

INTRODUCTION

The Survey of Islamic Manuscripts in the World sponsored and organized by Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation was launched at the beginning of 1989. On the basis of already existing reference works, such as *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, by Fuat Sezgin; *Fahāris al-makhṭūṭāt al-ʿarabīya fī ʾl-ʿālam*, by Kūrīs ʿAwwād; *Les manuscrits arabes dans le monde*, by A.J.W. Huisman and *Bibliografiya arabskikh rukopisei*, by I.B. Mikhaïlova and A.B. Khalidov*, it was estimated that the total number of countries possessing collections of Islamic manuscripts came to seventy-two countries. The actual figure, however, turned out to be greater than this, the reason being that the above-mentioned works are primarily of a bibliographical nature and consequently do not consider all of the manuscript materials available today. The countries about which no material had ever been published were not covered in these works. It is worth mentioning that in Sezgin's monumental work there are occasionally hints of a collection which exists in an Islamic country and contains Islamic manuscripts, but the information provided is not substantial. When the Survey was launched, our statistics of countries possessing Islamic manuscripts came to almost 80, and in the course of its development the figure went well beyond 85 countries. Moreover, the division of the former USSR and Yugoslavia into new countries is not considered in these statistics.

In order to organise a research project of this magnitude it was necessary to make a preliminary study to identify at least one scholar who had sufficient knowledge of manuscripts in each country. This study was based on various reference works, the advice of individual scholars in many countries, and the recommendations of institutes involved in research in the area. Scholars were then invited to carry out the survey in their own countries and formally commissioned through an agreement with the Foundation.

From the very beginning the Foundation has been faced with four grey areas:

* *Oriental manuscripts in Europe and North America*, by J.D. Pearson, is indeed a survey, but, as its title indicates, is restricted to Europe and North America.

- 1 Eastern Europe
 - 2 Sub-Saharan Africa
 - 3 China
 - 4 War-torn countries
- 1 The main problem in Eastern Europe was gaining contact with scholars, and persuading them to sign agreements, because co-operation with foreign institutes was frowned upon by the governments. Nevertheless, the scholars recognised the significance of the survey and showed enthusiasm to participate. The political changes in these countries were a blessing to us, as it then became possible to arrange and complete the surveys there.
 - 2 Sub-Saharan Africa still remains a problem for us since there are not many sources for consultation to identify local scholars. Available information about Islamic manuscripts is extremely scarce, or non-existent. Because of the size of many African countries and poor transport facilities, movement within these countries is not always easy, and neither is access to privately owned collections of Islamic manuscripts in outlying areas. There has been a reluctance amongst scholars in this area to undertake the survey.
 - 3 The political situation in China is such that individuals are not allowed to enter into agreements with foreign institutes, and agreements with Chinese institutes involve a great deal of complicated bureaucracy.
 - 4 The fourth category is that of the war-torn countries or countries suffering from political unrest, including Afghanistan, Algeria, Chad, Ethiopia, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, and Somalia.

These problems have all contributed to delays in the completion of the survey. As a result the first volume of the Survey of Islamic Manuscripts in the World is published with the omission of Algeria, Chad, China and Ethiopia. The results of these surveys will appear in the third volume. Meanwhile, we are managing to overcome our difficulties in some of the problem areas.

The present survey of Islamic Manuscripts in the World is characterised by its comprehensive nature. It covers the largest number of countries possessing collections of Islamic manuscripts ever investigated, almost 100 countries, including all the new States in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. It covers a wide range of Islamic languages. It includes public as well as private collections. It provides comprehensive information on the contents of the col-

lections of Islamic manuscripts. It incorporates up-dated and detailed bibliographies of all existing catalogues of Islamic manuscripts in the world. It gives information, where possible, on uncatalogued collections as well as unpublished catalogues. The present survey, however, can by no means claim to be exhaustive. The widespread domain of Islamic manuscripts is so vast that much more must be done to explore it properly.

Finally, it would have been impossible to carry out such a huge research project without the generous funding and encouragement of Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, the Chairman of the Foundation. To him is due our deep gratitude for making this survey a reality, and making possible the publication of its results which will help scholars throughout the world for many years to come.

The Survey of Islamic Manuscripts was supervised by Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr. We thank him for his generous help and guidance.

Our gratitude is also due to all the scholars throughout the world who have undertaken the task of carrying out the survey in their own countries and thus have helped the Foundation in achieving this aim; the General Editor, Dr Geoffrey J. Roper, who has so patiently edited all the material, is to be thanked sincerely. Without his contribution and knowledge the survey could not have been produced to such a high standard.

Thanks are also due to Charlotte Heap, the Foundation's secretary, who has helped throughout this project.

Hadi Sharifi
Secretary-General