Paratexts, marks of ownership, other annotations (manuscript notes)

An Introduction to Islamic Manuscript Culture | Session 4

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In this session

Looking beyond the main text(s) to other significant textual elements

Some provided in the course of the production of the copy (transcription, collation / correction), others provided later

Can appear at the opening and close of the volume (on otherwise blank endpapers / folios), at the opening and close of the text, in the margins, even on the exterior of the volume (edges of the text block, spine, etc)

Can reveal history of that particular codex and that particular witness of a given work, details for approximate dating, significance of a particular witness, evolution in form of work, variations in title, historical details on authors / readers, reception / significance in particular communities across time and space, reading / collecting practices, elements of popular culture, etc etc

These include paratexts, marks of ownership, other annotations = “manuscript notes”
Paratexts

Term coined by French literary theorist Gérard Genette in 1982

Paratexts or paratextual elements = textual elements beyond the authorial text(s) which are associated with the production of the copy (MS culture) and its circulation

Inform the reader (intentionally or not) of the copy’s “status and uses” that is production contexts, contents (navigational aids), transmission, and significance / standing (eg being in the hand of the author, from an exemplar in the hand of the author, from an audition in the presence of the author and authorized by the author etc)


Keep in mind that many lengthy marginalia are companion texts intended to have nearly the same weight as the main text, ie for consideration together as a body of authorial texts. Therefore they are not exactly paratexts.
Paratexts in Islamic Manuscript Culture

Can include

[typically found at opening or close of text or volume]

typically found in margins

glosses or commentaries, notabilia / sideheads (which invite the reader to pause and consider a particular place in the text) cf Isl. Ms. 561, corrections, collation marks (cf Isl. Ms. 156, pictured), indications of order / arrangement / extent (such as catchwords, middle of the quire marks, foliation, quire signatures / numbering) & other elements of scribal apparatus
Marks of ownership in Islamic Manuscript Culture

Typically appear at opening and / or close of the volume or text but may also appear at intervals in the margins (cf Isl. Ms. 468)

Mainly subsequent to any patronage statements contemporary with the production of the copy but of course those are also owners’ marks

Usually in the form of inscribed statements or notes (more or less detailed), personal or on behalf of a collector or endowed collection (waqf) (cf Isl. Ms. 16), even for inspection / valuation

May also comprise or be accompanied by seal impressions or stamps (of an individual or for a particular collection / library / endowment cf Isl. Ms. 136)
Marks of ownership in Islamic Manuscript Culture (cont.)

Personal statements often include name(s), manner of acquisition (e.g. purchase, inheritance, gift), date, (cf. Isl. Ms. 247) place and occasionally from whom acquired and even price (cf. Isl. Ms. 554 pictured).

Waqf statements typically detail endowment (by whom, for whom, where, when, formulas to discourage removal) and library (cf. Isl. Ms. 128, Isl. Ms. 859 etc).

Inspection or inventory statements often mention bibliographic details, number of folios, number of illustrations, inventory / registry number, inspector, library, etc.
Other kinds of annotations in Islamic Manuscript Culture

Study / reading (Isl. Ms. 122, Isl. Ms. 635 etc)
Borrowing / loan (Isl. Ms. 644 / Isl. Ms. 863)
Travel (Isl. Ms. 652)
Births (Isl. Ms. 419)
Deaths (Isl. Ms. 626)
Pen trial (Isl. Ms. 590)

Potent formulas for healing or making medical determinations (Isl. Ms. 42)
Protective devices, often for the volume itself (eg (Isl. Ms. 543)
Invocations, poetry, excerpts from other texts
Etc etc
Essential Reading


The History of Books and Collections through Manuscript Notes, Ed. Boris Liebrenz = Special Issue: Journal of Islamic Manuscripts 9, 2-3 (2018)


