



The Research Library makes every endeavor to preserve and restore the partly heavily damaged Oriental manuscripts for researchers, the interested public and the next generations, to catalogue them according to the latest codicological standards, to make them accessible online and to present them in exhibitions. Several sponsors and partners support the Research Library in this regard.

### VISITORS

Universität Erfurt  
Universitäts- und Forschungsbibliothek Erfurt/Gotha  
Forschungsbibliothek Gotha  
Schloss Friedenstein  
99867 Gotha  
Germany

### OPENING HOURS

Library:  
Monday to Friday 9 a.m. – 8 p.m.  
Saturday 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Special reading room:  
Monday to Friday 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.

The manuscripts can be used in the special reading room after registration. For conservation reasons the library provides in some cases only microfilms or digital scans. Contact person: Monika Hasenmüller, M.A., Research Associate for the Oriental manuscript collection.



UNIVERSITY OF ERFURT  
Nordhäuser Straße 63  
99089 Erfurt  
Germany

[www.uni-erfurt.de](http://www.uni-erfurt.de)



### FURTHER INFORMATION

University of Erfurt  
Gotha Research Library  
Schlossplatz 1  
Friedenstein Castle  
99867 Gotha | Germany  
[bibliothek.gotha@uni-erfurt.de](mailto:bibliothek.gotha@uni-erfurt.de)  
TEL +49 (0) 361 | 737-5540  
[www.uni-erfurt.de/bibliothek/fb](http://www.uni-erfurt.de/bibliothek/fb)

**Oriental manuscript  
collection**

GOtha RESEARCH LIBRARY

The Gotha Research Library ranks among the most prominent historical libraries in Germany. It harbors the country's third largest Oriental manuscript collection comprising more than 3,400 codices. The roots of the collection date back to the second half of the 17th century when the first manuscripts were entrusted to the library of the Duchy of Saxe - Gotha - (Altenburg) founded in 1640. In 1678 Duke Friedrich I (1646-1691) acquired the Bibliotheca Gerhardina, the scholarly library of the Jena theologians Johann and his son Johann Ernst Gerhard (1582-1637; 1621-1668), which contained a few Arabic, Persian and Ottoman-Turkish manuscripts.

In the early 18th century the small collection mainly consisted of Qurans and prayer books. This emphasis shifted when Duke Ernst II of Saxe - Gotha - Altenburg (1745-1804) commissioned the explorer Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767-1811) to purchase Oriental manuscripts, antiquities and objects of natural history in the Middle East. Seetzen set out on his journey in the summer of 1802 heading to Istanbul and Syria where he began studying the Arabic language. His expedition took him not only to Istanbul and Syria, but also to Asia Minor, Lebanon, Jerusalem and Palestine, Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula where he purchased approximately 2,700 predominantly Arabic manuscripts for the library in Gotha.

Seetzen acquired old South Arabian inscriptions and diverse objects of natural history and cultural artifacts during his second expedition to Yemen. Unfortunately, all these materials, including a large number of manuscripts, were lost in the course of his mysterious death while travelling to Sanaa in 1811. Due to Seetzen's efforts,



the Gotha collection of Oriental manuscripts no longer consists merely of theological works as in its beginnings in late 17th century. It now encompasses historical and biographical treatises as well as jurisprudential, medical, grammatical, lexicographical and poetical codices representing a broad spectrum of Islamic knowledge and sciences. In the second half of the 19th century the library acquired some 40 Oriental manuscripts mainly via auctions, but all in all the phase of large-scale purchases has ended. Currently the library only acquires individual manuscripts occasionally.

After World War II the former ducal library was transported to the Soviet Union as spoils of war, but the majority, including the Oriental manuscript collection in its entirety, was returned to the Friedenstein Castle in Gotha in 1956. Although this collection was considered to be the largest of its kind in the German Democratic Republic little attention was devoted to it due to difficulties surrounding the division of Germany and the incongruence between the character of the collection and the focus of Eastern German Islamic studies. More recently the collection has received renewed interest both nationally and internationally.

In the beginning of the 18th century the theologian and library director Ernst Salomon Cyprian (1673-1745) undertook the first attempt to publish a catalogue of the codices in the ducal library. It included 38 Oriental manuscripts. Seetzen's voluminous purchases made a comprehensive survey of the collection necessary. The Orientalist and librarian Johann Heinrich Möller (1792-1867) took on this challenge, cataloguing 965 manuscripts in 1825/1826 and

thereby completing the fragmentary inventory lists that Seetzen had attached to his book parcels from the Middle East.

The Indologist and philologist Wilhelm Pertsch (1832-1899) set new standards when he catalogued the collection in detail and for the very first time according to the languages represented: Arabic, Persian and Ottoman-Turkish. Pertsch did not only identify authors and titles of the respective manuscripts, but also added comprehensive content-based descriptions to his entries based on several manuscript catalogues that the Orientalists Fleischer, Hammer-Purgstall, Sprenger, Flügel and others had composed. Consequently, Pertsch enjoyed such an excellent reputation among his colleagues that he was entrusted with cataloguing further Oriental manuscript collections in Germany, such as those held by the Royal Library of Berlin, the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft (DMG) and the University Library of Göttingen. Today Pertsch's manuscript catalogue is accessible online via the homepage of the Research Library. Further manuscripts are described and recorded by the academy project entitled *Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland* (VOHD, German only).

#### Images:

Cover: Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī: *Yūsuf wa-Zulaykhā*. Approximately third quarter of the 16th century. Scene: Yūsuf is sold by the Canaanites. FBG, Ms. orient. P 78\*, front cover.

Inside: Aḥmadī: *Iskandar-nāma*. Approximately end of the 15th century. FBG, Ms. orient. T 186, Bl. 305b.