Bindings

An Introduction to Islamic Manuscript Culture | Session 2, pt 2

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In this session

Overview of bindings, addressing structure / format, materials, finishing, later interventions (repair, re-covering, etc)

Bookbinder, depicted stamping a binding
On the margins of a folio from the Gulshan Album (Freer Gallery of Art F1954.116)
Figures attributed to Madhava (act. 1582–ca. 1624)
India, Mughal dynasty, ca. 1600
Binding

Provides protection and coherence for the book, stabilizes for long-term consultation / use

Comprised of structural elements, cover, and attachment, each involving materials and techniques that can be characterized as well as possibility of ornament (finishing) and later intervention

Range of variations encountered across Islamic manuscript cultures, but also certain commonalities

Challenging for codicological study, however!
Bindings are often not independently dated, covers are easily detached / replaced / repaired (often quite subtly), only rarely have signature of binder and ability to date based on knowledge of their activity (from external sources), might have some internal evidence (regarding restoration, identifying binder in colophon etc) but must analyze and compare with present state of affairs
Bosch et al (1981), p.38 Fig.3 “Terminology...”
Common features encountered

( across Islamic manuscript cultures)

- Codex (with slight variations as seen earlier, octagonal, agenda, unsewn, etc)
- Unsupported link stitch sewing on two stations or four stations*
- Woven endbands (usually chevron pattern) worked on the book and typically integral to cover attachment
- Cover material affixed to spine over spine lining(s) = tight back
- Cover typically flush with text block (no squares)

*Though do occasionally encounter sewing on recessed supports in 19th century manuscripts!
Variations in features

Structural elements
box binding or not, with flap or not, covers and textblock flush or not (squares), two-piece
binding or not, sewn gatherings or not, number of sewing stations, endbands, attachment,
format etc

Materials
paper (decorative = marbled, stamped, etc, ‘waste’, pasteboard layers), leather, textile,
lacquerwork, metal, thread of silk, linen, or cotton

Ornament (finishing)
techniques = tooling, stamping, filigree applique, painting / lacquerwork
composition = motifs, colors, etc.
material = gold, onlays, inlays, etc.

Interventions / manipulations = repair, re-covering, etc
Sampling of types encountered

Box binding (Déroche Type I)

With flap (= Déroche Type II) cf Isl. Ms. 39 or without flap (= Déroche Type III) Isl. Ms. 270

Two-piece binding cf Isl. Ms. 286, 285, etc

Wrapper bindings (unsewn or individually sewn gatherings) cf Isl. Ms. 17

Pouch for unsewn gatherings cf Isl. Ms. 643

Reproduced from Karin Scheper, The Technique of Islamic Bookbinding, 2nd rev ed 2018
Sampling of materials

- delaminating pasteboards (Isl. Ms. 420)
- leather (Isl. Ms. 39)
- shagreen (leather treatment and/or exotic skin) Isl. Ms. 307, Isl. Ms. 286
- framed binding (frame cover) with marbled paper (Isl. Ms. 631), silk textile (Isl. Ms. 414, Isl. Ms. 370), velvet textile (Isl. Ms. 855) & leather
- use of ‘waste’ (Isl. Ms. 40)
- use of recycled / reused cover (Isl. Ms. 541)
- lacquerwork (Isl. Ms. 285)
Sampling of finishing techniques

- tooling: blind and gold (*Isl. Ms. 70*, *Isl. Ms. 39*)
- block-pressing (*Isl. Ms. 626*)
- filigree appliqué (*Isl. Ms. 330*)
- painting / lacquerwork (*Isl. Ms. 285*, *Isl. Ms. 351*)
Sampling of interventions

Isl. Ms. 541, Isl. Ms. 444, Isl. Ms. 562 v.1 & Isl. Ms. 562 v.2, etc


Subtle edge and fore-edge flap repairs on the cover of Isl. Ms. 444 (ca. 1742-1762)
Essential Reading


“Bookbinding” (Déroche et al, *Islamic Codicology*, p.253-310)
