

# Wolfgang Voigt (1911-1982) and the Cataloguing of Oriental Manuscripts in Germany

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At a time where the swiftly developing technological tasks of librarianship tend to gain precedence over manuscript matters, it is useful to point to the fact that the vastly increased production in the field of Oriental studies in recent decades is due, not only to archival research, but to a large degree to the fundamental research done connected with manuscript description. In this connection Wolfgang Voigt deserves to be remembered, who was the first director of the most extensive Oriental manuscript project ever carried out.

Wolfgang Voigt was born in Berlin on July 17, 1911, and died there on August 30, 1982. He studied Indology, Iranian languages and theology at the University of Berlin (1931-1935) and at Marburg (1935-1936), where he also took up Tibetan and comparative religion. There he received his doctorate, in 1936, for a dissertation on the role of the animal in Zoroastrian religion. A year later he passed his examination in Protestant theology in Berlin, but turned to librarianship in 1938. By the time he had got an appointment at the Preussische Staatsbibliothek, the Second World War had begun. He served with the air force and was severely wounded and taken prisoner. Returning to Marburg, he became a librarian in the Westdeutsche Bibliothek which had been founded there after the end of the war. Next to his work in the users' department, he helped recover the holdings of the Preussische Staatsbibliothek and rebuild its renowned Oriental Department. Among the recovered holdings the Oriental manuscripts held a special place. By that time consciousness of the need for manuscript catalogues had grown; the average age of the Berlin catalogues was then eighty years. Much energy was spent on the preliminaries. It was acknowledged that the importance of these manuscript holdings merited their being covered according to modern standards, that is, extensively. Voigt drew up a pilot questionnaire to be used for manuscript description, derived from the experiences of the German indologists.

In 1957 the *Katalogisierung der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland* (KOHD), to give its full name, was established by the German Oriental Society, in close cooperation with and financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, to describe existing holdings

of Oriental manuscripts with the collaboration of public libraries in the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. Financing this project, either through inviting university teachers to take part in it as part of their research or by employing full-time specialized catalogue workers, received a high level of priority. Dr. W. Treue looked after the project in the DFG. Manuscript description was not mistaken, as it still sometimes is, for one of the service-functions of the librarian. The drawing-up of hand-lists, useful in itself, was excluded from the KOHD from the start. For practical reasons, work on the KOHD began with the holdings of the former Preussische Staatsbibliothek: those which are now kept in the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz as well as those kept in the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, Berlin (DDR). Estimates were soon surpassed. In 1957 it was believed that there were 14.000 uncatalogued Oriental manuscripts in the public libraries of the Federal Republic and the DDR, and that five or six years were needed to produce 12 or 14 volumes. Now, 28 years later, we know that about 90.000 manuscripts have to be catalogued. Wolfgang Voigt became the life and soul of the project. He possessed the energies and intelligence required to run the ever-growing undertaking next to his duties as a librarian, and he had the ability to inspire those around him to put into practice what had been planned. He did not require his manuscript researchers, professors of standing or young doctors paid by the DFG, to commit themselves to publish so many pages a year. In the end, he always did get the volumes of his authors whom he encouraged and whose work he sincerely appreciated. Throughout the sixties everyone connected with the project valued the Marburg library not only as a reservoir of manuscripts, but as a place of inspiration. Hours of seclusion in the stacks which were hot in summer and very cold in winter were followed by the cheerfulness of evening gatherings around Voigt and by occasional excursions in the woodlands around Marburg. Official meetings were held in 1961 and 1965. In the course of time the manuscript holdings, faithfully guarded by G. Meier, went to Berlin. The crowded Marburg library, the Depot at Tübingen, all these were successively abandoned for the newly-built Staatsbi-



Wolfgang Voigt. Marburg 1965.

bliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin, but Marburg and Voigt's office there, with I. Wagner in charge, remained the centre for many years.

As a matter of course Voigt had taken on the editorship of the *Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland* (VOHD), the well-known catalogue series. He was a resourceful and energetic editor and had found an ideal publisher in Franz Steiner who with K. Jost and G. Hoppen attended to the attractive edition of the catalogues. 82 volumes of the VOHD and its valuable by-product, the *Supplement*, have appeared. 32 volumes are in the press or in manuscript. Owing to the central position of manuscripts in Oriental studies, the VOHD benefits not only the various philologies, but also a whole range of other disciplines, such as history, history of ideas, islamology or the history of medicine.

Thus, when Voigt retired as a librarian, he well deserved to be honoured, among others, by the honorary degree conferred on him by the University of Hamburg and the Festschrift entitled *Folia Rara*. Other institutions were thankful for his qualities as an organizer with world-wide contacts; he was First Secretary of the German Oriental Society from 1962 to 1977

and he helped founding the German Oriental Institute in Beirut; he flew thousands of miles to present the cause of manuscript conservation in Nepal and to open, in 1970, the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project. Brought up with an idea of duty and service, Voigt maintained his upright bearing when, in the mid-sixties, he came back from one of his Eastern travels, ill and in pain. With unflagging enthusiasm he continued his work for the *Katalogisierung* until his death. His work was carried on until the summer of 1985 by his successor as a librarian, the regretted Dr. Dieter George.

#### LITERATURE

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