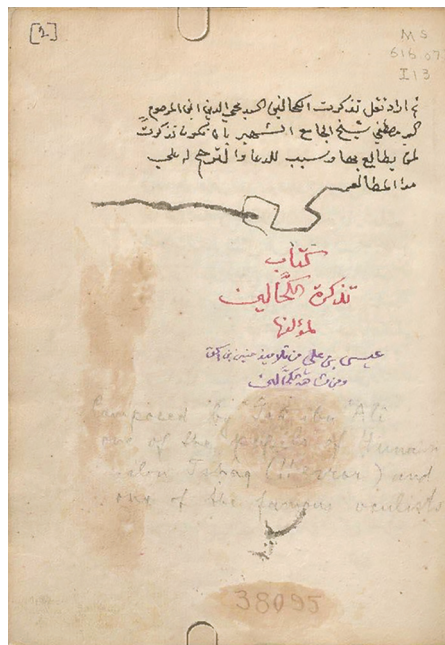


Figure 5. Al-Kahhāl, ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā (d. 1038 or 1039). *Tadhkirat al-Kahhālīn*, 1260 [1844 A.D.].

Manuscript 389/24 Osler—Robertson.

Online version: https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-osl_ms389-24_004145122-18056

Description from Adam Gacek's catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts (1991), entry no. 227/5, p. 204.

This late nineteenth-century manuscript counts sixty-five unnumbered folios made from laid European paper with a “Tre Lune” watermark.⁶¹ The text block contains twenty to twenty-four lines per page, written in an elegant Egyptian hand in black ink. The volume is only half-bound. An inscription in the hand of Professor Max Meyerhof on folio 1a reads: “A commentary on ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā’s *Tadhkirat al-Kahhālīn* (in the form of questions and answers). The order of contents of the original *Tadhkirat al-Kahhālīn* has not been

⁶¹ Evyn Kropf, “Watermark Wednesdays: Three crescents,” *Beyond the Reading Room: Anecdotes and other notes from the U-M Special Collections Research Center* (blog). 27 August 2014.

followed.” Folios thirty-five to thirty-nine are left blank, and the manuscript is incomplete at the end.

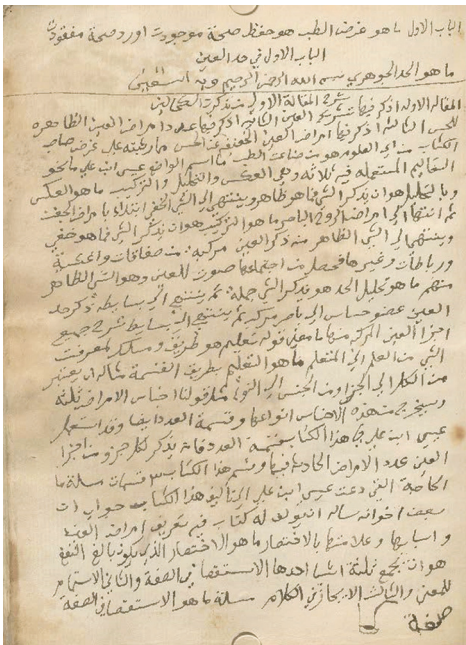


Figure 6. Anonymous. *Sharḥ Tadhkirat al-Kaḥḥālīn*, late 13th century [19th century A.D.].

Manuscript 389/12, Osler—Robertson.

Online version: https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-osl_ms389-12_004145120-18054

Description from Adam Gacek’s catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts (1991), entry no. 217, p. 193.

Conclusion

By investigating and documenting Casey Albert Wood’s passion for books and strong interest in the history of ophthalmology through the archives, this paper provides historical context to his contribution to the development of the McGill Libraries’ Islamic manuscript collections. First, we learned how Wood mandated a Russian Orientalist, Wladimir Ivanow, to collect manuscripts covering a wide variety of topics to raise awareness among McGill students

on “important branches of learning and knowledge”⁶² in India, and in particular among Muslims. We then examined his intellectual friendship with a German scholar exiled in Egypt, Max Meyerhof, and showed how this lifelong relationship led to significant donations of Islamic manuscripts to the McGill Libraries, especially in the field of the history of medicine. Next, we focused on the collaboration between Wood and Meyerhof on the English translation of *Tadhkirat al-Kaḥḥālīn*, often seen as one of Wood's greatest contributions to the field of the history of ophthalmology. Lastly, we described the McGill Libraries' unique collection of manuscript copies of *Tadhkirat al-Kaḥḥālīn* and commentary on the treatise, shedding light on a little-known corpus of manuscripts.

This paper could serve as a base for a more researched study. A more in-depth examination of Wladimir Ivanow's correspondence and published memoirs could provide greater insight into his personal and professional life, as well as his engagement with Islamic manuscripts and book collecting. Similarly, a deeper analysis of Casey A. Wood's correspondence and available provenance information from the McGill Libraries' collections could provide a better understanding of his passion for rare books and manuscripts, as well as the significance of his overall contribution to the McGill Libraries' collections. Lastly, further research into the importance of 'Alī ibn 'Isā al-Kaḥḥāl's treatise to the history of ophthalmology in both the Islamic World and the Western World would support a more accurate assessment of the value of McGill's collection of *Tadhkirat al-Kaḥḥālīn* manuscripts compared to collections held elsewhere. Nevertheless, this paper has showed how Casey A. Wood's passion for rare books and strong interest in the history of ophthalmology resulted in significant contributions to the development of the McGill Libraries' Islamic manuscript collections.

Author biography

Holding two Master degrees in Arabic Studies, and Library and Information Sciences from France, Anaïs Salamon has been an Islamic and Middle East studies Librarian for over 20 years. She worked in a number of academic and research libraries in France (National

⁶² William J. Watson, “The C.A. Wood collection of Oriental manuscripts,” in *A Dictionary Catalogue of the Blacker Wood Library of Zoology and Ornithology* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1966), 681.

Institute for Oriental Languages and Cultures), the Middle East (Yemen, Syria, Palestine, Egypt), and the U.S. (Harvard) before joining McGill as Head of the Islamic Studies Library in July 2010.

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