Islamic Codicology: an Introduction to the Study of Manuscripts in Arabic Script

The modern system

The vocalisation system in use today was developed rather later on; it first appears during the third/fourth century, as exemplified by a manuscript dated 280/893 (Istanbul Süleymaniye Veliyadîn Efendi 3139). In Qurʾan manuscripts this system was adopted in the following century. Its status as an appendage to the nun was strongly felt, for in many manuscripts from the Arab Muslim East vowels were still marked in red in the fifth/sixth and sixth/seventh centuries (see illus. 42), a tradition that endured longer in the Islamic west.

Other orthographic signs were introduced in a progressive fashion, as evidenced by the many ‘mixed’ manuscripts, in which vowel points coexist with modern forms of kāna, thādana, and dā'il. In the Maghribi, these signs sometimes retained the particular colours that had been assigned to them in earlier systems of vocalisation, an approach attested as early as the fifth/eighth century in the famous ‘Qurʾān of the Nurse’ (al-Hādīma).

88 Şueyş, op. cit., pp. 45 and pl. IV A. It is also found in MS. Dublin CBL 3494, dated 279/892; see A. J. Arberry, The Classter Beatty Library, a handbook of the Arabic manuscripts, vol. II (Dublin, 1956), p. 106 and pl. 68. 89 Later additions to early copies are always difficult to detect. This situation arises notably in MS. Dublin CBL 1417, written before 292/905, in which both vocalisation systems co-exist; see A. J. Arberry, ‘A Koran in “Persian” Kufi’, Oriental College Magazine 40/3-4 (1964), pp. 9-16, and Jansen, Q and H, p. 36, no. 12. Other examples appear in Paris fragments BNF arabe 332 and 342a; Déroche, Cat. I, p. 77, no. 47 and p. 112, no. 158). 90 A fragment datable to the early fourth/fifth century, Paris BNF arabe 383, bears modern signs in red, but it is difficult to tell whether or not they are later additions, Déroche, Cat. I, p. 137, no. 245. 91 See, for example, MSS. Paris BNF arabe 575, dated 1194/1780, BNF arabe 576, dated 1195/1781, and BNF arabe 569, circ. 1242/1826-27; Déroche, Cat. I, pp. 44-45, nos. 325, 326 and 328. 92 The form and use of these symbols were somewhat unsystematic in the early days; Wright, op. cit. pl. XLVII, analyses these variants in his commentary on MS. London BL Add. 19357.

Books and their Ornamentation

The study of decoration: ends and means

Even before the advent of the Muslim religion, decorating manuscripts was already a well-established practice in the birthplace of Islam. Very early on, its practitioners were embellishing the books they copied, a habit that stirred up a lively debate in the community concerning what was permissible and what forbidden. The best-known facet of this argument concerns the representation of living beings: their prohibition did not in practice, however, altogether preclude manuscripts with paintings from being produced. This important question continues to be discussed today and is the object of a great deal of research that has thrown up some extremely interesting findings. It is important to note that whereas in the study of European manuscripts “illumination” often means (or includes) “illustration”, in Islamic studies the two are invariably distinguished.

In line with the perspective of the present volume, the following account of illumination aims above all to aid description and further understanding. It is a subject that would benefit from greater uniformity in the application of technical terms. The usage of common expressions — frontispiece or ornaments, for example — has not yet been fixed even among specialists; depending on the author concerned, the same word may denote something different. In future it would be helpful to establish conventions governing usage, but in the meantime the guiding principle must be for writers to try to ensure that they apply their own usage consistently.

1 This chapter was written by Muhammad Isaa Waley, with contributions from François Déroche. 2 For an initial approach, see J. Weinschel [T. Feld], EF ES, pp. 889-892, i.e., “ utiliza”. 3 This term should be reserved for a title accompanied by decoration, though the meanings given it by authors are much more varied. 4 Guéck, AMT, p. 67. Certain authorities hold that the surah is a reasonably large illuminated panel placed at the beginning of a text or section of a text; it contrasts with bismillah, a word applied to bands occupying less than a quarter of the surface area of the page. Here, the term surah refers to a title band or heading.
Manuscript decoration and its importance in codicology

The reader may justifiably be wondering as to the purpose and significance of the study of manuscript decoration for those interested mainly in the manuscripts themselves, and only to a lesser extent (if at all) in art history. As we shall see, however, knowledge of the subject can certainly prove useful, and on occasion even essential, to codicologists. This applies especially to identifying the geographical provenance and date of a manuscript in which this information is not provided by the copyist or by other internal written evidence; and also when evidence is being sought about the later travels and ownership history of a manuscript to which ornamentation was added not at the time of copying but at some later stage.5

Moreover, the evolution of the book in Arabic script, at least as regards the very finest examples, is marked by a tendency to impart a unitary decorative scheme: binding and inner covers complete, or at least reflect, the illumination within, even though the means employed—gilding, painting, filigree, etc.—are distinct. This should also be kept in mind when examining how artists approached the task of decorating manuscript books.

The presence or absence of ornamentation also furnishes an indication as to the status of the manuscript as a whole and of the person for whom it was produced. Numerous other parameters have to be taken into account, including the style of script and the type of paper, but there are occasions when the style of ornamentation (often including the binding as well as illumination) constitutes the single most reliable indication of provenance. A note of caution must nevertheless be sounded: it is not unknown for illuminations to be added to manuscripts, often long after they were copied,6 and there are also examples of illumination (as well as of miniatures) being extracted from one manuscript and inserted into another.7

From a codicological point of view, all illumination deserves attention; unsophisticated, even slipshod, examples are far from devoid of interest. After all, these form the majority of surviving decorated works, and can prove invaluable for dating or for establishing the place of origin of a manuscript, as well as for allowing the scholar to gauge more accurately the quality of the production of books in Arabic script of every kind.

In addition, the materials employed in manuscript decoration represent a precious source of information on the places and conditions in which they were produced.8 Relatively little physical and chemical analysis has been carried out to date, but it is to be hoped that their development in years to come will allow comparative studies to be carried out on larger samples of manuscripts.9

5 M. I. Waley, ‘Problems and possibilities in dating Persian manuscripts’, Mrs du MO, pp. 7–15. 6 One example among many is a Timurid copy of Jami’s Viqayat-i-i Zalayshah (MS, London BL, Or. 10903). 7 MS, London BL, Or. 10914 (illegibly titled, but probably a hadith) contains a ‘borrowed’ kaunus. 8 See Chapter ‘Instruments and preparations used in book production’. 9 See also Chapter ‘Instruments and preparations used in book production’.

The scope of the present chapter

Manuscript ornamentation can be examined in relation either to the history of decorative art or to the history of the book, and the present survey will tend to concentrate on the latter. As regards the arts of the Islamic book, new fields of study have opened up and discoveries have been made which cast new light not only on the craftsmanship and creative processes involved, but also on the nature and ideology of patronage as well as on the structures that nurtured the high art in which specialists in this area are primarily interested. As stated above, in the context of codicology, the examination of manuscript decoration of less exalted quality—i.e., that appearing on commonplace texts designed for everyday use—is less rewarding. The aim here is to provide a very brief account of the purposes, historic development, typologies and techniques involved.

Because of the centuries-long history and wide geographical diffusion of Islamic illumination, it is of course out of the question to deal with the material in exhaustive fashion in a few pages. Instead, the focus will be on a limited number of examples whose purpose is to illustrate the main thrust of the argument. This chapter will take more account of manuscripts from outside the Arab world than some of the other essays in the Handbook. Many significant developments in the art of illumination took place in Iranian and Turkic regions, India and elsewhere; also, great quantities of copies of Arabic texts survive that were written and decorated in these and other regions.

Sources: extent and origin of present knowledge

As specialised research in the field of manuscript studies advances, it may be anticipated that future discoveries will be made that will extend knowledge and improve understanding. Indeed there are grounds for believing that even new sources will eventually come to light. First among written sources come technical manuals and treatises composed by and for the craftsmen. None of the known extant works is more than 500 years old, but they contain valuable information about techniques as well as about noted artists and their oeuvre. Important research has been carried out in this field by Yves Porter and others.10 In a few cases, such as the celebrated treatise in Persian by Qādī Ahmad,11 the reader will encounter biographical (or pseudo-biographical) information on distinguished artists and also on the forms and techniques associated with them.

A second important corpus of sources is constituted by archival documents and inscriptions concerning the organisation of the tradesmen and their workshops. Scholars such as Ira Afiře, AnniMarco Schimmel and...
Wheeler Thackston have also traced scattered literary references to the production and decoration of manuscripts, in poetry as well as prose, and compared them to extant examples. Such allusions seem to have been more numerous in the Persian-speaking domain, one of the regions where the art of illumination reached a peak of refinement. It may be added, at the risk of stating the obvious, that the predominant means employed by craftsmen in teaching their arts to apprentices under them were direct verbal instruction and practical demonstration; ‘trade secrets’ were often jealously guarded. Today, knowledge of traditional methods has been deepened by the insights of present-day craftsmen and -women in both the Muslim world and the West, and also through the practical work and growing experience of specialist conservators, both of which have given a new lease of life to age-old techniques.

Perhaps the most important source, though, consists of internal evidence gleaned from illuminated manuscripts themselves and from related documents. As with other forms of art, minute examination and comparative research by specialists has yielded a mine of information. There is a wealth of evidence from colophons and other texts that give concrete details about the activities of individual illuminators (as well as scribes and other craftsmen) which awaits methodical presentation, analysis and interpretation by scholars.

Manuscripts and the decorative arts

In the following account, the applications, the forms and, so to speak, the genres of manuscript illumination (ṣadıkhībī,2 modern Turkish işç(.)hip) will be treated more thoroughly than the history of the art. Nevertheless, it may be appropriate to consider certain aspects of illumination in relation to the decorative arts, since they bear some relevance to the origins of this art form and to the cultural milieu in which it was practised.

The role of decoration

At this point, an elementary yet fundamental question arises: why did – indeed why do – craftsmen add decoration to manuscripts? Account must first be taken of the repute and significance of the book prior to the onset of printing and mass-production. In the sense that it is a handmade artefact, every manuscript can lay some claim to uniqueness. Furthermore, even when little illumination was added, in the Middle Ages high-quality copies were considered as luxury objects because of the scarcity of the materials employed and because of the time and skill necessary to produce them. In these days of huge print-runs and global distribution networks, a certain effort of imagination must be exercised to understand the extraordinary mystique that once attached to fine books. This aura was felt not only by connoisseurs but also by many of the illiterate majority – as well as by those who deliberately burnt books. The prestige associated with quality books as artefacts and as vectors of a given text is reflected in patronage, both individual and institutional. To own books or to pay for their production conferred renown on literati and laymen alike. Many fine manuscripts contain illuminated panels commemorating the patron or patroness’s ownership or else their bestowal on an institution as a pious endowment.

In a previously published article,13 the present writer proposed a classification of Islamic manuscript illumination based on function under four categories, according to the type of text or document concerned. Before examining the various forms of illumination, we shall consider this typology only briefly, since such a classification is too restrictive to serve as a basis for more advanced analysis, and many manuscripts fall into more than one of the pre-set categories. It should be borne in mind that beauty and utility do not necessarily represent separate considerations: in illumination, as in all creative enterprises, they often go hand in hand ([lbs. 39, 40].

In the European manuscript tradition, practical utility figured high among the purposes of ornamentation: headings and initials in colour or gilt and with or without decor helped the reader negotiate his way through the text. The same applies to the Islamic book: the reader of the Qur’an and other texts, be they religious or profane, has even greater need of signs to indicate the beginnings of chapters or other textual units. However, whereas ornate initial capitals are among the most important decorative elements of Christian book illumination, Arabic script has no capitals. The Muslim reader looks out for, but does not always find, other indicators to aid ‘navigation’ through the text. Orthography is a further factor. To avoid ambiguity or difficulties in reading, signs were invented to differentiate between short vowels for which no graphemes proper exist in the alphabet; these signs were occasionally made more prominent by the use of colour, and could even be transformed into an independent decorative element. Other manifestations of ornament for the sake of utility will be considered in a discussion of the different kinds of texts to which illumination was applied.

12 Gussak, AMT, p. 31.

Ornamental aspects

This category appears, for example, in literary works where the embellishment of a text may relate to its nature as a work of the imagination. In a collection of narrative poems, for example, the form of the decorative panels on the title page resembles an arched doorway giving access into another world; the frontispiece can thus be compared to a magic carpet that transports the mind to far-flung or make-believe lands. Occasionally a short encomium to the author or his work figures in the illuminated panels of the opening to the text.

Religious aspects

As in the Occident, manuscripts were often decorated in ways designed to imbue the reader or beholder with reverential awe and a sense of the ineffable beauty of the spiritual world. The first works to be illuminated by Muslims were copies of the Qur’ān: mention has already been made of the practical reason behind this choice. Chrysography (writing in gold ink) is not especially rare, and numerous Qur’ānic manuscripts have survived which contain the entire text copied in letters of gold outlined in black. In many relatively modest volumes, important words or phrases, such as Allāh or other Divine Names, are highlighted in gold. Better known and more significant is the utilisation of illumination in decorating the opening of a Qur’ānic text and the margins of each page. Monographs have been devoted to the study and evaluation of illuminations such as these, which have come to epitomise Islamic art.14

Socio-political aspects

Thirdly, book decoration can also be a manifestation of political position and/or social standing. Besides manuscripts whose decoration stems from charitable impulses or self-aggrandisement on the patron’s part, there is also illumination applied to official documents, decrees and letters of state, whose status as well as beauty is enhanced by illumination. What applies to manuscripts proper is equally true of documents such as royal decrees or correspondence. Since every official letter (or document of this type) was inextricably associated with the personage in whose name or for whose benefit it was issued or promulgated, close links exist between geographic region and decorative style, evidence that helps to determine the spatial distribution and time frame of the illuminations involved.

Practical aspects

Numerous texts were designed by and for professionals in some particular domain: they were occasionally embellished in order to assist in understanding their contents. Examples of this phenomenon include works on scientific or technical subjects, in which decorative elements may make the text and/or the accompanying illustrations easier to grasp. Illuminated diagrams, star charts, terrestrial maps, technical drawings, tables of numbers or other data all fall into this category.

Non-Islamic antecedents and parallels

In discussing Greek and Latin manuscripts surviving from late Classical and Byzantine times containing decorative features, Richard Ettinghausen expresses agreement with Adolf Grohmann’s contention that a form of panel found in some of the earliest examples of Islamic illumination derives in fact from a classical prototype, the amora or tabula ansata, a shape resembling a kind of tray with wedge-shaped handles.15 Historians of art have also discerned the influence of wall paintings and artefacts from Central Asia or early Persian book painting and illumination. There is an interesting parallel to Islamic decorated text openings in a Soghdian manuscript from Central Asia preserved at the British Library: a scroll that unrolls to reveal at the very beginning a kind of title-piece design including depictions of ducks. Studies on the Manichaean book and its decoration tend to suggest that there might be a grain of truth in legends that tell of rivers of liquid gold and silver pouring from pyres of lavishly illustrated and illuminated manuscripts burnt by the conquering Muslims. Art historians have also convincingly traced lotus flowers to Indian models and other decorative features, such as cloudsbands, to a Chinese origin. The palmette motif in the margins of numerous ancient Qur’ān manuscripts seems to have come from Sasanian Iran. Finally, there exist close similarities between certain motifs in Coptic textiles and in early Qur’āns, a significant example being the eight-pointed star.

Farther west, and a few centuries later, the history and development of manuscript and book decoration in Europe and that of Islamic illumination unfolded along very different lines. Yet, in its formative period, Christian book illustration in the Near East seems to have influenced that of Iraq and Iran. In more recent centuries too, there were times and places where an interchange of sorts occurred, particularly when European rococo elements found their way into the decorative repertoire of Muslim artisans and illuminators (illus. 73). On the other hand, Islamic motifs, like their European counterparts, sometimes exerted palpable influence on the work of Jewish, Armenian and Eastern Christian illuminators generally. Better-known examples include some of the fine Hebrew manuscripts from the Yemen.16

The relation between illumination and other fields of decorative art

The question then arises as to whether the similarities that often appear between elements of design and decoration on manuscripts and in other specimens of Islamic art should be interpreted as coincidences or as deliberate borrowings. If they are indeed borrowings, was the illuminator more often lender or borrower? How are the various ornamental motifs and elements to be 'read' or 'interpreted' in terms of symbolism and cultural ideology? These fascinating questions fall outside the scope of this study, but the curious reader is advised to consult specialised studies on the subject by art historians, in particular those written by Eva Buer (on types of ornamentation, their organisation in applied art and architecture and the connections between the various art forms), and by Oleg Grabar (for the role and the interpretation of ornamental elements in Islamic art).

To summarise, there exist many numerous and often striking parallels — but not at all necessarily causal relationships — between manuscript decoration and ornamentation on ceramics, textiles, and metal objects, on wood or stone sculpture and even on modern posters and borry bodwork. Ettinghausen has suggested that manuscript illumination was a kind of 'mother art', and as such was often an inspirational source of designs for artisans working in three-dimensional media. Quite apart from the parallels he cites as evidence for this thesis, it is clear that it would have been easier to innovate while working in two rather than three dimensions, if only for technical reasons.

The repertoire of ornament

Unsurprisingly perhaps, considering the time-frame and extent of the geographical area involved, illuminators and decorators of Islamic manuscripts were able to draw on an immense vocabulary of decorative elements. In the embryonic stages of the study of Islamic art, stylistic classification based on dynastic history proved more or less adequate; this is no longer true today, since scholars, in their quest for trends and influences, now focus more closely on minor details while at the same time encompassing broader horizons.

Elements are incorporated into a considerable number of different forms or units, from minuscule text dividers to full-page decorations. As a result,
presentation of the typology and nomenclature of the components will inevitably end up by being rather lengthy in comparison with the treatment of other aspects.

Among other purposes, illumination serves to organise the text; it thus naturally articulates key points of contact between text and non-text, such as the beginning and the end of a manuscript. In these zones, illumination may perform specialised functions complementary to those already mentioned.

In order to simplify the account that follows, reference will be to the foliation of an imaginary 'standard' manuscript. In practice, though, the numbering of the folios can differ from this standard owing to the presence of additional folios before or after the folio containing evidence of ownership or qasaf status was removed, leaving (for example) only the lefthand page of the decoration of two facing frontispieces of the manuscript. Unfortunately, instances of this kind of vandalism are not rare.

Elements at the beginning of texts

The approaches adopted by illuminators in the past were highly diverse, as were the tasks they undertook and the means or media they used. Some manuscripts contain only the types of illumination described below, whereas in others the text opening has more than one ornamented page. The forms of decoration described here are therefore not always mutually exclusive. Moreover, a manuscript is not invariably a single textual unity, and it is not unknown for a second or third within it to start at a point other than an initial folio. In order to highlight the new content for the reader, the illuminator may put in the appropriate place a decoration similar to those mentioned below.

Qurʾān manuscripts

It is not inconceivable that texts other than the Qurʾān were illuminated during the course of the first centuries of the Hijra, though it must be admitted that documentation available to researchers today for the study of decoration from that period is constituted almost exclusively of manuscripts of the Qurʾān. In later periods, many manuscripts of the Qurʾān were illuminated, with certain styles and formats often adhered to over a considerable length of time. We shall therefore begin with an analysis of manuscripts of the Qurʾān, which have certain special characteristics but are in many ways similar to other manuscripts.


22 See Chapter 'bookbinding', 23 Dublin CBL 1476, f. 1; see James, Q. and R., p. 64, no. 47. 24 A. Ersoy, Türk tezhip sanatu (Istanbul, 1988), figs. 22 and 24 (MSS. Bursa Ilyas Bey Medresesi, Ulu Camii 26 and Ortun 60). 25 Dublin CBL 1448, f. 1 (see James, Q. and R., p. 37, no. 22). London N. D. Khalili Collection Q. 298, f. 1 (James, After Timur [London, 1992], pp. 62-63, no. 143). 26 As in MS. London N. D. Khalili Collection, Q. 372 (Deroche, Abbasid Tradition, pp. 72-75, f. 3, 2 a, introduced erroneously as f. 3 a on p. 72). At this period, it was not unknown for two illuminated double pages to precede the text (Abbasid Tradition, pp. 123-124, Kus. 70). 27 See MSS. London III. Or. 4948, ff. 14v, 2 and Cairo DAK 10, ff. 1 v., 1 v.; dated 710/1310 and 775/1372 respectively (Lings, op. cit., pl. 52 and 71).
the Qur'an—all features that alluded to the special content of the manuscript. It would seem that two basic approaches to decorating the opening double page came to the fore in succession. Initially, illuminators executed a pair of symmetrical but independent decorations, but later they favoured placing a single illuminated design over two facing pages.

Artists sometimes contented themselves with transferring a decoration analogous to that on the recto of the first folio and duplicating it on the double page; the central circular or oval motif sometimes remains unchanged, but at others it is integrated into a rectangular ornament covering the two halves of the double page.30 The quotation from the Qur'an, 16:1, 77–78, was ideal for the purpose: the four verses could be distributed over the four heading bands, leaving the centre of the decoration for Qur'an, xviii, 88.31

The opening of the text of the Qur'an invariably appears on a double page, be it the very first of the volume or else the first after the illuminated double page; it is often placed in a regular, balanced position within a border. Very frequently, above and below the space reserved for the script, two headings contain either information pertinent to the text (title, volume number), or else a quotation from the Qur'an. In single-volume Qur'ans, the double page is sometimes reserved for the opening Sūra alone; frequently, however, Sūra 1 is on the right and the opening of Sūra 2 (normally the first five verses) on the left. In the first instance, the second folio verso contains the beginning of Sūra 1, often preceded by a heading band topped by a sort of dome; in the latter case, the frame is less conspicuous.

At an early period, the openings of presentation or ceremonial Qur'ans, such as those of which fragments have been discovered at Sar‘ā, were characterised by a full-scale decorative program. The initial sequence covered at least two illuminated double pages containing no writing (featuring a representation of two mosques), and continued over pages of text within a frame that gradually became less heavy.32 A similar scheme continued to be applied until modern times, except that from quite early on illuminators showed a marked tendency to incorporate textual elements (quotations from the Qur'an, verse-counts, etc.) into the decoration.

Non-Qur'anic texts
Identification of the text on the recto of the first folio

The recto of the first folio—which serves as a kind of 'main entrance' to the text—commonly includes signs to guide the reader: these often feature the title of the work, but other information concerning less the text itself than the actual copy the reader holds in his or her hands may also be added. The fact that the first folio possesses no symmetrical counterpart naturally enough governs the composition of its decoration.

The illuminated area around the essential feature of the title of the work gradually became organised.33 Often, a plain or polylobed circular ornament (shamsa) contains the title of the work or works, and sometimes the name of the author. The arrangement most frequently adopted consisted in placing the decoration at the centre of the page. Illuminators sometimes took pains to add pendants to the central circle and these might contain supplementary information relating to the text. Again, the circular decoration might be flanked by flatterly ovoids ('mtrandas') whose outlines display various degrees of complexity.

When the decoration is a heading of oblong shape, it appears in the upper half of the leaf. In the most elaborate versions, the illumination occupies a whole page: it is then itself generally rectangular in form, and elements within it can readily be identified that, elsewhere, appear isolated on a page, such as headings or shamsas.34 The content of the manuscript is occasionally given in fuller detail: the Khamis of Nigäni MS., Vienna Cod. A.F. 66, begins with a rosette (f. 1) in the centre of which the title Yūnafat al-Zalāykhū is inscribed, with the titles of the four other poems being likewise contained in four symmetrically arranged cartouches.35

Indicators of commissioning patron or library

The recto of the first folio is the ideal place to catch the reader's eye with the name of a patron or other individual, and those commissioning manuscripts are often identified there (ills. 47) in ornaments similar in shape to those found in title headings.36 More extensive investigation is called for to discover whether the inscription is genuine or has been subsequently altered. In some manuscripts, the space that would have normally contained the patron's name has been left blank; in such cases, it may be that the patron abandoned the commission or died (or was deposed) before its completion.

Beginning the text on the verso of the first leaf

Traditionally, the text would begin on the verso of the first folio; very frequently, an illumination marks the start of the text without being preceded by a double page of illumination. But whereas on the recto an empty field can be filled as the artist sees fit, the decoration on the verso has to coexist with the incipit, so that the illumination takes the form of a band situated in the upper

section of the page, and commonly set within a frame of simple form. Many such headings (sarlazeh) contain inscriptions (illus. 43); it is not unusual for the title of the work to appear, while pious expressions (such as the hamdallah, or Allâh say yâ-I-Rasûl) are also frequently chosen. Some illuminators sought to increase the size of this decoration, which resulted in the invention of purely ornamental elements to crown it. In Ottoman times these generally took the form of a cupola (occasionally more than one) and several right in vertical arrays (illus. 44).

To improve the balance of a page layout which inevitably entails some discrepancy between the right- and left-hand sides of the double page, a generally quite simple frame (one or more gold or coloured fillets) encloses the text. There is therefore no hard and fast division between this type of mise-en-page and some of the other varieties discussed below; a copy of Attâr’s famous Persian poem Mantiq al-Asyâr (Paris BNF persan 348) exemplifies how easy it was to obtain a stable composition over ff. 1 v–2 by duplicating the frontispiece.

The initial double page

The aesthetic that underpinned the production of books in Arabic script spurred illuminators to make the most of the opportunities presented by the initial double-page of the manuscript and fill it with ornamentation. This approach is typical of the more sumptuous manuscripts. It is hard to determine when exactly this tendency arose. For non-Qur’ānic texts, Kitâb Khâq al-Nabî wa khusba’ihî (Leiden BRU Or. 437), copied during the second quarter of the fifth/eleventh century, may well number among the earliest examples of the practice; in many ways, the style recalls certain contemporary Qur’ānic illuminations, and the text too deals with religious matters. The text may begin within two rectangles at the heart of the illumination: the headings are frequently embellished with the title of the work, as well as with the name of the author. It is common enough for the title and list of contents alone to be so placed: in this case, illuminators could develop designs inspired by those appearing on the first folio recto with still more panache. In a poetical Divân (MS. Paris BNF suppl. persan 1469ff. 1 v–2), the two almond-shapes are purely decorative; the title of the works features in the headings that surround them above and below, arranged in the same manner as

in a BNF Divân of Sa’dî (suppl. persan 1357ff. 2). The same position can be occupied by a phrase praising the work itself: a Persian Kitâb wa Dinm in London (BL Or. 13506, dated 707/1307-8), which comes from southern Iran, and a copy of Jam‘udîn-i khrâdî by Muhammad Qazwînî (St. Petersburg Institut Vostokoviedenia Or. C 650) are fine examples.

Less frequently, this double page displays two miniatures laid one opposite the other within an illuminated frame. This solution was chosen for an anthology of Amir Khusrau Dihlavi (Vienna ONB Cod. Mxt. 356, ff. 1 v–2). The text then has to start on the following double page, either beneath a heading or band, or, in the more sophisticated manuscripts, over an entire double page analogous in conception to that described above.

Internal Divisions

As was remarked above, illuminations within the body of the volume have at least one practical purpose: to act as signposts for a reader searching for a specific point in the text. Before proceeding, it is as well to stress once more that the terminology employed here is not universally accepted, in terms both of meaning and usage. The word umrûdî, for example, is often taken to designate an illuminated heading band, but both art historians and authors of catalogues also use it to refer to a full-page decoration, with or without incipit; in this case, however, others prefer the term sarlazeh.

Major textual units

The earliest known copies of the Qur’ān (late first/early eighth century) already bear witness to the habit of demarcating the Sûras by leaving a line or part of a line unwritten, as well as of indicating the end of a verse by a marker, or âya (illus. 64). It was not long before the space initially left entirely blank between two Sûras began to be decorated: in early times, anepigraphic illuminations were introduced in the rectangular space, but very quickly the awareness of function led artists to inscribe the title, sometimes accompanied by the number of verses in the Sûra and an indication of whether it was revealed at Mecca or Medina. This eventually became an essential decorative feature. On occasion, the illumination is confined to gilt lettering, but more often the characters themselves become an intrinsic part of the illumination (ills. 39, 41, 42).

of course, particularly in copies made for wealthy patrons. In this category may be included collections of treatises, as well as calendars, almanacs, and astronomical or astrological texts, often in the form of scrolls. A further category of illuminated texts is represented by the long narrative and/or didactic poem or verse garland—genres which are often seen to overlap in Persian, Turkish, and Urdu literature. Among the most celebrated of all Islamic manuscripts are outstanding illuminated and illustrated copies of Persian literary classics such as Firdawsi’s Şahānšah (‘Book of Kings’) and Nizāmi’s Khamsa (or ‘Five Poems’). Few such volumes lack ornamental headings for each separate poem or book, and some have smaller-sized headings for episodes from the narrative or for sage reflection on events. Also in the poetic category come manuscripts containing the collected or selected lyric works of a single author, as well as verse collections. The finer copies of such works customarily include illuminated headings for (a) each author in an anthology; (b) each genre of poem, qa‘īdas being separated from ghazals, rub‘ā‘is, etc.; (c) poems rhyming on a particular letter; or (d) separating poems of a single author with phrases such as wa la-hu (illus. 65). Arranging the collected works (kālīlgōy) of an author in verse and/or prose called for consummate skill in devising the nīse-en-page and in illumination composition.

Subdivisions
In the absence of standardised punctuation, the Muslim scribe customarily had recourse to various devices to indicate the beginning of a new sentence or paragraph—that is, of an intelligible unit we might describe as a sentence or a paragraph. As with vocalisation, this may be no more than a dot of black or red ink, though good quality manuscripts may contain either small vignettes or rossettes resembling Qur’ānic verse markers. Diverse decorations for the latter gradually tended to replace the ink-outlined signs with which it had been usual initially to mark verse separations.47

Returning to divisions between units of text, devices separating verses (bāyāt) or hemistiches (mā‘īn) should now be considered. Where verses are inserted into a block of prose, either to impart variety or as quotations, they are normally signalled by verse markers of the type described above. When laid out as verse, as in the European convention, however, the division customarily takes the form of ruled columns of one or more vertical lines, most commonly in pairs (illus. 65 and 66).

The exact form and disposition of the columns conforms to those of the text frames or jadwal (see below);48 they are most often single fillets or arrays of several lines marking off the text from the margin, both vertically and horizontally—and sometimes even diagonally, when the margins contain lines of text copied at a slant. In numerous literary manuscripts from the ninth to thirteenth/nineteenth centuries, jadwals featured guttering between both coloured and black lines. The art of ruling these frames, known in Persian as jadwal-hafti, was held in high esteem, and whole chapters of treatises on the manuscript arts were devoted to the subject.49

Special features of Qur’ān manuscripts
The special requirements of readers of the Qur’ān and the unique nature of its text resulted in the creation of various forms of ornament in answer to specific needs: ornaments may indicate groups of five or ten verses, ritual prostration (sajda), or divisions of the text into units of the same length for devotional reading (halves, sevenths, jums, hizb or other fractions).49 Often, these indicators amount to no more than marginal ornaments, though certain more sophisticated copies mark the place of the divisions by extending illumination over the whole page. The midpoint of the Qur’ān was already indicated in this fashion by the eighth/nineteenth century, for example in a Qur’ān in Dublin (CBL 1342, f. 193, dated 723/1323)46 in tenth/twelfth-century Persia, decoration took the form of a highly elaborate border. This system was expanded to cover the whole jum, so that certain resplendent manuscripts such as Berlin SB Or. 10450 or Dublin CBL 1342 contain twenty-nine marginal illuminations of this type, not counting the large-sized initial and final decorations.

Other forms of textual decoration
Frames and marginal illumination
At a very early period, frames made an appearance in Qur’ānic manuscripts—for example, in a Qur’ān from Šar‘a (DaM Inv.-Nr. 20-33.1);48 they are relatively thick and derive from cable, or plaited, motifs. At a later date, from the ninth/tenth to the thirteenth/nineteenth centuries, a lighter form evolved, made up of one or more gold and/or coloured fillets; this became the standard approach in all kinds of manuscripts (illus. 39, 65, 66). The colours employed often reflect local practice and hence are a rich source of information: the

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48 The word, jadwal designates the ruled margins of a manuscript, often including the gilt and/or coloured lines; another use of the same term covers a list of contents or a table, e.g. in a scientific manuscript.
51 James, Qur’ān of the Mamluks (Leiden, 1988), p. 73, fig. 43.
inlaying of these frames was not left to chance and, in the Iranian world, a number of recipes provided instructions as to their composition. The margins of a eleventh-eighteenth-century Mughal copy of the Mathnawiyyat of Zafar Khān (Collection of the Royal Asiatic Society, London) are very much out of the ordinary in that they are illuminated in gilt on every page. From the beginning of the ninth/fifteenth century, colour motifs were produced with the use of stencils, especially in Iran, Mughal India, Transoxiana and the Ottoman Empire. Gold arabesques and colour designs in both the margins and text frames also feature in the Miscellany of Iskandar Sultan (London BL, Add. 27261). In high-quality manuscripts, particularly in Safavid Iran and Mughal India during the tenth/sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth centuries, figurative images, most commonly chinoiserie birds and animals, both earthly and mythical, were often drawn in two tones of gold and/or silver within the borders. Sometimes such illustrations are stencilled or simply highly standardised; virtuoso examples of free drawing are not rare, however.

Another device in marginal decoration was the technique known as waqfī (illus. 15). Tinted or decorated papers offered a wide range of effects which artists exploited with relish.57

Insertion of decorative panels in the text area

A number of additional decorative elements appeared from the early ninth/fifteenth century onwards. Associated initially with early Timurid rulers such as Iskandar Sultan, whose brief reign in southern Iran witnessed the production of illuminated manuscripts of extraordinary quality, these included triangular panels containing gilt motifs or arabesques on a plain or coloured ground. This formed part of a trend towards more sophisticated and all-embracing design concepts for the illuminated book and of a concomitant concern to co-ordinate the style of illumination on the preliminary pages, frontispieces, title pages, facing pages and, last but not least, binding and doublures (illus. 44). This tendency, already visible in more ambitious copies produced among others, for Seljuk, Ilkhan, Jālatūrid or Mamlūk patrons (seventh/thirteenth and early eighth/fourteenth centuries), became more pronounced from the ninth/fifteenth century onwards in the sumptuous volumes copied for Timurid, Turkmen, Safavid, Mughal and other patrons (from the ninth/fifteenth to eleventh/eighteenth centuries) (illus. 66).

Remaining in the area of mise-en-page, ornamentation was sometimes added in panels interspersed among the blocks of text. This was done with the manifest intention of postponing the finishing point of the work (generally poetic in nature) to the end, or at least to the lower half, of a subsequent page.

55 'Margin' is مسجد (see Goeck, AMT, p. 33); by extension, the word can also denote marginal decorations. 56 See Chapter 'Instruments and preparations used in book production'. 57 See below

Such precautions are in some ways analogous to avoiding 'widows' and 'orphans', i.e. the lone strings of typographical text preceded at the end or followed at the head of a page by a full line space or more. Illumination panels are sometimes used over several successive pages, part or all of the surrounding text being written diagonally to complement the overall page layout. Careful planning was made possible to ensure that a full-page miniature painting could be placed at exactly the right point in the text, or that the colophon at the end of a poem would fall towards the foot of a page rather than the top. These precautions come to the fore, for example, in the Khamsa of Nizāmī from Herat and illustrated by artists of the school of Bihzād, and in the copy made for the Safavid Shah Tahmās (between 1539 and 1543 (London BL, Or. 6816, and Or. 2265). This vein of illumination is widespread in manuscripts from the mid-ninth/fifteenth century executed for Timurid and Turkmen patrons.

Interlinear Decoration

In the fourth/fifth century manuscripts appeared in which lines of text are enclosed in cloud-shaped ribands (that is, long, thin panels with frilled edges) set off on a ground of coloured hatching. In deluxe manuscripts in the following centuries, gilt replaced hatched decors (except for episode or section headings). In many fine-quality manuscripts, the lines of text in the first two pages are enclosed within interlinear gilding, often in the form of cloudbands. In some opulent volumes, every single page is decorated on the same lavish scale. The eleventh/eighteenth-century Mughal copy of the Mathnawiyyat of Zafar Khān mentioned above is a fine example.

Decoration at the end of the text

The point where the text ends marks a crucial point of articulation, and is thus often emphasised by various forms of decoration. Some were unique to the colophon, a feature which enjoyed special status; others, on the other hand, seem to be encountered solely in manuscripts of the Qurʾān.

In the main, however, the end of a manuscript is less ornamented than the beginning. In Qurʾāns, a deep-seated feeling for symmetry led some artists to conclude the copy in a fashion that matches its opening pages. Full-page decorations multiply, as, more rarely, do circular motifs, pendants to those emblazoning the initial folios.

58 See Dublin CBL 1497, f. 3r-v-4 (see James, Q. and R., p. 17, no. 4) or the Qurʾān of Ibn al-Hawwāb (Dublin CBL, 1431, ff. 284 v-285); see James, Q. and R., p. 34, no. 19); reference can additionally be made to MS. Dublin CBL 1457, f. 293 v-294 v (see James, Qurʾāns of the Mamluks, II, 28). 59 Paris BNF, Smith-Locais 220, f. 1 (Drevese, Cat. 12, p. 58, no. 352); the same device also appears in eighth-century Qurʾāns. 60 See for example MS. London N. D. Khalīl Collection, Qurʾān, 240, ff. 373 v-374 v (James, After Timur, pp. 232-233, no. 56).
Frequently, decorations at the end of the text seem to function similarly to the panels outlined above, i.e. to occupy a space that script alone would be hard pressed to cover; the process is familiar from an early period since it already surfaces in a Qurʾān from the second half of the third/ninth century.61 Perhaps the same intention motivated the illuminated circle inscribed with the quotation from Qurʾān, lxxxii.26,62 which is sometimes introduced after the end of the text. The Qurʾān text may be followed by other elements, particularly prayers for acceptance at the conclusion of Qurʾān recitation or Fā’il-nāmas, divination texts; both provided ample opportunity for decoration at the end of the volume. Although the style of illumination is generally the same throughout, a concern to differentiate between the Qurʾānic text itself and the rest often led artists to ring the changes. The end is also sometimes the place for an illuminated inscription commemorating royal patronage or the deed of endowment (muqāf).63

The ambivalent status of the colophon relative to the text perhaps explains why copyists strove to ensure a particular place for it. Reference has already been made to the question of the special mise-en-page for colophons, be it accompanied by an illumination or no (lls. 67 to 71). As early as the fourth/fifth century, different solutions were devised with the aim of emphasizing the ‘special’ character of the colophon, which was made conspicuous by the use of a particular style of script or else integrated into an illumination64 created more or less expressly for that purpose. The copyist’s signature is both clearly separated from the rest of the text and highlighted. In the finest Qurʾāns, the colophon is treated independently.65 When the colophon is shaped like a triangle or trapezium, the pair of right-angled triangles on either side form an empty space which illuminators sometimes decorated.66

The chief characteristics of the decorative repertoire

Owing to the scattered nature of the documentation and the small number of published studies, it would be patently premature at this stage to offer a complete overview of the decorative repertoire. Descriptive inventories such as that of Dorothea Duda covering the collection in Vienna are thus especially valuable;67 in the same way, certain very richly decorated manuscripts, such as the Paris copy of the theological works of Rashīd al-Dīn Fāḍl Allīhī (Paris BNF arabe 2324),68 present a decorative repertoire that deserves more thorough examination.

Architecture

The most spectacular examples of architectural elements appearing in illumination date to an early period. They are not genuine representational decorations, but allusions to a world familiar to all Muslims. Almost contemporary Arab Christian manuscripts also display decorations inspired by architecture.69 In more recent times, images began to appear that seem to show real buildings: these include depictions of the Haram of Mecca and of the Mosque of the Prophet at Medina, as in copies of al-Jahiz’s Dalī’d al-khayrāt,70 for instance, or minuscule illustrations, as in the illumination of a Qurʾān now in Istanbul (MS. Sileymaniyê, Pertevniylî 8; ll. 74).71

Forms reminiscent of arches, arcades and niches are less specific and appear essentially as frames around an illuminated heading. It is very rare to find them fulfilling that function in a text or list of contents.

Vegetal decoration

Treated realistically or stylised, the plant world provided illuminators with an inexhaustible storehouse of forms. Artists borrowed isolated elements—flowers, leaves and fruits—as well as broader compositions, be they branches or swaying tendrils. Indeed, to Western eyes, ‘arabesque’ has become a byword for Arab-Islamic decoration, and some years ago Ernst Kühl wrote traces its development through various arenas of artistic endeavour.72 The palette or half-palette based on the stylised palm flower already featured in early Qurʾāns. Following the Mongol invasion of the eastern Muslim world during the seventh/thirteenth century, elements of Chinese origin, such as the poony, lotus flower, burgeoning blossoms and more complex floral motifs, rapidly gained favour. By the end of the following century, artists in Central Asia and Iran had evolved relatively

61 MS. Dublin CBL. 1421, ff. 1 v–2 r (see James, Q. and B., p. 20, no. 7). This procedure should not necessarily be laid as the door of mediæval illuminators and copyists: see the fragment Istanbul TKS EH 245 (James, Qurʾāns of the Manṣūrī, fig. 63). 62 As in MSS. Paris BNF arabe 5846, ll. 39, and 5950, l. 25 (Droste, Cat. II, pp. 56–57 and nos. 350 and 549). 63 See the magnificent illuminated mise-en-page of the text commemorating the commemoration of the 'Moulid Qurʾān' by the Mongol El-Chân Khan Şultân, MS. Istanbul TIEEM 541 (James, Qurʾāns of the Manṣūrī, fig. 72). 64 As in MSS. Vienna ÖNB Cod. 251, l. 25 (Duda, It. Ilr. 2, pp. 124-125 and fig. 100). 65 See James, Qurʾāns of the Manṣūrī, figs. 35, 45 and 65 (MSS. Istanbul TIEEM 450). Dublin CBL. 1481, l. 310 v, and Istanbul TKS EH 232, l. 64). 66 As in MSS. Vienna ÖNB Cod. mit. 1062, l. 614 (Duda, It. Ilr. 2, pp. 222-223 and fig. 157).
naturalistic floral motifs which they often deployed alongside arabesque forms. This stock-in-trade developed further in succeeding centuries – most spectacularly in the hands of Ottoman artists with motifs such as the rişûn, a floral scroll including long, pointed leaves, and the smaller-sized ḏaylûl.

Geometry and allied forms

Several early types of Qur'anic illumination sprang from abstract shapes inspired by geometrical forms, including the coloured circles, triangles, and squares that separate the Sütsûn. Pull-page decorations from the third/ninth century betray a desire to devise complex designs that might impart to the whole illumination a more vigorous structure. The finest examples of this geometric vein are without doubt to be found in certain Il-Khanid and Mamlûk Qur'ans of the eighth/fourteenth century, which give the impression of exhausting the possibilities of the genre.

Geometrical forms coexisted in two genres: firstly as self-contained designs, plain or else with some internal ornament such as hatching or arabesques in the enclosed spaces. In the second type, motifs are repeated or varied and interlaced, composing either the background or the foreground of complex decors incorporating still more geometric forms and/or floral elements. The most commonly occurring basic figures are squares, lozenges, polygons, triangles, stars and circles (illus. 46). Employing sensitivity and imagination as well as their consummate mathematical knowledge, Muslim illuminators and other craftsmen generated complex ornaments by means of interface and subdivision or extension of different types of lines (such as those of six- and eight-pointed stars).

Other decorative features

Compared to the three sources of inspiration mentioned above (architecture, the plant world and geometry), borrowings from other domains were somewhat limited. In spite of a vogue for ‘Chinoiserie’, illuminators generally confined themselves to reproducing cloudbands. A ninth/tenth-century poetical anthology from Yazd (London BL Or. 8193) provides a striking illustration of designs that combine plant and animal imagery: its decoration, apparently produced with the aid of stencils, combines not only stylised landscapes

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73 See fragments Paris BNF arabe 324 c (Déroche, Cat. U, pp. 75-77, no. 45); this should be compared to the folios of the same MS. preserved in Cairo (B. Morfo, Ar. Pal., pls. 1-12).
complete with trees and, in one case, fish in a pool, but even a page with stylised heads of men and angels—a type of imagery that represents a striking development of a theme already present in MS. Paris BNF arabe 2324. These cases, like that of the more realistic kind of figurative marginal drawings, are perhaps not strictly part of the domain of illumination as defined above, but belong more to the arts of painting. To some degree, the extremely elaborate lettering employed for inscriptions in illuminations also constitutes a decorative category.

Decorated papers

Illumination was not the only resource book artists had at their disposal in their efforts to endow manuscripts with beauty and grace. In the area of decorated papers, several techniques had been developed over the centuries that resulted in increased rates of production or at least made it easier to decorate leaves of a manuscript already written on, be it in part or in its entirety.79 Tinting, already much used on parchment, was a widespread practice in the Muslim world and its applications have been noted elsewhere.80

‘Silhouette’ papers

Already attested in ninth/fifteenth-century Persia, the technique of ‘silhouetting’ applied by stencil to leaves conjured up arabesque, vegetal and animal forms, angels, etc. (illus. 45), most often coloured red or violet. Leaves decorated in this way break the monotony of the volume;78 copyists preferred in general to avoid transcribing texts directly onto the silhouettes they traced, although in certain Ottoman manuscripts they are integrated into the text area.

Ottoman silhouetted (or ‘shadowed’) papers of the late tenth/sixteenth82 and eleventh/seventeenth century83 (illus. 47), were created by a different

77 O. F. Akhmedshin and A. A. Ivanov, 'The Art of Illumination', in B. Gray (ed.), The arts of the book in Central Asia (Paris/London, 1979), pp. 42, 48-50; Waley, op. cit., pp. 105-106. 78 This section is by Francis Richard. 79 A more detailed account appears in Porter, op. cit., pp. 41-60. 80 See Chapter ‘The Writing Surface: Paper’. 81 See MS. Paris BNF suppl. persan 1425, f. 27 v–28 (see Richard, Paris, 1996, p. 100, no. 55 and pp. 88-89). Related decorations figure in twelfth/thirteenth/eighteenth-nineteenth century MSS. from Central Asia; the area of the page intended for the text is sprinkled with tiny drops of vermilion or some other colour. 82 For example, in ibid. susamch, such as MSS. Paris BNF latin 18596 a to BNF arabe 3416, or in MS. ner. 288 in the same library. See also MS. Paris BNF suppl. persan 770, ff. 16 v–17 (Richard, Paris, 1997, p. 175, no. 121 and pp. 160-161).

83 As in the margins of MS. Paris BNF arabe 169 (Egypt, seventeenth century). Others are still found in the twelfth/eighteenth century, for example in MS. Paris BNF suppl. ner. 1144.

Gold-sprinkling and gold-scattering

Another practice in ninth/fifteenth-century Iran was that of gold-sprinkling and -flecking (illus. 46), in which tiny drops of liquid gold are flaked from the brush or laid in (dipped) with the tip over the surface of the leaf prior to or after copying. The margin is often left blank. A second technique relied on dusting minute fragments of gold-leaf from a bag pierced with holes swung back and forth over the leaf. Silver-flecked paper is recorded in twelfth/eighteenth-century India. One technique of applying gold (zur-qshn) appeared ca. 1450 in Persia before being adopted by the Ottomans. In the most lavish manuscripts, paper gilding served to reinforce the lustre of the leaves, and it presupposed the use of some kind of size.84

‘Dipped’ and marbled papers

A Persian technique, a forerunner of true marbling, is today sometimes called ‘dipped’ paper (Fr. papiers coulés). It would seem that the leaf was decorated by holding it at a slant and slowly and irregularly pouring the colours (ochre, yellow, brown, red or violet) over one side. Occurring in a relatively limited number of manuscripts dating from between 1470 and 1490,85 such paper was perhaps produced in a single Timurid or, more likely, Ağ Quyûnlû Turkman atelier.

Marbled paper (illus. 50), which appeared some time in the middle of the tenth/sixteenth century, is also decorated only on one side of the leaf and is made by laying the paper on the surface of a tank or tub filled with colourant. Initially restricted to two colours, this palette gradually broadened and motifs too became progressively more complex. It should be observed, however, that its beginnings have been ascribed to an earlier era (ninth/fifteenth century), although no extant examples survive to corroborate references to the technique in the literature. Pastel papers served as a writing surface for calligraphy, while other shades appeared in the margins. Marbled papers (abri, meaning ‘cloudy’ in Persian) are to be found in Iran as early as 1540; within a few decades, in the Ottoman Empire, ebru was to become immensely successful, to the extent

that by the end of the sixteenth century this type of paper was being imported, and later imitated, in Europe. Like its tinted and coloured counterparts, it was made from the same types of paper on which manuscripts were written.

Manuscript illustration

The figurative illustrations found in manuscripts in Arabic script fall into several categories. Mention should be made of the diagrams that appear in mathematical treatises, including tables, and above all of the constellation charts in treatises on astronomy (for instance, the work on fixed stars by ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Sufī, illustrated copies of which are known from the fifth/eleventh century), as well as personifications in astrological manuscripts. Other examples of illustrated codices include textbooks on surgery with figures showing the instruments used; diagrams in discourses on military strategy (farrīsyya) showing battles; and maps in geographical compilations (illus. 36). Drawings of plants often accompany the text of Dioscorides or the Theophrastus. Stemming from an ancient tradition, such images are closely linked to texts which without their aid might in some cases prove difficult to follow. Works of an encyclopaedic nature, such as al-Qazwīnī’s Jāḥīṣ al-muḥādīqāt, placed image and text on almost an equal footing.

The purpose of illustration in literary and historical works was quite different. Not necessarily indispensable for understanding the text, they simply depict scenes recounted in the narrative. In some cases, when the sources of the paintings differs from that of the text itself (generally a matter of two different versions of the same work), they provide as it were a parallel to the main line of the story. Mediaeval Arabic literary culture held illustrated versions of the Maqāmāt by al-Ḥaḍrī and Bīḍāy’s Fables (Kalīla wa Dimna) in high regard, and the paintings were frequently adapted from models in copies of Dioscorides or the Christian Gospels. From the Il-Khanid period onwards, Persian literary manuscripts—often produced for a courtly readership that was particularly fond of figurative images—are frequently illustrated, cases in point being the works of Firdawsi, followed by those of Nizāmī and a legion of other poets who continued or tried to emulate the masters’ creations. In certain Persian historical manuscripts, the illustrations that punctuate the narrative fit into a programme that could be carefully contrived for political or ideological purposes. Some royal or princely manuscripts open with a dedicatory painting (of court life or battle, and hunting scenes, for instance, and occasionally of a manuscript being presented to a patron) that appears totally irrelevant to the body of the text but serves to exalt the personage for whom the volume was produced. Ottoman Turkish tradition kept faith with certain elements of Persian practice, though also it possesses specific features, the illustration of official historical chronicles occupying an especially important place.

In illustrated manuscripts, the miniature may be positioned within the text in various ways. It may, for instance, be placed in a rectangular frame or be inserted in the borders prepared for the text—though occasionally no frame appears. Other, more sophisticated page layouts, in which the image overflows into the margins, or in which certain elements of the image creep outside the framing, provide touches of drama and variety. Intricate geometrical constructions allow picture and text to be bound together as closely as possible, and recall the inextricable links between image and calligraphy. Sometimes, though rarely, the paintings may be executed with scant regard for the text or may be misplaced, causing a discrepancy between what the text relates and what the image depicts.

As with many other constituent elements of a codex, careful observation of the illustrations can bring to light precious information concerning the manuscript. A miniature may be incomplete (illus. 72), retouched, or even have been appended decades or centuries after the manuscript was copied; it was not unknown for paintings to be cut out of one manuscript and inserted into another. Codicology is an indispensable aid to iconographical and art-historical study. In order to conduct a scientific study of the image, it is imperative to examine the support meticulously and marshal all the data gathered from the manuscript. In this respect, physical and chemical analysis has opened new perspectives in our approach to manuscript illustration.

On a slightly different tack, details such as the position, number, dimensions and subjects of the miniatures are crucial to the exhaustive description of a manuscript. In Persian, Indo-Persian, Arabic and Turkish miniatures, some calligraphic devices should be compared with the other types of non-figurative decoration occurring in the manuscript: it should not be forgotten that the role of the illuminator is all-important.

It remains to be said that the literature on Arab, Persian and Turkish painting, though immense, remains all too often in the form of disparate and scattered studies that do not always take sufficient account of the manuscripts in which the paintings described appear. This is much less the case now, however, than it was before the 1980s.

84 By Francis Richard. 85 This is a much-studied area: the reader is referred to the bibliographies of the question in K. A. G. Creswell, A Bibliography of the Architectures, Arts and Crafts of Islam (Cairo, 1965); Supplement (Cairo, 1973); Supplement (Oxford, 1984); a further supplement is being prepared and is to be issued shortly.

88 A recent study describes written instructions to the illustrators, discovered in a whole series of Persian, Indian and perhaps Ottoman MSS. (John Seyller, Painter’s directions in early Indian painting’, Arts Asie 59 [2000], pp. 303–318). 89 See Chapter ‘Instruments and preparations used in book production’.