Structures: the codex & beyond

An Introduction to Islamic Manuscript Culture | Session 2, pt 1

20 May 2019
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In this session

Looking at book structures commonly encountered in Islamic manuscript cultures

Carefully discussing the structure of the codex, its components, and how to assess their arrangement (collation, collation formulas, etc)
Book structures beyond the codex

Roll / scroll

Typically opens vertically in a format known as a *rotulus*, significantly longer than it is wide in which the text is arranged across the width and down the length (cf. *Isl. Ms. 220* etc).

Often used for copies of the Qur’an, amulets / talismans, genealogical charts (*silsilenameler*), almanacs or calendars (*ruzname*) used for determining prayer times etc.
Book structures beyond the codex (cont.)

Concertina / accordion

Hinged together in a format which opens like a concertina / accordion. Mainly used for albums of calligraphy (cf. Isl. Ms. 244 etc)
Variations on the codex such as loose-leaf sheets (not simply unsewn) housed in a wrapper (cf. Isl. Ms. 1061), octagonal format (cf. Isl. Ms. 1067), agenda (cf. Isl. Ms. 1045), etc.

Loose-leaf format commonly used in Sub-Saharan Africa (esp. for the Qur’an)

Octagonal format almost always in miniature with case for copies of the Qur’an that could be attached to standards (sancak Kurani) or otherwise carried for protection.
Components of a codex

Text block

Comprised of gatherings (= quires) of writing material. Typically each quire is a nest of folded bifolia or single folios with stubs stitched through the fold

Sewing

Typically unsupported link stitch with silk, linen or cotton thread on two or four stations to secure the quires together, but can be entirely unsewn / unbound (cf. Isl. Ms. 643) or sewn individually (cf Isl. Ms. 17) and placed in a pouch or wrapper

Cover

Typically covered boards attached and stabilized by endband stitching (primary warp threads) through a spine lining, with cover material affixed to spine of text block by way of pasting to spine linings (tight-back)
Parchment quires (gatherings)

Important to note sequence of hair and flesh sides, presence of a stub, center of gathering, missing folio

Eg Isl. Ms. 162 a


Arrangement is typically flesh facing hair (in contrast to Gregory’s Rule), suggesting sheets of parchment were cut and stacked rather than folded to achieve the desired dimensions. This composition appears to have been used in early Syriac manuscripts as well, and the method of stacking and cutting was used for papyrus.
Paper quires (gatherings)

Most commonly encountered types are quinions V (five bifolia = 10 folios = 20 pages) and quaternions IV (four bifolia = 8 folios = 16 pages)

Others are senions (= sexternions) VI, ternions III, binions II, single bifolium I

Quires with odd numbers of folios are irregular and may either be indicative of a lacuna (missing folio), need to accommodate opening or closing of the volume, or to accommodate available paper stock

In some cases, the same type of gathering is used throughout the codex, in other cases the arrangement alternates and in others it is inconsistent / even incoherent
Systems for maintaining order

Catchwords = repetition of opening word of a following recto on previous verso, typically in the lower inner corner, each folio not just end of quire

Foliation = numbering of each folio / leaf, usually upper outer corner of the recto

Pagination = numbering of each page, typically upper outer corners

Quire signatures / numbering (numerals, full words, abbreviations) often outer corner of first recto of each quire cf Isl. Ms. 532 v.2, Isl. Ms. 91, etc

Middle of the quire marks (strokes, bā’ hindīyah, etc) cf Isl. Ms. 670 (pictured), Isl. Ms. 360 v.4, Isl. Ms. 589
Collation

In this context, collation means the process of establishing of the sequence of gatherings / quires

(same term can also refer to the process of establishing correct transmission by carefully comparing the manuscript copy produced with its model / exemplar)

Check catchwords etc for indication of disorder, missing leaves, etc

Look for centers of quires (sewing, middle of quire marks, fold) and count number of folios center to center

On that basis establish number of folios in each successive quire

Represent with a collation formula, eg: i, 3 VI (36), IV (44), II (48), i (IsI. Ms. 879)
iv, II (4), 4 V (44), IV (52), 2 V (72), VI (84), 8 V (164), V+1 (175), 4 V (215), IV (223), 14 V (363), V-1 (372), 2 V (392), VI (404), 7 (411), i (IsI. Ms. 91)
Trends in composition of quires

Composition of quires can suggest geography / manuscript culture eg

- Quinions are the most commonly encountered type in Arab areas and for Arabic manuscripts across periods. Quaternions are scarcely encountered apart from Ottoman-era modelling of Iranian exemplars (often in Persian).

- Quaternions are the most commonly encountered type in the Iranian world, into Persianate areas, particularly by the 15th and 16th centuries. Also for Persian manuscripts produced elsewhere. In the 14th century however, both quaternions and quinions were being used in the Iranian world.
Essential Reading

“Introduction: Not all books are codices” (Déroche et al, *Islamic codicology*, p.12-15)


Gacek, *Vademecum*