

# Cataloging Islamic Manuscripts



## A Brief Introduction

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## Background

The Islamic Manuscript Collection in the Princeton University Library comprises approximately 10,000 manuscripts written in the Arabic script that encompass a substantial timespan (7<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century) and a broad geographical area. From December 2010 to October 2013, I worked on a project funded by the David A. Gardner '69 Magic Project to supply original cataloging for a portion of the Library's Islamic manuscript holdings. While the vast majority of the Arabic manuscripts had been described in printed catalogs, most of the Persian manuscripts were noted in checklists with minimal information and thus were selected for original cataloging in order to provide better access and a more complete picture of the Library's holdings.

## What Is an Islamic Manuscript?

- ✦ Generally refers to handwritten texts in the Arabic script.
- ✦ May be archival (i.e. government documents, letters, etc.), but more frequently refers to a literary text in the form of a bound codex.
- ✦ May include manuscripts produced by non-Muslims in predominantly Muslim areas.
- ✦ Is written in one of a wide range of languages, such as: Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Azerbaijani, Uighur, Urdu, Punjabi, Malay.

# Resources for Cataloging Islamic Manuscripts

A literary manuscript is an unpublished resource. Each manuscript is unique and must be described individually. In FRBR terms, the manifestation and item entities are identical for manuscripts.

## General Manuscript Cataloging

**Pass, Gregory A. *Descriptive cataloging of ancient, medieval, renaissance, and early modern manuscripts*. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2002.**

In addition to RDA, *Descriptive Cataloging of Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance, and Early Modern Manuscripts*, better known as *AMREMM*, should be consulted for guidelines on providing enhanced bibliographic, physical and historical description for manuscripts. RDA itself gives few guidelines for the cataloging of literary manuscripts.

Although this guide is intended for manuscripts dating up to the mid-17th century, that guideline is based on the history of manuscript production in Europe. In Muslim countries the printing press did not take off until the mid- to late 19th century, resulting in a much longer timespan for manuscript production.

AMREMM is based on AACR2, but a few simple modifications can bring its guidelines in line with RDA, as was done at Princeton when RDA was adopted in 2012.

## Islamic Manuscript Cataloging

**Déroche, François, et al. *Islamic codicology: an introduction to the study of manuscripts in Arabic script*. London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2006.**

An illustrated introduction to the history and structure of Islamic manuscripts: writing surfaces, quires, inks, page layout, craftsmen, scripts, ornamentation, bookbinding, and historical evidence.

**Gacek, Adam. *Arabic manuscripts: a vademecum for readers*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.**

An illustrated resource for terminology pertaining to the codicology and paleography Arabic-script manuscripts.

# Identifying the Text of Islamic Manuscripts

Title pages and colophons were not routinely provided on Islamic manuscripts. *AMREMM* 0B1 provides detailed rules for the preferred source of information that are helpful for manuscript identification.

## Information from the Resource

The preferred source of information is the manuscript itself, meaning the text and any parts that are contemporary with the text. The title of the text is taken first from the title page or colophon; in their absence, one looks for the title in its fullest form from a number of other sources: opening or closing rubric, running title, contents list, incipit, explicit, or other evidence.

In Islamic manuscripts, the best place to look for the title if there is no contemporary title page is in the introduction, where the author frequently names himself and states the title of his work. If one is lucky the title will be rubricated and easy to find.

In the absence of information contemporary with the text, one can take the title from any later source in the manuscript. Such information is bracketed when cited in the bibliographic record.

## Information from Reference Works

It is not unusual to be faced with a text that has no title or author. In this case, the cataloger must use the incipit to identify the text. A Google search of the incipit may turn up a citation for the text that would identify the title and author, but frequently the process requires searching in various manuscript catalogs. Fortunately in the case of Persian manuscripts, a large number of these catalogs are available online.

***Bank-i ittila`at-i kutub va nusakh-i khatti. Khanah-i Kitab.*** Retrieved from <http://www.aghabozorg.ir/>

Digital access to printed manuscript catalogs for libraries in Iran.

***Noor International Microfilm Center. NoorMicroFilmIndia.com, 2013.*** Retrieved from <http://www.noormicrofilmindia.com/en/>

Digital access to printed manuscript catalogs for libraries in India.

***Storey, C.A. Persian literature, a bio-bibliographical survey. London: Luzac, 1927-***

The canonical reference work on Persian texts, arranged topically.

# The Bibliographic Record

Because a manuscript is a unique object, it is recommended that the cataloger provide details concerning its physical and historical aspects in addition to the bibliographical elements. Institutions can choose a level of description ranging from a nearly complete absence of physical and historical description to an extremely detailed one.

At Princeton, I took a middle-of-the-road approach that attempted to balance between the need to provide the details necessary to accomplish FRBR user tasks and the need to catalog as many volumes as possible within the project's budgetary constraints.

## Physical Description

**Format:** While most Islamic manuscripts are bound codices, a few are scrolls, individual quires, or loose sheets.

**Dimensions:** The page size, writing surface, and binding size are given in millimeters.

### **Source of title**

**Writing material:** Usually European paper (with watermark) or Arabic paper (no watermark, with or without chain lines); very early manuscripts were written on parchment.

**Script:** Type of script, size, calligraphic or casual.

**Layout:** Number of lines and columns per page.

**Decoration:** Headpieces, frontispieces, marginal decorations.

**Visual content:** Illustrations, charts, diagrams, etc.

**Binding:** Style of binding (Islamic or European), decorations, doublures.

### **Overall condition**

## Historical Description

**Marginal glosses and other texts:** Occasionally a separate work is written in the margins which may or may not have a relationship to the main text.

**Corrections:** Either by the copyist or a later hand.

### **Ownership statements and seal impressions**

### **Dedications**

### **Transmission certificates**

### **Birth/death records**

### **Borrower statements and other notes**



Search Request: Guided = (Mujallad-i sālīs min Rawẓat al-ṣafā)[ in Title ]

Search Results: Displaying 1 of 1 entries

[◀ previous](#) [next ▶](#)[brief view](#) [long view](#) [more like this](#) [staff view](#)**Author/Artist:** Mīr Khvānd, Muḥammad ibn Khāvandshāh, 1433-1498.میر خواند، محمد بن خاوندشاه، 1498-1433.**Uniform title:** [Rawẓat al-ṣafā. Jild 3][روضه الصفا. جلد 3]**Title:** Mujallad-i sālīs min Rawẓat al-ṣafā.مجلد ثالث من روضة الصفا.**Published/Created:** [1620]**Description:** 326 leaves : paper ; 270 x 160 (202 x 111) mm bound to 280 x 172 mm**Summary note:** Volume 3 of Rawẓat al-ṣafā, containing the history of the twelve Imams, the Umayyads, and the Abbasids.**Notes:** Ms. codex.

Title from colophon on fol. 326a.

On back cover: Label reading "32 Rozate Sofha / Garden of Purity / 79."

Physical description: 20 lines per page; written in nasta'liq in black on tan glazed, laid Arabic paper.

Rubrication and catchwords. Text framed in blue, gold, and red; edges painted blue. Some staining, smudging, and insect damage. Some leaves ragged and/or detached; fol. 1 has been pasted onto a sheet of machine-made paper.

Decoration: Illuminated 'unwān in gold and color on fol. 1b; outer marginal border consisting of a gold foliar design, mostly trimmed away, on fol. 1b, 2a.

Origin: 29 Muḥarram 1029 H [5 January 1620], by Mīr Muḥammad Amīn (fol. 326a).

**Binding note:** Plain boards with brown paper wrapper.**Language(s):** Persian.**Provenance:** On fol. 326b, note in English by Chas. Boddam, Lucknow, 7 October 1786; note in Persian dated 1228 H [1813].**References:** Rieu, C. Catalogue of the Persian manuscripts, I, 89**Subject(s):** Manuscripts, Persian --New Jersey --Princeton.  
Islamic Empire --History --Early works to 1800.**Form/Genre:** Manuscripts, Persian --17th century.Illuminated manuscripts --Islamic countries --17th century.Headpieces (layout features) --Islamic countries --17th century.**Original language:** Incipit: حمد و ثنای که سبحان ملاء اعلی از ادا شمه از آن عاجز آندد شکر و سپاسی که معکفان سوامع بالا در گفتن آن بتقصیر اعتراف نمایند**Location:** Rare Books: South East (MSS)**Call number:** Islamic Manuscripts, New Series no. 1808q Oversize

# Sample Terminology

Walters Museum MS628

Poetry of Hafiz

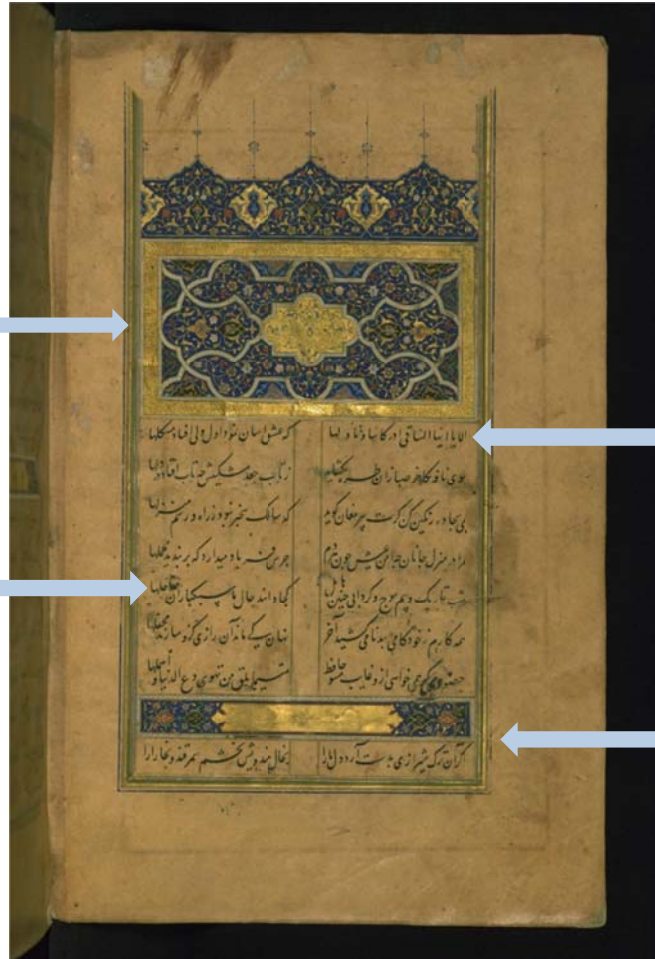
# Incipit Page

Headpiece  
(`unwan, sarlawh)  
May contain title.

Nasta`liq script

Incipit

Text, columns  
framed in gold

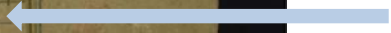


# Colophon

Damp-staining



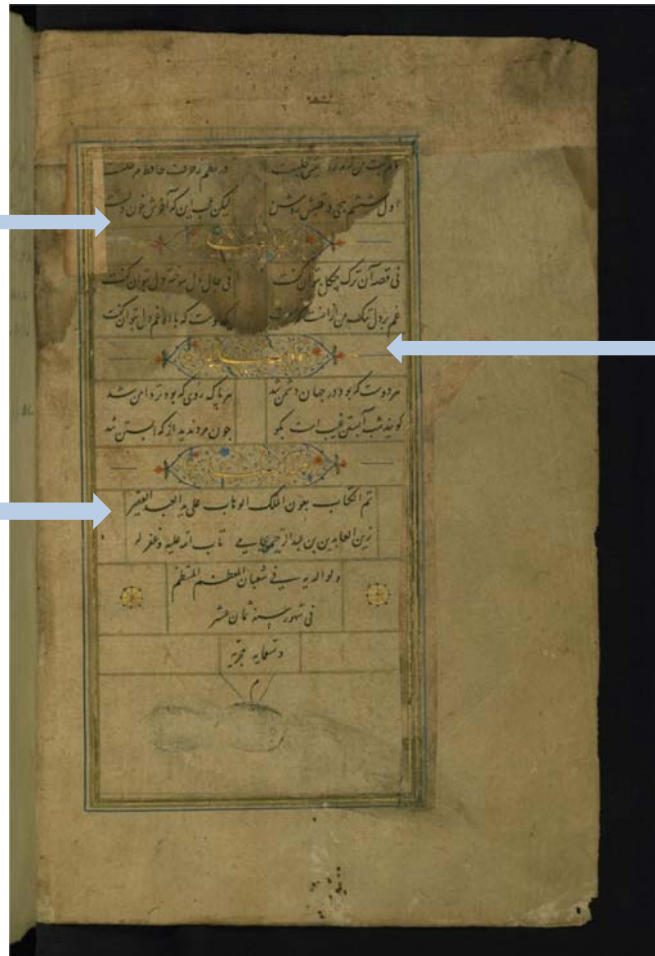
Decorative header



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Zayn al-`Abidin ibn  
`Abd al-Rahman al-Jami,  
Sha`ban 918 Hijri  
[October 1512]



# Binding

