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Court librarian Sebastian Tegnagel's "Oriental" Copyists and Their Role in Fostering Knowledge of the Orient in the Seventeenth century

Sebastian Tegnagel, the imperial librarian in Vienna (1608–1636) and a scholar of Arabic, Turkish and Persian, was one of the leading figures of the “Republic of Arabic Letters”. His many interests included history, poetry, cosmology and his correspondents ranged from giants of philology like Casaubon, Gruter and Erpenius to unknown, mist-shrouded figures from a shifting ecosystem: missionaries, adventurers, interpreters, slaves and prisoners of war, from the borders of the Ottoman Empire and the shores of the Mediterranean. These were the people who conveyed information, who sold or copied the texts that would then be studied in the cities of Europe. It was thanks to them, therefore, that a more precise knowledge of the Near East and of Islam was formed, which not only fed into the extraordinary intellectual endeavours of the time but in Europe served more generally “to shake things up, to provoke, to shame, to galvanise”, as Noel Malcolm has recently written. These people often belonged to a marginalised, almost invisible humanity: we know of at least one captive scribe, Ibrahim Dervish, and a second scribe, named ash-Shuwaykh ‘Ali ad-Daqqaq. In our paper we use letters, manuscripts and notebooks to raise and answer the following questions: How did Tegnagel work together with the (captive) scribes he hired? How did he communicate with them? And how can we describe a kind of daily routine? Two of Tegnagel’s notebooks in particular, which contain at least three different Arabic handwritings (one being Tegnagel’s), show traces of collaborative work and mutual support. What was the role of these “hidden helpers” in the making of knowledge about the Orient between 1600 and 1636?

Paola Molino (University of Padua)

The Power of a Mistake: Library Scribes, with Too Much Ink and Never Enough Wood

Who were the library scribes in late Renaissance Europe? Were they men or women, young or old, did they live in the library or could go home in the evening? What kind of skills were they expected to have? But even more important: what has been the impact of their mistakes in the history of scholarship? If we believe what the Imperial librarian of Vienna Peter Lambeck wrote in 1665 the mistake of an amanuensis could let an author, or a book disappear for the time to be or one other be created out of a misspell. In my presentation, I will not only present a set of these “mistakes” but will also try to investigate the reasons why some mistakes happened, such as the lack of wood to warm up the rooms, the noise coming from the streets. I will introduce a selected group of library helpers, active in Central Europe, between roughly 1570 and 1650, and thanks to the letters that they have written to the librarians and to their relatives, and also thanks to the evaluation of their work by future scholars, I will, first, spatialize and contextualize their contribution, dwelling upon the intellectual and physical space they occupied in a library and, second, I will present the various duties they had, from cleaning the shelves of the library until reframing titles and writing subject catalogues, in fact very similar to encyclopaedias.