Layout / ruling, media and ornament ; Scripts & hands

An Introduction to Islamic Manuscript Culture | Session 3

20 May 2019
Evyn Kropf
In this session

Overview of approaches to layout / ruling (accommodating textual and visual content), various media employed, and ornament in Islamic manuscript cultures

Introduction to variety of script models encountered and approaches to characterizing hands (palaeography)

Illuminated opening of Isl. Ms. 1044, Maghribī copy of Dalā'il al-khayrāt
Layout (mise en page)

Layout achieves particular arrangement of content for a given page / page opening

Careful layout choices ensure efficient and / or aesthetic distribution of text and visual content, accommodate simultaneous presentation of multiple texts (typically in a central written area and on the margins but also interlinear and in other arrangements), and accommodate later annotations

Complex layouts serve to slow reading, encourage lingering, devotional contemplation and other means of interacting with the object and its contents

Layout can also be standardized to achieve visual recognition associated with a particular genre, work or paratext
Ruling

Ruling provides lines to prescribe the arrangement of content and guide the writing.

Parchment was often scored and pricked.

Paper could be pressed against a ruling board (*miṣṭarah*) to form an impression of blind guidelines for lines of text in a central written area and / or on the margins or to frame / outline an area to contain text and visual content / illustration.

Impression of ruling board visible in *Isl. Ms. 959*
Distinctive layouts

Colophon

Often presented in a triangular shape or rectangular shape distinguished from the preceding text

See both across production contexts, though triangular became increasingly popular and particularly favored in Ottoman-era manuscripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Triangular eg</th>
<th>Rectangular eg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isl. Ms. 458  (1349 or 50)</td>
<td>Isl. Ms. 588  (1335)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isl. Ms. 313  (Iran? 1488)*</td>
<td>Isl. Ms. 529  (Cairo? 1466)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isl. Ms. 103  (Istanbul, 1705)</td>
<td>Isl. Ms. 883  (Tabrīz, 1827)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Colophon in Isl. Ms. 313, p.862
Distinctive layouts

Prose

Single column with ample margins (modest to exaggerated)

Sometimes intended and exploited to accommodate marginal annotations (cf Isl. Ms. 1051, pictured), in other cases left blank

Variations across manuscript cultures / time / place
Distinctive layouts

Poetry / verse

Typically presented in a divided column layout that may vary further (two column or four column, additional text on the diagonal in the margins, etc) according to production context, format, and length of the versified work eg

- two column, text continuing on the diagonal in the margins Isl. Ms. 297
- two column, distinct texts on the diagonal in the margins Isl. Ms. 407 (pictured)

Cf UCLA MS M343 Yūsuf va Zulaykhā (1862 or 3)
Distinctive layouts

Qaṣīdat al-Burdah

Accommodates text of poem and accompanying amplification

Often saṭr and first few words of the ‘ajuz of each bayt fill the column width horizontally and the remainder of the ‘ajuz is appended, slanting down diagonally. Three lines of amplification are centered below the saṭr and first few words of the ‘ajuz

cf. Isl. Ms. 228 (pictured)
Distinctive layouts

Commentary (ṣaḥḥ) / supercommentary (ḥāshiyah)

Layout in which commentary and text being commented upon (matn) are interspersed, presented seamlessly and distinguished by contrasting ink, keywords, and / or overlining cf Isl. Ms. 145

Layout in which commentary (usually supercommentary) is provided interlinear and / or on the margins of the matn cf al-Kāfiyah Isl. Ms. 625 and in UCLA MS M1363

Not uncommon to have supercommentary upon commentary upon text all presented together! cf Isl. Ms. 73 and Isl. Ms. 112

*Important to note* that most “marginal commentary” is not the original composition of the copyist, but transcriptions of excerpts of existing commentaries / translations / etc including those of the author of the main text (minhīyāt). Further, lengthy marginal texts may not be commentary at all but excerpts from a non-derivative work cf Isl. Ms. 1051
Distinctive layouts

Standard Ottoman copies of the Qur’an (17th century on)

*ayet ber kenar* layout in which each page has 15 lines, opening with the beginning of a verse and closing with the close of a verse

Decoration (verse markers etc) also relatively standardized

Eases reading / memorization and translates to a standard material form of 300 folios total with each *juz’* (30th) of Qur’anic text in 10 folios

Somewhat more challenging for calligrapher who must manipulate the spacing, expanding between words / letters on certain lines and contracting between others

Particularly popular in pocket-size during 17th and 18th centuries

cf [Isl Ms 168](https://example.com) (Istanbul, 1627)
Distinctive layouts

Paintings

Might be full page (filling the written area or even spilling into the margin with fields left for a couple of lines of text in the upper and / or lower registers) or three-quarters or half page, accommodating more text. Often preferred for narrative illustration, depictions of sites or maps (cf Isl. Ms. 280, Isl. Ms. 386, Isl. Ms. 347, Isl. Ms. 606 and Isl. Ms. 773)

For diagrammatic illustration (explicative but also often technical, even functional, and more schematic), drawings and paintings are more often inset within the text or placed in the margins (cf Isl. Ms. 120) but may also be full page (cf Isl. Ms. 826)

Cf UCLA MS Ar. 109 (Biomed Ms. Coll. no. 61) Risālat nujūm, MS M343 Yūsuf va Zulaykhā (1862 or 3), MS M692 Sharḥ-i Divān-i ʿAlī
Preparations of inks, pigments / dyes and precious metals used with writing implements (mainly variations on the cut reed pen = *qalam*) and brushes for painting (illustration and painted decoration)

Numerous recipes appear across texts in Arabic, Persian and Turkish with variation in use across manuscript cultures / periods / geography

Preferred elaborated color palettes similarly vary with decorative styles (eg use of pink in 18th century Ottoman painted decoration) though significant use of ultramarine and gold throughout

Contrasting ink often used for headings, keywords, overlining, rule borders, etc very often red. Polychrome (red, blue, green, yellow, brown etc), especially common in the Maghrib (cf. *Isl. Ms. 478*, pictured)
Inks were chiefly either carbon black ink (blacker, more fast, not acidic) or iron gall ink (browner, less stable / uniform, acidic) in numerous variations

On paper, the acidic iron gall ink tends to leave telltale signs of ink burn even breakthrough

A variety of pigments and dyes were used,* natural mineral colors (quite famously ultramarine, orpiment, etc), synthetic colors (lead white, red lead, vermilion, various copper greens eg verdigris etc) and organic colors (indigo, saffron, red lakes esp the insect dyes)

Common binders were gums (esp. gum arabic) and egg white

Gold (almost always alloyed with copper or silver) was used extensively, both as leaf and paint / ink (shell gold). Shades of gold ranged from reddish (more copper) to greenish (more silver). Typically burnished using small stone on end of a shaft

*May describe color but difficult to discern composition of most pigments / dyes in a manuscript apart from chemical analysis (cannot simply tell by hue / shade!)
Ornament / decoration

Painted decoration or illumination*

Frontispieces, title pieces, double-page openings, headpieces, marginal decoration, frames, cloud bands, textual dividers, headings, tail pieces, finisepieces, etc

UCLA MS B415 Hadikatü’s-süada
UCLA MS C3 Kulliyāt-i Saʿdī

In description, use of contrasting inks and illustration may also be mentioned here though functional and convey visual content rather than being purely decorative

*In this context, the term illumination is used more precisely to refer to use of gold with no insinuation of illustration
Ornament / decoration (cont.)

Decorative papers

Dyed / tinted in full or borders only, silhouette papers, silver or gold-flecked or sprinkled, and especially marbled

Typically used for endpapers, borders (especially for mounting calligraphic pieces), or facings for boards (cover)

(cf Isl. Ms. 281, Isl. Ms. 440 etc)

Binding ornaments

Tooling, stamping, with or without use of onlays, filigree, painted compositions - on leather or lacquerwork, decorative papers, and even occasionally metalwork

Calligraphic script (next section)
Scripts

Various models / calligraphic genres for writing Arabic script (modified to accommodate various languages)

Models formally defined and then styles elaborated by calligraphers

Cursive scripts classified in famous six pens (elaboration attributed to Yāqūt al-Mustaʿṣimī, d.1298), rectilinear and curvilinear

muḥaqqaq > rayhān
thuluth > naskh
tawqī‘ > riqā‘

Cf Isl. Ms. 231
Cf Isl. Ms. 401 (pictured)
Traditionally, certain scripts preferred as chancery hands and others as bookhands (with certain scripts preferred for Qur’anic transcription)

Arab chancery: *thuluth, tawqī‘, riqā‘, ghubār*

Iranian and later Ottoman chanceries: *ta‘līq, dīwānī, ruq‘ah, siyāq/siyāqat*

Of course occasionally chancery hands could be employed in books

UCLA MS M1369 Khulāṣat al-tawārīkh (*shikastah, siyāq/siyāqat*)
Bookhands include ‘Abbāsid bookhand (originated in early chancery and was used in books for non-Qur’anic texts), naskh (often preferred for Arabic text even if another script is being used otherwise), nasta‘īq / talik (developed in Iran, preferred for Persian and Turkish), Andalusi, Maghribī, Bihārī, Südänī, Barnāwī etc with some scripts (eg thuluth, tawqi‘, ta‘īq) reserved for display scripts or paratexts only.

For early Qur’anic transcription, mā‘il / Ḥijāzī is followed by Early ‘Abbāsid (Kufic) and Eastern Kufic (New Style or broken cursive). With elaboration of the cursive scripts eventually muḥaqqaq, rayhān and naskh are preferred for transcribing the Qur’an cf Isl. Ms. 1047 (pictured), muḥaqqaq, likely 15th century Egypt or Syria.
Characterizing & deciphering hands

Not all hands are calligraphic! Still valuable to characterize them as coherently as possible, particularly in the interest of discerning any regional and chronological trends (somewhat challenging for models like *naskh*).

For that attend to letterforms, ligatures, spacing, relation to the baseline, size, counters, pointing, serifs, etc.

Characterizing a hand is one stage of palaeographical analysis. Palaeography aims at classifying scripts and hands, deciphering handwritten texts, and dating and placing manuscripts on the basis of their handwriting.

As with codicological approaches, most helpful to begin with dated and localized exemplars Cf *Isl. Ms. 100* (still face challenges of scribal mobility)
Essential Reading

“Ruling and Page Layout” (Déroche et al, Islamic Codicology, p.159-184)


“Instruments and Preparations Used in Book Production” (Déroche et al, Islamic Codicology, p.103-158)


>> analysis of colorants across a sample of 50 painted folios from Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Central Asia dated from the 13th to the 19th centuries CE

“Books and Their Ornamentation” (Déroche et al, Islamic Codicology, p.225-252)


“Craftsmen and the Making of the Manuscript” (Déroche et al, Islamic Codicology, p.185-204)

“Scripts” (Déroche et al, Islamic Codicology, p.205-224)


Resources for Arabic script palaeography (E Kropf)