TIMA’s Introduction to Islamic Codicology

Matenadaran, Yerevan, Armenia

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Codicology One:
issues involved, writing materials

Prof. Jan Just Witkam
(Leiden University Centre for the study of Islam and Society [LUCIS], Leiden, The Netherlands)
www.janjustwitkam.nl
www.islamicmanuscripts.info
The term ‘Codicology’ is derived from the Latin word *codex*:

Codex: the book as we know it. The etymology of ‘codex’ is from the Latin word *caudex*, the trunk of a tree:

Source image: Déroche 2006, p. 16
‘Codicology’ derived from the word codex:


A number of quires sewn together form a codex.

The codex as book form is relatively modern (c. 4th century CE).

(Source image: Déroche 2006, p. 65).
‘Codicology’ derived from the word codex:


But other (and older) shapes of the book have been in use as well:
Not all books are were in the form of a codex.

The *volumen* is such an earlier book form:

![Diagram of a volumen]

The *volumen* has not been adopted as an Islamic book form.

Source: Déroche 2006, p. 13
‘A Reading from Homer’, in front of a small audience with the use of a parchment scroll.

Classicist painting (1885) by Sir Lawrence Alma Tadema (1838-1912) of a reading session, as imagined by the painter.

Source: Original oil painting (91.8 x 183.5 cm) in The Philadelphia Museum of Art (E 1924-4-1).
Not all books are in the form of a codex.

The *rotulus* is yet another such an earlier book form:

The *rotulus* has been adopted as an Islamic book form.

Source: Déroche 2006, p. 13
The *rotulus* has been adopted as an Islamic book form.

Ottoman *Ruznama* (Calendar), in scroll form (rotulus), Istanbul 1217/1802-1803.

Not all books are in the form of a codex.

Outside the Mediterranean world entirely different shapes of the book were devised (palmleaf manuscript from India):

Source: Déroche 2006, p. 16
Not all writing material is now paper:

Documents from an archive of a notary public, from the High Atlas Area in Central Morocco (19th-20th century).

Source: Leiden University Library, Or. 26.165
A selection of the subjects that will be treated during the course:

codicology
writing surface: papyrus, parchment, paper, other
quires: organization of the codex
instruments
techniques: ruling, lay-out
craftsmen
scripts: paleography, styles, calligraphy
ornamentation: illumination, illustration
bookbinding
dating a manuscript
collections of manuscripts
terminology in use

(Summary of subjects, according to Déroche 2006)

Dated Dhu al-Qa‘da 252 AH (= 866 AD), and thereby possibly the oldest dated Arabic manuscript on paper in existence.

Source: MS Leiden, Or. 298, f. 2b
Scholarship with books and instruments:
The research team of fifteen science-minded men of Taqī al-Dīn ibn Ma’ruf, the 16th-century astronomer to the Ottoman Sultan, in his newly established observatory in Istanbul. Classical Islamic instruments and modern Western equipment can be seen together in one image.

At the background are bookshelves, with the Observatory’s library.

Source: MS Istanbul, University Library.
Owner’s note by Taqi al-Din b. Ma’ruf, the astronomer to the Ottoman Sultan:

انتشار، محمد بن مليان
الفقيه تقي الدين بن مروف

Source: MS Leiden, Or. 168, f. 1a, detail
One of the books of the library of the Istanbul Observatory: From a treatise containing four problems of mechanics, solved by an author whose name has been erased. Possibly from a text on automata by the Banu Musa b. Shakir.

The MS does not contain a date, but may be as old as the 6th/12th century.

Source: MS Leiden, Or. 168, f. 70a
Phonology: drawing of the human organ of speech: a cross-section of the mouth. Indicated are the articulation points of the Arabic phonemes, as part of the preliminary pages of an Acehnese (from Indonesia) Qur’ân of the 19th century. In non-arabophone regions one may find similar explanations of Arabic phonology.

Source: MS Leiden, Or. 2064, f. 4a
Not all manuscripts of the Middle East are always in Arabic script, even if their language is Arabic. Example: *Qissat Yusuf ha-Saddiq*, in Judeo-Arabic, copied in Mosul, 1859 (Source: MS Leiden Or. 14.403, ff. 16b-17a)
Not all Arabic manuscripts are exclusively in Arabic script, even if their language is sometimes Arabic.

Example: Prayer after the noon meal. Greek and Arabic text. Egypt, possibly 13th century

Source: MS Leiden Or. 14.239, f. 38a
Not all Islamic manuscripts are always entirely in Arabic script.

Example: A *Qur’an* from Sulawesi (Indonesia) with Makassarese interlinear translation, between 1861-1869.

(Source: MS Leiden, NBG Boeg. 52e, p. 183)
Not all manuscripts of the Middle East are always entirely in Arabic script and in the Arabic language.

Example: Beginning of *Sifr Ayyub al-Barr*, the Book Job, of the Old Testament, in Coptic and Arabic. Dated 1508/1792

(Source: MS Leiden, Or. 14.544, f. 4a)
Not all manuscripts of the Middle East are always in Arabic script, even if the language is Arabic.


Source: MS Leiden, Or. 14.607, f. 139b
Not all Islamic manuscripts are always in Arabic script.

Example: Miniature of the Ark of the Prophet Nuh, in a Javanese translation of an Arabic or Persian version of the *Qisas al-Anbiyâ’,* the ‘History of the Prophets’.

Manuscript in Javanese, from Java (Indonesia), around 1830.

Look at the Dutch flag, with the word *Allâh* written in it, apparently as part of the *Shahâda.*

Source: MS Leiden Or. 2251, p. 22.
Not all Islamic manuscripts are always in Arabic, though written in Arabic script. Example: Fragment of an old (15th-century?) text in Berber.

This extremely rare (just this damaged leaf preserved!) example of a work written in Berber proves that already in the Middle Ages there was a written Berber culture. There are several words recognizable in Arabic, but the overall text is in Berber.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 23.306, recto side
Anonymous collection of proverbs. With illuminated ex-libris of an Ayyubid prince (12th century). Text of the ex-libris of an Ayyubid ruler:

شوارد الامثال | بخزائه | مولانا
السلطان الملك | الناصر صلاح الدنيا
والدين ابي المظفر | يوسف | ابن الملك
العزيز خلد الله ملكه هـ

Source: MS Leiden, Or. 1073, f. 1a
Codicological subjects

Definitions, approaches, outlines:

Excluded from this part of the course are: texts on stone, texts on wood, texts on metal work, texts on textiles, printed texts, etc.

Codicology is part of book science, and we will here confine ourselves to books, more specifically to handwritten books of the Middle East.

Codicology studies the physical details of the book. A short description of codicology could be: everything that one can know about the book, except its content.

Codicology is a well-developed branch of book science. It is nowadays used for the science of the book in all cultures, not only for books from the Middle East.

In the following course we will focus on the written surface: papyrus, parchment, paper, and others. For practical reasons, attention will be given to documents as well.
Papyrus, parchment and paper 1

These three have been mostly used as the material basis for the transmission of texts. Paper has in the ninth and tenth centuries gradually replaced papyrus and parchment.

Papyrus was a cheap writing material, but brittle and vulnerable. It did not survive very long and was mostly used for texts that did not need to be preserved over a long period, such as letters, receipts, inventories, and other texts of everyday use. The papyri that have been preserved are an important and often unique source of everyday life. They are a complement to our knowledge from historical sources.

Parchment was an expensive writing material but very stable. It was used for texts which one wished to preserve over a long time.

Paper was less cheap than papyrus (more work to manufacture!), but was more stable. At the same time it was less stable than parchment, but much cheaper. This combination of the combined advantages of parchment and papyrus made paper the ideal substitute of either one of them.
Papyrus, parchment and paper 2

The basic material of papyrus and parchment is nature-made. The consequence of this is that repairs and restauration are difficult and often not quite satisfactory.

The best that can be done with the restauration of parchment and papyrus is lamination by inert and transparent materials, such as Japanese paper or purpose-made plastic sacs. Thereby the constituting fragments are stabilized in a fixed position and are protected against impact from outside. Papyrus in public collections is often kept between glass.

Paper, on the other hand, is much easier to restore, and the result of repairs can be spectacular.
Papyrus (البردي):

The word is used for the plant and also for the writing material made of that plant.

The plant is typically Egyptian, but not exclusively so. It is known to grow in other regions where there is an abundance of water, such as Mesopotamia.

The etymology of the word ‘papyrus’ is Coptic. From it, the word ‘paper’ in European languages was derived, through Greek and Latin, but paper and papyrus are entirely different materials.

An image of the papyrus plant (lower half of the page), and a description of its medical use, as depicted in the Arabic translation of the originally Greek *Materia Medica* of Dioscurides (c. 40-90 AD), in a manuscript written in Samarqand in 475/1082.

Because of this medical use of the papyrus plant (the care for the wounds made during treatment of hemorrhoids and fistulae) we have descriptions of the plant and its preparation.

Source: MS Leiden, Or. 289, f. 35a
'They used to take the long stalk of this type and to split these in two, from beginning to end and then to cut strips from these, the one after the other. Each strip of these is laid down on a tablet of polished wood, each strip next to the strip that belongs to it. Then they take the seeds of the blue lotus, dissolve these in water, and put that glue on the strips. They leave it like that till it has become completely dry. Then they strike it softly with a piece of wood which looks like a small arzabba, till the rawness is gone, so that it gets the constitution of full paper, and that they use in medical therapy.'

A bilingual (Greek and Arabic) text (a document of financial content) on papyrus. This is possibly the oldest dated Arabic text on papyrus: Gumada I of the year 22 Higra (643 AD).

Source: Vienna, National Library.
A document on papyrus from the 2nd century Higra

Fragment of a financial receipt, dated ‘[…] and hundred’.

A typical example of the fragmentary state of papyrus literature. The formulaic nature of the texts often makes it possible to supplement missing text.

The script, though more modern than Qur’an manuscripts of the time, still makes an ancient impression.

An autobiographical account on papyrus, Egypt, 9th century.

The round script makes a ‘modern’ impression, and can be considered as a direct precursor of the round scripts that about a century later were going to be used for book texts.

Parchment (الرق)

Parchment is the hide of an animal, cleansed, prepared, stretched (but not tanned). Parchment is not the same as leather (which is tanned). The production of parchment is not limited to areas with abundance of water, it can be made everywhere where suitable animals are kept.

Parchment is preferably made of young, not too big animals, whose skin is supple.

For one average-sized book a small flock of animals must be killed. It makes parchment expensive and hence scarce. Preparing parchment is labour-intensive. It is obvious that most parchment must have been made from domestic animals, sheep mostly, and healthy ones preferably.

There has never yet been a systematic research to the origin of the hides used for parchment. Raqqa al-ghazāl (رق الغزال) does not mean parchment made of gazelle hide, but made of baby animals or still-born animals. It is an indication of quality (as vellum), not of origin.
Parchment, showing which part of the hide can be used for writing. Folding twice gives a standing or oblong format, folding three times gives a square format (as books from the Maghreb have).

To be observed when looking at parchment:

Difference between hair side (outward side of the hide) and flesh side (inward part of the hide).

Hair side is often darker than flesh side. Often the grains of the implant of the hair can still be seen.

Flesh side is often lighter in colour and softer to touch than the hair side.

Repairs of holes or defects in the hide.

Contours of the animal still visible.

Occasional traces of reuse, recycling of used parchment: old text is brushed off in order to make a clean sheet of parchment. Cheaper than new parchment. Sometimes the old text remains visible underneath (palimpsest).
Fragment of a Qur’an. Parchment, with stitched repairs.
Source: Original MS Istanbul (TIEM), Sham Awraqi No. 85, f. 6 (detail), here quoted from F. Déroche (2006), p. 41.
A text on *Hadith*. Fleshside of parchment, with repairs of defects, and traces of scraping (bottom, left). Source: Original MS Paris (BnF), Arabe 6095, f. 3b (detail), here quoted from F. Déroche (2006), p. 41.
A Maghribi (or Andalusi?) Qurʾan on parchment, showing traces of scraping (bottom, left), 13th century (?).

Source: MS Leiden Or. 228, p. 27, detail.
A Maghribi (or Andalusi?) Qur’an on parchment, opening at flesh side, possibly 13th century CE.  

Source: MS Leiden Or. 228, pp. 2-3.
A Maghribi (or Andalusi?) Qur’an on parchment, opening at hair side, possibly 13th century CE.  

Source: MS Leiden Or. 228, pp. 4-5.
A Maghribi (or Andalusi?) Qur’an on parchment, opening at hair side, possibly 13th century CE. Source: MS Leiden Or. 228, p. 4, detail.
Large (c. 50 x 70 cm) *Qur’an* on parchment, showing hairside (left) and fleshside (right). Note the difference in colour. Leaves do not belong together, text is not continuous. Parchment has become brittle (dried out) and was damaged in course of time. Source: MS Leiden Or. 14.545a, ff. 1b-2a.
Fragment of an oblong Qur’an on parchment, possibly dating from the 8th-9th century (CE).
A Maghribi (or Andalusi?) Qur’an on parchment. Detail of the ornamentation and colouring of the text. Colours indicate additions to the `Uthmani *rasm*. Not dated but possibly of the 13th century. In the West of the Islamic world, parchment remained longer in use (for important texts) than in the Mashriq.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 228, p. 3, detail..
A Maghribi (or Andalusi?) Qur’an on parchment. Colours indicate additions to the `Uthmani rasm. Not dated but possibly of the 13th century. In the West of the Islamic world, parchment remained longer in use (for important texts) than in the Mashriq.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 251, f. 24a
A Qur’anic palimpsest. The underlying text, which was imperfectly erased, can be dated to the 1st/7th century. The text on top is much later.

An example of re-use, recycling, of writing material. With parchment this is possible and sometimes necessary, but papyrus and paper are too fragile to reuse. Their lower cost does not make recycling necessary.

The written surface, a summary

We have seen that papyrus and parchment, once the two most-used materials for the making of books, have been gradually replaced by paper. The Islamic and Middle-Eastern manuscript is usually a manuscript on paper.

In the course of history other materials have been used for writing down texts. The early collections of the Qur’an consisted of a multitude of materials (textile, bones, palm leaves, etc.) which could be used, as long as there was a more or less flat surface, to write upon.

Bibliographical references:


Bibliographical references (cont’d):

H. Voorn, *De papiermolens in de provincie Noord-Holland*. Haarlem (De Papierwereld) 1960


References to manuscripts in the Leiden library can be found in the on-line inventories by J.J. Witkam. These can be accessed through the URL: www.islamicmanuscripts.info and then navigate => inventories => Leiden.