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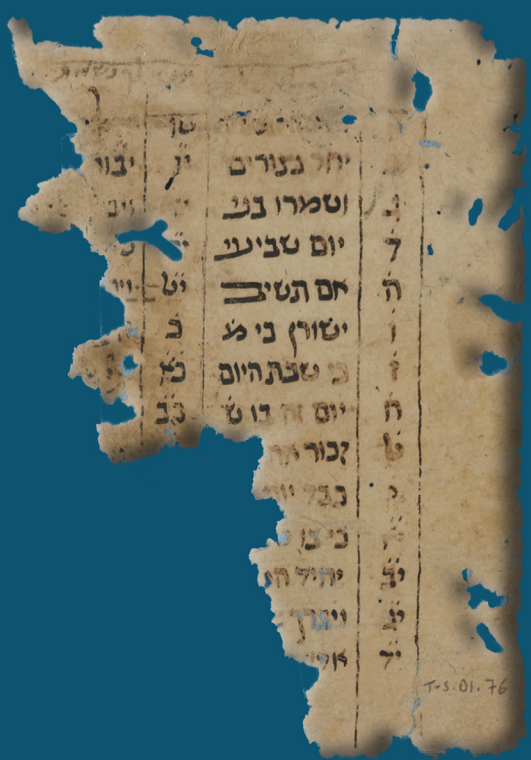
Synopses and Lists
Textual Practices in the Pre-Modern World

Edited by Teresa Bernheimer and Ronny Vollandt



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Cover image: A fragment of a numbered and tabulated list of 22 biblical and rabbinic passages relating to the Sabbath, each referenced by means of a short lemma (T-S D1.76 from the Cambridge Genizah Collection). Courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.
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The fonts used in this volume are Charis SIL, SBL Hebrew, SBL Greek, Scheherazade New, Estrangelo Edessa, and Serto Antioch Bible.

INTRODUCTION
TEXTUAL PRACTICES: SYNOPSES AND LISTS[1]

Teresa Bernheimer and Ronny Vollandt

"In the beginning, there was the list," or so one might start a history of human writing. Lists are among the earliest written records; they are also among the earliest forms of scholarship. While a list may be defined as an enumeration of items, be they ideas, people, events, or terms, a synopsis is a particular kind of list, "a list in more than one dimension," as Martin Wallraff puts it in his contribution to this volume. To understand how lists and synopses were planned, produced, and consumed is to gain insight into the practices of what one might call the 'management of knowledge' in a time before our own. Lists and synopses entail

[1] We would like to thank the Center for Advanced Studies (CAS) at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich, particularly Managing Director Annette Mayer and Academic Coordinator Julia Schreiner, for providing the framework and financial support for our research focus *Textual Practices in the Pre-Modern World: Texts and Ideas between Aksum, Constantinople, and Baghdad*, which allowed us to organise a number of exciting interdisciplinary meetings, among them the workshops that led to this volume.

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a variety of textual practices to allow storing, retrieving, selecting, and organising knowledge. Both make deliberate—yet not always explicit—choices as to what is included and excluded, thereby creating lasting hierarchies and canons.

The present volume is the product of two workshops on 'Synopses and Lists', held in 2019 and 2021 as part of the research focus 'Textual Practices in the Pre-Modern World: Texts and Ideas between Aksum, Constantinople and Baghdad', which was generously supported and funded by the Centre for Advanced Study (CAS) at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU) Munich. The research focus examined the textual practices among the great intellectual traditions in pre-modern times: the ancient Near East, ancient philosophy, and the three monotheist religions Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Aiming to understand how lists and synopses function in different types of literature, the workshops particularly looked to offer a historical and transcultural perspective, highlighting the centrality of lists and synopses as textual practice, that is, as a form of textual communication that is integral to scholarly writing.

The theoretical literature on lists has substantially grown in recent years. Two collected volumes should be particularly highlighted, as they offer a substantial bibliography and state-of-the-art discussion of list theory: *Forms of List-Making: Epistemic, Literary, and Visual Enumeration* and *Le pouvoir des listes au Moyen Âge*.[2] Lists, as the latter title states, play an important role in

[2] Barton et al., *Epistemic, Literary, and Visual Enumeration*; Anheim, *Le pouvoir des listes au Moyen Âge*.

knowledge-making, and thus in the creation of power structures; this aspect was already remarked upon in Jack Goody's chapter on lists in his seminal *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, which has also formed a common background for the discussions in this volume.[3] Goody identified three kinds of lists that remain helpful in the broad categorisation (listing) of the subject: the inventory, a retrospective list that sorts and stores data; the shopping list, essentially a guide for future action, a plan, from which items can be struck off; and the lexical list, a proto-dictionary that is particularly prominent among early Mesopotamian writings. As Enrique Jiménez shows in his contribution to this volume, lexical lists underlie other early literary genres "at the genesis of writing." What all lists have in common is their emphasis on ordering, a sorting of items or ideas when speech is committed to writing.

So far, the emphasis of list studies has been on Western cultures. Thus, Umberto Eco's rich and inspirational *Il vertigine della lista* offers a discussion of a vast range of lists, from textual to visual and musical—though exclusively drawn from Western culture.[4] In his analysis, Eco suggests that lists are more than simple arrangements of items. They are a rhetorical device used to amplify a message, select and shape information, and create aesthetic appeal. Lists are "the origin of culture," our attempt to "make infinity comprehensible."[5]

The present volume aims to broaden the perspective by focusing on textual traditions from the eastern Mediterranean,

[3] Goody, *Savage Mind*, 80.

[4] Eco, *Il vertigine della lista*.

[5] Eco in Beyer and Gorris, 'Interview with Umberto Eco'.

where Eco's distinction between "practical" and "poetical" lists equally applies. In the present volume, however, the focus on the East is not exclusive, as we hope to emphasise a transcultural perspective and the universality of list-making as a textual practice among the great intellectual traditions of the pre-modern world. The common denominator as regards definition has been Robert Belknap's formulation of the term 'list' as "a formally organised block of information that is composed of a set of members."[6] Belknap argues that lists are not mere collections of items but rather a literary device with profound meaning. He suggests that lists serve as a tool for organising thoughts, ideas, and experiences, providing a sense of order and coherence; they have aesthetic, cognitive, and symbolic significance that contributes to the overall meaning and impact of a text. In this volume, Belknap's definition provides a starting point for the more specialised discussions that each context requires. Indeed, each of the 10 chapters begins with a brief review of lists and contextualisation as pertinent to the respective topic.

The volume opens with the contribution by Enrique Jiménez on 'Quotations from Lexical Lists and Other Texts in Later Mesopotamian Commentaries'. As Jiménez shows, lists represent the oldest, and most pervasive, scholarly genre in ancient Mesopotamia. Cuneiform commentaries, first attested in the first millennium BCE, can be regarded as a genre derived from lexical lists. Jiménez's paper studies the ways in which lexical lists are

[6] Belknap, *The List*, 15.

cited in commentaries, and compares them with quotations from texts other than lexical lists.

Lists in different genres are also the focus of Lennart Lehmhaus's contribution, 'A Rabbinic Epistemic Genre: Creating Knowledge through Lists and Catalogues'. Lehmhaus focuses on the variegated forms and functions of lists as adaptable containers as reflected in the practice of list-making in Jewish textual traditions from late antiquity, commonly known as rabbinic or talmudic literature. As he shows, rabbinic works deploy lists for different discursive purposes—exegetical, homiletical, narrative—embedded in their ancient Near Eastern surroundings and based on a long tradition derived from biblical and other ancient Jewish traditions. After a survey of the history of ancient Jewish lists, their broader cultural entanglements, and pertinent scholarship, Lehmhaus discusses some theoretical approaches to the literary and epistemological features of lists within three main frameworks: information, instruction, and enquiry. Lehmhaus argues that rabbinic texts deploy the versatility or affordance of the list not only for ordering knowledge, but also for the very process of knowledge, turning them into a powerful 'epistemic genre'. Consequently, lists do not serve as mere containers for knowledge that circulated apart from their usage. In fact, the rabbinic authors may have arrived at certain conclusions precisely in and through lists in which specific concepts or taxonomies were tried out before becoming more manifest or substantiated. This main argument is exemplified by focusing on complex types of list in two tractates of the Babylonian Talmud, which can be described as clusters, sequences, or, most compellingly, as catalogues.

A catalogue as a list, more precisely a book list, is also the focus of Liv Ingeborg Lied's 'The Unruly Books of Abdisho of Nisibis: Book Lists, Canon Discourse, and the Quest for Lost Writings'. Lied critically engages scholarship on the list of Old Testament books in Abdisho of Nisibis's (d. 1318) Syriac *Catalogue of the Books of the Church*. Focusing on the trajectories in scholarship that have focused on the Christian biblical canon and the lost books of early Judaism, the essay explores the entries that have proven challenging to this scholarship. The unruly entries of Abdisho's list fall into three categories: writings that are only known by title and which do not survive as extant and available texts, writings known by multiple titles, and entries that do not comply with the scholarly imagination of an Old Testament book. A new look at the epistemological and ontological status of these categories of entries provides a correction to the treatment of book lists by modern and contemporary scholars and a new appreciation of the many ways of knowing (about) books in a manuscript culture.

The contribution by Peter Tarras, 'A List in Three Versions: Revisiting al-Kindī's *On Definitions*', draws attention to the transmission process in the study of lists. Tarras examines a definition list in the Arabic philosophical tradition, a well-known text commonly attributed to the 'philosopher of the Arabs' al-Kindī (d. after 252/866). The study of this list, thought to stand at the beginning of the career of this literary format in that tradition, offers insights into the way in which Arabic philosophy emerged in the early Abbasid caliphate. However, the manuscripts that transmit it witness three divergent versions. Further, each version

testifies not to a well-ordered text, but to a more or less loose assemblage of technical terms harvested from philosophy and related fields. This raises a number of questions as to the structure, function, and use of this text. This study attempts to show that these questions can be addressed fruitfully once we attend to the stratified compositional process from which the three versions of this text must have emerged. Its manuscript witnesses represent the latest stage in this process. After a brief survey of previous scholarship, the study thus begins with a review of the manuscript evidence, in order to make observations as to the text's codicological settings and paratextual features. It proceeds with an analysis of its different structural levels. The conclusion that can be drawn from this enquiry is that this definition list has not reached us as one unified literary entity, but in the form of three distinct historical artefacts, which owe themselves to the sum of the intentions of their users/producers.

Transmission is also a central theme in Matthew P. Monger's contribution. 'A Syriac List of the Names of the Wives of the Patriarchs in BL Add 14620' looks at the way in which scribal activity played a role in the transmission of lists as individual units—free from the work from which the knowledge was extracted. By viewing the list as its own composition, the function and transmission of the list become clearer. As the list is viewed as a work in its own right, the way in which the scribe interacted with the base text helps allows us to analyse the specific context in which the current list was produced. As Monger shows, the book of Genesis systematically omits the names of the women in the generations between Adam and Eve and Abraham and Sarah,

but two different works from antiquity gave names to the women of each of these generations: Jubilees and the Cave of Treasures. The names of the wives of the patriarchs were then extracted and circulated in a number of different historical, linguistic, and manuscript contexts throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, including in list form. The chapter provides an analysis of a Syriac list of the names of the wives of the patriarchs previously not discussed in scholarship, found in London, British Library Additional Manuscript 14620, fol. 30, and argues that the list in that manuscript is based on a list of the names of the wives of the patriarchs from the Jubilees tradition but supplemented at several points with knowledge that must ultimately come from the Cave of Treasures, making the list especially interesting in discussions of the transmission of the names.

The chapter by Teresa Bernheimer, 'Revisiting Lists in Early Islamic Historiography', examines lists as a crucial part of early Islamic historiography: lists provide the broad frameworks of organisation of the sources, and are ubiquitous in their content. As Bernheimer shows, lists in early Islamic historical works are not simply enumerations of people, events, or tax payments, but an important narrative strategy in the overall historiographic project of early Islam. Understanding lists as textual practice highlights their importance in the forging of a new cultural narrative and memory of early Islam, and emphasises their function as a principal scholarly form in historical writing.

Martin Wallraff's 'A List in Three Dimensions: The Case of Eusebius's Canon Tables of the Gospels' highlights the potential complexity of lists in ancient book culture. The canon tables of

the gospels, composed by Eusebius of Caesarea in the first half of the fourth century, are a new form of synopsis: a list in three dimensions which uses both the extension (length and breadth) of a page in a codex, and the hypertextuality within the codex (intratextual references back and forth). In the antique culture of the book, this system raises the list to a new level of complexity. Given the extraordinary success of the device, to which many hundreds of extant copies in numerous languages attest, the impact on viewing habits and textual practices was enormous.

List documents of a very different kind are the subject of the contribution by Rebecca Ullrich, 'Lists of the Songs of Ascents (Pss 120–134) in the Cairo Genizah: Their Form and its Implications'. In the Cairo Genizah there are fragments containing lists of Psalms 120–34, the Songs of Ascents. All of them can be dated to the period from the tenth to the thirteenth century in Fustat. Given that these lists are single pieces in the Cairo Genizah, they have to be analysed without their specific context. Ullrich provides an introduction to list documents in the Cairo Genizah, noting that the most noticeable common feature of the lists examined is their small size. In addition, shorthand is used in all the fragments. Sometimes the place of the psalm in the prayer can be deduced from other entries. In some of them, the psalms were written on the back of the fragment, which suggests a secondary use of the paper. As a conclusion, Ullrich suggests that these lists were probably used in a private liturgical context and may have served as memory aids in prayer.

The possibilities of a rethinking of well-known lists when seen through the lens of other fields is exemplified in the contribution of Maroussia Bednarkiewicz, 'Regularity and Variation in Islamic Chains of Transmission'. Bednarkiewicz examines the *isnād*, a list of narrators' names which precedes an account about Islam's prophet or his companions, and indicates its origin. The content and the form of this list have been studied in different fields. Islamicists have scrutinised the names contained in the *isnād* in order to assess the authenticity of the following account and uncover potential fraudsters. Computer scientists, in turn, have focused on form: they attempted to exploit the regular succession of names and transmission terms to develop algorithms capable of distinguishing *isnād* from non-*isnād* texts. In her contribution, Bednarkiewicz opens a novel horizon and analyses the structural variations of the *isnād* within the old and universal context of list-making. A twofold methodology, combining traditional and computational text analysis, allows her to characterise the actual contours of the *isnād* in a large corpus of texts and propose a hierarchy of functions linked to the different variations observed.

The final contribution, 'Chapter Lists in Giant and Beneventan Bibles: Some Preliminary Remarks' by Marilena Maniaci, examines the so-called *capitula*, or chapter lists, that introduce the individual biblical books in the majority of Latin Bibles, particularly prior to the thirteenth century, when the 'Paris Bible' made its appearance and brought with it a new chapter subdivision of the biblical text. The Latin *capitula* briefly summarise, chapter by chapter, the contents of each section of the biblical

text, or reproduce the words or the section's initial sentence. Several sequences or 'families' of lists are attested, which differ (even significantly) in the number, extension, and wording of the individual *tituli*, but also in the way they are arranged on the manuscript page and distinguished from the main text. The existence of different sets of lists for the same book, the textual instability of the individual chapter titles (*tituli*) and of their succession, even within the same set, and the not always linear relationship with the corresponding biblical text induce one to wonder about the chapters' functions and the exact meaning of their extensive—although not universal—presence among the paratexts of the Latin Bible between antiquity and the end of the monastic era. Maniaci's contribution, which is a prelude to a much wider study, aims to provide some examples of the potential interest of an in-depth analysis of the chapters, not only as a tool to highlight relationships between individual codices or operate groupings within specific strands of textual tradition, but also to deepen our knowledge of the practices of manufacture and transcription of the biblical text and of its accompanying paratexts.