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**A D P F**

9, rue Anatole-de-la-Forge

75017 Paris - Tél. : 42 27.32.97

## PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES IN DATING PERSIAN MANUSCRIPTS

Muhammad Isa WALEY

Islamic codicology and palaeography being under-developed disciplines, this paper approaches methodology at a relatively elementary level. Types of evidence for dating manuscripts are assessed under four categories: (1) Physical constituents: paper, binding, etc. (2) Decorative: illumination, illustration, etc. (3) Internal, written: colophon, clues in text, inscriptions, seals. (4) Palaeographic: calligraphic style, orthography. Additional problems arise from the lack of (a) coordinated research; (b) agreed terminology; (c) full, published cataloguing of all extant manuscripts; (d) sufficient knowledge of the historical/socio-cultural background; (e) biographical and geographical documentation on scribes and scriptoria. Finally, some hopeful recent developments are outlined, and further measures proposed.

La paléographie et la codicologie islamiques étant des disciplines sous-développées, cet article aborde la méthodologie à un niveau relativement élémentaire. Les genres d'indices pour dater les manuscrits sont étudiés en quatre catégories: (1) composants physiques: papier, reliure, etc... (2) décoratifs: enluminure, illustration, etc... (3) internes, écrits: colophon, indices textuels, notes, empreintes de cachets; (4) paléographiques: style calligraphique, orthographe. Des problèmes supplémentaires viennent du manque (a) de recherche coordonnée; (b) d'une terminologie reçue; (c) d'un catalogage complet et publié de tous les manuscrits; (d) d'une connaissance suffisante du milieu historique/socio-culturel; (e) d'une documentation biographique et géographique sur les scribes et les scriptoria. Enfin, des progrès récents sont signalés et des mesures ultérieures sont proposées.

### Introduction

The subject under discussion in this paper is the methodology of dating manuscripts in the Persian language. However, much of what will be said applies also to Islamic mss. in Arabic, Turkish, Urdu, and other languages. The range of processes that can be applied to the problem of ascertaining the approximate date of an undated ms. potentially involves the application, singly or in combination, of all facets of codicology and palaeography. Thus the methodological problems to be discussed here are central to that discipline.

The ideas put forward here, and the examples adduced to illustrate them, are drawn from experiences in two areas of activity: cataloguing Persian mss. at the British Library, and studying the earliest extant ms. copies of the *Divân-i Shams-i Tabrîzî*, the lyric poems of the great Sufi poet Jalâl al-Dîn Rûmî. This outline survey will inevitably contain some statements of fact that will seem obvious to specialists in ms. studies. Nevertheless, there is some justification (besides the limitations of the writer's expertise) for treating this subject at a fairly elementary level. The codicology and palaeography of Islamic mss. as a serious and methodical discipline is as yet practically in its infancy, compared with the present state of Western (or Hebrew) ms. studies. There are important lessons to be learned from the experiences of our "Occidentalist" colleagues. Even an elementary treatment may therefore be of some value to non-specialists and perhaps provoke responses in the form of more advanced contributions from experts.

Let us begin with an obvious question. Why is it important to establish, approximately if not precisely, the date of a ms.? In the first place, a chronological underpinning is a prerequisite for any kind of study relating to the past. Islamic mss. are precious documents for the study of all areas of Islamic civilization - history, language, literature, art, etc. - whose assessment in a

global context is incomplete without scientific dating. Accurate dating is a prerequisite when assessing the authenticity or reliability of a document or ms. in itself and in comparison with other copies of the same text. This applies *a fortiori* to the cataloguing and study of mss. and the arts of the Islamic book. Our goal must be to gain a more detailed, well-documented picture of the way in which the various features of the Islamic ms. developed over the centuries.

In the writer's experience, only just over one-half of all mss. in Persian have colophon dates. There is therefore ample need to develop detailed methodology for the approximate dating of mss., based on the gathering and interpretation of various different types of material and documentary evidence. The more different types of evidence are marshalled, the greater the accuracy that should be achieved in the dating process. The present writer has had no success in drawing up an order of priorities or a tidy flowchart indicating the most effective order in which to apply dating criteria. The main reason is that there can be no invariable rules: much depends upon the type of ms. and the data available.

In this paper, the various kinds of evidence will be considered in turn under four separate headings. There is nothing absolute about the categorization adopted here, particularly since they sometimes overlap, and other arrangements would fit the need just as well. For present purposes, the categories are as follows: first, physical constituents of the ms. and their state; second, its ornamental features and format; third, textual and other written evidence; and fourth, palaeography: handwriting and orthography.

### PHYSICAL CONSTITUENTS

By "physical constituents of the ms." are meant the materials of which it is composed: paper (or vellum, or

other writing surface), ink, binding, and suchlike; and the way in which these are assembled.

Paper is an obvious subject with which to begin, but is also in a way one of the most problematic. As is well known, codicologists are at a disadvantage when compared with researchers into some other types of antiquities in respect of what is by far the most precise available means of dating undated material. It is rarely possible to undertake the dating of paper or other writing surface materials by radio-carbon measurement owing to the weight of the sample required for this purpose. Shrinkage tests for vellum indicate only very approximate dates. Chemical analysis of fibres is more easily undertaken, and can help in locating geographical provenance. However, the latter does not necessarily correspond to the place (nor the date of manufacture to the time) of production of the ms. Nor does chemical analysis yet greatly assist in determining the dates of mss., although there are hopes for the future in that direction. This is partly because rather little is known in detail about the history of paper-making in the Islamic world. For mss. on watermarked paper there are sources such as Briquet<sup>1</sup> which although not totally reliable do provide much guidance to the identification and dating of watermarks.

In the catalogues of some libraries in Iran the description of each ms. specifies by name the type of paper used. According to the late Mehdi Bayani, it is vital that the apprentice cataloguer acquaint himself with the different types of paper, each having its own name (or attribution) and learn to distinguish between them. Bayani lists the following names as being most important: *Khānbālīgh*, *Khaṭā'i*, *Samarqandī*, *Bukhārā'i*, *Iṣfahānī*, *Dawlat'ābādī*, *Baghdādī*, *Kashmīrī*, *Vinīzī*, *Tirmah*, *Ādil-shāhī*, *Fustuqī*; and, of course, *Firangi'i Jadīd*<sup>2</sup>.

Some of these terms, such as *Samarqandī*, *Baghdādī*, and *Khaṭā'i*, are found in mediaeval Persian texts<sup>3</sup>. Some are associated with particular characteristics (e.g. the rather thin, white paper from Kashmir). Nonetheless, the meanings of these terms (as well as the quality and type of the paper made in, or associated with, Samarkand, Baghdad and indeed China) may have changed over the centuries. It is doubtful, too, whether most cataloguers could ever acquire enough knowledge to identify all these types with certainty, even if one were sure that the same names were always consistently applied to the same papers.

Because such characteristics of paper as its colour and thickness are susceptible of almost infinite gradation within the limits of the medium, consistently to describe all papers with precision and according to objective standards is a practical impossibility. Until recently, few western cataloguers attempted at any description, except in some cases for mentioning gold-sprinkled, tinted, *ebṛū* (marbled) or highly polished papers of outstanding quality<sup>4</sup>. Nonetheless, there can be little doubt as to the value of attempting to describe the characteristics of paper, however imprecisely, in all ms. cataloguing; and the cataloguers responsible for the *Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland* invariably do so.

Since the above remarks may appear unduly negative, it should be emphasized that future research probably will greatly enhance our knowledge of paper and permit a wider use of such data for dating purposes than is currently possible.

### Ink

Although ink has to be mentioned here, it has so far proved to be of rather little significance for purposes of dating and authentication. Black ink is generally soot-based, while brown ink is ferrous and sometimes prone to fading. Numerous variations of chemical content are possible. Red inks were of course employed for rubrics (hence the word), and other colours for the same purpose or for decoration. Although fashion may have played a part in their use, few appear to be specific to one period or geographical area. Techniques and formulae for the preparation of various types and colours of ink are found in an 11th century Arabic treatise entitled *Umdat al-Kuttāb* by a Maghribi craftsman named Ibn Bādīs<sup>5</sup>.

### Bindings

Manuscript bindings, on the other hand, frequently offer very substantial and reliable evidence towards dating. Research on binding techniques, styles and ornamentation has progressed in recent years<sup>6</sup>. Fine Seljuk or Mamluk bindings, or Qajar or Kashmiri lacquered and painted boards, are easy to identify (although in both cases one occasionally gets confused with the other). The binding rarely permits a very precise dating, more exact than within one or two decades. Exceptions to this

limitation include bindings which actually bear a date (these are fairly rare, although several fine Timurid bindings are dated), or the signature of the binder or painter; or a secure attribution; and those containing portraits or other paintings whose contents provide evidence as to their date of execution.

A hazard occasionally encountered when using a binding to date a ms. arises where a binding from one ms. has been used to replace the worn covering of another. A sign that this may have occurred is a visible reduction in the size of the folios from their original dimensions, perhaps with the loss of marginalia, catchwords or even text. But folios were more often cut down in size in order to eliminate wormholes or stains, or else to permit remargination more for aesthetic reasons.

Before leaving the subject of bindings, it is essential to mention the importance of examining the boards and endpapers of a ms. when circumstances (e.g. torn binding) permit this; and that curators and conservators responsible for mss. should retain and thoroughly investigate all old materials when having mss. rebound. Valuable evidence has been found as part of boards and endpapers. There is always the chance of finding some oriental equivalent of the unknown Caxton printing which was found, cut into strips, in another Caxton volume some years ago.

### Collation

Another respect in which Persian mss. from different periods and regions vary is the manner in which the quires are made up. Little research has been done into this, where Islamic mss. are concerned. Of great interest is the detailed study undertaken by M.S. Simpson and others on the way in which the imperial Safavid *Kitābkhānah* first distributed to the artists involved, and finally assembled, the leaves of an outstanding illustrated ms. of Jāmī's *Haft Awrang*<sup>7</sup>.

### Ornamentation

Next, let us consider the ornamental, decorative features of a ms. Although only a small percentage of Islamic mss. are ornate productions, few of them are altogether unembellished. In the case of those ornate mss. and occasionally the others too, the art historian has the opportunity to help the specialists in ms. studies and other fields on whose assistance many art historians without language or other orientalist expertise depend.

### Illustration

In the particular case of illustrated Persian mss., the style of the miniature paintings which they contain is often the most reliable indication of their date. While it is true nearly all of the most outstanding examples of the Islamic illustrated and illuminated ms. are documented by contemporary colophons, a certain number of high-quality ones are not. A century ago, the current state of knowledge permitted a scholar of Charles Rieu's stature to say almost nothing about the paintings in the mss. which he described. Research on Islamic painting has advanced enormously during the past few decades; it has proved possible to identify and trace the development of almost all the main styles and sub-styles, with hundreds of paintings submitted to detailed study and published in reproduction. There are many remaining controversies and unanswered questions of detail, but if Persian codicology and palaeography were to progress to a remotely comparable degree one would be well pleased.

For completeness' sake it may be well to mention some traps that have been known to mislead the cataloguer, and hence the catalogue user, in dating mss. or determining their provenance on the evidence of their miniature paintings. The practice of adding miniatures years, decades, or even centuries after the copying of the ms. text was a widespread phenomenon. Largely because of the turbulent history of Iran and other countries and the consequent disruptions of patronage and artistic activity, a considerable number of mss. were left with blank spaces framed in the text area where illustrations were to have been added. In some cases paintings were added decades later, a famous example being the British Library's Niẓāmī ms. Add. 25900, one of the finest Timurid mss. from Herat. In some cases the later additions were made in a different geographical region and/or style from the originals. Incidences of fake mss. and of faked illustrations to authentic mss. are not uncommon and have deceived many. Finally, since the 18th century and perhaps earlier, miniatures have been painted in a variety of styles that appear to be honestly archaistic rather than fraudulent in intent; these sometimes appear in mss. of earlier date.

### Illumination

Despite the advances in the study of Islamic art history referred to earlier, the importance of research on Islamic illumination is still underrated by comparison with that on painting<sup>8</sup>. Recent studies on fine illuminated copies of the Holy Koran have yielded results

1. Ch. M. Briquet, *Les filigranes: dictionnaire historique des marques du papier dès leur apparition vers 1282 jusqu'en 1600*. 4 vols. Paris, 1907.

2. *Kitābshināsī-i kitābhā-yi khatī*, Tehran 1352/1974, pp. 19-20.

3. E.g. Qāzī Ahmad, *Calligraphers and painters*, trans. T. Minorsky, Washington, D.C., 1959, p. 113, and Rashīd al-Dīn Fazl Allāh, *Vaqfnāmah-i Rab'i Rashīdī*, ed. M. Mīnuvī and I. Afshār, Tehran 2536/1978, p. 240.

4. One notable exception: G. Flügel, in *Die arabischen, persischen und türkischen Handschriften der Kaiserlichen-Königlichen Hofbibliothek zu Wien*, 3 vols., Vienna, 1865-1867.

5. See pp. 15-36 of the study and partial translation by M. Levey, "Mediaeval Arabic boomaking and its relation to early chemistry and pharmacology", *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 52, (1962) 4.

6. See for example G. Bosch, J. Carswell and G. Petherbridge, *Islamic bindings and bookmaking*, Chicago, 1981.

7. M.S. Simpson, "The production and patronage of the *Haft Awrang* by Jāmī in the Freer Gallery of Art", *Ars Orientalis*, 13 (1982), pp. 93-119.

8. The most notable study is still R. Ettinghausen, "Manuscript illumination", A.U. Pope, ed., *A survey of Persian art*, vol. 3, Oxford, 1939, pp. 1937-1974.

which should inspire those working on mss. in Persian and other languages to undertake more detailed investigations. A good model now exists in the form of an article<sup>9</sup> in which O.F. Akimushkin and A. Ivanov survey the development of form and style in illumination found in Persian mss. of the 14th to 16th centuries. In this as in other areas of Islamic art, changes in style and content generally took place over a long time-span owing to the conservatism of tradition. But certain design formats, or combinations of motifs or colours, can be reliably associated with particular periods and geographical areas, allowing the date and provenance of a given illuminated ms. to be pinpointed. On the other hand, the typology of illumination in such regions as Afghanistan is indistinct for some periods, perhaps because of the paucity of ms. production at those times.

It is a welcome fact that many modern ms. catalogues include plates reproducing pages of text and illustration. The publication of illuminated pages in the various styles is an extremely valuable aid to research and cataloguing. One example from my own experience as a cataloguer will illustrate this. Some years ago the British Library acquired a ms. (Or. 13506) of the Naṣr Allāh Munshī version of *Kalilah va Dimnah* containing miniatures in a style not represented in any other known ms., and with a colophon dated 707/1307<sup>10</sup>. The ms. was thought to have been produced at Shiraz, mainly because the miniatures in some respects resembled those painted there under the patronage of the Inju dynasty in the 1330s and 1340s. Searching for material with which to compare the illumination and other features of the *Kalilah va Dimnah* ms. I found a rather similar illumination reproduced in the *Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland*<sup>11</sup>. The ms. in question, a fine early copy of the *Divān* of Sa'dī preserved at the Staatsbibliothek in West Berlin, was copied in 706/1306, the year before the British Library's ms. There is less similarity as regards calligraphic style, the *naskhī* hand of the London ms. being less rounded and more compact. (In 14th century copies of the *Divān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, various style of illumination appear in mss. from the same region and period).

One has seen few cases where the illumination was misleading as to the date of the ms. Most are the result of a piece of illumination having been added to a ms. at a later date in the same way that miniature paintings sometimes were. Nor is it unknown for an illumination cut out of one ms. to be stuck down onto the opening folio of another by a proud owner, or a rapacious vendor, intent on enhancing its appearance.

Before leaving the subject of ms. illumination, one may include in this category the ornamental circles and other small designs or motifs which are so often used to mark verses or quotations in Persian texts. This usage is analogous to, and may be derived from, that of the diverse range of verse markers found in mss. of the Holy Koran from early times onwards. These Koranic verse markers are among the features meticulously studied by F. Déroche in his catalogue of Korans in the Bibliothèque Nationale<sup>12</sup>. Comparable classification of Persian, Turkish and other markers and motifs, though requiring great patience, might yield information to aid in the task of dating mss.

#### WRITTEN EVIDENCE IN THE MS.

From ms. decoration we can now proceed to look at the written evidence to be gleaned from the ms.: that is, from the text itself and the other written contents. Naturally enough, the obvious place to begin is the colophon of the ms., if it has one. Certainly the colophon is normally (there are exceptions, as we shall see) the best possible type of evidence for the date of a ms. One of the greatest obstacles facing those of us concerned with Islamic rather than western mss. is the perplexing fact that such a high proportion of mss. possess no colophon. What is the explanation? Here, again, we have little certain knowledge. It is known, however, that the medieval Muslim scribe regarded himself as a craftsman; he tended to share with his fellow artisans the traditional Muslim view that since God is the sole Creator it is unbecoming for a mortal man to lay claim to the creation of anything by putting his name to it, or to claim historical significance for a piece of work by dating it, unless impelled to do so by a patron. Because evidence of ownership is often found on the same folio as the colophon, the latter was sometimes obscured or the entire folio removed by someone who acquired or sold the ms. dishonestly.

A further question one may ask about colophons is why so many of them give only part of the information we should like to have had. For example, a scribe may mention both his own name(s) and those of three generations of his forefathers, but omit the date or place of copying, and often the title of the work. On the other hand, there are colophons where the copyist has obligingly spelled out the day (occasionally even the time of day) and month in which he completed the ms., then omitted the year! Again, some colophons are illegible, or almost so. We shall never know all the reasons why scribes were so often slapdash in this respect. Having

seen many mss. in which the handwriting deteriorates sharply towards the end, one is tempted to imagine the person who ordered the ms. arriving on the scene just as the copyist, who is struggling to meet the agreed deadline (or has failed to do so) is writing the last page. The ms. is wrenched out of the scribe's hand as he tries to scribble a signature and date at the end of the book.

Even when there is a colophon it can lead us astray. An authentic colophon may have been tampered with, especially by altering the date. A fake colophon may be appended to an authentic ms. to enhance its prestige. Perhaps the greatest source of confusion is the colophon which refers not to the ms. copy in which it occurs but rather to the date of copying, etc., of the source ms. from which it was copied. Alternatively, it may refer to the date of composition of the work. Ambiguous wording, and ignorance of the proper meaning of Arabic words on the part of non-Arabs, is sometimes responsible for errors in the interpretation of colophons. Incidentally, one sometimes finds the *nisbah* of the copyist used to identify the place of copying; this sometimes works but is a highly dangerous assumption.

Finally, authentic data in colophons can be misread even by experts. An example from my experience with the mss. of Rūmī's *Divān*: according to Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, who edited the text in question<sup>13</sup>, one of the oldest extant mss. is dated 730. The correct reading of the year, however, is certainly 703: a case of misreading *thalāth* as *thalāthīn*.

#### Text

The text of the ms., or available knowledge concerning it, naturally affords possibilities for dating copies. Obviously the date of literary composition of the text constitutes a *terminus post quem* for ms. copies of the same. In practice our knowledge of the date of composition is often very approximate as well. Other clues sometimes occur in the body of the text, such as a statement by the author of his life, or the circumstances in which the work was composed, or again (especially in scholarly or technical works) an acknowledgement to the written sources used or the persons consulted. This can be seen in numerous treatises on such subjects as lexicography or jurisprudence. In some Persian mss. - *Divans* especially come to mind - the wording of pious formulae in headings can, interpreted with caution, afford an indication as to whether the author is still alive.

Linguistic style and vocabulary require a different kind of expertise, but some knowledge of their historical development is in my view an essential tool in the study and cataloguing of mss. Orthography, too, perhaps

belongs in this class of linguistic evidence. However, I propose here to view it in the context of the particular copy of a text rather than as inherent in the original text itself, and will therefore discuss it in the context of palaeographical evidence.

#### Marginalia

In Persian mss., marginal annotations are relatively seldom dated (except for *ijāzahs* and the like, where these happen to have been written in the margin rather than elsewhere) but if they appear reasonably close to the date of copying of the text they almost always present some interest from the viewpoint of dating, for which they provide a *terminus ante quem*. Annotations elsewhere in the ms., such as ownership inscriptions, will be discussed below. One interesting type of marginal annotation occurs in some royal Mughal mss. Officials in the royal studio sometimes marked the extreme edges of folios as part of the process of reckoning the sum to be paid to artists. Generally these were removed by the marginator, but in the British Library's ms. Or. 14139, the 'Bute Hafiz', my colleague J.P. Losty found remnants of such an inscription clearly dated 1014/1605. This reveals the date when, on the orders of Jahāngīr, illustrated and illuminated margins were added to the folios calligraphed about 130 years earlier by the renowned Sulṭān 'Alī Mashhadī<sup>14</sup>.

#### Inscriptions, seals, etc.

Although never devoid of interest, the inscriptions and seal impressions found in so many mss. vary greatly in their usefulness as evidence for the date of copying. If they are dated, or belong to known persons, this increases their usefulness, at least as giving *termini ante quos* for the date when the ms. was written. Such evidence of ownership is all too often scribbled to the point of illegibility or deliberately obscured. Dated seal inscriptions afford only approximate evidence for dating. Still, all inscriptions and seals provide some indication of the history of a ms., and sometimes of a whole library or collection.

Among the best and most informative inscriptions are *vaqfiyyahs* and *'arz' dīdahs*, recording respectively charitable donation and inspection by a royal owner; this is because of the amount of detail given in them. Patronage inscriptions sometimes occur entwined in the arabesques of an illuminated medallion (*shamsah*) at the beginning of a ms.

#### Page format and layout

Although format is not a decorative feature, it is an element which generally relates to the appearance

9. 'The art of illumination', *The Arts of Central Asia*, edited by Basil Gray, London, 1979, pp. 35-57.

10. P. Waley and N.M. Titely, 'An illustrated Persian text of Kalila and Dimna dated 707/1307-8', *British Library Journal*, vol. 1 no. 1 (1975), pp. 42-61.

11. W. Heinz and W. Eilers, *Persische Handschriften*, Teil 1 (VOHD, Bd. XIV, 1), Wiesbaden, 1968, plate 3.

12. *Les manuscrits du Coran*, 2 vols., Paris 1983-1985; see in particular vol. 1, pp. 27-33.

13. *Kulliyāt-i Shams yā Divān-i Kabīr*, 10 vols., Tehran 1336/1957 - 1346/1967.

14. J.P. Losty, 'The 'Bute Hafiz' and the development of border decoration in the manuscript studio of the Mughals', *Burlington Magazine*, London 1986.

rather than the practical aspects of a ms. Exceptions are the small-format compilations and anthologies, exemplified by the Timurid Miscellany of Iskandar Sultan in the British Library (ms. Add. 27261), in which the practical consideration of portability seems to have determined the page size. In speaking of format I have in mind such details as the layout of a page of text: the number of lines of text per page; the use or otherwise of a *mastar* or other form of ruling; size of margins, hence the proportion of written to unwritten page surface; the relative length and breadth of the text area, "thumb-pieces" in the margin, and the dimensions and colour of *jadval*, text frame, and column ruling<sup>15</sup>. Other variables include the number and colour of the ruled borderlines or text frames; and techniques (e.g. hatching) for decorating panels containing headings. The usefulness of examining the ruling of European mss. in relation to their collation is well established<sup>16</sup>. Future research may show these factors to be applicable criteria for assessing the dates of Islamic mss.

## PALAEOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

### Handwriting (or calligraphic) style

In the category of palaeographic evidence let us first look at questions of handwriting or calligraphic style. Just as the study of painting has made great strides recently, so that of Islamic calligraphy. The publication of a large number of books on the subject has brought the attendant benefit of a great many examples of calligraphic and palaeographical interest being reproduced on their pages. Understandably enough, though, the emphasis has tended to be very much on the standard *aqlām-i sittah* rather than the less celebrated, less imposing, more regional calligraphic hands. Some of the latter, such as the Indian *bihārī*, are now emerging from obscurity to be appreciated for their often spectacular beauty, and are being subjected to closer study.

An abiding difficulty is the lack of neat, "water-tight" chronological dividing lines such as might permit us to key the typology of scripts to the historical development of particular styles, "sub-styles" or single individual calligraphic elements. As a general rule, stylistic change took place gradually, with occasional innovative bursts whose impact tended to be diffused and circumscribed because of the immense geographical extent of the Persian-speaking world, to say nothing of the entire Islamic world. Consequently, although cataloguers are accustomed to categorizing a given hand as "probably 17th century" or suchlike, it is as well to recognize, consciously as well as unconsciously, that no calendar

century has any real meaning as a unit or dividing-line in this context.

Where handwriting styles are concerned, some problems of terminology remain to be resolved. Inconsistencies arise partly because of differences in usage between different languages or regions<sup>17</sup>, partly also because some terminological distinctions, such as that between *rayhānī* and *muḥaqqaq*, are inconsistently applied, if not altogether factitious<sup>18</sup>. Still the major problem is perhaps inherent in the very nature of handwriting. Since despite the existence of strict classical canons no two Muslim master-calligraphers always wrote every letter in precisely the same way, it is small wonder that the generality of scribes deviated widely from these standards. A great many more, perhaps, simply set out to copy text as rapidly as was possible without lapsing into illegibility. Sometimes, though rarely, they did lapse into illegibility. The generality of scribes not employed by the major scriptoria must have varied in respect of their literacy and the amount of training they received. Where the chief, or only, concern was make another copy of a given text, they would not necessarily have felt under any compulsion to conform to stylistic canons. The same applies to authors who wrote out their own works, except where they intended to present a calligraphic holograph ms. to some patron of literature or scholarship. The ordinary scribes' chief concern would have been to finish one text in order to proceed to the next, their livelihood depending on producing work in quantity rather than of quality. Be that as it may, the fact that such a large proportion of extant mss. in Persian are copied in writing which is either beautiful or at least pleasant and reasonably clear testifies to the importance which scribes - like other artisans who served apprenticeships and often belonged to guilds - attached to upholding professional standards.

### Orthography

By "orthography" is understood the manner of spelling, of representing spoken phonemes in written form. What interests us here is the extent to which divergences in such representation can be interpreted for the purpose of assigning dates to mss. Minor changes in practice in orthography, generally termed *rasm al-khaṭṭ* in modern Persian (though this term originally referred to calligraphic style), continue to occur in Iran today. In the period which witnessed the production of the earliest Persian mss. that are still extant - the 12th to 14th centuries A.D. - there existed a greater degree of flexibility in orthography. The same might have been true of Arabic but for the earlier orthographic standar-

dization of the text of the Holy Koran, which greatly influenced the writing of other texts in that language.

Certain features of the development of New Persian orthography are widely known among non-specialists: e.g. that the postvocalic letter *dhāl* began instead to be rendered as *dāl* during the 14th century, and that the consonants *pā* and *chīm* only began to be rendered with three dots rather than two at about the same time. Closer study of 13th-15th century mss. teaches one that these pronouncements are only "rules of thumb" to which exceptions may be found in abundance. For example, there are several dated mss. from the 13th century in which postvocalic *dhāl* is not to be found. On the other hand, a recent sale in London included a ms. dated 836 *hijrī* which featured postvocalic *dhāl* but no other archaic elements of orthography; and this is not unusual.

Especially interesting and valuable is the kind of work done by Jalāl Matīnī on the orthography of Persian mss. of the 5th/12th century<sup>19</sup>. In his article Matīnī gives a full list of the forms of letters and ligatures found in the mss. examined, revealing a wide disparity of orthographic values between mss. of approximately the same period. Of the more archaic forms occurring in 12th century mss., most can also be observed in 14th century mss. Examples are the joining of initial *bā* to the top of the diagonal flourish of the following letter *kāf* (or *gāf*) in subjunctive verb forms; another is final letter *ye* with two subscript dots in Persian words. The rendering of initial *gāf* by means of *hamza* above *kāf*, a feature occurring in 11th century mss., can still be found in India in the 19th century. Despite these words of caution, the present writer believes in the usefulness of the rules of thumb, and that orthography is one of the most important criteria for dating mss.

Before we leave this subject, it may be worth recounting another aspect of the early mss. of the *Divān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*. It is particularly interesting to have the rare opportunity of comparing two mss. of the same text, albeit incomplete copies, written within five years of each other by the same copyist. A man named Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Nassāj al-Mawlavī copied the *Divān*, or part of it, in the year 723 and again in 727, as clearly attested by the colophons of the respective mss. These mss. are M.C. K/17 preserved at the Atatürk Kitaphānı in Istanbul (formerly in the Belediye Kütüphanesi), and ms. 18233 of the Gedik Ahmed Paşa Library, Afyonkarahisar<sup>20</sup>. As regards calligraphic consistency, both mss. are written in an identical *naskhī* hand that is large, rounded and very clear. (The ink used is uncommonly black, which aids greatly in reading the text.) I

can detect no significant differences in ductus between the two mss. Three of Rūmī's stanzaic poems or *tarjī'āt* are to be found in both mss. copied by our scribe al-Nassāj al-Mawlavī. It is not certain that he copied from the same source ms. on both occasions. At all events, in the three poems in question the two mss. differ only on one word (see *Tarjī' XXIII*): the ms. M.C. K/17 reads *shudhan* where all the other early copies read *shavadh*. While speaking of M.C. K/17, named after Muallim Cevdet, a former owner, the French Institute in Istanbul seems an appropriate place in which to announce that this ms. "has a friend" at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris: a fragment found in B.N. supplément pers. 823 and briefly described by Blochet in his catalogue of the Persian mss. in the Bibliothèque Nationale (vol. 3, p. 434). This was established thanks to the kindness of the Bibliothèque Nationale in supplying me with a microfilm of the Paris ms. Incidentally, the most probable explanation for Blochet's supposition that the Rūmī fragment dates from about 1265 (and this illustrates a point made earlier in this paper) is that he misinterpreted the wording of the headings above each poem (*afāza Allāhu nūrah, 'alayhi ashraf al-taḥiyyāt*) as signifying that the poet was still alive when the ms. was copied.

## METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

While considering the various types of evidence that are of use in dating Persian mss, we have also touched on several factors which tend to impede us in this task. This may have given an unduly gloomy impression of the prospects for advancing our knowledge. Let us now attempt to draw together some of those threads and assess whether the picture can be made more positive. Perhaps by looking at the underlying causes of the problems we may be able to formulate some measures designed to broaden and deepen our knowledge, both in the area on which we have been focusing and in Islamic codicology generally.

### Lack of coordination in research

Like most other fields of specialization in minority disciplines such as oriental studies, codicological and palaeographical research is a solitary pursuit for those who have the fortune, or misfortune, to acquire the taste for it. Perhaps we should seek in some measure to emulate those of our colleagues who study western mss.; they associate in learned bodies, carry out coordinated research projects, and do sometimes succeed in obtaining funds to finance their research and publications.

15. See Akimushkin and Ivanov, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

16. T.S. Pattie, "The ruling as a clue to the make-up of a medieval manuscript", *British Library Journal*, vol. 1 no. 1 (1975), pp. 15-21.

17. P. Soucek, "The arts of calligraphy", *The arts of the book in Central Asia*; see p. 12.

18. Déroche, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 13.

19. "Rasm al-khaṭṭ-i Fārsī dar qarn-i panjum-i Hijrī", *Majallah-i Dānishkadah-i Adabiyāt-i Mashhad*, vol. 3, nos. 2-3 (Mashhad, 1346/1967), pp. 159-206.

20. The last folios, with colophons, of Afyonkarahisar mss. 18233 and 18225 (the latter being the one dated 703 alluded to earlier, are among the specimens reproduced at the beginning of Furuzanfar's edition of *Kulliyāt-i Shams yā Divān-i Kabīr*, vol. 7, Tehran 1345/1966.

### Lack of uniformity in descriptive terminology

One man's *unvān* is another man's *sarlāwh*. That is to say, there is no uniform agreed descriptive terminology in our field of study, and this can lead to misunderstandings. For linguistic reasons a certain degree of discrepancy may prove inevitable; again, when it comes to matters of calligraphy there are the contentious issues regarding the dividing-line between *naskhī* and *thuluth* script, and suchlike. Still it would be helpful if we all used the same Persian-language term to refer to the same thing. This would probably require the compilation of a thesaurus of terms in Persian, and likewise in Arabic and in Turkish (perhaps other languages too). Much relevant material for Persian mss. is included in A.M. Piemontese's invaluable article "Problemi di studio e criteri di catalogazione dei manoscritti persiani", *Onomasticum arabicum, Sussidi didattici: 1.* (Rome 1975), pp. 40-72. Another useful source is the glossary found on pp. 99-131 of an apparently rather little-known book in Russian on the artistic and technical features of Middle Eastern mss.<sup>21</sup>

### Lack of full published catalogues describing all extant mss.

Most orientalists are to some degree aware of the magnitude and significance of this particular problem, for it obtains in all too many institutions, not least in the most illustrious ones. Where a single curator is required to work not only on mss. but also on printed books (perhaps in a wide variety of languages) as well as carrying out administrative and other functions, it is difficult to catalogue mss. properly and carry out serious research on them, and excessively difficult to produce a complete catalogue. The British Library is by no means the only institution sitting on unpublished riches. In a recent series of articles<sup>22</sup> E. Birnbaum has surveyed the state of cataloguing of Turkish mss. worldwide, country by country. His findings make depressing reading. At least there is better news about Persian mss. in Iran, some fine catalogues having appeared of late.

The required remedies perhaps include the publication of handlists in preparation for, but not as ultimate substitutes for, full descriptive catalogues. Cooperation and correspondence between cataloguers in different institutions and countries will surely be encouraged by the appearance of Dr. Jan Just Witkam's new specialized

periodical, *Manuscripts from the Middle East*. Another desideratum, as mentioned above, is the publication of more illustrative specimens of palaeography<sup>23</sup>.

### Insufficient knowledge of the historical, cultural and social background of mediaeval Islamic ms. production

The importance of this knowledge may be less readily apparent than that of having mss. fully catalogued. However, it is generally accepted that a full understanding of a ms., as artefact or as literary document, depends on a proper awareness of its historical and cultural background. From the literary historian's viewpoint it is relevant to ask: why was this text produced, or copied, at that particular time or place? For the student of codicology any information concerning the circumstances of ms. production are potentially valuable. That more historical and documentary source material exists than is generally supposed is illustrated by a recent essay by O.F. Akimushkin<sup>24</sup>. The number of references made here to the work of Soviet scholars suggests the desirability of seeking to correspond and cooperate with them. The relative vigour with which ms. studies are pursued in the U.S.S.R. is no accident. It is indicative that attached to the Institutes of Oriental Studies of several Republics' Academies of Science are ms. collections (*Rukopisnyi Fond*) which are also research centres.

### Paucity of biographical, chronological and geographical documentation on scribes and scriptoria

This problem is of course associated with the previous one. We know a good deal about some of the ateliers where the finest mss. were produced for royal or other wealthy patrons, and have some knowledge of the careers and characters of certain illustrious calligraphers from *tazkirah* and historical literature. Art historians have pieced together much of the history of Imperial Mughal scriptorium under Akbar, for example. What is lacking is methodical documentation on the names and activities of all known scribes, with colophon dates, geographical locations, and particulars of their calligraphic style and the types of mss. on which they worked. The same is also required for painters, illuminators, binders and other craftsmen. Such ideas may prove over-ambitious, yet in fact much of the raw

material already exists in the world's ms. catalogues. To extract it and establish a database may some day prove possible.

Meanwhile, the collection of this and other types

of data in the field of Islamic codicology and palaeography might perhaps be an area of fruitful collaboration among those colleagues working in the field who possess the necessary patience and dedication.

21. A. İ. Kaziev (Adil Yusuf oğlu Gaziev), *Khudozhestvenno-tekhnicheskie materialy i terminologiya srednevekovoi knizhnoi zhivopisi, kalligrafii i perepletnogo isskustva*, Baku, 1966. A dictionary of Turkish technical terms relating to mss. and the arts of the book was published recently: M.E. Özen, *Yazma kitap sanatları sözlüğü*, Istanbul, 1985.

22. "Turkish manuscripts: cataloguing since 1960 and manuscripts still uncatalogued", in 5 parts, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 103 (1983), pp. 413-420, 515-532, 691-707; 104 (1984) pp. 303-314, 465-503.

23. One of the pioneering works of this kind was A.J. Arberry, *Specimens of Arabic and Persian palaeography*, London 1949.

24. "Zametki o persidskoi rukopisnoi knige i ee sozdaniakh", *Ocherki istorii kul'tury srednevekovogo Irana*, Moscow, 1984. Compare the discussion of Pashto ms. production in V.V. Kushev, *Afganskaia rukopisnaia kniga*, Moscow, 1980.