

The role of manuscripts in the writing versus oral debate in Premodern Islamic Society

Adrian Gully

Asia Institute, The University of Melbourne

Abstract

The introduction of manuscripts into pre-modern Islamic society was a major stimulus in the debate on the merits of writing over orality. This presentation will take a look at the importance of manuscripts as a vehicle of the transmission of knowledge in that society, and at how manuscripts symbolised the movement from an essentially oral tradition to an oral/writerly culture. It will also look briefly at the manuscript as a valued commodity within the intellectual community, and at how the Arabic script in manuscript form became the secretary's main tool in claiming precedence for writing over oral transmission.

Pigments and organic colours used in manuscripts from Armenia and Cairo: Tradition and tradition

Cheryl Porter

Director of the Montefiascone Project, Italy.

Senior Conservator and Co-ordinator of Preservation/Conservation, The Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation, Egypt.
Secretary of the Conservation Sub-committee of The Islamic Manuscript Association.

Abstract

Examination of a number of Armenian manuscripts from the 15th-17th centuries and of manuscripts made in Cairo in the 14th century, have produced some interesting results. We have been able to identify the pigments as well as many of the organic colours used to paint and decorate the manuscripts. The paper will discuss the use of an entirely unexpected white pigment used in the Cairo Mamluk manuscripts, and proceed with the identification of the organic colours used to paint in Armenian and the Mamluk manuscripts. For a number of very good reasons, it is unusual to be able to identify organic colours used in manuscript painting. It is not easy to perform analysis of these colours and the paper will discuss some of the reason for this as well as outline the techniques used for our analysis. The history of the use of these colours and the history and technology of the recipes used to create them will also be presented.

For the purposes of conservation, it is not usually necessary to know exactly which organic colours have been used to paint in the manuscript, but it is essential to know when and where they have been used, if any treatments are to be executed and if the painting in the manuscript is to be exhibited. Organic colours are extraordinarily pH sensitive and fade rapidly. These issues will be examined in some detail and with examples.
