

2018 · BAND 113 · HEFT 1

ORIENTALISTISCHE LITERATURZEITUNG

ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR DIE WISSENSCHAFT VOM GANZEN ORIENT UND
SEINEN BEZIEHUNGEN ZU DEN ANGRENZENDEN KULTURKREISEN

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ISSN 0030-5383 · e-ISSN 2196-6877

Alle Informationen zur Zeitschrift, wie Hinweise für Autoren, Open Access, Bezugsbedingungen und Bestellformulare, sind online zu finden unter www.degruyter.de/journals/olzg

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TYPESETTING rdz GmbH, St. Augustin

PRINTING Franz X. Stückle Druck und Verlag e.K., Ettenheim
Printed in Germany



Offenlegung der Inhaber und Beteiligungsverhältnisse gem. § 7a Abs. 1 Ziff. 1, Abs. 2 Ziff. 3 des Berliner Pressegesetzes: Die Gesellschafter der Walter de Gruyter GmbH sind: Cram, Gisela, Rentnerin, Berlin; Cram, Elsbeth, Pensionärin, Rosengarten-Alvesen; Cram, Dr. Georg-Martin, Unternehmens-Systemberater, Stadtbergen; Cram, Maïke, Wien (Österreich); Cram, Jens, Mannheim; Cram, Ingrid, Betriebsleiterin, Tuxpan/Michoacan (Mexiko); Cram, Sabina, Mexico, DF (Mexiko); Cram, Silke, Wissenschaftlerin, Mexico DF (Mexiko); Cram, Björn, Aachen; Cram, Berit, Hamm; Cram-Gomez, Susana, Mexico DF (Mexiko); Cram-Heydrich, Walter, Mexico DF (Mexico); Cram-Heydrich, Kurt, Angestellter, Mexico DF (Mexico); Duvenbeck, Birgitta, Oberstudienrätin i.R., Bad Homburg; Gädeke, Gudula, M.A., Atemtherapeutin/Lehrerin, Tübingen; Gädeke, Martin, Einzelunternehmer, Ingolstadt; Lubasch, Dr. Annette, Ärztin, Berlin; Schütz, Dr. Christa, Ärztin, Mannheim; Schütz, Sonja, Berlin; Schütz, Juliane, Berlin; Schütz, Antje, Berlin; Schütz, Valentin, Mannheim; Seils, Dorothee, Apothekerin, Stuttgart; Seils, Dr. Ernst-Albert, Pensionär, Reppenstedt; Seils, Gabriele, Dozentin, Berlin; Seils, Christoph, Journalist, Berlin; Siebert, John-Walter, Pfarrer, Oberstenfeld; Tran, Renate, Mediatorin, Zürich (Schweiz).

Inhalt

Artikel

Ulrich Rebstock:
Orient meets Occident: The Writings of Mauritania and the Western Sahara — 1

Ägypten

Jay, Jacqueline E.:
Orality and Literacy in the Demotic Tales (Damien Agut) — 12

Kurth, Dieter:
Wo Götter, Menschen und Tote lebten (Barbara Richter) — 14

Keilschriftforschung

Peterson, Jeremiah:
Godlists from Old Babylonian Nippur in the University Museum, Philadelphia (Joachim Oelsner) — 19

Volk, Konrad (Hg.):
Erzählungen aus dem Land Sumer (Jean-Jacques Glassner) — 21

Pongratz-Leisten, Beate:
Religion and Ideology in Assyria (Nikita Artemov) — 21

Mouton, Alice / Rutherford, Ian / Yakubovich, Ilya (Hg.):
Luwian Identities (Gary Beckman) — 26

Bartl, Peter Vinzenz:
Die Ritzverzierungen auf den Relieforthostaten Assurnasirpals II. aus Kalḫu (Eva-Andrea Braun-Holzinger) — 27

Günther, Linda-Marie (Hg.):
Tryphe und Kultritual im archaischen Kleinasien – ex oriente luxuria? (Wolfgang Messerschmidt) — 31

Ulbrich, Anja:
Kypris. Heiligtümer und Kulte weiblicher Gottheiten auf Zypern in der kyproarchaischen und kyproklassischen Epoche (Königszeit) (Christine Winkelmann) — 34

Altes Testament / Judentum

Hossfeld, Frank-Lothar † / Bremer, Johannes / Steiner, Till Magnus (Hg.):
Trägerkreise in den Psalmen (Heinz-Dieter Neef) — 37

Lee, Keung-Jae:
Symbole für Herrschaft und Königtum in den Erzählungen von Saul und David (Andreas Käser) — 40

Gaß, Erasmus:
Im Strudel der assyrischen Krise (2. Könige 18–19) (Michael Pietsch) — 43

Grütter, Nesina:
Das Buch Nahum (Martin Rösel) — 47

Semitistik

Marmorstein, Michal:
Tense and Text in Classical Arabic (Michael Waltisberg) — 50

Lipiński, Edward:
Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics IV (Holger Gzella) — 54

Moriggi, Marco:
A Corpus of Syriac Incantation Bowls (Erica C.D. Hunter) — 58

Islam

Hauenschild, Ingeborg / Kappler, Matthias / Kellner-Heinkele, Barbara (Hg.):
Eine hundertblättrige Tulpe – Bir şadbarg lāla: Festgabe für Claus Schönig (Christoph K. Neumann) — 61

Ahmed, Shahab:
What is Islam: The Importance of Being Islamic (Raissa von Doetinchem de Rande) — 65

Tworuschka, Monika / Tworuschka, Udo:
Illustrierte Geschichte des Islam (Victoria Mummelthei) — 69

Heinzelmann, Tobias:

Populäre religiöse Literatur und Buchkultur im Osmanischen Reich (Ahmed El Shamsy) — 72

Südasien

Bergau, Julius Thomas / Klein, Jan Paul / Schillen, Rainer:
Gandhāra Buddhas griechisches Erbe (Michael Knüppel)
— 75

Verbeke, Saartje:

Alignment and Ergativity in New Indo-Aryan Languages
(Alice Louise Davison †) — 78

de Bruijn, Thomas / Busch, Allison (Hg.):

Culture and Circulation (Imre Bangha) — 81

Zentralasien

Wilkens, Jens:

Buddhistische Erzählungen aus dem alten Zentralasien
(Erdem Uçar) — 87

Dreyer, Caren:

Abenteuer Seidenstraße (Annette Kieser) — 89

Afrika

Savà, Graziano / Tosco, Mauro:

An Annotated Edition of Father G. Toselli's Dizi Grammar
(Yvonne Treis) — 91

Liste der eingegangenen Bücher — 93

Corrigendum — 100

Ulrich Rebstock

Orient meets Occident: The Writings of Mauritania and the Western Sahara

Steward, Charles C. / Salim, Sidi Ahmed Wuld Ahmed: *The Writings of Mauritania and the Western Sahara*. Teil 1 und 2. Mit Unterstützung von Mohamed Nouhi, Babacar Mbengue, Bruce S. Hall und Abdel Wedoud ould Cheikh. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2016. XXX/XXX, 2054 S. 8° = Handbook of Oriental Studies: Section 1 The Near and Middle East 13. Arabic Literature of Africa 5. Hartbd. € 480,00. ISBN 978-90-04-26038-2.

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<https://doi.org/10.1515/olzg-2018-0001>

I. Point of departure

The publication of *The Writings of Mauritania and the Western Sahara* was planned to close a gap: as volume 6 of *Arabic Literature in Africa* the work was intended to put the westernmost end to this ambitious project started by John O. Hunwick in the early sixties, and joined by R.S. O’Fahey in 1980. As it is usually the case with such herculean projects things turned out differently and *The Writings of Mauritania and the Western Sahara* will (perhaps) conclude this series as a delayed volume 5. The four volumes that preceded it were already published between 1994 and 2004. The relentless course of time not only left a gap in the founding collective of *ALA*, but also promoted the scientific progress and widened the formal and conceptual distance to its forerunners. During the last one and a half decades, the documentation and assessment of Arabic manuscript literature in Africa achieved enormous results. Therefore, *ALA* 5 must hold its own within a profoundly changed scientific milieu regarding the growth of Arabic source material and – correspondingly – the secondary literature, in particular in the form of local literary histories of the region between Senegal, the Western Sahara and Timbuktu. In addition, the progress of computer science introduced new expectations of the reading clientele: the accessibility of an ever-increasing mass of material had to be continuously rearranged and refined.

Thus, with respect to both the high standards of *ALA* 1–4 and the particularities of this progress in assessment of the Arabic literature in this region, the presentation of almost 1,900 authors and their works on more than 2,000 pages is expected to qualify by more than sheer quantity. Since the 1960s, numerous catalogue-like compilations of different genres and aspirations have added up to a ‘state of the art’ where progress is not anymore embodied by enumeration. The claim that “close to 300,000” Arabic manuscripts in Timbuktu waited to be safeguarded against the collateral infringements of the Malian civil-war in 2012 shows that the hype of counting items had superseded laborious identification and description.

When John Hunwick asked me in 1998 to publish my *Maurische Literaturgeschichte* (MLG) – at that point a work in process – in English and – as originally planned – as volume 6 of *ALA*, I had already decided to follow a different conceptual and methodological track. My aspiration was not to “provide a bio-bibliographical overview of the current ‘state of the art’”¹ but nothing less than to expand Carl Brockelmann’s comprehensive *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* into Africa. Neither happened. Nor did I accept a second (and last) offer of C.C. Stewart in 2008 to officially participate in the edition of a slightly re-formatted *ALA* 6. The publication of *MLG* in 2001 had changed the original state of affairs and squeezed present *ALA* 5 into an unintended rival position: On the one hand *ALA*, differently from *MLG*, delineates the geographical and temporal scope (see below) and introduces the criterion of selecting the authors by their tribal affiliation, and on the other hand enjoys the grace of late birth of more than a decade and a half of scientific progress ahead. Although both works claim to cover the history of the Arabic literature in the ‘Moorish’ region, a closer look at it will reveal that there are substantial differences in form and quality that must be conveyed to the user in order to help him optimize his findings. Another reason calls for a comparison. From *ALA*’s most important sources – the *Mausū’a* of Muḥtār wuld Ḥāmidun and *al-Mağmū’a al-kubrā* of Yaḥyā

¹ *ALA* 1, Leiden: Brill 1994, p. xi.

ould al-Barā',² as well as the data base AMMS³ and the *MLG* – only the latter is available everywhere and to a large extent accessible online, and offers comprehensive data on authors, texts and sources.

The welcome increase in information on the history of Arabic literature in the region is based on the successful attempt of *ALA* to merge the different and, in particular, local Mauritanian genres of sources of the last two decades and insert them into the overall corpus. Here and there, *ALA* also helps to substantially replenish and correct *MLG* data (corrections of other sources do not occur). *Vice versa*, the source information of *MLG* helps to better understand unfounded statements in *ALA*. However, the extent of serious factual and professional deficits of *ALA* that will be assessed in this review can be substantiated only by closely examining the manner *ALA* is referring to *MLG*.

II. The content of *ALA*

The “Foreword” (pp. IX–XIII) by Graziano Krätli, librarian of Yale University and co-editor of *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade* (2010), introduces into *ALA* 5. Krätli, with good reasons, emphasizes the outstanding role of John Hunwick (*raḥimahu llāh*), the founder of *ALA*, for the genesis of the two highly praised volumes. Krätli’s considerable distance from the subject, though, remains.⁴

“Works Consulted and Abbreviations” (pp. XV–XXX) contains a sort of bibliography with approximately 170 elements and their short titles applied later in the central part “Authors” (pp. 51–1718). An impressive number of sources are of local and recent origin. Unfortunately, one of the major deficiencies of *ALA* 5, its careless way of dealing with proper names and any kind of transcribed elements, starts already here. It is not so much due to

negligence⁵, but rather to a lack of precision as well as errors⁶ that doubts are nourished about the adequate utilization of quite a few of these sources. Another substantial part of the sources – in particular elements of personal archives as well as unpublished theses – is *eo ipso* for the most part inaccessible. This also holds true for the most spectacular of all cited sources, the “*Makhtout Mauritania*”, a data base containing 34.000 elements of manuscript entries that “deserve[s] special note” (p. 13, footnote 31): its short title, “MM”, is given, however, its URL is lacking. Either, the access to the results of this project financed by the World Bank since 1996 seems to be restricted – or it was simply forgotten to be included.⁷ It is unclear to which extent this project was the reason for the publication of two catalogues, edited by the IMRS (Institut Mauritanien de Recherche Scientifique, Nouakchott): *Fihris Maḥṭūṭāt Tishit*, 2 vols., Nouakchott: IMRS 2013, containing 4,372 manuscript units, and *Fihris Maḥṭūṭāt Walāta*, Nouakchott: IMRS 2014, containing 2,064 manuscript units, neither of which is used or mentioned in *ALA* 5.

Another “Mauritanian” lacuna is the omission of part 16 (on the *Tashumsha*) of the *Mausū'a* of Muḥtār wuld Ḥāmidun, edited 2009 by Yaḥyā wuld al-Barā', al-Ḥusain b. Maḥanḍ and Muḥammad wuld Maulūd together with part 6, 26 and 30 which – for their part – were made use of. In 2013 four more parts (4 = *Idau'ish*, 13 = *Midlish*, 15 = *Idaudāy*, and 32 = *Wafayāt al-a'yān*) were published by a team of editors, among whom Sīdī Aḥmad wuld Aḥmad Sālim, the most important co-editor of *ALA* 5. None of these printed versions was used, only unregistered manuscripts of the IMRS, while parts 13 and 32 were completely ignored. These conspicuous omissions seem to continue the ignominious editorial drama of the encyclopaedia of Muḥtār wuld Ḥāmidun.⁸

² The hitherto 10 edited (of totally more than 40 manuscript) parts of the “Encyclopaedia” of Muḥtār wuld Ḥāmidun, and the 12 volumes of the *Maḡmū'a al-kubrā* of Ould al-Barā' are completely available in Germany only at the Orientalisches Seminar at the University of Freiburg.

³ The web-address of the data base “Arabic Manuscript Management System” has changed from AMMS to WAAM (“West African Arabic Manuscript Project”, <http://www.westafricanmanuscripts.org>) but the content does not seem to be maintained regularly: “History” ends with a short remark from 2009, “Collections” leads to an inactive window, “Studies” contains an article that was published elsewhere in 2009. The “website” الشيخ محمد ابن حنبل الحسنی (see pp. XXX and 753 ff.) cannot be identified as such: there are too many options.

⁴ Cf. his giving the author of *Faṭḥ ash-shakūr* another exotic name: “al-Bartilī [sic]” (p. XII), with several more to come (see below).

⁵ See e.g. p. XV: “*al-muḥamadiyya*”; is p. XVI: “Ta'riḥ Ahl Bārik Allāh” correct, or p. XXIX: “Ta'riḥ Ḥayāt Ahl Bārik Allāh”?; p. XXIII: “Ibn M'adh, *al-Yaqūt* [sic] *wa'l-marjān*...”; p. XXX: “Zirikili” [sic].

⁶ P. XV: “*Alawī/Kitāb an-naṣab* [sic]” repeatedly instead of “*naṣab*”; or p. XVIII: “GAL S I&2 Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur* [sic], Supplementbande [sic], I-II. E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1937–42 [sic]”, where the (most important) S III (not “3”) is lacking, and the dates are wrong; or “GAS ... *Geschichte [sic] des arabischen Schrifttums*”; p. XXII: “Ibn Ḥāmidun/*Mawsū'a: Tandagha*... Rabat, 2009” does not exist at all and seems to be a mistake.

⁷ Another relevant data base, the *Mausū'at al-maḥṭūṭāt al-'arabiya fī l-mūrītāniyā (barnāmaḡ iliktrūnī)* <http://wadod.net/bookshelf/book/2392>, is not mentioned either.

⁸ Cf. in detail *MLG* 2486, field “Anm”. Henceforward, “nnn” in “*MLG* nnn” and “*ALA* nnn” will always refer to the number of the author; with “*OMAR* nnn” it will refer to the number of the microfilm scan.

It is also incomprehensible why the lavish edition of M. al-Amin b. Ḥamādī of Abū Bakr b. Aḥmad al-Muṣṭafā's (d. 1335/1917) *Manḥ ar-rabb al-ġafūr* was not used and presented to the user of *ALA 5*⁹. Instead, an inaccessible manuscript of the text in Nouakchott was used as source for this important amendment of 185 western (mainly Trārza and Brākna) Moorish authors and about 345 titles to the *Fatḥ ash-shakūr* (see above). The same holds true for the use of two IMRS manuscripts of the *Kitāb al-A'dād* of Aḥmad b. Aḥbāyib al-Yadmūsī (d. 1393/1972–3)¹⁰ instead of the critical edition by Gunhild Graf of 2012. The damage caused here, though, is serious: Without Graf's edition the *Kitāb al-A'dād* cannot be assessed as an efficient key to Arabic Islamic literature in Mauritania. Graf identified and commented upon close to 500 primary and secondary sources which al-Yadmūsī made use of in his 'encyclopaedia' of Moorish literary culture. Moreover, Rainer Oßwald's pioneering studies on the social and juridical history of Mauritania received no attention at all.¹¹ In view of this exclusion of germanophone scholarship it is only logical that the only catalogue of Mauritanian Arabic manuscripts that (although containing only 100 units) could claim, until today, an adequate scientific standard¹², remains unknown to the entire *ALA* team.

The (anonymous) "Introduction: The Literature of the Western Sahara. Context and Content" (pp. 1–17) is, presumably, penned by the general editor C.C. Stewart. He starts with the early "Almoravid" period, then moves on to the so-called *Shurr Bubba* war (ca. 1671–1677), the 'big bang' of the Moorish social history, and finally discloses the essential features of the local literary development: "Two genres of literature dominated literary production among the *zwaya* [sic] scholars in the 18th and 19th century" [sic] in the "*bādiyya*" [sic] of the "*bilād as-sayba*" [sic]: "jurisprudence and poetry" (p. 8). A little later, "a

third dominant theme" is added: "Sufi tracts and debates" (p. 9). One could, of course, ask whether "poetry" should be dealt with as a "theme" and not as a genre, and how a juridical poem could be classified. The vagueness of this first part of the introduction continues in the following passage on the "*silsila* for this compilation of Mauritanian authors and literature" (p. 11). The peculiar fact that *ALA 5* and *MLG* cover – more or less – the same subject would require a thorough and thoughtful description of both works, of their common and different conceptual grounds and – in particular – of the extent and mode of dependence of *ALA 5* on *MLG*. This kind of *silsila* cannot be achieved within seven sentences among which we find such elucidating ones as "in this *ALA* compilation only authors with documented writings have been included" and "MLG noted every manuscript written by an author that has been documented" (pp. 12–13). The concluding sentence in footnote 29 "[T]his resource [*MLG*, UR] has been a major asset for documenting this work." (p. 12) corroborates also the inexplicable failure to emphasize here the overall importance of Yaḥyā wuld al-Barrā's *al-Maġmū' al-kubrā* for *ALA 5*.

"The *Maḥazra* Educational System" (pp. 18–48) by Mohamed Lahbib Nouhi and C.C. Stewart continues the "Introduction" in more detail. The system of the "*maḥā-zir*", the so-called desert universities of the *Zawāyā* in the western Sahara, is moved into the centre of their reflections.

The historical part of this thematic introduction proceeds with the myth of the Almoravid prehistory of Moorish culture. Sentences like "Tichitt, for instance, is said to have been founded in 563/114 [sic]..." (p. 19) disclose how futile successful research (cf. Oßwald's *Handelsstädte der Westsahara*, pp. 312–467) can turn out to be.

The following part (pp. 27–48) offers – for readers unfamiliar with the region – a concise insight into the curricula of the *maḥāzīr* and a helpful overview of the most important scholars and their disciplinary and pedagogical peculiarities as well as a short presentation of the modern development of the education system in Mauritania. Many names and book-titles, especially if of non-Mauritanian origin, are spelled incorrectly.¹³ While the

⁹ Mohamed Lemine Hamady: *La Mauritanie au XIX^e siècle 1785–1908*. Lyon: ENS Editions (VECMAS 2011). See my review in: *ZDMG* vol. 167 (2017/1), forthcoming.

¹⁰ There is some confusion about his name: In *ALA* "Works" (p. XXIII) we read: "Ibn Ḥbayb, see Yadmūsī/A'dād", where we find (p. XXX): "Aḥmaddū b. Ḥbayb"; in "Index of Authors" (p. 1798b): "Aḥmaddū b. Ḥbayyib al-Yadmūsī 1677"; in "Authors" (no. 528 [more below] 7.) a fourth variant is to be found: "Aḥmaddū b. Aḥbayb".

¹¹ The introductory conclusive remark on the social order in the Western Sahara as "opposing forces of the Book and the Sword may sound a bit Tolkienesque" (p. 5) could have gained some more depth with a bit of Oßwald's *Die Handelsstädte der Westsahara* (1986) and a glimpse into *Schichtengesellschaft und islamisches Recht* (1993) and *Pactane sunt servanda?* (1998).

¹² *Katalog der arabischen Handschriften in Mauretaniën*, bearbeitet von Ulrich Rebstock et al., Beirut/Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 1988.

¹³ Misspellings are: "Ājarrūm" instead of Ājurrūm [p. 28, but correct p. 1989a, where *MLG* 1743 Nr. 86 "li-l-Ġurrūmiya" is double wrongly cited as "... li-Jurrūmiya (*MLG*) 1689" instead of li-l-Ġurrūmiya (*MLG*) 1743]; "al-Jazri" instead of al-Jazarī (p. 29); "*Mawrid aḡh-Ḍham'ān...* ash-Shurayshī... (d. 718/1318)" instead of *Mawrid aḡ-Ḍam'ān...* ash-Sharishī... (d. around 703/1303, see *GAL S II* 349); "*Lubābb*" instead of *Lubāb* (p. 30); "Abū al-Ḥassan al-Ash'arī" instead of Abū al-Ḥassan al-Ash'arī (p. 31); "al-Maqqārī" instead of al-Maqqarī (p. 32), and "al-

opportunity was missed to shed light on the influence of classical Islamic literature on the development of the local literary traditions, mediated by the periodically changing connections with North Africa and Egypt, the “Index of Subjects” (see below) compensates to some extent for this weak point.

“Authors” (pp. 49–1718) contains the major part of *ALA 5*: a list of 1857 (+ 17 “Unidentified and Addenda”) entries of author units.

These entries are grouped into 77 “*identifiers*”. Each one of these is marked by a *nisba*, an ascription that reveals – in most cases – the tribal relationship of the author, in a few others his local background. None of these ascriptions refers to religious or other spiritual affiliations. Since the *nisbas* are not accounted for in the indices the reader must turn to the entry “Tijāniyya Sufi order” in the “General Index” (see below) in order to identify members of this important Ṣūfī brotherhood. The *identifiers* are listed (see “Contents” pp. V–VII) in alphabetical order. Within an *identifier* chapter the authors, too, are listed in (standard) alphabetical order, however, with some irregularities.¹⁴ No explanation for this system is given. The rationale for squeezing tribes into an alphabetical order can only be suspected to root in the social features of nowadays Mauritania. Beyond its impeccable alphabetical impartiality, the logical value of the statement of placing the “Ahl Ābbayrī” at the head of *ALA 5* tends towards zero. Why not take their geographic repartition, their size, the number of their *maḥaẓir* or even of their scholars; why not arrange their scholarly members similarly or even better: chronologically?

Each entry underlies a structure of fields with optional references, except the first obligatory field: the numbered author’s name in bold type with C.E. – and *Hiġra* dates if available. Despite the various elements of their names and – if existing – alternate names (“Alt. names”), the reference system is strictly limited to this standard form. The

Qurāfi” instead of al-Qarāfi (p. 34 and Index p. 2046b); “*tahzib al-Mudawwana* written by al-Barad’i” [sic] (p. 33); “*Naẓm ad-dībāj al-madhhab li-Ibn Faḥrun*” instead of *Naẓm ad-dībāj al-mudhahhab li-Ibn Farḥūn* (p. 1250) etc.

There are also insufficiencies with regard to the content, see e.g. pp. 38–39, where the comment upon “Sciences” is not only wrong (instead of “Muḥammad b. Sa’id al-Mirghī” it should read al-Marghī, see *GAL S II*, p. 707) but also unnecessarily superficial: cf. my relevant article “Arabic mathematical manuscripts in Mauretania” (*BSOAS LIII/3/1990/429–441*) which, in fact, is mentioned in the context of “logic (*mantīq*)” in footnote 14, p. 1783.

¹⁴ See e.g. pp. 674 f. where “Muḥammaddu” is followed by “Muḥaṇḍ” and “Muḥummadhun”; pp. 1032f. with the sequence “Sidi Muḥammad – Sidi ‘Umar – Sidi Muḥammad”.

only predictable way to find an author like “200 Sidi Aḥmad... al-‘Alawī at-Tishīti” in the indices is to know his title “Sidi”. The simple data-processing algorithm for cross-reference is missing in all indices of *ALA 5*, some cases of the “General Index” excepted, which complicates any kind of search.

Below the standard name field follow: “Alt. name:” and/or “known as:”; “teachers:”; “students:”; biographical field, however, without field-name;¹⁵ source field “See:” with brief remarks on sources – mostly without diacritics, often without page reference or even title, e.g. “See: MLG 2528; Ibn Aḥmad Sālim” (*ALA 566*).¹⁶

A numbered list of his works concludes every author’s entry. This italicized title entry, too, consists of fields optionally filled. Example *ALA 71* title no. 27:

“27. *Risāla fī nabawiyyat aḥādīth taswiyya* [sic] *aṣ-ṣuqūf*. Subject: Hadith [sic]; Form: Risala [sic].”

No. 29 is more complex: “29. *Kitāb fī ansāb al-Bayḍān* [sic]. Subject: History: Genealogy.

Alt. title: *Dhikr khabar al-Bayḍān* [sic] *wa-buldānihim wa-ḥurūbihim* (Niamey).

MSS: Niamey 88 (AMMS).

in [sic] 66 folios; the Niamey copy appears to be on the same subject.”

Presumably, this field is supposed to inform about the (provable?) availability of the text as manuscript (micro-

¹⁵ The field often, but not always, contains valuable information. At random selection pp. 512–513: *ALA 480*: “Muḥummadhun b. Abū [sic] Bakr (Bābakr) b. Muḥummadhun b. Ḥjāb was a well-educated poet from the Awlād Sidi al-Fāḍil from within the Awlād Daymān; he had no children.” *ALA 481*: “Muḥummadhun b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Sālim b. ‘Alī b. Sidhan b. Muḥummadhun b. A’mar was from Idābahum within the Awlād Daymān who died at the age of 62. During his life [sic], he was a jurist and poet.” 482: “Muḥummadhun b. Muḥammad b. al-Amin b. Maḥḥam, a poet and jurist [sic], was from the Awlād Sidi al-Fāḍil within the Awlād Daymān. He was interred in Trarza [sic].” *ALA 483*: “Muḥummadhun b. Muḥammad Fāl b. Muḥummadhun b. Aḥmaḍ b. ‘Aqil [sic], best known by his nicknames ‘al-Qāḍī’ and ‘Mmayn’ [sic], was from the Idābahum fraction of the Awlād Daymān. He was a judge, poet, and expert on the *Qur’ān* who served as *qāḍī* from 1909 until his death.” This “Mmayn” (which is misread from “Ammayai”) is, however, reported five lines above (d. “1287/1870”) as having passed away some 40 years before; see also title no. 6, the *Risāla fī usūl* [sic] *ar-riqq fī Murītāniyā* [sic], which was “[c]omposed at the request of Commandant [sic] Charbonnier, the French administrator of Mederdra in the late 1920s.”

¹⁶ At random selection pp. 836–974: “*Naḥwi/Bilād Shinqī*” and “Ibn Ḥāmidun/*Mawsū’a: Thaqaḥfa*” (p. 836); “Ibn al-Lūh.” (p. 859); “Muḥammad ... undergraduate thesis, Nouakchott 1990” (p. 862); “See: Ould al-Bara” (p. 868, but also p. 831 and elsewhere); “*Thamarāt al-jinān; Mu’jam Bābaṭīn*.” (p. 881), and “*Thamarāt al-janān*” [sic] (p. 881), “*Thamarāt al-janān* [sic]... 2004” (pp. XXIX, 868 and elsewhere); “Alione [sic] Traore 1983” (p. 935); “Al-Kurdi.” (p. 948).

film, printed edition?). Only rarely, the number (but never the size) of the folios are given, even if such details are available in the source where the information is taken from. Thus, in many cases the information of the existence of a manuscript is suppressed, especially when the relevant source does not mention the name of the library where the manuscript was recorded.¹⁷

“Cited in MLG 1513(2);¹⁸ Ibn Ḥāmidun and Heymowski 90; *Mu‘jam at-Trārza* 87; Ould al-Bara 322.”

A closer look at other titles of ALA 71 corroborates the general impression that the identification of the titles should have been realized more carefully. To change (here title 32), without note, the printed (correct dual) title “*Imāratai Idaw ‘ish wa-Mashḏūf*” of MLG 1513 t11 into the (wrong plural) title “*Ta’riḫ Imārati Idaw ‘ish wa-Mashḏūf*” (p. 149) does not increase the confidence in ALA 5. Moreover, the general lack of references to such texts that are publicly accessible (see e.g. above MLG 1513 t2) is prone to conceal information rather than to help open up Moorish literature to the appreciation so long missing.

The “Indices” (pp. 1719–2054), finally, are meant to exploit the material spread out in ALA 5. Their first one, “Index of Authors of Derivative Works” (pp. 1721–1785), deserves special attention. It is a clearly new type of index that attempts to deliver a key to the contents of Mauritanian literature. Two major classificatory approaches are chosen to make the reader understand that “[t]he most convincing evidence of the growth of an autonomous Islamic culture is found in the mapping of derivative works written by its authors within core Islamic sciences.” (p. 1721). The first criterion used is the differentiation of “derivative”. In this kind of literature, the Arabic umbrella-term “*sharḥ*” (commentary) is split up into three genres: the versification (*naẓm*, *manẓūma*) of another author’s work; secondly, the gloss (*ta’liq*, *iḏāḥ*), marginal commentary (*ṭurra*, *ḥāshiyā* [sic]), the opuscle (*ta’lif*), the résumé (*mūjaz*), and, in recent times, the edition (*taḥqīq*); and thirdly the correction or amendment (*istadrāk* [sic], *taṣḥīḥ*), the preface (*muqaddima*), the completion (*takmil*) or abridgment (*ikhtisār*), and the derivative work with the word *mujaddid* or *ijtihād* [sic] (independent opinion) woven into the title (pp. 1721f.). Apart from its blurriness and generality – where examples could have been given – this subdivision leaves the reader completely at a loss with

“1600 [*sharḥ*] of which appear in ALA V [sic]” (p. 1721). None of these titles that commence with *sharḥ* (and probably with all the rest of the “genre”-labels) appears in the indices elsewhere than exactly under “*sharḥ*”. The differentiation just won is immediately lost again.

The second criterion refers to the classification of scientific disciplines in the Islamic tradition and has an ambitious goal: “What follows is not a definitive [sic] compilation of derivative works within the Islamic disciplines among the nearly 10,000 titles in this volume, but, statistically, the 1700 manuscripts whose authors’ are cited below are a valid sample.” (p. 1723) These impressive figures induce the author – not without reason – to state that “Mauritanian writing is largely hidden in the shadow of the legendary center of Sahelian Islamic learning in Timbuktu” (p. 1724). In the light of the preceding emphasis on the variety of the commentary literature, the following list of disciplines and their authors displays in great clarity the characteristic bonds that has linked Mauritanian writing with North African, Egyptian and Eastern scholarship for more than four centuries. Among the 20 most important disciplines which are grouped into eight thematic headings (Qur’ān 31 titles, Arabic language 69, Prophet Muhammad [sic] 34, Hadith [sic] 12, Jurisprudence 59, Belief 26, Mysticism 18 and Logic 9¹⁹), the names (plus – only Christian – dates) of authors and the title of the relevant key-text commented upon by a Mauritanian scholar are listed, followed by those of their commentators and – if extant – sub-commentators.²⁰

The listing method is – again with quite a few lapses (pp. 1748, 1757, 1762 etc.) – alphabetical, both in the lists of authors of primary and derivative texts. Particularly here, a chronological order would have been very helpful. Unfortunately, too, neither the titles of “derivative works” or their number, nor the number of the commentating authors are added. This means – in view of the lack of cross-references – much of leafing through with the consequence that the joy of using this innovative source index is likely to be spoiled.

The “Index of Authors” (pp. 1786–1841) cannot be used without leafing through the text either. Describing its alphabetical system as ‘unconventional’ would be an understatement. Since not a single remark is explaining it, I assume that it is the undiscovered (or uncorrected) result

¹⁷ Cf. ALA 728 t3 with MLG 2236(2).

¹⁸ The reference is incomplete: MLG 1513 t2 mentions an (incomplete) *Kitāb fi tāriḫ aṣ-Ṣanḥāḡa* = OMAR 587, while t1 entitles a complete *Ansāb al-bayāḏin* = OMAR 814. The underlying relevant texts are identical, the manuscripts, though, as OMAR clearly shows, were written by different hands.

¹⁹ On p. 1723, footnote 3, the disciplines of philosophy (*falsafa*), “metaphysics, mathematics, medicine and the natural sciences”, are allocated to “logic (*manṭiq*)”.

²⁰ By far the densest net of commentators – 178 of them are listed (pp. 1765–1769) – produced the famous abridgement of the *māliki* law handbook *al-Muḥṭaṣar* of Ḥalil b. Iṣḡāq al-Ġundi (d. 1374).

of a programming error: the transliteration of the letters *‘ain* and *hamza* as well as the apostrophe that stands for the omitted *alif* without *hamza* are counted as independent letters; if the *alif* is not omitted as in the definite article it is counted as an “a”; the hyphen is ignored in the first round of sorting; that results e.g. in the following sequence: “Atāh – Atfagha – at-Tāb – Attāh – at-Ṭā’i – at-Ṭālib” (p. 1807a). The same system applies to the sorting of the “Index of Titles and Alternate Titles of Manuscripts” (pp. 1861–2017) which contains ca 3,000 entries.

The introductory remark of “Index of Subjects” (pp. 1842–1860) points – rightly – to the difficulty of a normative subject classification. Therefore, the AMMS (see above) system is roughly followed and “[r]eaders will be awarded for their intuitive skills in seeking particular subjects than [sic] may appear under more than one descriptor.” (p. 1842). Except a few Arabic terms (e.g. “ḥāj”) [sic], p. 1850b), often without diacritics, at least one English term is noted for each title. 45 dominant subjects are subdivided into ca 550 subject entries that can also appear as dominant subject. Thus, “Belief” (p. 1843b), with ca 160 entries, appears also in the function of a subentry among the dominant entry “Jurisprudence” (p. 1850a, 13 entries), “Prophet Muhammad [sic]” (p. 1857a, 2 entries), “Qur’ān” (p. 1857b, 4 entries), “Science” (p. 1859a, 1 entry), and “Sufism” (p. 1859b, 4 entries) – the majority of which do not appear among the dominant entry “Belief”. Most of these double appearances are due to the standardizing translation of the Arabic terms into English. In view of the fact that the typical user of ALA 5 is arabophone, a considerable part of the usefulness of this index is wrongly addressed. It is most peculiar, however (p. 1858b), that the entry “astromony” [sic] (21 entries), ranging immediately before “astronomy” (15 entries), survived throughout the editorial process of the work.

The “Index of Titles and Alternate Titles of Manuscripts” (pp. 1861–2017) contains the main and the alternate titles of each title entry, but in the case of commentaries no cross-references to the titles of the primary texts. Thus, “Sharḥ ‘alā Alfīyyat Ibn Mālik” (p. 1979a) does not appear under “Alfīyya ...” nor does “Ibn Mālik” in the “General Index” (see below) have a cross-reference to this “Sharḥ”. Unlike repeatedly stated,²¹ the source is often not mentioned. With an approximate guess that “up to one quarter of the 10,000 titles in ALA V are derivative works” (p. 1724, footnote 5), the index ignores an important part of

²¹ “Alternate titles *generally* [my italics] appear with their source;” a little later “[a]pproximately 2,000 such alternate titles are included in this index, *most followed* [my italics], in parenthesis, by the abbreviation for the source from which they are drawn.” (p. 1861).

the title inventory of the work. Again, an arbitrary control renders a questionable result.

– ALA 1846, title no. 13 (p. 1690): “*Sharḥ manzūmat ‘Abd al-Majīd ash-Sharnūbī*. Subject: Belief: theology [sic]: Divine attributes; Form: Commentary”. As expected, neither “*Manzūma*” nor “‘Abd al-Majīd b. Ibrāhīm al-Azhārī ash-Sharnūbī (d. 1348/1929)” appear in an index. The “*Manzūma*”, however, is described as being a “commentary” of “*Yaqūl rāj al-ghafār* [sic] *ad-dhanūb* [sic] ‘*Abd al-Majīd al-Azhārī* [sic] *as-Sharnūbī* “. Five sources are cited: “Zirikli [sic] IV,149”, where (7. Ed. 1986) “ash-Sharnūbī” – not “ash-Sharnūbī” – is mentioned as a *māliki* Jurist and author of a *Muḥtaṣar Kitāb ash-Shamā’il al-muḥammadiya*. There is no mention of this mysterious “*Yaqūl rāj al-ghafār...*”; next comes “GAL I 118, 339, S I, 263, 525, 683, S II, 469”, all of which were simply copied from the index in GAL S III, p. 763 a, where – bad luck! – “G I” should read “G II”! None of the six references, however, refers to the “*Yaqūl*”-title. Next comes: “MLG 1743(26)” and “Ould al-Bara 769”, who both are silent about this “*Yaqūl rāj al-ghafār ...*” but have, on the other hand, the *complete* title “*Sharḥ manzūmat ‘Abd al-Majīd ash-Sharnūbī fi t-tauhīd*” which goes back to the sixth and – as so often – primary source: “Ibn Ḥamidun and Heymowski 231”.

The alphabetical system follows the same innovative rules as the “Index of Authors”: “al-Yusra” stands immediately before “Amālī” (p. 1877b) and “Kitāb fi ‘z-zakāt” before “Kitāb fi aḥkām” (p. 1910a).

A “General Index” (pp. 2018–2054) concludes ALA 5. The index contains ca 2,500 entries and is supposed to replenish the preceding indices with the diverse and rich geographical, tribal and biographical information contained in the author entries. Overlapping is unavoidable, as are errors.²² Which criteria triggered an entry remains unclear. E.g.: ALA 527 reads: “... He was very knowledgeable in arithmetic and algebra. On his way to the pilgrimage to the holy sites of Islam, he stopped in Cairo and debated [sic] scholars at al-Azhar. He received an ijāza from ash-Shaykh Sīdī al-Amīn b. Ḥabīb aj-Jakanī (d.1180/1772) in the seven readings of the Qur’ān who had received his own ijāza from Ibn Sīdī ‘Abd Allāh at-Tinwājīwī [sic]. The author was interred in Tinyikhlif (تنينخلف), in the Trarza [sic] region. He was survived by his children al-Mubārak and ‘Abdī.” Of 14 potential elements, only “pilgrimage”, “algebra” und “Cairo” and “al-Azhar University [sic]” are

²² Ibn Aḥbaiyib al-Yadmusī (ALA 1830, see above footnote 11) does not appear among “Yadmusī” in the “Index of authors”; in the “General Index” (p. 2054a), however, a certain “al-Yadmusī” (pp. 412 and 481) is referred to, who forms part of the “Idawdinyu’qub” (p. 412, the page before the *nisba* runs “Idawdanya’qubī”, in the “General Index”, p. 2034b, the entry reads “Idawdinyuqub see al-Yadmusī”), a branch of the “Awlād Daymān”. This “Yadmusī”, however, of p. 411, is called “Aḥmad Sālim”, whereas the one of p. 481 is called “Muḥammad Sālim” and belongs to the “Madlish who resided among the Idawdanyu’qub [sic]”, with not a single “al-Yadmusī” on the entire page.

selected for the “General Index”. By now, the alphabetical order has found the way to the standard rules.²³

III. The relationship of *ALA* to *MLG*

Stewart’s attempt (pp. 12–13) to describe the relation of genesis, construction, and aspiration of *ALA* in comparison to *MLG* is of central importance for the user of *ALA* who expects to get answers to questions like: What do I find where? Why do I need both of the works? The information given is piecemeal and tends to generate the impression that the qualities in common are greater than the differences. The most significant and effective difference between the two works refers to the importance attributed to the authorization of information. In *MLG* each information that can be dealt with independently is authorized by at least one reference effecting titles, names, dates etc. – be they ‘correct’ or incorrect – and can be followed up through their respective history in the source literature. In *ALA*, one of the major sources – *al-Mağmū‘a al-kubrā* of Yaḥyā wuld al-Barrā’ – provides lists of the above mentioned “documented writing” which draws its authoritative reputation, in traditional manner, exclusively on the mnemonic powers of its author.²⁴ The restriction of the geographical limitation of *ALA* to “Mauritanian writers” and “the Hassaniyyaphone world” (p. 13) remains unclear – it is a restriction which *per definitionem* is not bound to national borders.²⁵ Another vague point of difference refers to the core element of both works: are they dealing with “writings” or “texts”? From the indices of *ALA* it is clear that the genre of the proper ‘document’ (ar. *milaff*, *waṭīqa*, *kunnāsh*) is not treated on equal terms with the “text”. That kind of material put forth in *MLG* (and pub-

lished in *OMAR*)²⁶ and which is indispensable for any kind of socio-economic research exceeds not only that of *ALA* by far, *ALA* also not added more than a few ‘new’ specimens to it. The only indisputable difference is of a temporal nature: The material base of *MLG* ends in spring 2000.

There is, however, a fact that cannot be ignored and that might have provoked the following ‘clear-cut’ sentence: “This compilation [i. e. *ALA*, UR] has also expanded on biographical and bibliographical information that fills out some of the citations that appear in both projects.” (pp. 13–14). This other project, quite obviously *MLG* is meant, contains a total of 4,847 (ca 98 % of which are “Mauritanian”) author entries and ca 10,150 (179 of which are anonymous) works and titles. In 2007, I selected and made available to *ALA* 5 ca 550 digital records of authors together with ca 5,000 work-titles, ca 1,600 of which were listed separately in chronological order and attributed to 20 different literary subjects. Not all of these records seem to have been completely integrated into the *ALA* records, some of them look like they have been replenished by hand with additional information, and parts of numerous further records must have been included by copying from the printed version of *MLG*.

– Cf. *ALA* 59 with *MLG* 2749: the author Muḥammad Sīdī b. Ludā‘a was not part of the digital records. Inclusion of information from *MLG* by hand raised the risk of mistakes and errors considerably. Simple mistakes, like *ALA* 59 where this Ibn Ludā‘a is called “Ibn Lūda‘a”, or *ALA* 1192 with “Yamīn” instead of *MLG* 2423 “Yaimīn”, are the rule; other types of error occur: the two “Students” of *MLG* 935: “... al-Bāna‘marī [waṭanan] al-Mağlisī [nasaban] 1155, Aḥmad b. al-Muḥtār...” merge in *ALA* 70 into one: “... al-Bana‘marī al-Mağlisī [sic] Aḥmad b. al-Mukhtār...”. Behind *ALA* p. 13, footnote 30: “Sa‘id b. Yahya b. Amad [sic] al-Susi [sic] al-Marjiti [sic] (from the Tafilat [sic]: *MLG* 148)” is hiding *MLG* 148: “Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Sa‘id (b. Muḥammad) b. Yaḥyā b. Aḥmad as-Sūsī al-Marğīṭī (Mirīḡṭī)”. The title in *ALA* 528 no. 35: “Alt. title: *Naẓm aṣṣḥāb an-nabīy wa-ābā‘ihim* (*MLG*). MSS: IMRS 808 (AMMS).” reads correctly in *MLG* 1786 t4: “*Naẓm man ṣaḥība ma‘a abīhi n-nabīy*” – a difference which, however, cannot be explained by a simple mistake but only by a failure of memory – or by an unnoticed takeover of the title of the IMRS manuscript. The “*Naẓm i‘rāb al-Qur‘ān*” of “Akbarī [sic]. Muḥab [sic] ad-Dīn Abū al-Baqā‘ ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 1219)” (p. 1726) is presumably the *Tibyān fī i‘rāb al-qur‘ān* of the well-known philologist of Bağdād Muḥibbaddīn al-‘Ukbarī, cf. *GAL S I*, pp. 495–496, and *MLG* 1786 t8: “*Bayān fī i‘rāb al-qur‘ān*”, and

²³ If representing titles, some name elements (*Amīr*, *Qāḏī*, *Sultan* [sic], *ash-Shaykh* etc.) at the beginning of names are ignored: e.g. the sequence “Sīdī Mḥammad...” – “*ash-Shaykh* Sīdī Muḥammad...” – “*Sultan* Sīdī Muḥammad...” – “Sīdī Muḥammad ...” (p. 2049b).

²⁴ Vol. II, the introductory bio- and bibliographical volume of *al-Mağmū‘a al-kubrā* (Nouakchott: National Library 2009), does, as a rule, not provide the reader with any information on the work of an author beyond its title. In the “Instruction” (*tanbīh*, pp. 16–18) Yaḥyā wuld al-Barrā’ lists 40 sources from which he drew his information from – the *MLG* inclusive, thus perfecting the *circulus vitiosus*!

²⁵ Both limitations stand three lines below the running headline “Introduction: The Literature of the Western Sahara”. The difficulty to delimit the geographical extension of the literature of a nomadic merchant society put apart – it is above all the literary network of the derivative and commentary character of the Moorish literature (see above) that demands *sui generis* cross-border definitions and considerations.

²⁶ Pp. XI–XII and footnotes 9–11 compare WAAM to *OMAR* (“full-text access to 2603 manuscripts ... in cooperation with the Center of Informatics of the University of Tübingen”, then p. XXVII: “*OMAR* University of Friburg [sic] on-line collection ...) without being aware of, or pointing to the fundamental difference: only *OMAR* contains, next to the ordinary meta-data, ca 134,000 publicly accessible online scans of the microfilmed texts and offers – in addition – digital access to the main indices of *MLG*.”

field “Anm” with additional information. Of the 39 titles of Zain b. Aġġamd (*ALA* 528), who commented upon the *Tibyān*, five shorter texts are not recorded in *MLG*; for ten of the remaining 34 titles *ALA* omits the reference to *MLG* where a total of 47 titles – five of which are lacking in *ALA* – is ascribed to Zain. Since Zain b. Aġġamd’s record was part of the digital support, it must be assumed that this is an example of a selective inclusion of this entry by hand. A different type of inclusion occurs with *ALA* 1699: “Muḥammad b. Ahmayda [sic], fl. 20thC”, part of the digital records, is called in *MLG* 1052: “Muḥammad b. Aḥmaidā (lived before 1971)”, proven by four references. None of these are mentioned, the name of the author is spelled incorrectly. The conclusion is inevitable: no citation from *MLG* in *ALA* should be given credit without checking.

Another type of author entry must be considered too: authors who are provided in *MLG* with an entry that is ignored in *ALA*.²⁷ Beyond the margin of error, the process of including information from *MLG* into *ALA* is also accompanied by attempts to clarify, complete or correct²⁸ elements of this information. The two following examples – picked by random reading – should give an impression of the complexity of the undertaking.

- To *ALA* 1869 “Muḥammad Fāḍil [Vāḍil] b. al-Ḥabīb, fl. 19thC”, a student of “as-Shaykh Muḥammad Fāḍl [sic] b. Māmāyina al-Qalqamī”, the title “*Risāla fī ‘l-radd ‘alā Muḥammadū ... at-Tīshīti*” is ascribed to, without reference for this authorship, though, but to *MLG* 1575 t1 where the title “*Radd ‘alā Risālat Muḥammad ...*” (with reference to the catalogue *Sammlung* no. 376) is ascribed to a certain “Muḥammad b. aṭ-Ṭālib Laḥbīb b. Abaddī al-Amīn al-Ġakani”. The *nisba* “al-Ġakani” makes *ALA* doubt, with good reason, the correctness of the ascription. The check of the scan of *OMAR* 376, source of *MLG* and accessible also to *ALA*, does not bring any clarity.
- *ALA* pp. 451–453: Here, two authors – 422: “Khaylīd (Mūlūd) b. Muttayliyya b. Sīdī al-Fāḍil [Vāḍil] ... d. 12/18thC Known as Mūlūd.” and 425: “Mawlūd b. al-Mukhtār (Mutayyilī) b. Sīdī al-Fāllī [al-Vāl.l.i] ... d. 12/18thC” – stand next to each other. To both is ascribed one and the same title: *al-‘Asal al-muṣaffā* but each time based on a different reference: 422 has “*Mu‘jam at-Trārza* 70”, 425 has “Ould al-Bara 862; *MLG* 194(1)”. Curiously enough, the differing phonetic transcription of the name element “Fāḍil” resp. “Fāllī”, doubtlessly added belatedly, corroborates the erroneous doubling of the entry. In *MLG* 194, not only the variant readings of the name and its origins are mentioned, there is also a reference (Yaḥyā wuld al-Barrā: *al-Fiqh wa l-muġtama*’, Nouakchott: IMRS 1994, p. 127) on which the reference in *ALA* (“Ould al-Bara 862”) is based. However, the name is spelled differently there: “Mawlūd b. al-Mukhtār (Mutayliya)...”. Due to a lapse in *MLG*, the abbreviation of the relevant source (“yb:fi”, a forerunner of “Ould al-Bara”) is missing

²⁷ Cf. *ALA* 1791 with no reference to *MLG* 4119.

²⁸ Several types of erroneous corrections occur: *ALA*, p. 190, misspells “*ad-Dir‘ wa ‘l-mijfar*” from *MLG* 1353 t1 “*ad-Dir‘ wa l-miġfar*”. *ALA*, p. 1579, corrects “*Naṣīḥat* [sic] *ash-Shanahsawiyya* [sic]” from *MLG* 334 t22: *an-Naṣīḥa ash-Shamshawiyya*. This kind of establishing without reason a genitival link is a systematic transcriptional error.

in the list of abbreviations (but not in the bibliography). This is why the editors of *ALA* could not identify the origin of this reference (and all the other 194 references to “yb:fi” in *MLG*). There is, moreover, in *MLG* a reference to two works with similar titles one of which (*MLG* 1391 t5) is copied under the relevant entry in *ALA* (1277 10.): “*al-‘Asal al-muṣaffā fī shuḥadā‘ zamān al-muṣtafā*.” The second similar title (*MLG* 1786 t16) goes back to a predecessor of “Mūlūd”: Zain b. Muḥammaḍin (*ALA* 528: “Zain b. Muḥammadhun [sic]... (MLG)”). In *MLG* 1786 t16, three references are given for two different variants of the title. One of them, *al-‘Asal al-muṣaffā fī ḥukm madḥ an-nabiy*, is based on Heymowski and Muḥtār wuld Ḥāmidun (*Katalog*, p. 60); the other one, *Nahr al-‘asal al-muṣaffā fī faḍl madḥ an-nabiy al-muṣtafā*, is based on no. 398 of C.C. Stewart’s co-edited version of the Heymowski-Catalogue of the IMRS of 1989. This is why they should be identical. Now, there is a third variant to be found, under the entry of “Zayn b. Muḥammadhun” (*ALA* 528 39.): “*Nahr al-‘asal al-muṣtafā* [sic] *fī inābat madḥ an-nabiy al-muṣtafā*”. The sources mentioned are “*MLG* 1786(16)”, “Heymoski [sic] 60” (p. 925: “Heymowski”) and “Ould al-Bara 235”. Ould al-Bara (no. 235, p. 92/3 and /-6), however, calls the author “Zain b. Muḥammaḍin” (like *MLG*) and the title (like *MLG*) “*al-‘Asal al-muṣaffā fī ḥukm madḥ an-nabiy*”. This means that all three *ALA*-references prove to be inaccurate. The origin of manuscript of title 39: “Zawiya [sic] Ahmad Zarraq [sic], Nouakchott” is not described in detail, the supposition “possibly IMRS 726 (AMMS) titled “*Naẓm fī tawasil*” [sic] is wrong: Stewart’s *IMRS-Catalogue* has the ‘correct’ title: *Naẓm fī t-tawassul*, just like *MLG* 1786 t28 recorded it.

Another type of incomplete editorial manipulation of information incorporated from *MLG* into *ALA* refers to the superficial use of the various fields of information in *MLG*. I will restrict myself, perhaps, to the most explicit and prominent case of critique on the part of *ALA*:

Under *ALA* 1679 (i. e. al-Faqīh Muḥammad Yaḥyā al-Walāṭī) it is stated that “Rebstock (*MLG*) attributes to Muḥammad Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad al-Mukhtār ad-Dāwudī [sic] ... some 63 works that were, in fact, written by Muḥammad Yaḥyā b. Sīdī Muḥammad ... al-Yūnusī al-Walāṭī al-Dāwudī [sic]”, with the unsorted list of the title numbers following.²⁹ Each one of these titles is – just as any other ascription of a title in *MLG* – provided with a relevant reference. In *MLG* 1743 “Muḥammad Yaḥyā b. Sīdī Muḥammad ... al-Yūnusī”, field “Anm”, the general confusion about this author in the secondary literature is mentioned and analysed. *ALA*, unfortunately, did not make use of this field.³⁰ Thus, not only is possible reconciliation of apparently contradictory information obstructed, but also the knowledge of the multiplicity of traditions and their possible role for this confusion is covered.

²⁹ *ALA*, p. 1543, title 1.

³⁰ The unstructured presentation of the material in this field of *MLG*, though, raises the hurdle to overcome the linguistic obstacle.

- In ALA 1544 no.1 “*Sharḥ ‘alā ‘l-basmala wa‘l-fātiḥa*” the complaint reads: “Cited in MLG 2198(8) where the work is misattributed to the author’s son; Ibn Ḥāmidun and Heymowski 225.” In MLG, however, the “misattribution” to the son “Muḥammadun b. Muḥammad(ū) an-Nābīga” is based on an-Nahwīs reference (*Bilād Shinqīt*, p. 601) and on “ha:he 225”, i. e. the ALA source “Ibn Ḥāmidun and Heymowski 225”, where the four relevant texts are attributed to “Muḥammad an-Nābīgha at-Tandaḡī ([d.] 1383)”. The occasional confusion of the son with the father – who seem to have died both around 1384/1964–5 – is noticed in the field “Anm” and supported by the reference of MLG, “ha:he 207”, i. e. Ibn Ḥāmidun and Heymowski 207 that seems to be unknown to ALA and points to a certain “Muḥammadun b. Muḥammad an-Nābīgha at-Tandaḡī (+1383h)”, who may be identical with “the son”, without, however, attributing to him a “*Sharḥ ‘alā ‘l-basmala wa‘l-fātiḥa*” but with the same date of death, “1383h”. The ALA reference to “Ould al-Bara 640” is a mistake and leads nowhere. The correct reference would be “Ould al-Bara 575” where the information of MLG 2198 is completely confirmed. The complaint of ALA, therefore, remains unfounded.
- ALA 1618 criticizes that “MLG 137 misattributes *Qatr an-nada* [sic] to this author [MLG 137(1)]; for the author of that work see Abū Bakr aṭ-Ṭufayl b Aḥmad ... at-Tishīti.” This is, in fact, true for MLG 137 t1. In the field “Anm”, however, the confusion with MLG 198 t1 is notified; it is there that the *Qatr an-nadā fi n-naḥw* of this “Abū Bakr aṭ-Ṭufayl b Aḥmad ... at-Tishīti” is to be found, next to a cross-reference to MLG 137 t1 and further references.

The plausibility of much criticism on the part of ALA suffers from its systematic ignorance of parts of MLG. Thus, not only legitimate corrections become doubtful, but also extant knowledge may not be communicated to the user, or only in a way which does not really represent a benefit to him. On the other hand, the striking indifference of ALA towards exhaustively assessing all available proofs in the primary and secondary sources discloses an incomprehensible self-restriction to premodern credulity in the authority of traditional mnemonic scholarship.

IV. Notes on transcription and other peculiarities

The system of transcription used in ALA – which just like other editorial aspects should have been explained somewhere prominent and in detail – requires some interpretative remarks.

Contrary to the usual anglophone system and without any annotation ALA adopts the assimilation of the sun letters. The details of the assimilation of particles, apparently, are decided by a mixed system: e.g. “*bi-awḡāḡ, fiḥi ash-shi‘r, fi ‘t-tar‘if* [sic], *wa‘l-ābār wa‘r-rakīz*” (p. XVII),

“*bayna ‘t-taqlīd*” (p. 1717), but “*Fihris ... al-Ni‘mah*” (p. XVIII).

In the second introduction (Nouhi: “Maḥazra Educational System”) “ḡh” in addition to “z” is used to transcribe “ظ”.³¹ Throughout ALA, clusters of three consonants are used to simulate dialectal pronunciations: “Sidī b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmḡmaydan ... al-Ḥāḡī” [sic] (p. 687), the *nisbas* “al-Idayllbī” and “al-Idyaydbī” (p. VI) etc. Consonant sounds (but which ones?) from the phonetic alphabet are represented as “ḡ”, “v”, “m”, or “l” – and sometimes “ḡh”, see above) – with a dot underneath. Their Arabic original appears now and then in the text, but neither in a regular nor always congruent manner³². In order to understand transcriptions like “Bāḡḡā” a phonetic alphabet should have been introduced.

All information of the field “MSS” in the main part of ALA goes without diacritics, including the ‘ain at the beginning of the word. System or error?

Often, grammatical forms are wrongly spelled: “*idāḡ*” instead of *idāḡh*, “*ḡāshiyya*” (often “*hashiyya*”) instead of *ḡāshiyya*, “*istadrāk*” instead of *istidrāk* (result of check of 16 terms on p. 1722); “*tanāsikh*” instead of *tanāsukh* (p. 1037). For the problem of the genitival link see footnote 28 and below.

Systematic check of author entry ALA 1064 (pp. 1008f., 21 lines): “aṭ-Ṭālib Ṣiddīq b. aṭ-Ṭālib al-Ḥasan aḡ-Jummānī, d. 1073/1663”. Sources: “*Bārtaylī/Faḡh ash-Shakūr* [sic], biography 150, p. 156; *Ta‘riḡh Jaddu* (1073 AH) [sic]; Ibn Aḡmad/*Ḥawādith* [sic]; Ould al-Bara 423; MLG 125.” In MLG 125 there is, besides the reference to biography 150 and p. 156 of *Faḡh ash-shakūr*, another reference to “Oḡwald: *Handelsstädte*, S. 498”, for information on the family of the author, and a second reference to *Ḥayāt Mūrītāniyā* by Mukhtār wuld Ḥāmidun. The source reference “Ould al-Bara 423” must be a mistake since it leads to a certain “‘Abd al-Mālik b. Akhyārhum” (ALA 23);³³ the remaining two sources lack a page number. The author of the *Ta‘riḡh* is correctly called “Jiddu”, the one of the *Faḡh ash-shakūr* appears just in this very entry as:

³¹ See footnote 14: *Mawrid aḡh-Dham‘ān fi rasm al-Qur‘ān*, p. 30.

³² Cf. “Aḡhlanṣar” to اَغْلانَصْر (p. 453) instead of Aghallanṣar (?), on p. 513 “Mmayn” transcribes مَمَّيْن [sic]. On p. 562, to one (no. 38) of 39 writings of Zain b. Aḡḡamad (= ALA 528) is attached the Arabic *incipit*. On pp. 313, 529 and 533 Arabic titles and verses appear (without translation), on p. 837 one of a few Arabic sentences is cited (with an inaccurate translation).

³³ Inaccuracies of references to “Ould al-Bara” (= *al-Muḡtama‘ al-kubrā* II) are numerous and most often not correctable; see e.g. “*Qayḡat al-aṣābī‘ an-nāfi‘ li‘l-marada at-tābi*” (ALA, p. 257) refers to “*Faiḡat al-aṣābī‘ an-nāfi‘a li l-marad aṭ-ṡābi*” (Ould al-Bara 275), or mistakes like “Ould al-Bara 276” (ALA, p. 253) instead of Ould al-Bara 267.

“Bārtaylī”, “Bartaylī” and “Bartyali”. The origin of title of the text attributed to author, a “*Maktūb ḥawla ḥukm at-tadhkīn*”, can only be guessed: it seems to be derived from *Faṭḥ ash-shakūr* where al-Bārtaylī mentions a “correspondence ... where he [i. e. aṭ-Ṭālib Ṣiddīq] asked about the legal judgement of tobacco” (p. 156/4: “*murāsala ... sa’ala fihā ‘an ḥukm tibḡ*”).

Systematic check of p. 1411 in the main part = ALA 1556, titles 24–35 (= p. 1411):

Ad no. 24: ALA corrects, without giving a reason, the information of (MLG 952 t3 = OMAR 1036) about “‘Abdal-‘azīz b. Yāybūya in Wadan [sic]”, the owner of the *Aḡwiba*, into “‘Abd Allāh b. Yāybūy [sic] in Wadan”. I myself microfilmed the manuscript. Title 25: “*Fatāwā fī ‘unūwīyāt ḥādīthi [sic] fī ‘l-bilād*”. Title 32: “*Ta’līf ḥādīhi [sic] bihi... al-Hadūd fī [sic] at-ta’arīf [sic] al-fiqhiyya*” instead of *al-Ḥudūd fī ‘t-ta’arīf al-fiqhiyya*; title 33: “*Ikhtīṣār sharḥ al-muwāq [sic] li-Mukhtaṣar Khalīl ḥadhf minhi [sic]...*”, which is an abbreviated version of the commentary of the *Muḥtaṣar* of al-Mauwāq (d. 1492), the last Qāḍī of Granada, cf. GAL S II, pp. 375 f. and MLG 625. Finally title 34: “*Fatwā fī ‘l-kama [sic] fī qismat ad-dīyya ‘alā ‘l-‘āqila*”, and title 35: “*Nāzilāt [sic] al-fulāniyya*” (which is either a grammatical or a transcriptional mistake).

Systematic check of p. 1889b: “Ḥassaniyya”, „Ḥassāniyya“, and “Ḥassaniyya” (more on p. 2033a) instead of Ḥassāniyya, “bi’l-‘āmiyya” instead of bi’l-‘āmmiyya, “wa-ākhir” instead of wa-ākhar, “fi’ [sic]dh-dhab [sic?] ‘an as-sunna”, “shī’r ḥāfil bi-madā” instead of shī’r ḥāfil bi-madā’ih, “madarasa” instead of madrasa, “al-‘aliyyā” instead of al-‘āliya, “fasiḥ” instead of faṣiḥ, “wa-tujīh” [sic?], “min ḥayātahā” instead of min ḥayātihi of a total 29 entries that begin with “Dīwān ...”.

Error list through unsystematic reading:

p. XV: “Banū Ḥasān” instead of Banū Ḥassān; “*al-Alā‘m*” instead of *al-A‘lām*; “*Kitāb an-naṣab*” instead of *Kitāb an-nasab*.

p. XVI: “‘Ayun [sic] al-Aṣṣāba” instead of ‘Uyūn al-iṣāba; “*mu’alafāt*” instead of *mu’allafāt*.

p. XVII: “*shurfā*” instead of *shurafā*;³⁴ “*Encyclopedia [sic] of Islam*”; “*Ināra al-mubham*” instead of *Inārat al-mubham*.

p. XIX: “wa-mantiqat Adrār” instead of wa-minṭaqat Adrār.

pp. XIII and XXIV: “Institut Mauritanienne” [sic].

p. XXV: “*al-Mawāḥhab [sic]... al-Muwāḥabb [sic] al-‘anadiyya fī ‘l-manāqab [sic] ...*”.

p. 2: “Abū ‘Ubayd al-Bakrī (d. 1068)” did not die in 1068, the year he finished his *Kitāb al-Mu‘ḡam*, but only in 1094.

p. 11 footnote 23: “*Faṭḥ ash-Shakrūr*” instead of *Faṭḥ as-Shakūr*.

p. 63: 31. “*Ṣiygh adh-dhikr*” instead of *Ṣiyagh adh-dhikr*.

p. 71: “*Manzūmat ḥawādith as-sinīn ḥattā nihāyat khalāfat Ali karim Allāh wajhahī*” [sic].

p. 145: “3 Jumadi al-akhir [sic] 1342.”

p. 149: “*Risāla fī ‘l-ḥādīth al-mawaqūf*” [sic].

p. 152: “*ahl Ifriqiyyā*” [sic].

p. 511: 8.: “... *wa-mukhālaṭatuhunna*” instead of *mukhālaṭati-hinna*.

p. 550: “4. *Ta’liq ‘alā mawāḍa’ [sic]...*”.

p. 736: “Alt. name: Muḥummadhun b. Abī al-Ḥasanī (MLG); Muḥammadan b. Abī al-Ḥasanī (AMMS)” instead of attributing him as Muḥammadan b. Abī al-Ḥasanī to MLG where the author’s (Nr. 4463) name is based on C.C. Stewart’s proper entry in his *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts* no. 2720: “Muḥammadan b. Abī al-Ḥasanī”. This displays a fundamental misunderstanding of what a source proof must keep.

p. 805: “‘āmiyya” instead of ‘āmmiyya.

p. 895: “*al-Wazīfa ... al-māthura*” and “... *mā’tura* (MLG)” instead of *al-Wazīfa fī ‘l-ad’iya al-ma’tura*.

p. 923 “*al-Ḥāj*” instead of *al-Ḥājj*; a total 10 of 13 names of authors (p. 1800), even apart from the dialectal *nisba* “al-Ḥājī, are listed with this title.

p. 1007: “1... *as-Sālim ash-shayn* (MLG)” instead of ... *as-Sālim ash-shayn* (MLG); “2. *Waḍiḥ al-masālik ‘alā Lāmiyyat Ibn Malīk*” instead of 2. *Wāḍiḥ ... Malīk*.

p. 1008: “3. *Lamiyyat*” instead of *Lāmiyyat*.

p. 1153: “*Muqaddima [sic] ar-Riḥla*”.

p. 1155: “4. *al-Ḥath*” instead of *al-Ḥathth*.

p. 1412: “*Ajwibat mawḍū’ḥā an al-jamā’a ...*” instead of *Ajwiba mawḍū’uhā anna ‘l-jamā’a...*

p. 1683: “‘Umayyids” instead of Umayyads [?].

p. 1712/-4: mysterious title: “2 [sic] *fī jawāz imāmat [sic] wa-qa-dā’ al-mawālī*”.

p. 1722: “*istadrāk*” instead of *istidrāk*.

p. 1760: “‘Ibn Saḥūn [sic]... (d. 854)”, and “Muḥammad b. ‘Alī ash-Shāṭabī” [sic].

p. 1784: “*marunuq*” instead of *marauṇiq*.

p. 1841: of five Yahyās in the “Index of Authors” four are called – here as in the relevant main entries – “Yahya” [sic].

V. Summary

ALA 5 represents the (preliminary) accomplishment of a marvellous project. The course of time, however, placed this final volume in an unexpected position: it was not first but second, it had to be short rather than complete, general rather than precise. Moreover, the potential surplus that remained, the lead of one and a half decades of Arabic manuscript discoveries in Mauritania, was produced almost completely in an indigenous milieu, not anymore under the auspices and control of the project’s founder(s).

In particular, but not only, the results of the systematic check of the arbitrarily selected parts (see above IV) generate the impression that ALA 5 was produced under conditions that did not guarantee a consistent and professional outcome, neither in terms of formal correctness nor in terms of conceptual transparency. The predominance of bookkeeping lists over enlightening analysis,

³⁴ Perhaps understood as dialectal variant like p. XXII “ash-Shurfā’ Walāta” etc.

of the singular fact over the causal link, and of the freelance individual discretion over the industrious loyalty to scholarly standards result in a botched attempt to fill a gap.

Perhaps, the (announced) preparation of a digital version will offer the chance to remove the bulk of the deficits and refine the access of data processing. Such a version would eventually offer the chance to provide the user with adequate tools to benefit from the rich material. The extraordinary increase with *ALA* of archival information on Arabic literature of the region renders it imperative to dispel all doubts about the credibility of the material exposed.

In order to achieve this, more than (just one) proof-reading is required. Without a thorough and extensive reception of the state of the art – irrelevant of language, age and origin –, without a self-critical examination of the heuristic value of traditionally handed down scholarly knowledge, without the unceasing care for correctness in detail – including the responsibility of the publisher's (Handbook of Oriental Studies and Brill) –, and without a considerable investment of Islamic scholarship in editing, processing, and commenting upon the material collected, coordinated, and harmonized, *ALA 5* will not unfold but a fraction of its value. The Arabic literature of Mauritania and the Western Sahara deserves better.