In this session

Fundamentals of describing manuscripts: skills, guidelines, tools & techniques, resources

Description is essential for documenting manuscripts as sources

Descriptive exercises (characterizing features of manuscripts) are also an important means of developing codicological / palaeographical knowledge and knowledge of manuscript cultures
Considerations

Level of description
- Essential level with increasing detail according to time available
- Ranging from observations noting presence of a particular feature, to detailed characterization noting locations, providing transcriptions, etc

Access and handling
- Permitted to examine physical manuscript or only images?
- Photography permitted?
- Limitations on number of manuscripts to request / consult?

Data entry
- Worksheet / template
- Reliable internet access?
- Paper / pencil as well as device
- Backup for device
- Careful file naming
Examination

Strategies
● Work from exterior to interior
● Follow worksheet (eg workshop handout, eg version of Gacek’s data-sheet)
● Examine while collating (if possible)
● Document using photographs as you go (where permitted)
● Follow reading room guidelines!

Tools
● Clean hands (or nitrile gloves for metal cases / bindings etc)
● Ruler / tape measure
● Light source(s)
● Weights and supports
● Pencil and paper and electronic device for recording notes
● Device for photography
Examination

Techniques
● Measurement (page, binding, text block, written area, mould characteristics of paper)
● Collation
  ○ Simple: note number of folios or pages as enumerated
  ○ Detailed: analysis of quires and their structure
● Viewing in transmitted light: assessing watermarks, laid/chain lines, etc
● Viewing in raking light: assessing blind ruling, pricking, other aspects of paper/binding surface
● Gentle handling (where possible) following guidelines of reading room / repository
● Otherwise, careful attention to supplied images
Descriptive elements

(bibliographic, codicological / physical, historical)

Worksheet to guide description (eg https://tinyurl.com/uclalsamicMSShandson)

● Shelfmark / collection details*
● Format / size
● Binding
● Gatherings (quires) ie collation
● Writing material (support)*
● Layout*
● Ornament (painted decoration etc)
● Script & hand*
● Contents (text/composition & visual content)*
● Transcript, History & Transmission (colophon, paratexts & annotations esp owners’ marks)*

● References
● State of preservation
● Other observations
Hands-on exploration : Discussion

What was most exciting for you to observe or discover?

What was most challenging for you to observe / explore?

What differences did you observe in the two manuscripts you worked with?

What similarities?
Explore

MS M105 Sharḥ al-Khulāṣah al-Alfīyah, 1079 [1668 or 1669]
Collection 1147 Box 19

MS M140 Ravādiʿ al-nufūs, 1244 [1828 or 1829]
Collection 1147 Box 23

MS M211 Naqd al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ naqsh al-fuṣūṣ, 1036 [1626 or 1627]
Collection 1147 Box 32

MS M23 Majmūʿah
Collection 1147 Box 3

Cataloguing


Compare Catalogues

- Princeton (Bonmariage, Soufi, et al) >> main catalogue search / browse
- Michigan (Kropf et al) >> main catalogue search / browse
- Leipzig (Liebrenz et al)
- Wellcome Arabic Manuscripts Online (Serikoff, Pierazzo et al)
- Staatsbibliothek Orient-Digital (Rauch et al)
- Fihrist (UK+ Union Catalogue of Manuscripts from the Islamic World)
- Ahwardt, Verzeichniss der arabischen Handschriften
- Gacek, Persian manuscripts in the libraries of McGill University: a brief catalogue
- Perho, Catalogue of Persian manuscripts (COMDC 8.1) + Catalogue of Arabic manuscripts (COMDC 5.2)
- Rieu, Catalogue of the Persian manuscripts in the British Museum & Catalogue of the Turkish manuscripts in the British Museum
- Schmidt, A catalogue of the Turkish manuscripts in the John Rylands University Library at Manchester
- Tottoli et al, Catalogue of the Islamic manuscripts from the Kohle Collection in the Department of Oriental Studies of the University of Turin
- Witkam, Inventory of the Oriental manuscripts in Leiden University Library
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