Introduction

In the fifteenth century, the Cairene scholar Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497) witnessed new entanglements across the western Indian Ocean that would change the future reach of Arabic learning. Educated in Mamlūk Egypt and Syria, he travelled to the Hijaz several times, not only to go on pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, but also to take up residence for learned pursuits.[1] Much of his time would have been spent labouring over his monumental collective biographical work, entitled *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsi* ('The Brilliant Light Concerning the People of the Ninth Century'). He recorded the lives of thousands of people who he deemed important and who died during his lifetime – the ninth/fifteenth century (H/CE). In this regard, he very much emulated his teacher, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449), who had included biographies of people from North Africa to Egypt, Syria, the Hijaz, Persia, and India in his eighth/fourteenth-century prosopographical work, *al-Durar al-kāmina fī ʿayān al-miʾa al-thāmina* ('The Hidden Pearls Regarding the Notables of the Eighth Century').

Al-Sakhāwī also cast his geographical net wide. He looked towards the Maghrib (west) and the Mashriq (east). Importantly, it is the political changes playing out across the South Asian subcontinent (al-Hind) and their transoceanic implications which stand out in his work. Compared to his teacher, al-Sakhāwī documented many more 'Indians' (Hunūd, sg. Hindī) who travelled from the subcontinent to the Hijaz and further on.[2] Those Indians went on pilgrimage, participated in trade, but they also came to the cities of the Red Sea region to learn, collect teaching certificates, and copy texts from the great scholars, past and present. Many Indians studied with al-Sakhāwī, and thus, his biographical work also became an exercise in self-promotion demonstrating his large transregional discipleship.

[1] Here and in the following, Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 68: Petry, 'al-Sakhāwī'.
[2] See Chapter 1 in this book for a detailed study of al-Sakhāwī's *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ*.

Map I.1 The early modern western Indian Ocean. Map based on John Meloy, *Imperial Power and Maritime Trade: Mecca and Cairo in the Later Middle Ages, Chicago*, IL: Middle East Documentation Center, 2010. Reproduced with the permission of the Middle East Documentation Center, the University of Chicago. Changes to the map by O. Nelson, chinooktype.com. Amended map reproduced from Bahl, Christopher, 'Transoceanic Arabic Historiography, Sharing the Past of the Sixteenth-Century Western Indian Ocean', *Journal of Global History*, 15, 2, p. 208, 2020 © Cambridge University Press, reproduced with permission.

At the same time, al-Sakhāwī recognised changes in how scholars, traders, artisans, and pilgrims from al-Hind identified themselves. As was often the case across the region, they used an element of their name, the *nisba* ('affiliation'), to express a sense of belonging, and the *nisba* al-Hindī continued to be important in this regard. However, the Indians that al-Sakhāwī came across went one step further by adding further nisbas denoting specific regions of the subcontinent, new political formations, and urban centres. While his teacher Ibn Ḥajar had 'only' encountered 'Indians', al-Sakhāwī engaged with Gujaratis, Bengalis, and Deccanis, referring to regions and their newly independent sultanic courts, as well as Gulbargis, Kanbāyatis, and Ahmadabadis, designating the urban centres of Gulbarga, Cambay, and Ahmadabad. Over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries new Muslim courts had sprung up in Gujarat, Bengal, Jaunpur, and the Deccan. To staff their courts the newly crowned sultans and their courtly communities began to patronise learned groups, administrators, artists, and military experts, from western Asia, some of whom travelled to the Hijaz and met with al-Sakhāwī.

Al-Sakhāwī also documented people planning to venture out towards the East to look for new patrons and teaching posts. Many protagonists in al-Sakhāwī's *al-Dawʾ al-lāmiʿ* left the Red Sea region via Mecca and cities in Yemen, such as Zabid and Aden, from where they travelled across the Arabian Sea to such ports as Cambay and Dabhol and found patronage at courts such as Ahmadabad and Gulbarga, before they returned to the Hijaz to go to Egypt, Syria, and Anatolia. Transoceanic circuits which linked places from across the western Indian Ocean are prominent in al-Sakhāwī's prosopography, and apart from merchants, they were also used by people who offered their learned trades to patrons and students.

What al-Sakhāwī captured in his prosopographical sample was a new cast of protagonists repeatedly linking the same regions and places of the western Indian Ocean in their circulation for learned pursuits. Thus, a central notion that underlies his collective biographical work is that of an entangled world of Arabic learning stretching from the Red Sea region to the South Asian subcontinent. This world linked the regions of Egypt, the Hijaz, Yemen, Gujarat, and the Deccan. It was made up of ports, courts, and scholarly circles in mosques and *madāris* ('school of higher Islamic learning'), crisscrossed by scholars from different social backgrounds, and animated by the pursuit of study, the transmission of knowledge, and the exchange of texts.

Al-Sakhāwī points us to an emerging world of scholarly movements and the places, people, and practices involved in it. This world remained vibrant and interconnected over the following centuries. Alongside his

prosopographical record it is this period's fragmentary manuscript cultures that allow us to dive deeper into this transoceanic field of Arabic learning. In the following, I focus on the mobile manuscripts that delivered this learning. These mobile manuscripts can tell us many exciting stories about the transoceanic spread of Arabic learning and the shared social and cultural histories that it involved. Over the course of this Introduction, I will propose a method of how to make sense of these mobile manuscript cultures for the early modern western Indian Ocean.

Histories of Circulation

Al-Sakhāwī saw glimpses of a more dynamic and versatile maritime world of circulation. Transit shaped the early modern western Indian Ocean. Merchants shipped pepper from Malabar to the Red Sea, textiles from Gujarat to East Africa, and slaves from the Horn of Africa to the Deccan.[3] The *ḥajj* (annual Muslim pilgrimage) brought together an increasingly diverse community of Muslim pilgrims from the Red Sea region, Central Asia, Iran, South Asia, Southeast Asia and beyond in Mecca and Medina.[4] Shifting webs of port cities, from Aden to Jeddah, Hurmuz to Bandar Abbas, Cambay to Surat, Chaul and Dabhol to Masulipatnam also provided the learned the opportunity to sail the ocean (see Map I.1).[5] Ottoman and Portuguese competition drove the expansion of imperial interests across the ocean.[6] The monsoon winds dictated an annual schedule of transoceanic movements – going westwards during the early summer and eastwards during winter. Before the arrival of steam travel, this climatic phenomenon structured the exchange of human and material cargo to a great extent.[7]

Intellectual cargo travelled alongside people and goods. In the following, I study the spread of Arabic learning along those transoceanic movements, how it travelled, with whom it travelled, and how it shaped what people read and wrote, copied and studied, stored and exchanged, learned and discarded at old and new destinations. I argue that Arabic learning, facilitated by other transoceanic connections, shaped its own world of intellectual pursuits over the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. Patronage, thirst for knowledge, teaching opportunities, fame and

[3] Prange, *Monsoon Islam*, 25–91; Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan*, 105–28.
[4] Tagliacozza, *The Longest Journey*; Faroqhi, *Pilgrims and Sultans*; Pearson, *Pilgrimage to Mecca*.
[5] Scholarship discussing some of those cities will be presented over the course of this book.
[6] Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*, 6–8. [7] Green, *Bombay Islam*, 10–11.

fortune, scholarly and Sufi networks, all enabled Arabic learning to different degrees. What emerges is a changing map of early modern Arabic knowledge transmission, sketched by an intellectual rationale and coloured by a range of professional groups who participated in the quest for learning in courts, study circles, mosques, schools of Islamic learning, and libraries.

Building on a transoceanic corpus of several hundred early modern Arabic manuscripts (and in the context of several hundred more which serve as quantitative indicators), this book makes three new points that diversify the scholarship on the social and cultural histories of the wider western Indian Ocean region. It places cultural mobilities beyond trade, commerce, and pilgrimage at the centre of the investigation and explores the transoceanic frameworks of such circulations. It studies learned encounters in Arabic and thus maps 'connected histories'[8] of knowledge formation among seemingly distant communities of learning. Finally, it considers Arabic as a crucial language of learning in 'multilingual'[9] South Asia. Mobile manuscripts and their histories of circulation offer a crucial venue to investigate the still largely uncharted territory of Arabic sociabilities in the subcontinent, and how they linked up with the wider western Indian Ocean in the early modern period.

'Mobilities' of different kinds are central to this transoceanic world of Arabic learning.[10] Whether they are of a commercial, environmental, or scholarly nature, they describe the *potential* for people to move around, but also for people to become enmeshed in transregional networks, and to experience movement and its effects. In the following, I am interested in the mobilities linked to Arabic learning, and in particular the social and cultural mobilities of Arabic manuscripts and texts. While I refer to the potential of those mobilities of learning, I endeavour to study the *actual* movement, exchange, and spread of Arabic learning through the historical trajectory that I can trace in the sources that this world of learning left behind: the mobile manuscripts. This actualised trajectory of mobilities is what I want to call 'histories of circulation' consisting of the different moments and processes that shaped the social and cultural lives of mobile manuscripts.[11] This analytical framework explores how

[8] Subrahmanyam, 'Connected Histories'. [9] Orsini/Sheikh, 'Introduction', 6–11.
[10] Conceptual and theoretical scholarship has elaborated on this repeatedly to capture flows, movements, and transformations in humans' pasts. See for example Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility*; Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Mobility*; Freitag/Oppen, 'Introduction: "Translocality"', 2–7.
[11] This deliberately echoes notions put forward in the pioneering and influential work by Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*.

texts became socially and culturally mobile and how their mobility was generated by the communities they traversed.

Mobile manuscripts emerge as records of textual engagements through the marginalia, ownership statements, seals, reading and studying notes, and the composition and erasure of colophons. I analyse the changing social contexts and cultural significances of text transmission, in other words different social and cultural mobilities of texts and their historical manifestations. This methodological approach cross-references manuscript notes with each other and with other types of sources, such as narrative texts. In concert, this empirical constellation projects a new perspective on an early modern transoceanic 'field of cultural production'.[12] This conceptual framework of text circulation interconnects textual practices, the people who performed them, and the places where this happened. Textual practices, people, and places will be traced across the manuscripts that circulated as well as the prosopographical works that commented on the circulation of ideas and the written word. Historical protagonists reflected on forms of text transmission in chronicles and prosopographical works of the period. They also logged the circulation of a manuscript by inscribing documentary markers on its folios, in the form of various added notes and marginalia around the 'main text' (*matn*).

Social and cultural mobilities of Arabic learning circulated and spread multiple manuscript versions across communities of the western Indian Ocean world.[13] Early modern Arabic manuscript cultures captured a variety of textual practices. Andreas Görke's and Konrad Hirschler's collected volume on *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources* offers an important overview of analytical uses of 'reading notes' (*muṭālaʿāt*), and 'certificates of transmission' (*samāʿāt*), as well as other forms of glosses and marginal notes. Similarly, 'licences for transmission' (*ijāzāt*), 'ownership statements' (*tamlīkāt*), and 'endowment attestations' (*waqfīyāt*) provide markers to trace the circulation of manuscripts and the engagement with their texts.[14] Manuscript notes and the profile of different material and textual features of the manuscript such as the title pages, layout elements, colophons, and prefaces constitute the primary point of departure in order to track transmission and reception of texts across the western Indian Ocean.

[12] Bourdieu, 'The Field of Cultural Production'. This term will be discussed in a later part of the Introduction.
[13] Görke/Hirschler, 'Introduction: Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources'.
[14] Ibid., 9.

These documentary markers are 'paratexts' and, according to Gérard Genette, constitute culturally signifying additions made to the main text of a work.[15] With his studies of 'paratexts' and 'palimpsests' Genette provided a toolbox for the historical analysis of text circulation. Firstly, 'hypertextualities' and 'intertextualities' allow us to study the spread of a text by revealing the complex intellectual relationships between different texts.[16] Marginal glosses or stand-alone commentaries form such 'hypertextual' relationships with the texts they targeted. Secondly, 'epitexts' disclose the ways in which a text is referred to through other texts.[17] For example, *fahāris* (bibliographies, or 'lists of books') and *mashāyīkh* ('lists of teachers', which often include studied books) comprise the wider discursive field of a text and provide crucial clues of its dissemination. Thirdly, 'paratextual' elements (Genette calls these 'peritexts') are the most direct signs of a text's circulation and are inscribed in its immediate surroundings with the purpose of presenting a written text. 'Paratexts' are appendices (Fr.: *franges*), such as titles, chapter-names, dedications, and prefaces, which constitute a set of discourses and practices that present a written text.[18] Genette writes that,

> indeed, this fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies).[19]

Significantly for the current context, this zone of 'transaction' acted as a 'threshold' (*seuil*), where text and reader met, interacted with each other and where the reader left a trace, if the engagement happened in any written form.[20] Here, Genette's discussion of 'paratexts' for printed books will be applied to study historical aspects of manuscript notes: how they functioned, the time and place of their inscription, as well as their 'pragmatic regime', that is, how they inform about, interpret, command, and perform the reception of a manuscript.[21] While the following

[15] Genette, *Paratexts*, 1–14. His conceptualisation of 'intertextuality' is conducive to the study of reading notes, corrections, and other glosses on the *matn* (text) and will be considered in a different step of the examination, since these literary palimpsests produce different aural effects. See Genette, *Paratexts*.
[16] Genette, *Palimpseste*, 14–15. [17] Ibid., 14–18. [18] Genette, *Paratexts*, 1–14.
[19] Ibid., 2, and Genette, *Seuils*.
[20] Genette, *Paratexts*, 2; 'Reading notes' are necessarily a written documentation of an aural practice. See for example Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 33.
[21] Genette, *Paratexts*, 4ff.

is not a study of the historical emergence of the manuscript notes themselves, their inscription on manuscripts offers a diachronic perspective on the appreciation, circulation, and reading of Arabic manuscripts.

Recent studies of book cultures across the globe have underscored the heuristic strength of Genette's work. Scholars adapted and employed his work to shed light on the vibrancy of early modern European print cultures, the emergence of new reading practices in nineteenth-century Javanese manuscripts, and the affective nature of talismanic texts in Ismaili manuscripts in Baroda, Gujarat.[22] According to Helen Smith and Louise Wilson, 'paratexts' help us think about the authors, binders, editors, and publishers involved in the complex creation of printed books.[23] And 'thus, early modern paratexts had a variety of functions, and prompted very different readings, some literary or hermeneutic, some practical and physical'.[24] Contrary to a positivist reading of the analytical potential of paratexts, they underscore that 'the history of the paratext is as much one of obstacles and communicative failures as it is one of clarity and reader-management'.[25] In other words, paratexts are embedded in larger social and cultural worlds, their functions change, their aesthetics evolve, and readers interpret them differently over time. Written traditions were often resilient, and practices of reading and writing persisted and sometimes spread with only little change across time and space. It is this normative tension between historical change and continuities in the circulation of manuscripts that this book endeavours to explore regarding an almost unstudied Arabic manuscript circulation across the early modern western Indian Ocean.

Histories of circulation also throw into relief hierarchies of the social and cultural world, and perpetuate those hierarchies in textual practices. However, as Smith and Wilson noted about Arthur Marotti's intervention, 'paratexts are zones where multiple – and sometimes competing – authorities and sources are the norm, describing each piece of prefatory matter as "a site of contestation and negotiation among authors, publishers, printers and readership"'.[26] Early modern Arabic manuscript circulation across the western Indian Ocean region was not part of a print culture. However, manuscripts gathered scholarly writers, scribes, patrons, librarians, literate readers, and interested listeners among their audience. What linked this audience with the manuscript was different interests in an aspect of its history of circulation, be it the text itself, its

[22] Smith and Wilson, 'Introduction'; Ricci, 'Thresholds of Interpretation'; Akkerman, 'The Bohra Manuscript Treasury'.
[23] Here and in the following Smith and Wilson, 'Introduction', 3–5. [24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid. [26] Here and in the following Smith and Wilson, 'Introduction', 8.

chain of transmission, the authorities involved in it, a previous owner of the manuscript, the marginalia, the skill of the scribe, his biographical background, or the provenance of the textual artefact. I consider those individuals and groups as members of 'learned communities' and I do not presume that every interaction with an Arabic manuscript served only and principally a scholarly purpose per se. Instead, to learn more about their professional, social, and cultural backgrounds, I try to discern how individuals engaged with a manuscript. The main objective here is to flesh out the cultural diversity and social variety involved in histories of circulation of early modern Arabic manuscripts and what they can tell us about the complex world of early modern Arabic learning.

A growing body of scholarship has demonstrated the rewarding pursuit of reconstructing complex transtextual environments to achieve a historical understanding of Arabic texts. Stefan Leder analysed how notes on manuscripts document the social practice of transmission, the often networked exchanges of authors, patrons, readers, and scribes, and how these may contribute to an understanding of a manuscript's main text (*matn*).[27] Joel Blecher worked with manuscript versions to place Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī's contribution to the Islamicate commentary tradition, the *Fatḥ al-bārī* ('The Victory of the Creator'), in its political and social contexts.[28] The engagement with pupils, benefactors, and contenders among his peers shaped al-ʿAsqalānī's commentary and draws attention to the various social contingencies that signified textual composition. With respect to compilations of *ḥadīth* ('prophetic traditions'), Suleiman Mourad and James Lindsay provided a meticulous study of Ibn ʿAsākir's *The Forty Hadiths for Inciting Jihad* by building up a multi-intertextual environment.[29] Other than the author's background, the textual tradition, and historical context, it is the close reading of the manuscript notes, in particular the various colophons and ownership statements on the extant copy of the singular unique manuscript, which helped them determine the impact of this work and its respective social environment.[30]

Whereas previous studies have focused on one particular text, such as Ronit Ricci on *The Book of One Thousand Questions* and Jan Just Witkam on *Dalāʾil al-khayrāt* ('Proofs of Treasures'),[31] in the current context I chose an approach that sacrificed the depth of one case study for a micro-history of many case studies in transregional circulation. Apart from individual texts and manuscripts, new work on manuscript corpora

[27] Leder, 'Understanding a Text', 59, 62–72. [28] Blecher, 'Hadīth Commentary', 264.
[29] Mourad/Lindsay, *The Intensification and Reorientation*. [30] Ibid., 82–99.
[31] Ricci, *Islam Translated*; Witkam, 'Battle of Images'.

and library collections in the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia has repeatedly shown that expanding the textual genres of enquiry in combination with subtle readings of manuscript notes can grant access to more complex understandings of social and cultural histories of libraries and reading communities.[32] Most recently, Konrad Hirschler retraced the social and cultural lives of a library collection by reconstructing 'a monument to medieval Syrian book culture'.[33] The in-depth study of one corpus allowed him to locate lasting textual practices in an idiosyncratic medieval Syrian manuscript culture.

Manuscript notes and marginalia abound in Arabic (and other) manuscript cultures of the early modern western Indian Ocean world. They tell us a lot, but never everything for the same manuscript. One can neither trace all instances of perusal by readers or owners of manuscripts, nor reconstruct the entire spectrum of significances that a text produced in its circulation. However, it is possible to examine several documentary instances of textual engagement which have a *representational* value. Thereby I am referring to lasting and significant engagements with a manuscript version and to those instances in which readers left traces that were intended to be picked up by later readers as well, including a second engagement or a reading by the same person for the purpose of corroboration and so forth.

I conceptualise frameworks of reading and strategies of reception as recoverable instances in the 'enactment' of manuscripts. The term 'enactment' captures the practices of Arabic learning on early modern manuscripts and thereby clarifies how readers engaged with a given text – in the context of one manuscript version.[34] This builds on scholarship by Wolfgang Iser in the field of 'Rezeptionsaesthetik'.[35] Iser argued for 'a dialectic relationship between text, reader, and their interaction', which he called 'aesthetic response'.[36] Accordingly, the reading of a text has an effect on a reader, and the reading process produces significances which can change from reader to reader. Each significance is thereby generated through a reading enactment. Analogously, different manuscript versions can elicit different responses depending on the social environment in which they are read or reproduced. However, my aim is neither to

[32] See Heinzelmann, *Populäre religiöse Literatur und Buchkultur*; Liebrenz, *Die Rifāʾīya aus Damaskus*; and Hirschler, *Medieval Damascus*.
[33] Hirschler, *A Monument*.
[34] For a conceptualisation of this term see also Bahl, 'Arabic Philology at the Seventeenth-Century Mughal Court', 201–2.
[35] Iser, *The Act of Reading*.
[36] Ibid., x. I thank Rebecca Sauer for pointing this work out to me.