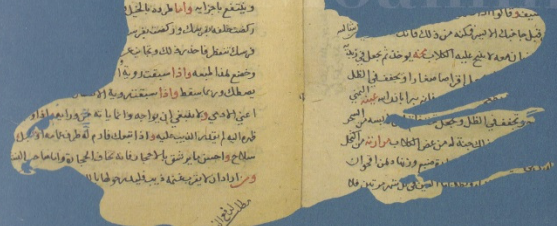


# Preserving the Written Heritage of Middle Eastern Falconry



The outstanding destiny  
of an ancient Arabic  
falconry treatise

## Ghitrif and Moamin



MIDDLE EAST FALCONRY ARCHIVE - ABU DHABI

### THE REASON BEHIND THE CREATION OF THE MIDDLE EAST FALCONRY ARCHIVE

Middle Eastern manuscripts on falconry are scattered throughout the world and are still often inaccessible. There is no single library in the world that houses a significant body of the original ancient literature in Arabic script (Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, Urdu) on the subject of falconry. Worse still, as the subject itself is of a specialised and narrow interest outside the Arab world there is sometimes little imperative to invest the necessary effort and resources required for the preservation of these treasures. The wealth of Islamic manuscripts on falconry is still partially untapped. Many texts are as yet unknown – awaiting their discovery or rediscovery – or at least insufficiently appreciated.

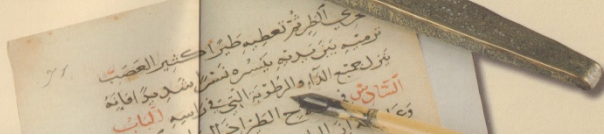
It is therefore crucial to identify and preserve any and all remaining versions of ancient falconry treatises, be they defective and incomplete, and this is one of the main goals of the Middle East Falconry Archive (MEFA), which was created in Abu Dhabi in 2008.

Ultimately, for the first time in history, copies of all manuscripts in Arabic scripts devoted to falconry could be gathered under one roof.

Preservation includes both the conservation of the original items through the production of museum-quality facsimiles as faithful as possible to the original, to convey to present and future generations a real cultural sense of history and awe, and the conversion of originals through digitalization. High-quality digital imaging ensures that the contents of manuscripts, including even minor details, will be preserved for centuries to come and readily available for research, through electronic books, intranets or internet.



Covers of the original (right, BNF, Paris) and facsimile (left, edited for MEFA in 2010) manuscripts of the *Manqush al-Usta al-Muhsin al-Falaki* ("Trade of the Great Ones with the Wild Beasts of the Waveless Desert"). Digital facsimile, not only ensure the preservation of documents but can be accessible to all researchers without any risk of damaging the original. As the originals are irreplaceable, museum quality printed facsimiles, as identical as possible to the originals but less fragile, can be handled, and unlike digital copies, they truly convey the real nature and history of the book.



Scroll of Ibn Lah'a, Egypt, 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. Institut für Papyrologie, Heidelberg. This manuscript is the only known surviving scroll in Arabic script.

### MANUSCRIPTS: A FRAGILE AND ENDANGERED HERITAGE

Since the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD, a large number of falconry treatises have been written in the Middle East. A number of them became popular and circulated in the form of manuscript for centuries, not only across the Middle East but also in Europe and Asia. In most favourable cases, several copies still exist in public libraries or private collections. Unfortunately many treatises were lost and recorded manuscripts have disappeared. We only know about these missing references from quotes in other works. In his encyclopedic work, Ibn an-Nadim, a 10<sup>th</sup> century scholar and bibliographer who became famous as the author of the monumental *Kitab al-Fihrist* ("Index"), mentioned ten falconry treatises, of which none remained.

What happened to these lost treatises? Manuscripts were produced on papyrus, parchment or paper, and they were/are rather fragile documents per se which require suitable methods of storing and careful use. Parchment for example is hygroscopic and deteriorates fast when exposed to high humidity. More dreadful than simple neglect, fire, war, cultural cleansing, thefts, and even natural hazards, have always been major threats to these manuscripts and books, in general.

As history has taught us from Alexandria to Timbuktu, public or private libraries can indeed be voluntary or accidentally destroyed. For example, in 1879, a fire caused extensive damage at the newly built Birmingham Central Library with only 1,000 volumes saved from a stock of 50,000. In Sarajevo, a shelling attack destroyed 90% of the library. Before the attack, the library held 1.5 million volumes and over 155,000 rare books and manuscripts.

Damaged Islamic manuscripts, private collection, Timbuktu. For centuries, Timbuktu has been home to one of the largest collections of ancient Islamic manuscripts in the world, some dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Most of them, still undated and uncatalogued, have been kept in private households and are in a poor condition because of inappropriate storage. Several collections were also looted and burned in recent years.

Usamah ibn Munqidh, *Kitab al-Fihrist* ("Book of Learning by Example"), 10<sup>th</sup> AD. Escorial Library. Copied before 1512 AD. The Memoirs of Usamah are a unique piece of Arabic literature, its most touching part being the final section devoted to his deceased father's exploits as a falconer. The Escorial manuscript is the only known copy.

### REFERENCING MANUSCRIPTS: THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EXHAUSTIVE

Some falconry treatises may be definitely lost, like those indexed in Ibn an-Nadim's *Fihrist*. But as manuscript inventories in public libraries or private collections worldwide are still often incomplete or difficult to access, we may still hopefully uncover some treatises and manuscripts that were thought to be lost.

Loss can also be partial. Many falconry manuscripts are actually incomplete versions of the initial treatise. For example, only Parts 7 and 8 of Volume 4 of the original seven volumes from Al-Mansur's *Kitab al-Sayd* ("Book of Hunting") remain and the beginning of Ibn Munqidh's *Kitab al-Fihrist* ("Book of Instructive Example") is missing. In the most favourable case, when several copies exist, it is sometimes possible to reconstruct the original text. François Viré, a French scholar who devoted most of his life to studying Islamic falconry treatises, analyzed and combined the texts from several

manuscripts to provide a French translation of the "work of Adham and Ghitrif", the oldest remaining falconry treatise in the world.

Sometimes, there is only one copy in the world (*unicum manuscript*) of a work. This is for example the case for the aforementioned famous *Kitab al-Fihrist*, a 12<sup>th</sup> century narrative which provides us with a vivid and intimate description of falconry in medieval northern Arabia.

Finally, manuscripts can largely differ because of the likelihood of errors when making a copy of the manuscript or because of deliberate changes and addenda to the copied text. It is therefore crucial to identify and preserve any and all remaining versions of ancient falconry treatises, be they defective and incomplete.

Kushajim, *Kitab al-Masayid wal-Masayid* ("Book of the Traps and Hunting Spots"), 9<sup>th</sup> AD. Sülemaniye Kütüphanesi, Istanbul. 15<sup>th</sup> century copy.

Two important Arabic falconry treatises were produced during the 10<sup>th</sup> century: the *Kitab al-Bagawat* ("Book on Falconry") and the *Masayid* of Kushajim. The latter is a valuable résumé of contemporary practice and knowledge on venery and falconry, sprinkled with related poems and anecdotes. Surviving copies are mostly incomplete.





Al-Ghitri Ibn Qudama Al-Ghassani. *Kitab Duwal al-Tayr* ("The Book of Birds of Prey"). 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. Topkapı Sarayı 15<sup>th</sup> century copy. Unfortunately, the eight known manuscripts of the oldest surviving treatise, the "Ghitri", were copied several centuries after the original text, and are all incomplete.

#### THE OLDEST REMAINING FALCONRY TREATISE: THE "GHITRI"

Al-Ghitri Ibn Qudama Al-Ghassani wrote the oldest surviving treatise on falconry in 775–785 AD. He was the master of hunting of the last two Umayyad monarchs and lived long enough to serve al-Mahdi, son of Al-Mansur and third caliph of the Abbasid Dynasty, who commissioned the treatise and became a major promoter of the Greco-Arabic translation movement. The treatise was based on the work of the falconer Adham ibn Muhriz al-Bahili. Around 700 AD, Bahili compiled Arab and non Arab transmissions on falconry, mostly Byzantine, Persian, Turks and Indian sources in his *Manaqil al-Tayr wa Hayat Da'ima* ("The Uses of Falcons and the Treatment of their Diseases"). Unfortunately, Adham's original text was lost. The one rearranged by Ghitri is often referred to as "Ghitri" or the "work of Adham and Ghitri". There does not seem to be a complete version of it but two shorter versions exist, which are preserved in

several manuscripts each. According to their prologues, they are usually referred to as the al-Hajjaj and Iskandar (Alexander) versions. In 813–833, Al-Hajjaj ibn Haytama recopied Al-Ghitri's work and modified it (Al-Hajjaj version). The Iskandar version, often shortened, starts with a fictitious dialogue between the author and Alexander the Great about the diseases of birds of prey – a testimony of the outstanding role model of Alexander for the Abbasid Caliphs.

The treatise provides a description of the birds used for hunting, their daily care and training, and their diseases. The veterinary section is by far the more thorough, with diseases affecting raptors described exhaustively from head to toe, as well as their treatment.



Al-Asadi Al-Jamhuri fi Bayzani ("Collection on the Science of Falconry"). 11<sup>th</sup> century AD. Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Istanbul. Copied in 1572 AD. This large and majestic 12<sup>th</sup> century hunting treatise towers over the whole literature written on the subject in the Middle East. It also contains important quotes from the "Ghitri", which are not always found in its often-defective manuscripts.

#### THE GREAT DESTINY OF THE "GHITRI"

The destiny of the 8<sup>th</sup> century Arabic falconry treatise known as the "Ghitri" is an exemplary case in many respects. It quickly circulated in the whole Islamic world and became the most important source for subsequent works in the region, with many of the Arabic falconry treatises written in later centuries containing quotations or references to this work, and/or at least usually structured in a similar way. Kishajim for example heavily relied on Ghitri's work for his *Kitab al-Masayid al-Matarid* ("Book of the Traps and Hunting Spears") written in 961 AD, as did Is al-Asadi in his encyclopaedia on hunting, written around 1240 AD. *Al-Jamhuri fi Bayzani* ("Collection on the Science of Falconry"), and Ibn Mangi for his *Kitab uns al-Mala' bi-Wahshi al-Fala* ("The Trade of the World's Great Men with Wild Animals in the Silent Deserts") written in 1371–1372 AD. The important role played by the "Ghitri" in the whole medieval literature on falconry, is proved not only by its far-reaching influence in the Middle East but also by its transmission to the West. We know that Arab falconry manuscripts circulated in

the whole Islamic world for centuries. A number of them, including the "Ghitri", reached the court of the Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen in the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD in Sicily, probably through his contacts with Hafid rulers in Tunisia. The Emperor, often considered the greatest falconry enthusiast of all time, is known to have expanded his knowledge and experience in falconry with Middle Eastern falconers. He did not only write a landmark work of falconry literature, the *De Arte Venandi cum Avibus* ("The Art of Hunting with Birds"), but also commissioned the translation of two Arabic treatises devoted to the subject, the "Ghitri" and the *Kitab al-Mutawakkil* ("Book for Al-Mutawakkil"), which was widely distributed in Europe under the name of Moamin. Interestingly, approximately at the same time, the *Kitab al-Mutawakkil* entered Europe through Spain and was directly translated to Spanish Castilian at the court of Alfonso X the Wise in Seville in 1250 AD.







#### THE MOAMIN: VECTOR OF THE "GHITRIF" TO THE WEST

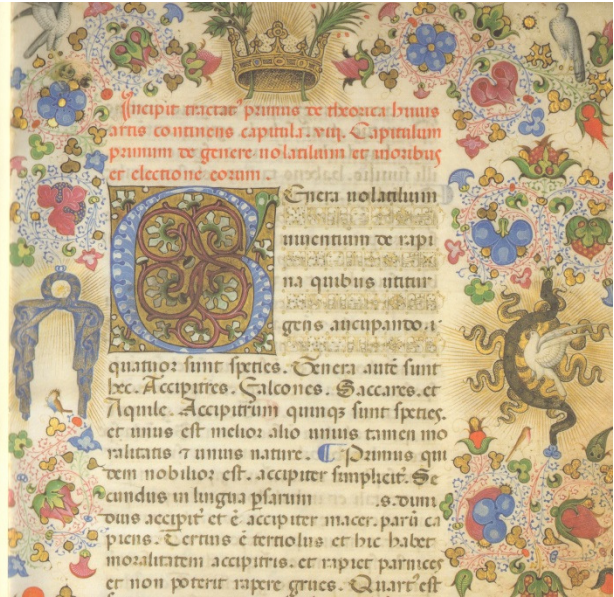
In 1240, The Emperor Frederick II commissioned Theodore of Antioch, a Syrian philosopher, to translate from Arabic to Latin an Arabic falconry treatise, the Latin treatise being untitled *De Scientia Venandi per Aves* ("The Science of Hunting with Birds").

The treatise was to become famous under the name Moamin. Although there are still some uncertainties and discussions about its original sources and the significance of its title – sadly the Arabic original seem to have been lost –, it is now acknowledged that the Moamin was in fact the translation of two combined Arabic treatises: the already described "Ghitrif" and the *Kitab al-Mutawakkil* (847–861 AD) by Muhammad Ibn Umar al-Bazayr. Although there are several references in the literature to the "Arab falconer Moamin", the name Moamin is more probably a corruption of Emir al-Mu'minin ("Commander of the Faithful"), a title frequently used by caliphs.

There are 26 known copies of the Moamin. The manuscripts, often incomplete, begin with a prologue and are divided into five books: a general description of birds used for hunting and their care in captivity (book I), the veterinary care of birds (II and III, the largest), and the care and treatment of the hunting dog (books IV and V). They are relatively low-profile codices, with the exception of two beautiful illuminated copies with miniatures throughout the text, currently held in Chantilly, France, and Vienna, Austria.

Ten years after the Latin translation commissioned by Frederick II in Sicily, the *Kitab al-Mutawakkil* was also translated from Arabic into Spanish Castilian at the court of Alfonso the Wise. The comparison of the two translations, as well as the surviving excerpts from the Arabic original, support that the Spanish version is more faithful to the Arabic text.

Folio IV of Moamin, Chantilly, 1499 AD. The Moamin from Chantilly is beautifully illustrated with falconry miniatures in each chapter and two full-page miniatures.



#### THE MOAMIN AND THE DE ARTE VENANDI CUM AVIBUS: PILLARS OF A CULTURAL BRIDGE BETWEEN THE EAST AND THE WEST

When compared to the monumental work of the Emperor Frederick II, *De Arte Venandi Cum Avibus* – to our modern eyes, certainly the most important falconry treatise of all times – the largely technical Moamin, a Latin translation of two Arab treatises, seems less attractive. However, Moamin manuscripts quickly spread across Italy and the rest of Europe and had a far greater influence on subsequent European treatises than the *De Arte*, which, although it went beyond the Arabic treatises and set a new standard for the subject, remained one of its kind and did not found a tradition, as was hoped by the author.

Did the Arabic treatises directly influence the Emperor for his own work? Probably not. Although, he commissioned the translation of Arabic texts while gathering material for his treatise and may have even supervised the translation process during the Siege of Faenza in 1241 AD, there seems to be no influence. However, there is no doubt that the Emperor was fascinated by Arab falconry and greatly influenced by Middle Eastern practices.

Unfortunately, his *De Arte* remained unfinished, and the original manuscript disappeared, probably when Vittoria, his fortress built outside the walls of Parma, fell into the hands of his enemies in 1248. Fifteen years later, word of a precious codex, decorated in gold and silver and stolen at Vittoria, came from Guillelmus Bottanius, a Milanese merchant. Bottanius offered to sell it to Charles of Anjou, describing it as consisting of two beautifully illustrated volumes, containing a figure of Frederick II in imperial robe. There are many analogies between the Bottanius copy and Frederick's work. It is now believed that the manuscript was a compilation prepared by the Emperor himself of several treatises, including the Moamin and depending on the authors, either a copy of the *De Arte Venandi* or of the *De Arte Venandi* ("the Art of Archery") by Guicemas, a German knight who had been part of Frederick's entourage.

"Manfred manuscript" of the *De Arte Venandi Cum Avibus*, 1248 AD, Biblioteca Vaticana, Rome, 13th century copy. Manfred, the son of Frederick II reviewed and enlarged his father's work.

