

Essais

Sous la direction de  
Mohamed Almoubaker et François Pouillon

# Pratiquer les sciences sociales au Maghreb

Textes pour Driss Mansouri



Professeur de Philosophie à l'Université de Fès, Driss Mansouri (1949-2012) est venu aux sciences sociales (anthropologie, histoire, linguistique, psychologie) dans le cadre de ses activités militantes. Dans une perspective de critique épistémologique, il n'a cessé par de nombreux articles de réfléchir sur leur orientation.

Ce large recueil de contributions en trois langues (français, arabe, anglais), émanant de chercheurs d'âges et de formations différentes, ressortissants de huit nationalités, témoigne du rayonnement de notre ami disparu. Rassemblé à sa mémoire autour d'un thème cohérent, il entend dire la largeur de ses préoccupations, l'exigence d'une recherche généreuse autant que rigoureuse, où il apparaît comme un modèle. C'est l'occasion d'essayer un bilan d'étape sur les enquêtes qui se conduisent aujourd'hui au Maghreb.

Le recueil est complété d'un choix de ses contributions.



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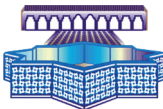
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**Textes pour Driss Mansouri**

avec un choix de ses articles



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## Table des matières

Remerciements.....	5
Introduction.....	11
<i>Mohamed Almoubaker et François Pouillon</i>	

### ARRÊTS SUR ENQUÊTES

Savoir local : éloge d'un « informateur » .....	27
<i>Dominique Casajus</i>	
Au seuil de la recherche ethnologique : initiation au Maroc .....	39
<i>Claire Nicholas</i>	
Figurations et hiérarchies de la violence dans le Haut Atlas (Maroc) ...	47
<i>Matthew Carey</i>	
En Kabylie : un savoir anthropologique à l'épreuve du terrain .....	63
<i>Michèle Sellès Lefranc</i>	
Dans l'Atlas central : une doctorante française sur le terrain marocain .....	85
<i>Annabelle Charbonnier</i>	
Enquêter sur les avocats dans la Tunisie de Ben Ali : les arts de faire et leurs limites.....	99
<i>Éric Gobe</i>	
Une semaine à Tunis (journal d'enquête, septembre 2012).....	111
<i>Alain Messaoudi</i>	

### ITINÉRAIRES ET RÉCAPITULATIONS

La cité antique et nous : retour sur un enseignement.....	131
<i>Mohamed Almoubaker</i>	
L'enseignement de l'archéologie à l'université marocaine. Le cas de l'université de Fès (partie arabe / p. 27)	
<i>Ali Ouahidi et Said El Bouzidi</i>	
A propos de la naissance d'un champ nouveau d'études historiques au Maroc : les études ottomanes et iraniennes. Difficultés et opportunités (partie arabe / p. 35)	
<i>Abderrahmane El Moudden</i>	

Du récit au manuscrit : éléments pour une auto-ethnographie historique .....	149
<i>Mabrouk Jebahi</i>	
Writing the History of Jews in Morocco: A Call to Arms .....	163
<i>Jessica M. Marglin</i>	
Histoire, entre mémoire orale et mémoire écrite : le parcours sinueux d'un projet de recherche .....	169
<i>Abdelahad Sebti</i>	
Écrire autrement l'histoire économique du Maroc du XX <sup>e</sup> siècle (partie arabe / p. 43)	
<i>Tayeb Biad</i>	
Dernière séance : retour sur un séminaire .....	179
<i>François Pouillon</i>	

#### TRAVAILLER SUR DES DOCUMENTS NON CLASSIQUES

Parties de chasse (et sciences sociales) au Maghreb .....	209
<i>Jean-Philippe Bras</i>	
Histoire et mémoire : retours sur la guerre d'indépendance de l'Algérie .....	229
<i>Daniel Rivet</i>	
De la connaissance de l'autre. Exemples de récits de voyage de musulmans en pays étrangers (partie arabe / p. 57)	
<i>Abderrahim Benhadda</i>	
Paper Worlds. A Nesrani Ethnographer Entering the Manuscript Trade in Morocco .....	239
<i>Léon Buskens</i>	
New Perspectives on the Voyage of Eugène Delacroix to North Africa: Jews and Arabs Together .....	267
<i>Shaw Smith</i>	
Indiana Jones et les manuscrits de Tombouctou : effets de manche et d'autorité dans le reportage télévisé et la pratique anthropologique .....	293
<i>Baudouin Dupret</i>	
Que peuvent dire des cartes postales sur la conquête du Maroc ? .....	307
<i>Bernard Rosenberger</i>	

## ENQUÊTER SUR DES SUJETS « SENSIBLES »

- L'esclavage en terre d'Islam : sujet « tabou » ? (partie arabe / p. 71)  
*Abdelilah Benmlih*
- Approches méthodologiques du soufisme : remarques à propos de la Tijania (partie arabe / p. 77)  
*Ahmed Azami*
- Travailler sur la *darija* (arabe marocain) ..... 335  
*Dominique Caubet*
- Travailler sur la prostitution au Maroc :  
pour les mots, quelle cuisson s'il vous plaît ? ..... 349  
*Hinde Maghnouji*
- Des Berbères dans l'Extrême-Sud tunisien ?  
Excursions à Tamezret, Jbel Matmata ..... 367  
*Sonia Ben Meriem*
- Archéologues au bord de la crise de nerfs :  
pratiques archéologiques en Algérie ..... 381  
*Kahina Mazari*
- De la dynamique d'une recherche en sciences sociales :  
entre inquiétudes et convictions ..... 393  
*Clémentine Gutron*

## ELARGISSEMENTS

- Sociologie des religions et paradigme de la sécularisation  
(partie arabe p. 91)  
*Mohamed Sghir Janjar*
- Une sociologie ethnique existe-t-elle ? ..... 415  
*Zakaria Rhani*
- De Geertz à Rabinow : questions de méthode ..... 425  
*Corinne Cauvin Verner*
- Qu'est-ce qu'une recherche collective ? ..... 437  
*Daniel Nordman*

## CHOIX DE TEXTES DE DRISS MANSOURI

- Publications de Driss Mansouri ..... 449
- **Sur la situation des sciences sociales au Maroc**
- Au prisme d'Ibn Khaldūn : nation et communauté au Maroc ..... 453

La nation : de l'histoire à la fiction .....	473
De l'individu à la personne. Actualité de la pensée de M. A. Lahbabi .....	489
Laroui ou l'obsession de la modernité .....	505
La référence absente : Paul Pascon et Robert Montagne .....	533
Manifestations festives et expressions du sacré au Maghreb.....	555
<b>• Textes philosophiques</b>	
Être et essence chez Avicenne : lecture de Driss Mansouri .....	573
<i>Azelarabe Lahkim Bennani</i>	
Référence et signification : les limites de l'«analyse du discours».....	583
Philosophie et liberté (partie arabe / p. 109)	
Introduction (partie arabe / p. 11)	
<i>Mohamed Almoubaker et François Pouillon</i>	
Table des matières (partie arabe / p. 7)	

**Paper Worlds.**  
**A Nesrani Ethnographer Entering the Manuscript  
Trade in Morocco**

Léon BUSKENS<sup>1</sup>

“... all men, or most men, wish what is noble but choose what is profitable; and while it is noble to render a service not with an eye to receiving one in return, it is profitable to receive one. One ought therefore, if one can, to return the equivalent of services received, and to do so willingly; for one ought not to make a man one’s friend if one is unwilling to return his favours.” Aristotle<sup>2</sup>

**First steps**

Fez, Sunday morning 19 June 1988, the weekly book market in the courtyard of the Qarawiyyin mosque. I am leisurely looking at old and second hand books, doing my best to understand whether they might be of any use to my research on Islamic law in Morocco. I have been brought here by my new friend Mostapha Naji, a bookseller from Rabat, who invited me a few days ago to accompany him on a trip to look for merchandise. All of a sudden a rather excited young man comes up to me, asking me whether I am a Muslim. Hardly

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<sup>1</sup> Leiden University

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics. With an English Translation by H. Rackham*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England, 1934, pp. 507-509.



waiting for my reply, he tells me to leave the market: non-Muslims are not allowed here. Fortunately Mostapha and one of his younger local scouts come to my defence, claiming that the courtyard is not yet part of the mosque proper, and that everybody is allowed to enter this market. After some arguing I am allowed to stay, but I do not feel very comfortable or welcome anymore. It is clear that as a *nesrani*, a Christian outsider, I do not really belong in this place.

A few hours later Mostapha takes me with him in a “petit taxi” to one of the new quarters of Fez, without saying much about what we will do. We visit a teacher in his apartment and enter his bedroom to look at some manuscripts. Mostapha spots a big jar of honey and immediately asks to taste a spoonful of this exquisite substance. Later our host invites us to a lavish lunch at his house. The gentleman turns out to be another of Mostapha’s contacts who are hunting for manuscripts, which Mostapha might want to buy for his business. Unintentionally I am entering the world of manuscript dealing, although I left on this trip as an innocent ethnographer looking forward to visit new places.

Two days before, Mostapha had taken me to Meknes, where he had still been cautious in introducing me to his contacts. Upon our arrival we immediately went to see a dairyman, who was also on the look-out for manuscripts. Mostapha had carefully instructed me not to show any interest or knowledge, so as to avoid the impression that I might be a potential customer. Soon afterwards he left me, telling me to wait for him at the dairy. He would go to see another contact who might not appreciate him being accompanied by a *nesrani*. On no account Mostapha was willing to endanger his precious relationships with local contacts, which constituted a vital part of his business capital. After a while he returned with some findings, which he showed me. He took me to a place where they made very good *kefta*, which we ate in the street with excellent mint tea from another booth. Mostapha explained to me that the food tasted so good because they added some dirt, or as others would have it, human meat. By sharing food and jokes our friendship grew.

The next morning Mostapha was already much more relaxed about me meeting his contacts. He took me to a somewhat dilapidated house full of stray papers. Mostapha had arrived too late to buy the manuscripts from the grandchildren of a local scholar. These papers were all that was left. I was free to choose whatever was of my liking,

Mostapha was happy to help me decipher the loose leaves and to offer a price to the young man in charge. I was astonished to see that the legal documents, which the deceased owner had stored at home while working as a judge, and the notes for sermons for the feasts celebrating the end of the month of Ramadan and the Great Sacrifice, and other private papers, were apparently nothing but waste to the heirs. Later that day I would have a similar experience with the grandson of a *'adl*, a notary professional witness. He was offering me bundles of legal documents from the archives of his grandfather. Mostapha did not see any interest in these as merchandise, but he was happy if I would buy these. In both cases my buying helped Mostapha to maintain his relationship with local middlemen, while I acquired some useful materials for my research on Islamic law in Morocco. The sellers seemed to be quite happy, even slightly surprised, to be able to sell papers for which hardly anybody would be willing to offer money.

A day later in Fez something similar would happen. In a curioshop in the midst of the *mdina* a legal document on parchment of about four centuries old was on display in a showcase. Mostapha considered the asking price, a thousand dirhams, quite high, but the piece also to be of excellent quality. I was doubting, a few weeks before I had still answered his offer to buy a manuscript with models for legal documents (*kitab al-watha'iq*) from him with the assertion that I did not want to become a collector of manuscripts, nor get involved in the manuscript trade. Now I needed but little encouragement from my friend to acquire this fascinating document, which would also be a good source for legal history.

I had made the acquaintance of Mostapha in the middle of April 1988, through an introduction of a fellow PhD student from Leiden, a story which I have told elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Soon I became a regular visitor to Mostapha's bookshop, *Maktabat Dar at-turath*, listening to the learned exchanges of Moroccan and occasionally Western scholars with him, and buying books from his well-selected stock. Within a week of our first meeting Mostapha already expressed his contempt

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<sup>3</sup> Buskens (L.), "Conversations with Mostapha: Learning about Islamic Law in a Bookshop in Rabat", in Kommers (J.) & Venbrux (E.) Eds, *Cultural Styles of Knowledge Transmission. Essays in Honour of Ad Borsboom*, Aksant, Amsterdam, 2008, pp. 19-24.

for Western researchers who pretended to be Muslim, only in order to get access for their research. He mentioned one particular Dutch professor as an example, whose *izhar al-islam* recently had been denounced in the *Majallat al-Azhar*.

Mostapha not only had a broad knowledge of the written heritage, *al-turath*, of the Maghrib, he also took a sincere interest in many other forms of knowledge and art, such as Chinese and Japanese poetry. Furthermore, he turned out to be reliable and generous, and to have a pleasant sense of humour. Apparently he started to appreciate my company as well. At that time he was still living with his family in the *mdina* of Salé, the twin city of Rabat on the other bank of the Bou Regreg river. For lunch he would not make the cumbersome trip back home, but normally go to “Taghzaout”, a popular restaurant in the nearby old city of Rabat kept by Swasa, migrants from Southern Morocco. Mostapha started to ask me to share his meals there and to keep him company until he would open his shop again in the afternoon. I was still trying to find a family to live with in the true anthropological fashion, meanwhile staying in a hotel next to the bookshop, and thus more than happy to find a friend with whom I could feel at ease.

Mostapha’s invitation two months later to go on a trip with him was a further expression of his trust in me, and also of his appreciation for me as a willing listener to his stories. Before embarking on the journey he expressly stipulated that I would in no way interfere with his business. Some of his contacts would not be too happy to see him in the company of a non-Muslim. Others might get the idea to raise their prices, since they would think that Mostapha would be buying on my behalf. I should also not talk about what I would see, since some would consider the trade in manuscripts as not entirely legal, while others would be happy to get around Mostapha and directly deal with his contacts themselves. For Mostapha, I would just be a tourist on a trip, who would keep him company and enjoy the sights and meals. I understood his concerns, and happily agreed to his conditions, looking forward to all kinds of new experiences. This first trip to Meknes and Fez would turn out to be the beginning of many trips together, and a dear friendship, which came to an end with Mostapha’s untimely death in September 2000.

## Entering the network

Often we would travel south. First by train to Marrakech, hence continuing by bus to Agadir and Tiznit. In all these places, Mostapha had his contacts, “des tuyaux”, who would search for manuscripts, lithographs, and other old books. With some of them he was on very good terms. For example, in Tiznit there was a father who toured with his sons the countryside of southern Morocco to look for herbs, old objects, which might be sold as souvenirs, and books. After the long trip from Rabat, Mostapha would knock at their door, stretch on the benches, and wait for food to be served. His *nesrani* travelling companion was brought along without much fuss, and he seemed to be welcome as well. Only after a proper meal and tea would Mostapha start to look at their harvest of manuscripts, occasionally even waiting until the next day, after a good night’s rest in the guest room. In Agadir we had a similar experience. We arrived there almost at midnight, and headed for the house of *l-hellaq*, “the barber”. This gentleman had found out that touring the countryside to look for manuscripts was more profitable than shaving heads and beards, and cutting hair. After having some fried eggs and mint tea we slept in the sitting room, only starting to look at his recent discoveries the next morning. During the next years the barber of Agadir would become a specialist in furnishing manuscripts and photocopies of Berber texts.

Trips to the north, to Tangiers, Tetuan, Chefchaouen, showed similar patterns, although the supply seemed less abundant. We would travel by public transport, trains, buses, “grands taxis”, “petits taxis”, find some lodgings in cheap hotels or at people’s homes, have good food in popular places, and start to look for old acquaintances and possible new contacts. While travelling, Mostapha would talk about his discoveries, his wide reading, or his happy memories of his travels as a hippie in Europe while in his early twenties. I would be a grateful listener, eager to hear new and already familiar stories. Mostapha was always willing to educate me, for example pointing out that the two welcoming fat ladies with whom we had just been rubbing buttocks in the back of the old Mercedes were in fact prostitutes on the road. When I saw the road sign for Tinmal, he was happy to take the detour, in order to see the famous ruins of the mosque from Almohad times, “pour se rincer les yeux”. We had wonderful walks at night in quiet Taroudannt or Tetuan, admiring

the light and shadows on the buildings. Of course it was cheaper and more pleasant to share a room. The one who had the money ready at hand would pay, and later we would settle our accounts without too much talk about small change.

I always stuck to the primary condition not to interfere with Mostapha's business. If I would be interested in his discoveries I would tell him later, to pay the price that he asked, without ever haggling, and he would never overcharge. Only if Mostapha did not see any commercial interest in a book offered, I would tell him that I might want to buy it if he did not mind. Sometimes he himself would encourage me to make an offer directly to the seller, thereby obliging his contact as well.

It was unavoidable that over time I did get involved in Mostapha's business. First of all as an incurable buyer in his bookstore. Occasionally Mostapha would protest, telling me that the book I coveted was worthless, or that I had already spent too much, and should better start to worry about buying a house for myself. I was also charged by my colleagues from the Leiden University Library with the task to acquire materials, orders which I was happy to pass on to Mostapha.

As an almost daily visitor to the bookstore, I gradually became acquainted with the buying end of the manuscript trading network. Whenever Mostapha had returned from a trip, a rather wealthy merchant from the Sous region would turn up in order to exercise what he considered to be his privilege of having the first choice of the new discoveries, at almost the price that Mostapha himself had paid. This gentleman did not have a lot of knowledge about the Moroccan literary culture, but took a strong interest in traditional medicine, alchemy, and other popular practices from his region of origin. In making these investments he strongly relied on Mostapha's expertise, occasionally going on trips with him in his big car, and helping him with money. In the course of the years the Sousi merchant would acquire a considerable library, parts of which he would later sell with a big profit to a private collector in the Gulf. This transaction would create serious trouble, as he was not willing to let Mostapha share in the profit, who felt utterly betrayed.

A few times I saw customers from Saudi Arabia or the Gulf in the bookshop. They acted as if they owned the place, looking at the European young man with a mixture of suspicion and barely

disguised disdain. For them I did not belong there, and could be at best an unwelcome competitor for what they defined as an Islamic heritage. Mostapha was good friends with a group of Spanish converts to Islam, who took a strong interest in his discoveries on the history of al-Andalus and Islamic mysticism. Mostapha liked to travel with them as well, going for walks in the mountains and having spiritual experiences. They showed their disapproval when Mostapha talked with me about lighter subjects, such as an erotic text in Arabic. However, our mutual friend did not see any problem in combining these worlds.

Occasionally a man called *al-Urduni*, “the Jordanian”, would show up, asking in quite an insistent manner whether Mostapha had found anything for him. He was particularly keen on writings on parchment and other old materials, which he would bring to Sotheby’s in London to be sold at auction. An erudite librarian would visit the bookshop frequently, being an avid bibliophile and bachelor. When he finally married and bought an apartment he sold a considerable part of his collection. The head of the national library at that time was another “habitué”. His editions of Andalusí texts were for sale in the bookstore. It seemed as if he wanted to keep a watchful eye on Mostapha’s business.

Mostapha was always very generous towards students and researchers. He offered them photocopies freely and suggested subjects for their theses and articles. One of them was an employee at the Ministry of Culture with a degree in Arabic who would publish articles in learned journals from the Gulf for which he got paid. He got involved in the manuscript trade by making descriptions of the manuscripts that Mostapha found and by looking up references. Somehow Mostapha was often short of money. Capital for his acquisitions was regularly furnished by a young man who worked as an assistant in a neighbouring bookstore. After Mostapha’s death he would start a bookshop himself, with a good stock of out of print publications.

Over the years Mostapha and I became close friends. After my return to the Netherlands in late June 1990, we would frequently exchange letters in which Mostapha announced new discoveries and offered recent publications and old sources, both for me and for the library. I would also call him regularly in his bookstore to catch up. Whenever I would come to Morocco, Mostapha had already

planned a trip to look for merchandise. I learned from Mostapha about manuscripts and Islamic law, but also how to move around in Morocco. Our mutual trust increased: when one of us was short of cash the other would advance the money. When I had hopes to start a relationship with a female colleague who happened to visit Morocco, Mostapha accompanied me on a crazy trip to join her, and we were both disappointed about my lack of success. At another occasion Mostapha suggested to go and see a family with two daughters, gifted for playing the lute and singing, where I might find a suitable wife. Returning from a trip to the south we had beans in a street restaurant in Marrakech and both fell terribly ill. Mostapha would make fun of my *darija*, imitating my mistakes. For both of us it was usually more convenient to speak French.

When Mostapha became critically ill and needed a considerable sum for his operation he knew where his friends were. He tried to calm me down when I feared for his life, by saying “Nous avons encore beaucoup à partager”. All these exchanges had transformed our relationship. I was no longer just a customer; Mostapha had become my elder brother. He once defined his conception of love in an unconsciously Aristotelian manner as: “Le plaisir d’être ensemble.”

## Questions

Only after Mostapha’s death I realised that I had had a unique opportunity to study from nearby the manuscript trade, which would permit me to understand the collections in libraries in an unrivalled way. While being on the road with Mostapha and hanging out in his bookstore, I had been too focused on the books themselves as sources of knowledge and objects of desire, and I had not recognized the booktrade in itself as a legitimate object of research, despite the fact that I had read with much pleasure Kratchkovsky’s *Among Arabic Manuscripts* before leaving for Morocco in the spring of 1988, in which this Russian orientalist described with relish his own collecting activities of about a century ago.<sup>4</sup>

So far, very little has been written on the trade in Islamic

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<sup>4</sup> Kratchkovsky (I.Y.), *Among Arabic Manuscripts. Memories of Libraries and Men*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1953.

manuscripts as a social activity. The presence of collections of manuscripts in modern libraries in the West and in the contemporary Muslim world is often taken for granted, something which hardly needs questioning. Only the older history, of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, gets some attention, often understood through the lens of an antiquarian or “orientalist” approach.<sup>5</sup> Studying the social dimension of the collecting process does go beyond the anecdotal or critical approaches, in that it makes us understand the possibilities and limitations of these collections of sources, and the social embeddedness of written materials. Texts do have a social life, which we need to know about if we want to understand them properly.<sup>6</sup> How rewarding these kinds of inquiries can be shows recent work on the history and actual practice of ethnographic collections.

The trade in manuscripts should also be understood as an economic

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<sup>5</sup> Touati (H.), *L'armoire à sagesse. Bibliothèques et collections en Islam*, Aubier, Paris, 2003, offers a history of libraries in the Muslim world in the classical period. For the history of libraries in Morocco, see: Benjelloun-Laroui (L.), *Les bibliothèques au Maroc*, Editions G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 1990; Binebine (A.-C.), *Histoire des bibliothèques au Maroc*, Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, Rabat, 1992; the history of the trade of the paper worlds, *al-wiraqa*, by Mostapha's distinguished patron, the famous historian Al-Mannūni, see al-Mannūni (M.), *Tārīkh al-wirāqa al-maghribiyya. Sinā'at al-makhtūt al-maghribī min al-'asr al-wasīt ilā al-fitra al-mu'āsira*, Manshūrāt kulliyat al-ādāb wa-l-'ulūm al-insāniyya bi-l-Ribāt, al-Ribāt, 1991 ; and the volume of studies on the trans-Saharan book trade Krätli (G.) & Lydon (G.) Eds., *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade. Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa*, Brill, Leiden & Boston, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> A special issue of *Terrain* applies this anthropological perspective to the study of books as objects, with two studies on Morocco: Hugh-Jones (S.) & Diemberger (H.) Eds, “L'objet livre”, *Terrain* no. 59 (2012). An attempt to study indications of social use in legal documents and writings from Morocco is: Buskens (L.), “Maliki Formularies and Legal Documents. Changes in the Manuscript Culture of the ‘Udul (Professional Witnesses) in Morocco”, in Dutton (Y.) Ed, *The Codicology of Islamic Manuscripts. Proceedings of the Second Conference of Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation*, Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, London, 1995, pp. 137-145, in which I suggested to practice codicology also as a social science. Benjelloun-Laroui *op. cit.* pp. 301-334, offers some information on private collections and the book market in Morocco. Ryzova (L.), “The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Collector, Dealer and Academic in the Informal Old-Paper Markets of Cairo”, in Mejcher-Atassi (S.) & Schwartz (J.P.) Eds, *Archives, Museums and Collecting Practices in the Modern Arab World*, Ashgate, Farnham & Burlington, 2012, pp. 93-120, is to my knowledge one of the few ethnographic studies on the trade in old books and papers in the Middle East.



phenomenon, in which dealers and scholars transform other people's trash into treasure. This alchemy takes place in a rather closed community with its own rules, in which participants balance secrecy with the publicity that commerce requires. For Morocco, Georges-Henri Bousquet and Jacques Berque produced an early example of how to study trade in their ethnography of the *dallala*, the auction, in Fez, to which Geertz' study of the *suq* in Sefrou can be seen as a successor.<sup>7</sup> The sociology of a flea market in Paris by Sciardet offers a model of analysis which comes closer to the peculiarities of the manuscript trade.<sup>8</sup>

In the rest of this essay I will first analyse the changes in my position in the trade network, especially the dynamics of the relation between Mostapha and me. My personal experiences were linked to my multiple and evolving statuses as a *nesrani*, ethnographer, collector, middleman, and friend. Then I will address two major ethical issues, which underly this analysis. The first is my participation in the network of the book trade, and the second my writing about these activities and experiences. My reflection upon these two issues is partly taking place after the fact, since I did already answer these questions through my actions: I was involved in the network and I am writing about the world of manuscript trade. As such this essay may serve as prolegomena to further ethnographic notes of the manuscript trade in Morocco, which I intend to publish elsewhere. My contribution may also be understood as part of a growing body of anthropological literature on the dynamics of doing fieldwork in Morocco.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Bousquet (G.-H.) & Berque (J.), "La criée publique à Fès. Etude concrète d'un marché", in *Revue d'économie politique* 3, 1940, pp. 320-345 (Reprinted in: Berque (J.) *Opera minora. II: Histoire et anthropologie du Maghreb*, Bouchène, Saint Denis, 2001, pp. 17-35); Geertz (C.), "Suq: The Bazaar Economy in Sefrou", in Geertz (C.) *et al.*, *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society. Three Essays in Cultural Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979, pp. 123-313.

<sup>8</sup> Sciardet (H.), *Les marchands de l'aube. Ethnographie et théorie du commerce aux Puces de Saint-Ouen*, Economica, Paris, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> The classic is Rabinow (P.), *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1977. A recent addition to this growing body of literature is: Crawford (D.) & Newcomb (R.) Eds, *Encountering Morocco. Fieldwork and Cultural Understanding*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 2013.

## Changing statuses

In my relationship with Mostapha and with his family, friends, customers and middlemen I had the multiple statuses of *nesrani*, ethnographer, student, collector, middleman, and friend. These identities and roles should be understood as social ties and processes evolving through time, rather than as static attributes. In the course of time we became closer, although there always remained an element of being an outsider, as in the case of many ethnographers who always have to balance involvement and detachment. In this section I focus first on the category of *nesrani*, and then on understanding the process of gradual integration in Mostapha's trade network and in his family.

For Moroccans *nesrani* is a current term to indicate a Westerner, who is assumed to be a Christian, as the literal, but scarcely understood meaning "a person from Nazareth" indicates. Like kindred terms such as *rumi* and *gawri* the stress in this notion is on difference, social distance, and being an outsider, with negative connotations that may come with the notions of "strange" and "stranger". As in all societies, in Morocco it matters whether a person belongs to the in-group, is one of us, or is an outsider. Belonging and social distance are expressed in spatial terms, by saying that somebody is *qrib*, "near",<sup>10</sup> or by saying that "he is one of us", as did an assistant in another bookshop when he saw me again after a while: "Léon, huwa dyalna!" Despite theological ideals about the relations between the followers of the three monotheistic religions, in daily parlance a *nesrani* is a clear outsider, who lives in a different cultural world, with its own values and practices, as expressions such as *kelma nesraniyya*, "a given word which one should keep" (literally "a Christian word"), and *qelbu nesrani*, "his heart is insensitive to pity" (literally "his heart is Christian") show.<sup>11</sup>

The term *nesrani*, plural *nsara*, refers to multiple forms of strangeness, in religious, geographical, and hence social terms. In

<sup>10</sup> cf. Eickelman (D.F.) *Moroccan Islam. Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Center*, University of Texas Press, Austin & London, 1976, pp. 96-98.

<sup>11</sup> De Prémare (A.L.) *et al.*, *Langue et culture marocaines. Dictionnaire arabe-français, établi sur la base de fichiers, ouvrages, enquêtes, manuscrits, études et documents divers. Tome II*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1999, p. 378.

this notion centuries of history resound: of Morocco being on the frontier between the Muslim and the Christian world, from the conquest of al-Andalus to its *Reconquista*, through the skirmishes with the Portuguese and Spanish invaders on the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts, the subsequent colonisation by Spain and France, and the decolonisation. The religious dimension also refers to notions of purity and impurity, which are strongly articulated in the classical Maliki doctrine that is dominant in Morocco. A *nesrani* is not circumcised, does not respect the taboos on alcohol and pork and is hence impure and potentially polluting. This impurity means for Moroccans that a *nesrani* should not be allowed to enter a mosque or other places of worship, such as the tomb of a saint or a *zawiya*. At the beginning of the French protectorate Lyautey confirmed this interdiction through legislation, in order to prevent social unrest. A *nesrani* might live in Morocco, but he does not belong there, he is foreign, outside society, strange, and suspect. A male *nesrani* is doubly suspect in that he constitutes a possible danger to Moroccan women, whom he might try to seduce and corrupt.

In these widespread Moroccan understandings of religious, social and cultural difference, there is also always a slight element of ambivalence. In some ways the European model is appealing, some people going so far in their complaints about present day corruption and economic problems that they express a longing for the bygone European colonial dominance. For some people having a *nesrani* as a guest or as an acquaintance might even be a source of social prestige. More directly, a *nesrani* is generally seen as a possible economic resource, first of all of readily available cash, but also a means to gain access to Europe and thereby to a well-paid job and a better life.

Occasionally, when in a bad mood, Mostapha would stress the differences between us. Once he told me that he would never be able to be friends with me as with a fellow Muslim, since we were fundamentally different. When I asked for a further explanation he showed embarrassment, finally coming up with the reason that *nsara* stink, since they are not circumcised. When Mostapha was seriously ill and I expressed my concerns in a too sentimental manner according to his taste, he corrected me by telling me that I overestimated our friendship. But over the course of more than twelve years his deeds seemed to contradict these isolated statements, and our ties grew stronger. He would often write me to ask when I would come again

so that we could travel. When on the telephone, he would tell me that he had “le caffard”, and would like to leave on a trip with me to cheer up. A few days after I got the news of his untimely death in September 2000, I received a letter from him which he had written right before leaving on his last fateful trip to Tetuan. He informed me about new discoveries, but also mentioned that he had dreamed of me and *mi novia* making a trip through Morocco in an air-conditioned car with the children that we might get. Somewhat earlier he had sent me a lock used in the Sahara to close leather pouches, which would keep my fiancée and me together.

Friendship was only one dimension of our relationship, albeit for me the most important one. Mostapha allowed me to enter his trade network in my multiple capacities as a friend, a student, and a customer. But I always chose to remain at the periphery of this network, at the buying end of his lines of contacts. This relative marginality was partly the result of Mostapha’s condition that I should not interfere with his business other than as his client. My position in the trading network hardly ever changed since Mostapha allowed me to enter it. I was content with my marginal position, which allowed me to observe. I never tried to cut him out, but on the contrary stressed the importance of him taking his gain, since he was dependent on the trade to make a living. For me our shared adventures were more interesting than the booty.

In the book trade the networks of middlemen and local scouts were one of the main assets. These networks needed to be created, maintained, extended, and renewed. At one end of the network the main question was how to find merchandise, which required being constantly alert. People collecting garbage and used paper in Marrakech knew that Mostapha would pay a good price if they found something interesting. There were also young men who would always be on the watch out on the flea markets and local auctions for old books. Itinerant traders were travelling the countryside searching for merchandise of all kinds, herbs, honey, antiquities, curios, and manuscripts. These men might also put Mostapha in contact with people with more substantial libraries to sell than they themselves would dare to acquire, knowing that they would be properly rewarded for any piece of useful information.

On the other end of the line would be the possible buyers, in number almost as limited as the providers. Only a few were Moroccan, and

these were mostly interested in printed books from the colonial period, preferably with nice illustrations. Mostapha preferred to mingle with the scholars and students with an interest in manuscripts, from whom he could learn in his turn. He enjoyed discussing his discoveries with scholars such as the traditionally oriented historians Bukhubza and al-Mannuni, whose learning he held in high esteem and to whom he would be happy to provide photocopies of texts that might be of their interest. Expertise was an important asset in this trade. The sellers could often hardly read the manuscripts they were selling and barely had an idea of their worth. Some trusted Mostapha completely with the prices he offered. He would add value to their discoveries through his extensive knowledge of palaeography and bibliography, which often enabled him to identify the more common texts at one glance. This process of value transformation meant that an important part of his business capital, the networks, could only be useful if it would be kept secret for private use. If large investments were required for the acquisition of considerable libraries, Mostapha often worked together with colleagues who disposed of cash, but had little knowledge of the materials. Trust and honouring your promises were important elements of the trade.

I obtained the privilege to observe this restricted world of sellers in search of profit, and buyers longing for knowledge and possessions by becoming part of this world as a marginal actor. Maybe it was strange for the middlemen to see Mostapha hanging out with this *nesrani*. For them I was mostly just a curiosity with money, although some welcomed me with genuine hospitality in their homes. It was clear that my admission was largely dependent upon my friendship with Mostapha. I was again confronted with this when I once tried to enter the *dellala*, the ambulant street auction, of old books opposite the Yusufiyya in Marrakech. Despite my efforts at explanation in Moroccan Arabic, I was told in unambiguous French that this was not a place for me to enter. Without good company, I remained an ordinary *nesrani*.

In the domain of family life, the changes in relations were more considerable over the years, although here there were also limits not to be crossed. I got to know his children, three sons and a daughter, quite well. I saw them growing up while visiting their father in his bookshop. Occasionally they would also go with us on a trip. Once he had bought a spacious house in the *mdina* of Rabat, he would

frequently invite me to his house for lunch. His wife would cook for us, but I was never allowed to meet her in person. Once, when he wanted to show me the kitchen, he told her to stand in the corner with her face to the wall. Later he explained that his wife did not want to meet me out of decency. But she would spy on us by looking down at the inner courtyard from the upper floor, and eagerly follow the development of my pursuit of conjugal happiness “as if she were watching a soap opera”, as Mostapha explained. Mostapha often invited me to stay with him at home, although he understood that I did not want to leave my friends in Salé, with whom I had been living before I came to know him well.

When Mostapha hunted down a substantial library that had belonged to a French *colon* in Casablanca he took me to the house of his parents. There we could leisurely go through the books that had been delivered in dirty bags originally used to transport agricultural products. He introduced me to his widowed mother and some of his brothers, and we would stay over for the night.

After Mostapha's sudden death because of a heart attack at the age of 49 in September 2000 my involvement changed drastically. I kept contact with his family, visiting them whenever I would be in Rabat. After the departure of Si Mohammed, the eldest son, to France, Amina, Mostapha's widow, changed her attitude and would meet me in person to receive my help. After ten years the heirs decided to sell his library, his notebooks, collections of photocopies, and private papers. The widow and her eldest son asked me whether I could help them to offer these to the library of Leiden University, which Mostapha had always held in high esteem. Mostapha had often told me that he wanted me to have his *knanesh*, notebooks, if ever something would happen to him. They are now kept in Leiden to honour his memory. It was a real joy that one of my former students spent almost a year in the house of Mostapha's family during his studies in Morocco.

The first few years after Mostapha's death his family and his business partner told me that some of his former middlemen, such as the barber from Agadir, still occasionally turned up with manuscripts to sell. They themselves lacked the knowledge for this business and asked me to intervene. I declined the offer, I no longer wanted to be involved. I not only missed Mostapha's knowledge and experience, but also his company. Without Mostapha the trade had lost its

meaning for me.

### **Ethics of participations**

The above analysis of my ambiguous position as a *nesrani* fellow traveller in the world of manuscript trading brings us to two ethical issues: both my participation in the network, albeit marginal, and my observing and writing about the trade may be considered problematic.

I could only gain access to the secrets of the trade because of my double status as both a friend and a client of Mostapha. My observations as an ethnographer, the job which enabled me to hang out with Mostapha in the first place, depended on my participation as a buyer. Collecting books, for the Leiden library and for myself, was part of my research activities. For Mostapha it was thus not only entertaining to take me along, but also profitable. We both mixed emotional, social, intellectual, and commercial interests. But in the later stages of our friendship he stressed again and again that I did not need to buy books. Even if I would no longer do so, our friendship would still continue.

As a compulsive collector, buying books was almost a natural activity for me. Before leaving for Morocco, I had also received the advice of a lecturer at Leiden University to hang out in bookshops as a good way to gather information. My exposure to manuscripts started at an early age. My father had instilled in me a strong wonder for illuminated Western manuscripts by showing me facsimile editions and by visiting the treasuries of Catholic churches. One of the attractions of studying in Leiden was its rich collection of manuscripts, linked to colourful stories of ancient collector heroes, such as Golius, Warner and Snouck Hurgronje, and contemporary ones, notably the keeper of the oriental collections at that time Jan Just Witkam. Time and again this mentor insisted on the importance of seizing opportunities. He always encouraged me to collect what I could, the analysis could wait till a later moment. I had also read with great relish the vivid tales of orientalist manuscript collecting by Kratchkovsky and Pelliot. On the very first day that I spent in Morocco, in spring 1984, I saw a manuscript for sale in the bookstore of Hennana in Tetuan. Little could I think that I would return many years later to this dealer with Mostapha, as he turned out to be one of his local contacts.

Despite these unconscious preparations, at first I categorically refused Mostapha's offer to buy manuscripts. I had all sorts of qualms, among them the consideration that ideally manuscripts should stay in their context, that their collecting belonged to an orientalist past incompatible with modern ethics. At the same time I felt a strong curiosity to enter these paper worlds.

Through my travels with Mostapha I gradually realized that the contexts of manuscripts were manifold. Private and public libraries were places for books, but the market was definitely another context. Books had many dimensions, as objects of study, of veneration, of conspicuous consumption, but also as commodities circulating, inside and outside Morocco's borders. While travelling with Mostapha in southern Morocco, I gradually discovered the longstanding intellectual and commercial exchanges between the Maghrib and West Africa with the Sahara as the trading route. These old links manifested themselves in the people I saw, the goods for sale in the markets of Marrakech, the ideas of scholars present in the teachings of the Maliki school, with as their paragon Ahmad Baba al-Tinbukti, the author of the indispensable bio-bibliographical work *Nayl al-ibtihaj*, but also in the manuscripts for sale.<sup>12</sup>

During the colonial period Western scholars tried to enter the book market in Morocco, thus practicing the dominant ideal of scholarly knowledge. Philology meant understanding these exotic worlds through texts, by collecting, editing, translating and annotating these. In the beginning it was quite difficult for the orientalists to obtain texts, as Renaud relates for example.<sup>13</sup> Refusal to sell books to Westerners may be understood as a form of resistance against colonialism.<sup>14</sup> This resistance was fused with religious objections

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<sup>12</sup> Recently the history of this trans-Saharan book trade has been the subject of a volume of studies: Krätli & Lydon *op. cit.* Stewart (C.C.), "A New Source on the Book Market in Morocco in 1830 and Islamic Scholarship in West Africa", in *Hespéris Tamuda* 11(1970), pp. 209-246, and four plates, presents an important source on a Mauritanian scholar acquiring books in Marrakech circa 1830.

<sup>13</sup> *cf.* Renaud (H.-P.-J.), « L'enseignement des sciences exactes et l'édition d'ouvrages scientifiques au Maroc avant l'occupation européenne », in *Hespéris* 14 (1932) no. 1, pp. 78-89; Benjelloun-Laroui *op. cit.* pp. 322-325 ; Binebine *op. cit.* pp. 117-118

<sup>14</sup> *cf.* Simenel (R.), « Le livre comme trésor. Aura, prédation et secret des manuscrits savants du Sud marocain », in *Terrain* no. 59 (2012), p. 62.



to grant *nsara* access to materials which people considered Islamic. However, during the following decades French and Spanish scholars created new public and private libraries in which they assembled important collections of manuscripts. They also explored existing collections, such as of the Qarawiyyin in Fez and published extensively about their discoveries.<sup>15</sup> Some of these private libraries later ended up in European collections. An example is the collection of Berber manuscripts which Arsène Roux assembled in close cooperation with local assistants and copyists during the colonial period in southern Morocco, and which he left to a research institute in Aix-en-Provence. Thanks to Roux' collecting, Western and Moroccan scholars now have an overview of an extensive Islamic literature in Tashelhit.<sup>16</sup>

Nowadays these orientalist collecting activities are regarded with suspicion and even disapproval by many Moroccan scholars. The occidentalist stereotype of foreigners emptying the country, for token prices or even without payment, conceals much more complicated historical processes. In the post-colonial world new global trade networks have emerged structured by new power relations. These manifest themselves in new understandings of cultural heritage, expressed in extensive operations of cataloguing, microfilming, and safeguarding manuscripts by Western and local scholars, in countries such as Mauritania and Mali.<sup>17</sup> It does in any case not correspond with the current state of the manuscript market, in which *nsara* play a very limited role, only to the extent that local actors allow them to do so.

In the manuscript trade as I got to know it during the last twelve years of the past century, people did not seem to be deprived of the treasures by cunning Westerners. It often seemed to me that the people who offered manuscripts for sale to Mostapha took very little interest in their merchandise. They were heirs of literati who lacked the sophisticated knowledge of their forebears to understand these learned texts. For them these books had become rather meaningless

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<sup>15</sup> cf. Benjelloun-Laroui *op. cit.* ; Binebine *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> cf. Van den Boogert (N.), *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes et berbères du Fonds Roux (Aix-en-Provence)*, IREMAM, Aix-en-Provence, 1995.

<sup>17</sup> cf. Krätli & Lydon *op. cit.* ; Dupret in this volume.

objects, almost trash, for which maybe somebody else would offer some money. In other cases the sellers were middlemen who also did not have much knowledge of the contents, but were patient enough to travel extensively and use their local contacts to find merchandise. Some of these manuscripts, for example the popular prayer book *Dala'il al-khayrat*, would end up as souvenirs for sale in curio shops. A similar example were the legal documents written on wooden boards, *alwah*, common in southern Morocco, which apparently had lost their legal meaning and started to turn up in increasing quantities in shops in Marrakech from the early 1990s onwards.

Some highly literate sellers were an exception to this general observation. They knew very well what they offered, and what it might be worth. These collectors might only sell in order to improve their collection, or occasionally out of need. In at least one case, the learned scholar and former librarian also earned money by copying manuscripts by hand if photocopying was not permitted, or considered less desirable for aesthetic or scholarly reasons. These erudites were at the same time also present at the buying end of the network, and formed a small, difficult to access circuit. The habitués of Mostapha's bookstore avidly followed his acquisitions. If they were not able or willing to buy, they might help in identifying texts with their expertise. Occasionally Mostapha would oblige them by offering a photocopy of a manuscript at the price of its reproduction. This was a favour, as some buyers would not be happy to know that their acquisitions had become less unique through reproduction. There existed a market for manuscripts, and also for photocopies of manuscripts.

A related market was the selling of old books from the colonial period. For these the market seemed to be somewhat bigger, as these books were more accessible to educated Moroccans. Especially luxurious illustrated editions became increasingly sought after. Some Moroccan dealers would go to France to look for stocks of these colonial publications that remained with the original publishers, as these books were much more expensive in Morocco. Once I received a letter from a business acquaintance of Mostapha with a request for lodgings and help in the Netherlands to look for orientalist publications. When I called Mostapha I understood that this man was not a real friend of his, hence I declined the possibility of further involvement.

Foreigners constituted an important part of the market, but not so much the Westerners. Collectors and librarians from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries regularly came to Morocco to look for what they considered to be “Islamic heritage”. When I realized that many manuscripts would leave Morocco to end up in almost inaccessible collections in Arabia, I felt less guilty of linking Mostapha to my colleagues at the Leiden University library, where the books would be freely available to any serious scholar.

The Moroccan government showed only limited interest in spending money on manuscripts. Mostapha complained that libraries had a very limited budget and delayed payment sometimes for years. People were also not too eager to send their manuscripts to the yearly exhibitions organised under the patronage of King Hassan II.<sup>18</sup> They feared that later they might be asked to donate these books, or that they would simply never get them back again. Seizure was a known way to enrich public libraries. After independence the government had confiscated the libraries of some prominent collaborators of the French and stored these in the national library in Rabat.<sup>19</sup>

During the past decade notions of Moroccan heritage have become stronger, in conjunction with the promotion of tourism, the development of a collecting middleclass, and international concern expressed in treaties and legislation. For Moroccan collectors folk art and modern painting seem to be more precious than manuscripts. At the same time Moroccan folk art, especially carpets, textiles and jewellery, has become a priced commodity on the international market, as catalogues of exhibitions in European and American museums and art galleries show. Also in this field manuscripts hardly play a role, maybe they are not conspicuous enough for showing off.

Mostapha’s agency played a decisive role in my getting involved in the trade. His encouragement was entirely logical since he made a livelihood out of trade. At our first meeting I bought some very useful bio-bibliographical works, which helped me substantially in understanding the classical Moroccan legal tradition. Soon afterwards Mostapha started to show me manuscripts which might be of interest either for my research, or for the university library,

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<sup>18</sup> *cf.* Benjelloun-Laroui, *op. cit.* pp. 325-326 ; 381-398.

<sup>19</sup> *cf.* Benjelloun-Laroui, *op. cit.* p. 309.

hinting at the fact that they were for sale. At that time I still resisted valiantly, but I would succumb soon, as this story demonstrates.

Mostapha was guided in his business not only by purely commercial considerations. In fact he was first of all a reader and an erudite, who enjoyed the exchange of ideas with friends and visiting scholars. Later he also became an editor and publisher of texts which he considered interesting for the study of *al-turath*, the Moroccan heritage. At several occasions he told me that he had become a book dealer in order to be able to read and to make as many fresh discoveries as possible. After he had enjoyed a book he did not have much difficulty in passing it on.

Mostapha assembled several collections of books and documents, for example an almost complete set of Octave Pesle's valuable studies on Maliki *fiqh*, and of Andalusī and Moroccan manuscripts on the drafting of legal documents, the *kutub al-wathā'iq*. He linked these with files of photocopies of manuscripts and articles, and with note taking in his *knanesh* and the writing of letters in which he exposed his discoveries and insights, and finally the edition and publication of some of these texts.<sup>20</sup> When he wanted to buy a new house he offered these two collections to me, knowing that they would always remain available for him, and that I would cherish them.

Another domain in which Mostapha demonstrated his agency was in his discovery of a literature on Islam written in Tashelhit, the Berber language of southern Morocco. The first trace of this, an Arabic-Berber glossary, he found by chance in a grocery shop late at night, while looking for matches to light his cigarette. This magnificent piece was acquired by the library of the Fondation du Roi Abdelaziz Al Saoud in Casablanca. At about the same time my friends from Leiden University in their turn discovered the collection of Berber manuscripts that Arsène Roux had left to Aix, and the edition of a text by Muhammad al-Awzali by the Dutch Egyptologist Stricker (1960). Once I had brought my friends in contact, a very fruitful cooperation developed, in which Mostapha's indefatigable collecting combined with Nico van den Boogert's studies led to

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<sup>20</sup> For example: Nājī (M.) Ed., *al-Wathā'iq al-mukhtasara li-l-qādī Abī Ishāq al-Gharnāṭī* (t.: 579 h.), Markaz ihyā' al-turāth al-maghribī, al-Ribāt, 1988 ; and Nājī (M.) Ed., *al-Wathā'iq al-sijilmāsiyya li-Abī 'Abd Allāh Muhammad al-Masmūdī* (al-qarn 11 h.), Markaz ihyā' al-turāth al-maghribī, al-Ribāt, 1988.

considerable progress in our knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

In all these exchanges it was clear that for Mostapha books were more than a commodity, and that the transactions were about more than financial gain only. He enjoyed the social aspect, the talking, hunting, the recognition for his insights and sleuthing, as much as the material benefits. He followed a conscious policy of “placing” rare pieces in the collections in which they fitted best and would be accessible for researchers. While the circle of people interested in manuscripts was quite small, the rarity of certain texts could still make competition between collectors quite stiff. Occasionally this would lead to quarrels between collectors and between Mostapha and his customers. Mostapha held the library of Leiden University in high esteem, since he considered it to be a place where any serious scholar would be granted access, hence he offered us manuscripts which he considered important. On the other hand he would never allow me to rummage in boxes with new arrivals for fear of me as a Christian touching *masahif*, copies of the Qur’an, which he considered *haram*. He would also never even offer me beautifully written leaves from the Holy Book for sale. In these matters I remained an outsider, albeit also of my own choice.

Our exchanges took multiple forms. The price written at the back of the book, normally by one of his two faithful assistants Abdelhafed and Si Mohammed, was not the price his friends would pay. Depending on the publisher there would be a bigger or smaller discount, which was also related to the degree of friendship with the customer. Other books would be a present, as I would send Mostapha books which he could not get easily in Morocco, or which I considered to be of particular interest, such as the French translation of Urabe Kenko’s *Les heures oisives*.<sup>22</sup> When I had taken

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<sup>21</sup> Van den Boogert analysed the Berber literary tradition in his 1997 monograph: Van den Boogert (N.), *The Berber Literary Tradition of the Sous. With an Edition and Translation of ‘The Ocean of Tears’ by Muhammad Awzal (d. 1749)*, Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, Leiden, 1997. He also catalogued the Roux collection in *op. cit.* (1995), and studied the lexicographical tradition in Berber. For a recent study of the cult of manuscripts in the Sous region, with attention to collecting and commerce, see Simenel *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> Urabe Kenkô, *Les heures oisives* (Tsurezure-Gusa). *Suivi de Notes de ma cabane de moine (Hôjô-Ki) par Kamo no Chômei*, Gallimard, Paris, 1968 (Translations by Charles Grosbois & Tomiko Yoshida; and by Sauveur Candau).

a copy of this book on my trip to Kyoto in 2010, I learned from a Japanese colleague that Mostapha had mentioned this text as one of his favourites. Mostapha in his turn would also look for objects which he knew I would appreciate, such as inkpots and brass water jars from southern Morocco.

### **Ethics of disclosure**

Not only my participation in the network, but also my writing about the trade, a form of taking distance and objectification, is problematic. I could enter the network and observe its workings because I was an outsider and a friend. For Mostapha I wasn't a menace, but rather an asset. Do I betray our friendship after twenty-five years by writing about it? I should give heed to Urabe Kenko's admonishment:

“En toute chose, il est bon de se comporter avec réserve. Un homme raffiné se vantera-il de ce qu'il sait, puisqu'il le sait ? [...] Des domaines qu'on connaît à fond, il vaut mieux ne pas parler si personne ne vous pose de questions.”<sup>23</sup>

The combination of the two ethical issues that I address here points to a general problem in anthropological fieldwork and reporting, which is balancing the two processes of involvement and detachment.

Mostapha felt somewhat uncomfortable about his trade. He enjoyed the adventure of discovery, the socializing, and the reading of his new finds. But he was also afraid that he would be seen as somebody who squandered the Moroccan heritage to foreigners. There was always an element of secrecy, to protect his sources and his clients, but also for fear of doing something illegal, or at least reprehensible, although the law in vigour (of 1980) might be understood as leaving considerable room for manoeuvring. At several occasions he told me that I should not keep his letters, but destroy them, as they might incriminate him with posterity.

The fear of prosecution became quite real when Mostapha heard a rumour about a theft from the Royal Library and that the police

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<sup>23</sup> Urabe Kenko *op. cit.*, p. 86.

might also come to search his house. Although Mostapha was not involved in this affair, he became extremely worried. All night he and a young employee at the Ministry of Culture, who often assisted him in describing the manuscripts for sale, were busy destroying all the photocopies they had collected of manuscripts, tearing them up and trying to flush them through the toilet. The morning after still nothing had happened, and Mostapha realised with relief that his worries had been unfounded.

Should I respect Mostapha's wishes and not write about him out of friendship? Does revealing the secrets of the trade mean betrayal? Or should I write about our adventures because of friendship? Can my reporting of Mostapha's actions be an act of loyalty?

I have already given an answer to these questions by writing this essay, so what follows might just be a justification for my egotism. With my reporting I intend to honour the unique contribution of Mostapha to the study of the Moroccan manuscript culture. He identified important fields of materials, by creating collections, note taking and editing. Mostapha played an active role in safeguarding the heritage by transmitting the manuscripts to a following generation, from people who hardly cared for this "waste paper" to scholars and collectors who were willing to pay for it. Without Mostapha's engagement the Roux collection in Aix would still be the only sizeable collection of written Berber texts in the world. He went to great trouble to tour the Moroccan countryside to find unknown texts, leading to the discovery of a folio of a very old manuscript in Berber. Amid a pile of trash in an old shed he immediately recognised it as an important fragment of an unknown early tradition, and hence he baptised it his "Mona Lisa". By searching assiduously over many years for these in Morocco at that time barely appreciated materials Mostapha created a new context for what seemed to be until then an almost isolated phenomenon. In a similar manner he collected many manuscripts and documents, as well as bio-bibliographical information, related to the tradition of written proof in the Maliki school of law. His untimely death prevented him from publishing more in this field.

With this text I have also tried to make a more general contribution to the knowledge of the coming into being of collections of Islamic manuscripts. Insights into the agency of the sellers and buyers offers understanding of the underlying structures of these collections. They

might seem to consist of randomly brought together texts, but this is not always the case. The present story demonstrates that not all manuscripts were for sale to everybody. Attention for the agency of the sellers in the network also contradicts the occidentalist stereotype that all collections are just illegally obtained booty. Manuscripts have for centuries been a commodity, although a special one, traded in a particular market. In order to work properly with these sources it is important to understand the workings of these markets, and the changes herein. The trade that I have described took place at a particular moment in history, a post-colonialist, globalising context, with its own peculiarities.

I have also more personal reasons to write down these stories. They might offer insights into the dynamics of anthropological research in Morocco at the end of the twentieth century. Human encounters and friendship are an important part of this kind of work. Mostapha was one of my dearest friends. Writing about our travels and exchanges is remembering his generosity and care, and letting others share in his legacy of friendship and scholarship.

### **Exchange and reciprocity**

In this case study of the manuscript trade I have sketched one particular network connecting people on the edge of the Sahara with booksellers in Rabat, and with scholars and booklovers in places as distant as Leiden and Riyadh. The individuals concerned were involved in a process of value creation, transforming trash into treasure. Apart from many other things, books were commodities, which people traded in a market. Like all markets, the proper functioning of the paper network required a certain form of publicity and accessibility. At the same time secrecy played a role, in order to make the trade profitable to actors.

Like collecting, trade is a social activity in which the social ties are constituted through various forms of exchange, and *vice versa*. Profit is only one aspect of these exchanges, and not always nor for all people involved the most important dimension. In recent writings on the history of orientalist manuscript collections the pernicious role of middlemen and collectors has been stressed. The present case study shows that all parties involved have a certain agency, they all have good reasons, partly economical, partly of a different nature, to



be involved in these exchanges.

The exchanges of books for cash that I have studied here were taking place at a particular moment in history, which we might call post-colonial. The *nesrani* was a guest in Morocco, often welcomed with grace, sometimes tolerated because of his cash, mostly marginal in the social networks, to which he mainly was granted access because of friendship. Although “friendship” can be a problematic category for understanding the social relations between anthropologists and their hosts, it may be the highest form of social involvement that an ethnographer can attain in this post-colonial context.<sup>24</sup> In this new social order, even if globalising forms of economic dependency have replaced earlier ones, exchange and friendship depend on the agency of all parties involved. The *nesrani* can no longer brutally impose his wishes, as in colonial times. If he behaves well and is lucky he may become a guest, or even a friend.

The focus in this case study of post-colonial book collecting has been on the multiple relations between Mostapha and the author. My marginal integration in the networks of the paper worlds depended on my evolving friendship with this key figure in the trade, the individual in which many routes came together. Our growing friendship was linked to various forms of exchange, of which commercial interests formed one aspect. Selling books was embedded in much more generalised forms of reciprocity. A simple act of selling would never have resulted in the collections and accompanying documentation that we, together with Moroccan scouts and Leiden colleagues, constituted in a collaborative effort.

However, my active involvement as a collector poses serious ethical problems. So does the fact that I have written about these transactions and networks, thereby taking distance and breaching the conditions of secrecy of the trade. The ethical issues peculiar to this case are but a particular expression of the more general problem of balancing involvement and detachment in anthropological fieldwork. The detachment required for the writing of this story is just another stage in the process that began with a first meeting to Mostapha’s bookstore in April 1988 and the all but expulsion from the book

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<sup>24</sup> cf. Driessen (H.), “Romancing Rapport: The Ideology of ‘Friendship’ in the Field”, in *Folk* 40(1998), pp. 123-136.

market in Fez two months later. Had Mostapha still been alive I might not have revealed the secrets of his trade, in order not to harm his business interests or his reputation. Now that he has passed away I hope that I honoured his memory. In this sense the present article is meant as a continuation of the process of exchange.