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EURASIAN STUDIES 17 (2019) 71-84

EURASIAN
STUDIES

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Notes on the Arabic Manuscript III.C.4 in the Central Library of the Sicilian Region

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Abstract

Among the Arabic manuscripts preserved in the Alberto Bombace Central Library of the Sicilian Region in Palermo there is an anonymous and acephalous document, the ms. III.C.4., which provides, as its only identification signs, the shelf-mark s.M.43., indicating that it used to belong to the Library of the Benedictine Abbey of San Martino delle Scale, and a cursory Italian explanatory annotation provided in 1796 by the Archbishop of Aleppo.

As a preliminary step toward the critical analysis of the above-mentioned document, which will be the subject of further study, this paper will attempt to provide a codicological description of the manuscript together with a philological and historical reconstruction of its arrival to the Central Library of the Sicilian Region.

Keywords

Abbey of S. Martino delle Scale – Palermo – Sicily – Arabic manuscripts

One of the Arabic manuscripts preserved in the Alberto Bombace Central Library of the Sicilian Region in Palermo is quite difficult to identify. It is an anonymous undated paper, acephalous, lacunose and apodous, which provides, as its only identification signs, on the *recto* of the second rear flyleaf, the old shelf-mark s.M.43., indicating that it used to belong to the Library of the Benedictine Abbey of San Martino delle Scale, and a cursory Italian explanatory annotation handwritten at the end of the 18th century. The annotation relates the following words:

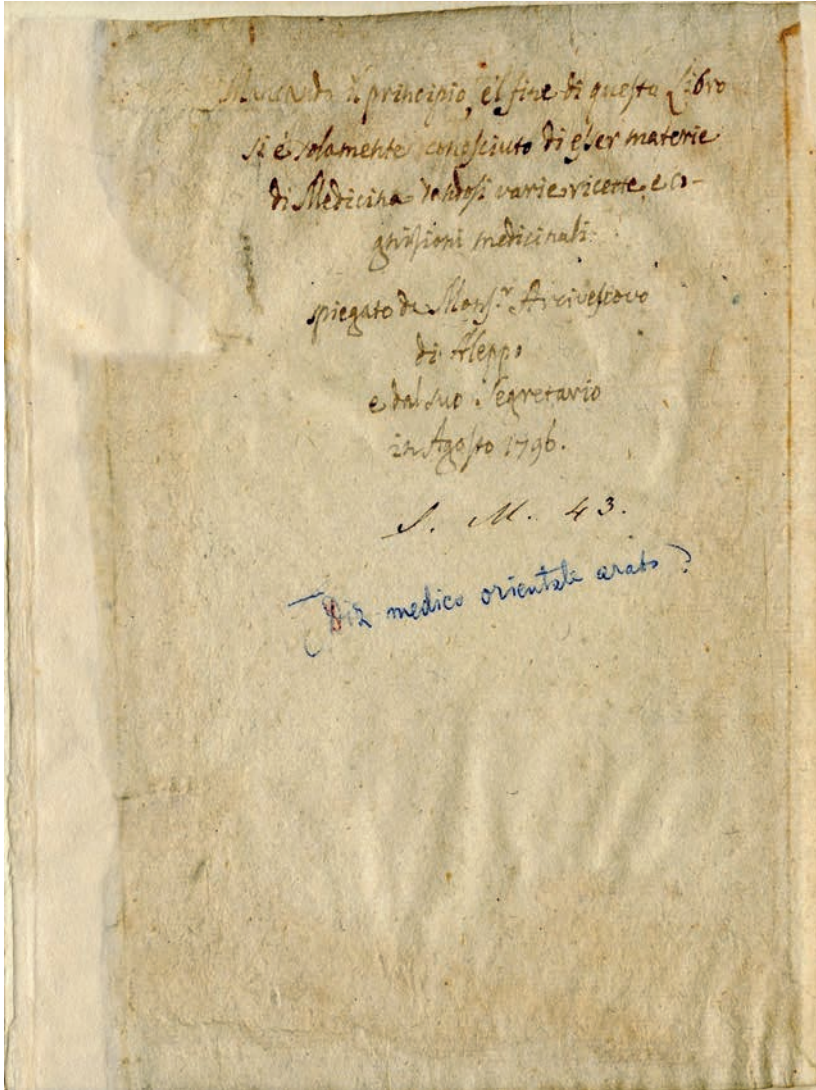


FIGURE 1 Biblioteca Centrale della Regione Siciliana, ms. III.C.4. Second rear flyleaf, recto

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Mancando il principio, e il fine di questo libro, si è solamente conosciuto di esser materie di medicina dandosi varie ricette e cognizioni medicinali. Spiegato dal Mons. Arcivescovo di Aleppo e dal suo Segretario in Agosto 1796 (Fig. 1).

1 Codicological Description and State of Conservation of the Manuscript

The ms. III.C.4. is a non-homogeneous Arabic manuscript consisting of I-III, 29, IV-VI folios. The copyist, as well as the compiler, is unknown and the text is datable to the late 16th or the early 17th century. It shows a modern pencil foliation in the upper external margin of the verso of each folio, which follows the Arabic right-to-left order. The folios of the codex, in ochre-coloured Oriental paper, do not show lineation. They reveal fibre thickenings in the mixture and a surface sizing. The proportion of the manuscript, i.e. the relationship between width (135 mm) and height (180 mm) is equal to 0,75. There seems to be no traces of ruling and the prevailing justification is $120 \times 92 / 180 \times 135$ mm (f. 14r). The interlinear spacing is 8 mm.

Each page of text has 15 lines (except for ff. 8r, 8v, having 16 lines and f.15v. having 14 lines) in Nashī script, written by one hand in brown ink with headings, titles and punctuation in red ink. Catchwords are present in the lower left corner of the verso of almost every folio (ff. 2-5, 9-12, 14, 16-23, 26-8). Many later annotations and extended glossae appear in the margins of ff. 5v, 6r, 8v, 11v, 17v, 25v, 27v.

The quire structure that is possible to observe after the restoration undertaken in the second half of the 20th century by the Restoration Laboratory of the Basilian Monastery of Mezzojuso (Pa) consists of a quaternion (ff. 1-8), a quinion (ff. 9-18) and a senion with the first folio missing (ff. 19-29). Such a structure probably does not coincide with the original quire structure, as it is possible to deduce from lacunae in the textual sequence.

Four of the six flyleaves in European paper are datable to the 18th century. In the present structure of the codex they are collocated as follows:

- the first flyleaf has been fully adhered as a front pastedown to a modern pastedown which was added during the process of restoration;
- the second has been lengthened with a guard and sewn to the first quire;
- the third has been lengthened with a guard and sewn to the last quire;
- the fourth – originally used as a pastedown – has been restored and lengthened with a guard which is today inserted under the spine-reinforcement strips of the rear flyleaves.

The binding of the codex ($191 \times 142 \times 18$ mm) has been realized during the process of restoration and is on vellum over cardboard boards. The folios, as well as the 18th century flyleaves, have been restored and sewn on three full-length ribbons together with three binions of modern white leaves – added at the end of the old quire structure – and four modern single flyleaves – two front guard

sheets and two rear guard sheets with spine-reinforcement strips, the first and the last of which were used as pastedowns.

On the verso of ff. 14 and 29 (in the middle of the bottom of the page) it is possible to observe the old stamp of the Library of San Martino (figs. 2, 3), indicating that the manuscript used to belong to the Library of the Benedictine Abbey of San Martino delle Scale; and on the recto of f. 1, as well as on the verso of f. 29 (in the middle of the top of the page), the stamp of the National Library of Palermo is also present, testifying the successive acquisition of the manuscript by the National Library of Palermo (figs. 3, 4). On the same folios (1r, 29v) the shelf-mark III.C.4., handwritten in pencil, is also present (figs. 4, 3).

A preliminary textual analysis reveals that the manuscript consists of a sylloge of six texts. The first (ff. 1r-15v), of medical interest, refers to the Greek-Hellenistic heritage of Galen (f. 1r, line 12) and Hippocrates (f. 5v, line 7), with particular regard to the humoral theory, according to which the health of the human body depends on a good balance between the four humours (*al-ṭabā' al-arba'*): blood (*dam*), phlegm (*balġam*), yellow bile (*al-mirra al-ṣafrā'*) and black bile (*al-mirra al-sawdā'*). To those humours correspond four temperaments or *mizājāt* (sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic), four elements (air, fire, earth, and water), four seasons (spring, summer, autumn, and winter) and four ages (infancy, youth, adulthood, and old age). The text also includes a reference to the curative properties of some herbs (3r-4v) and some minerals (7r-7v) and a description of some diseases and their symptoms (9v-10v), such as fever (11r-12v). The second text (f. 16r) is a *ḥadīth* reported by 'Abdallāh b. Amr b. al-'Āṣ (d. 65H/685) on blood relationship or ties of the womb (*ṣilat al-raḥm*); the third text (ff. 16r-16v) is a poem by Ma'an Ibn Aws (d. 73H/692); the fourth text (ff. 16v-24r) is an extract from the *Kitāb ḥayāt al-ḥayawān* by Muḥammad Ibn Mūsā al-Damīrī (742/808H/1341-1405); the fifth (24v-25v) contains verses by 'Alī Ibn Sīna (369-428H/980-1037) concerning eating, hygiene and sexual behaviours; and the sixth (26r-29v) is an extract from the *Kitāb tuḥfat al-mulūk* by 'Alī b. Zayd.¹

1 We suppose that it could be the *Tuḥfat al-mulūk* by Abū'l-Ḥasan 'Alī Ibn Sahl Rabbān al-Ṭabarī (d. 247H/861), author of numerous medical works, such as the *Firdaws al-ḥikma*. It is useful to point out that there is no consensus among historians about the name of the author, here given as 'Alī Ibn Zayd: "Iḥtalafa al-mu'arriḥūna allaḍīna takallamū 'alayhi 'inda ḍikr ismihi wa laqabihi [...]". In the *Kitāb al-ta'rīḥ* by Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, the first historical source where we find a reference to the author [*wa fi Kitāb al-ta'rīḥ li-Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, wa huwa awwal man takallama 'alayhi*], the name indicated is 'Alī Ibn Rabbān al-Ṭabarī; in the *Fihrist* by al-Nadīm we find 'Alī Ibn Zayl, and in the *Kitāb murūj al-dahab* al-Mas'ūdī refers to him

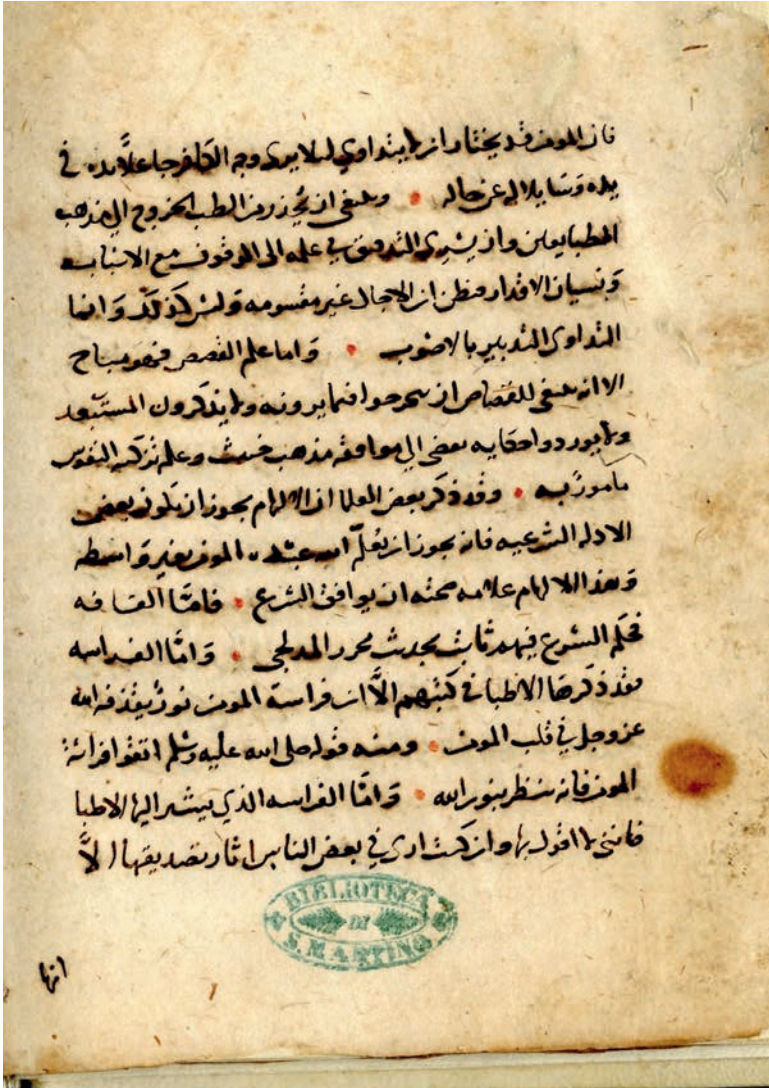


FIGURE 2 Biblioteca Centrale della Regione Siciliana, ms. III.C.4., f. 14v
 © COURTESY BIBLIOTECA CENTRALE DELLA REGIONE SICILIANA

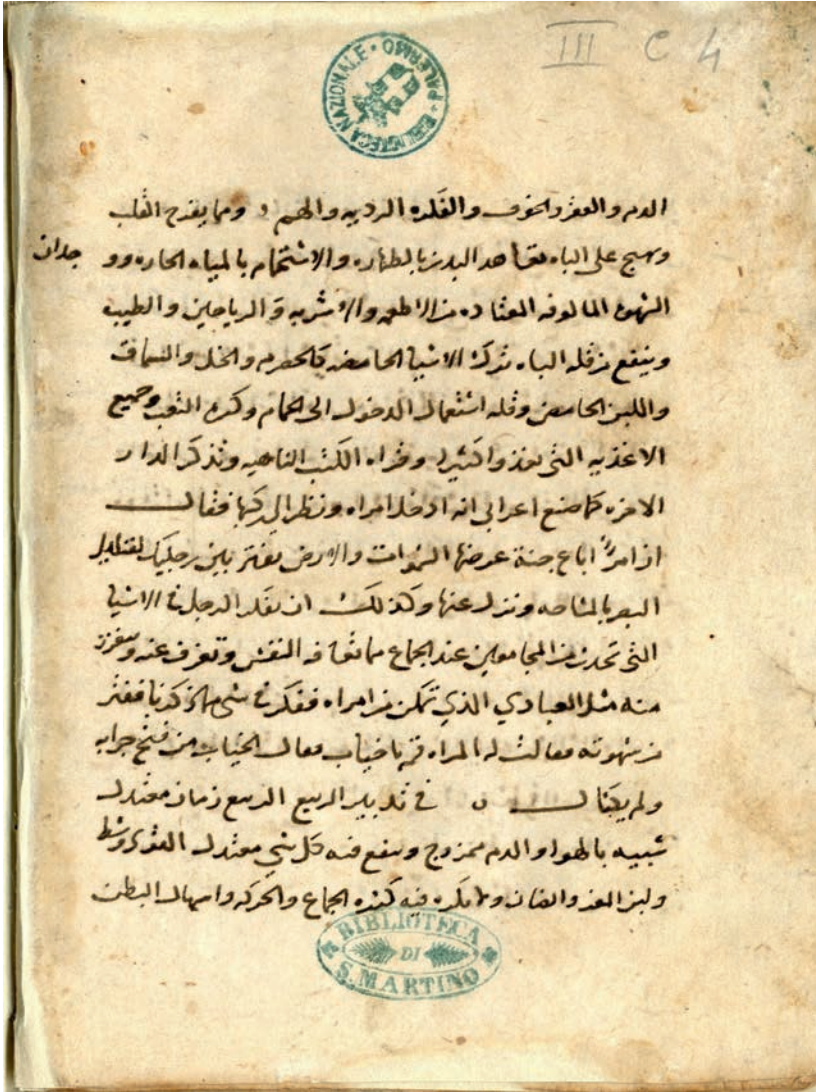


FIGURE 3 Biblioteca Centrale della Regione Siciliana, ms. III.C.4., f. 29v
 © COURTESY BIBLIOTECA CENTRALE DELLA REGIONE SICILIANA

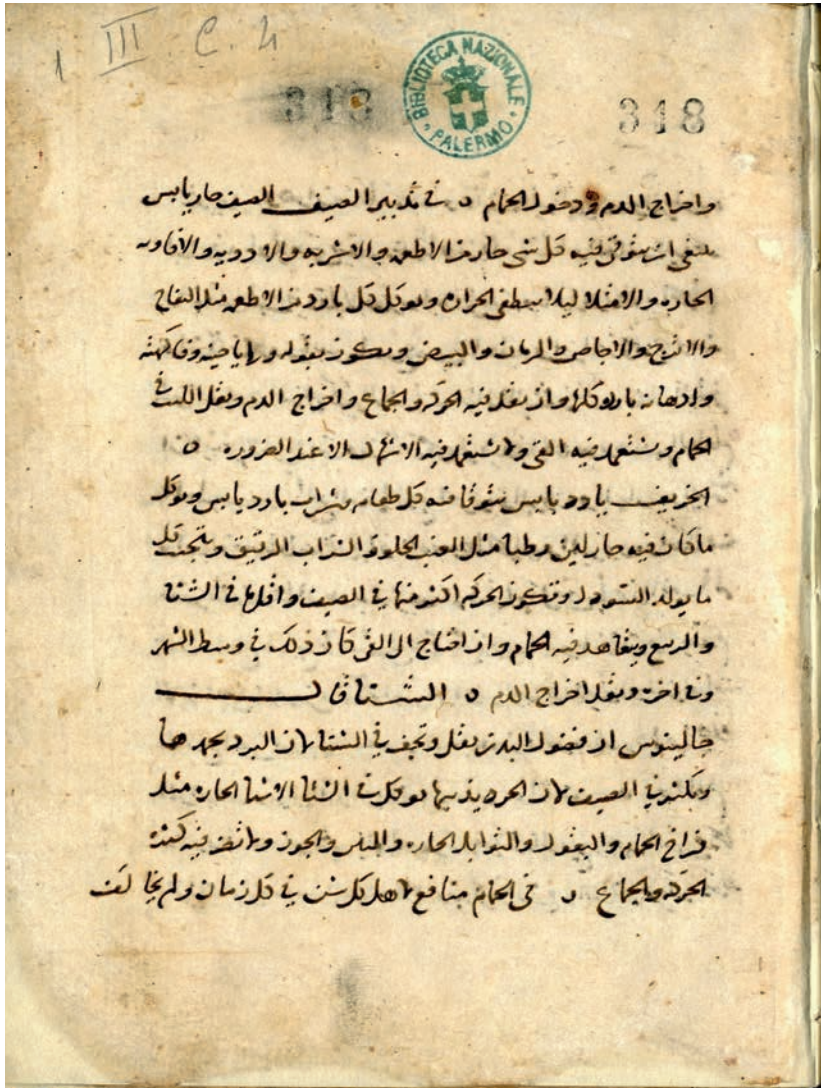


FIGURE 4 Biblioteca Centrale della Regione Siciliana, ms. III.C.4., f. 1r
 © COURTESY BIBLIOTECA CENTRALE DELLA REGIONE SICILIANA

2 The Acquisition of the Manuscript by the Library of the Abbey of San Martino Delle Scale and Its Later Transfer to the Central Library of the Sicilian Region

The circumstances related to the arrival of the manuscript III.C.4. at the Central Library of the Sicilian Region – at that time called a “National” Library – are strictly connected with the historico-political events of the 19th century, and particularly to the so-called “leggi eversive” (anti-clerical laws). In fact, the *Decreto Regio* dated July 7th 1866 established the suppression of religious orders, corporations and congregations and the consequent transfer to the State of all suppressed properties.

In fact, Article 33 excluded some ecclesiastical buildings – among them the Benedictine Abbey of San Martino delle Scale – which were considered to be of outstanding historical value by virtue of their monumental importance and the conspicuous artistic and literary heritage preserved there:

Sarà provveduto dal Governo alla conservazione degli edifizii, colle loro adiacenze, biblioteche, archivi, oggetti di arte, strumenti scientifici e simili delle Badie di Montecassino, della Cava dei Tirreni, di San Martino della Scala, di Monreale, della Certosa presso Pavia e di altri simili stabilimenti ecclesiastici distinti per la monumentale importanza e pel complesso dei tesori artistici e letterari”.²

Nevertheless, a few years later, on February 27th 1869, Senator Michele Amari, who had also served as Minister several times, in spite of having formerly demanded that the Benedictine Abbey of San Martino delle Scale kept its goods, submitted to the Senate a draft law for derogation from art. 33 and for the cessation of the benefits enjoyed by the Monastery of San Martino delle Scale.³

as ‘Alī Ibn Zayd. See Muḥammad Zuhayr al-Bābā, “Alī al-Ṭabarī (Abū’l-Ḥasan)”, *al-Mawsū’a al-‘arabiyya*, XIII (no date), p. 440, www.arab-ency.com.sy/detail/6072.

2 Lieutenant’s decree July 7th, 1866, art. 33., in *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d’Italia*, n. 187, 1866. I would like to express my thankfulness to Federico Russo, professor of Civil Procedural Law at the University of Palermo, for helping me to reconstruct the normative framework and providing me with the official copy of the document in question.

3 The bill was approved by law no. 5195 of July 21st 1869, published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d’Italia* on August 3rd 1869. The art. 1 established: “È abrogata per la Badia di San Martino della Scala, presso Palermo, la disposizione contenuta nell’articolo 33 della legge 7 luglio 1866, n. 3036”. It seems that the origin of such a resolution was a conflict between the Arabist and pro-Bourbon abbot Luigi Castelli. For uncertain reasons Abbot Castelli did not allow Michele Amari to examine the famous *martiniano* codex, better known as “Consiglio di Sicilia” and this angered the Arabist. See Equizzi, R., *Palermo. San Martino delle Scale: La*

After the bill was approved, in 1871, the library fund kept in San Martino delle Scale, including manuscript III.C.4, was divided into two parts and transferred to the National Library and the Municipal Library of Palermo.⁴

Even more interesting are the historical events which occurred before the arrival of Manuscript III.C.4. at the National Library, and the way in which the codex reached the Library of the Abbey of San Martino delle Scale.

According to what has been already demonstrated,⁵ among the Arabic manuscripts preserved in the Central Library of the Sicilian Region, a nucleus of seven came originally from San Martino delle Scale, as testified by the shelf mark *S.M.*, which is still visible on the pastedown of the codices.

The first bibliographical evidence concerning these seven Arabic manuscripts is given by the Sicilian Arabist Vincenzo Mortillaro (1836),⁶ who in a letter to the Cardinal Angelo Mai, written in the first decades of the 19th century, complained about the fact that the Austrian Orientalist Joseph Von Hammer-Purgstall did not mention Sicily and its libraries within his work on the Arabic manuscripts preserved in several Italian Libraries:⁷

collezione archeologica. Storia della collezione e catalogo della ceramica (Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2006): p. 75; Milazzo, M. M., Sinagra, G., "Palermo – Biblioteca Centrale della Regione Siciliana" in Milazzo, M. M., Palma, M., Sinagra, G., and S. Zamponi (eds.), *I manoscritti datati della Sicilia* (Firenze: SISMEL edizioni del Galluzzo, 2003), p. 47; Cusimano, F., "Infirmorum cura ante omnia et super omnia adhibenda est. Le vicende della Farmacia dell'Abbazia di San Martino delle Scale", *Mediaeval Sophia. Studi e Ricerche sui Saperi Medievali*, III (January-June 2008): p. 10.

- 4 It is useful to point out that after an attentive examination of the Arabic manuscripts kept in the Municipal Library of Palermo we have been able to observe that no Arabic codex provides the shelf mark *S.M.* In this regard I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Eliana Calandra, Director of the Municipal Library of Palermo, for allowing me to examine the library's valuable collection of Arabic manuscripts, and to Dr. Rosalba Guarneri for her precious kindness and support in facilitating my consultation of the aforementioned codices.
- 5 See Sciortino, M. G., "Il nucleo di manoscritti arabi provenienti da San Martino delle Scale e conservati presso la Biblioteca Centrale della Regione Siciliana", *OM*, XCIX (2019): pp. 263-79.
- 6 Mortillaro, V., "Lettera al Cardinale Angelo Mai sui manoscritti arabi che si conservano in alcune biblioteche della Sicilia", in Mortillaro, V., *Opuscoli di vario genere*, I (Palermo: Tipografia del Giornale Letterario, 1836), reprint in Mortillaro, V., *Opere*, III (Palermo: Stamperia Oretica, 1846): pp. 189-98.
- 7 See: von Hammer-Purgstall, J., "Lettere sui manoscritti orientali e particolarmente arabi che si trovano nelle diverse biblioteche d'Italia", in *Biblioteca Italiana o sia Giornale di letteratura, scienze ed arti compilato da vari letterati* (Milano: Antonio Fortunato Stella, 1826-1831). Lettera I [L'Ambrosiana di Milano], XLII (1826): pp. 27-36; Lettera II [Biblioteca degli Studi di Napoli], XLV (1827): pp. 32-41; Lettera III [Biblioteca Vaticana], XLV (1827): pp. 31-40 and XLVII (1827): pp. 10-20. Lettera IV [Biblioteca del cav. A. d'Italinsky, Roma], XLIX (1828): pp. 15-22; Lettera V [Biblioteche Barberini, Albani, Casanatense e Propaganda, Roma], L (1828): pp. 158-62; Lettera VI [Biblioteche Laurenziana e Magliabechiana, Firenze], LIV (1829): pp. 24-8; Lettera VII [Biblioteca dell'Istituto di Bologna], LVI (1829): pp. 28-35; Lettera VIII [Biblioteche

Sin da che lessi la prima lettera dell'oracolo degli orientalisti alemanni il chiarissimo De Hammer sui manoscritti orientali e particolarmente arabici che nelle varie biblioteche d'Italia conservansi, provai un segreto dispiacere che della Sicilia non si sarebbe parlato. Ben mi dolsi sin d'allora, io lo confesso, perché quel valentuomo avendo intrapreso un viaggio per la intera Italia, arrivato sino in Napoli, non avesse, essendovi così da presso, fatto passaggio alla Sicilia, che terra rispettabile è anch'essa agli occhi degli orientalisti; i quali ignorar non possono essere stata quest'isola per più di due secoli dominata da Saracini. Quivi e fabbriche, e lapidi, e monete, e monumenti arabi d'ogni genere ritrovansi, e i nomi delle città non solo, ma delle montagne ancora, delle terre, dei fiumi, il lungo soggiorno attestano che in questa regione fecero i Musulmani. Ho procurato io quindi aggiungere a quel prezioso lavoro del De Hammer le notizie analoghe riguardanti talune biblioteche di Sicilia, e impaziente di renderle pubblica testimonianza di ossequio e di riverenza, all'Em. V. le indirizzo [...]. E' della Biblioteca del Monastero di S. Martino De Scalis presso Morreale che stimo doversi in prima far parola. In essa non altro che sette arabici manoscritti conservansi.⁸

Vincenzo Mortillaro, writing about the Library of the Benedictine Monastery of San Martino De Scalis, mentions seven Arabic manuscripts confirming that five of these manuscripts came from the Library of the Sicilian scholar Martino La Farina. In fact, in the 17th century La Farina had been working as a librarian at the Escorial Library in Madrid: "bibliotecario in Ispagna dell'Escuriale, gran letterato siciliano fiorito nel secolo decimosettimo".⁹

After the death of Martino La Farina in 1679, his books, together with the Arabic manuscripts he had collected during his stay in Madrid, were acquired by the Library of San Martino delle Scale.

The above-mentioned information is confirmed by several historical sources of the period, such as the work entitled "Sopra il codice arabo sulle palme", written by the Italian Orientalist Salvatore Cusa. At the beginning of his book, he states the following:

Tra i nostri uomini di lettere, che nel secolo XVII si affaticarono tanto a formare la storia siciliana, allora bambina, colla raccolta di documenti

di Modena e di Parma], LIX (1830): pp. 186-9; Lettera IX [Biblioteche di Mantova, Vicenza e Venezia], LXII (1831): pp. 306-11.

8 Mortillaro, *Opere*, III: pp. 189-90.

9 Ibid.

storici, libri, diplomi e notizie d'ogni maniera [...] distinguevasi il nobile Martino La Farina. Quest'uomo insigne, onorevolmente accolto da Filippo IV in Madrid, attendeva lì, in quella ricca Biblioteca dell'Escoriale alle sue cure affidata, con ogni studio ed alacrità alla ricerca di quegli arabi manoscritti che potessero riferirsi al suo paese natio, rischiarendo quell'epoca molto oscura, in cui i Saraceni governato avean la Sicilia. Uomo dotato di svariata dottrina – adds Cusa – e della conoscenza di molte lingue, *vir polyglottus* come lo chiama il Mongitore, *vir linguarum orientalium eruditissimus*, come scrive il Gregorio egli il primo avvertì l'esistenza della Cronaca denominata di Cambridge, cooperò col solerte Antonino Amico a trarre dall'Abulfeda e dallo Sceabbodino, che in quella biblioteca trovavansi, alcuni squarci che alla storia di quel tempo si riferivano; i quali venivan poscia tradotti in latino dal Dobelio, in italiano, sulla traduzione latina, dall'Inveges, riprodotti in seguito dal Caruso e dal Gregorio, ed in ultimo, corretto il testo e migliorato, dall'illustre autore della *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia* nella sua *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula*. Ritornando in patria, portava seco molti codici arabi, sette dei quali, alla sua morte (1679) venivano acquistati dalla Biblioteca di San Martino delle Scale.¹⁰

Also the Sicilian historian Domenico Scinà, while reporting the notorious forgery of the abbot Giuseppe Vella, confirmed that the seven Arabic manuscripts mentioned by Mortillaro were originally from Martino La Farina's personal library:

Per lo che sapendo l'Airoldi, che quei codici arabi erano stati comprati dalla Biblioteca di Martino La Farina bibliotecario in Ispagna dell'Escoriale, gran letterato siciliano nel secolo decimo settimo, gli corse alla mente non essere del tutto inverisimile, che qualcuno potesse i fatti narrare degli Arabi, allorché la Sicilia signoreggiarono.¹¹

10 Cusa, S., *Sopra il codice arabo sulle palme* (Palermo: Stabilimento Tipografico Lao, 1873): pp. 3-4. Actually they were not seven but only five the Arabic manuscripts bought from Martino La Farina's Library. The other two, in fact, were bought after Martino La Farina's death. See: M. G. Sciortino, *Sulle tracce degli arabi manoscritti siciliani*.

11 See Scinà, D., *Prospetto della storia letteraria di Sicilia nel secolo decimottavo*, III (Palermo: Tipografia Reale di Guerra, 1827): pp. 301-2. Carlo Pastena informs us that in the *Giornale Maestro* of San Martino delle Scale, which is today preserved at the State Archive of Palermo, it is possible to find the accounting entry of the activities connected with the manuscript's binding. See: Pastena, C., "I manoscritti orientali della Biblioteca Comunale di Palermo", *Prospettive Settanta*, n.s. VIII/2-3 (1986): pp. 417-8.

The identification of Manuscript III.C.4. and the apposition in 1796 of the folio containing the explanatory annotation written by the Archbishop of Aleppo, Germano Adami,¹² and his Secretary are linked to the ill-famed Vella affair.

It is a fact well known that the Maltese abbot Giuseppe Vella, taking advantage of Monsignor Alfonso Airoidi's interest in the history of Arab Sicily, corrupted and interpolated an Arabic codex on the life of the Prophet Muhammad. The Arabic codex in question was preserved in the Library of the Benedictine Abbey of San Martino delle Scale. Vella passed the Arabic codex off as a Chancery Register of the Arab Government of Sicily and he translated it into Italian with the title of *Codice diplomatico di Sicilia sotto il governo degli Arabi*.¹³

Thereafter, in the hope of maintaining the privileges acquired through the publication of the codex, Vella published the translation of a new codex that he had literally invented. It was supposedly a collection of letters between the Norman princes of Sicily and the Fatimid governors dating back to the years 1074-1119. The *Dīwān Miṣr* was published in 1793 under the title of *Consiglio d'Egitto*, but within a few years, thanks to the Sicilian historian Rosario Gregorio and to some Orientalists, such as Olao Tyschen and Prof. Giuseppe Hager, Vella's deceit.

On September 1st 1796 the report written by the Greek Melkite Archbishop of Aleppo, Germano Adami was published. Adami was summoned to Palermo, together with his secretary Antonio Dakur, in order to examine the two fake Arabic codices. The report – say the coeval historians – “did not leave any doubt about the falsity of the codex *normanno* and the mistranslation of the *martiniano*”.¹⁴

12 For further information on the biography of Germano Adami, Archbishop of Aleppo (1777-1809), it can be useful to see: al-Maṭrān Nāwfiṭūs Iḍlibī, *Asāqifat al-Rūm al-malakiyyīn bi-Ḥalab fīl-'aṣr al-ḥadīth* (Ḥalab, Maṭba'at al-iḥsān, 1983): pp. 197-220.

13 *Codice diplomatico di Sicilia sotto il governo degli Arabi*, 3 vols. (Palermo: Reale Stamperia, 1789-92).

14 Scinà, D., *Prospetto della storia letteraria di Sicilia nel secolo decimottavo*, III (Palermo: Tipografia Reale di Guerra, 1827): pp. 296-383; Amari, M., *Storia dei musulmani di Sicilia* (Catania: Romeo Prampolini Editore, 1933²): pp. 6-11; Lagumina, B., “Il falso codice arabo-siculo della Biblioteca Nazionale di Palermo, illustrato e descritto”, *Archivio storico siciliano*, n.s., v (1881): pp. 233-314; Varvaro, P., “G. V. e i suoi falsi codici arabi con un documento inedito”, in *Archivio storico siciliano*, n.s., xxx (1905): pp. 321-32; Gottheil, R., “Two forged antiques, B. The Kitāb Diwān Miṣr”, in *JAOs*, xxxiii (1913): pp. 308-12. Finally, it can be useful and fascinating to consult the manuscript by Villabianca, F. M. Emanuele (Marquis of), “Della peste velliana del maltese Cagliostro”, kept in the Municipal Library of Palermo, ms. Qq E 110.

Hence, it is plausible to hypothesize that when Monsignor Germano Adami and his secretary Antonio Dakur, “who was not less intelligent than him in Arabic language”, visited the Abbey of San Martino delle Scale for the Vella affair, they did not limit themselves to analyse the two incriminated codices but they probably examined the other Arabic codices in the Library and provided some brief explanatory annotations, as the one handwritten on the pastedown of Manuscript III.C.4.¹⁵

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