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1 The second issue of the “Series Catalogorum” edited and published by the Istituto per l’Oriente C.A. Nallino of Rome and the CNRS “Monde Iranien et Indien” of Paris is welcome for a number of reasons. This second example sets forth a standard way of editing and publishing a catalogue of manuscripts from the Muslim world, giving a complete description of the contents, of the material supports and including a photographic reproduction of each item. It also brings to the student’s attention another collection from Central Asia – following the first which was devoted to a manuscripts collection in Qaršī – and, in particular, a largely unrecognised group of 54 manuscripts comprising 120 works, plus a description of archive documents (81 in
Arabic and 25 in Persian, 5 in turkī, 2 in karakalpak and 8 mixed). Finally, it focuses full attention upon the history of this collection in the city of Nukus in Khwarezm, through a comprehensive introduction to the volume in which all the major points of significance in the history of the town, the tradition of the manuscript in nearby Khiva and the origin of the collection itself in the Regional Museum are dealt with.

2 It is indeed the time to offer catalogues of manuscripts which are potentially useful across various disciplines and not only in terms of the literary contents which they preserve. This series is aimed clearly at this end and the catalogue by A. Muminov, M. Szuppe, A. Idrisov successfully caters for the needs of the reader of the texts, the scholar of the materials and the historian of the diffusion of the culture of the region while simultaneously offering each the information which is necessary.

3 This collection of manuscripts constitutes a rather interesting sample of a basic religious library. Apart from the two Qur’ans, with the typical predominance of fiqh works (29 works in 46 copies) with the usual majority of works from the Ḥanafite school and a consistent group of theological works (18 works in total) including classical manuals and other recent works among which one of the most significant is the rare commentary to the 'Aqā'īd al-Nasafī by the Tatar Abū al-Naṣr al-Qūṣāwī (d. 1812), the other major group is constituted – as usual and not only in non Arabic speaking Muslim regions but also in manuscripts collections from the Arab world – by Arabic grammatical and lexicographical works (14 works in 24 copies). What is perhaps most remarkable, and further also connected to the pre-eminence attached to the historical and cultural value of the items described, is the space accorded to the comprehensive transcription and description of the short extracts from other works which are usually added at the end (see for ex. nos. 5, 19, 49, 73, 85, 112) and of the jāzas, the notes of reading and transmission of the text (see for ex. nos. 10, 15, 31).

4 This is indeed the most primary information and also the most difficult to recover from the manuscript filios and is what best qualifies the assertion above that the series sets out a sort of standard way of editing a manuscript catalogue.

5 When dealing with well-known works there is in fact no need for wordy descriptions of the contents or of pages of numerous references to the many other catalogues, which are in need of updating the day they are published, but what is most useful are all the elements that accompanied the manuscripts and that can form notable sources for a historian. The merit for this must be attributed to the series and its editorial board which has defined the proper template for the description and, indisputably, to the authors of this volume which represents an even greater step than the first, smaller, item of the series. The only point of reservation to be raised is that the identification of individual contributions – who made what – in the catalogue amongst the three authors and the one mentioned for his collaboration is not clarified in the introductory pages. This may simply be the result, as it surely is, of a fully integrated collaboration between each of the authors, but this surely started from an individual approach to the items or to specific concerns (according to the differing linguistic tools of the authors, or to the differing skills as regards supports) that should be pointed out. But this is neither a critical remark nor even a reservation that can detract from such a highly praiseworthy work and one which deserves the full attention of students of Islamic manuscripts and historians of the Muslim world.
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Thèmes : 1.1. Bibliographie

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