

# WORKING WITH MIDDLE EASTERN MANUSCRIPTS

## A guide to Mss Collections worldwide and at SOAS

More than 3,000,000 manuscripts (Mss) are currently estimated to be kept in about 5000 libraries in ca. 100 countries, in various state of conservation, cataloguing and editing.

SOAS Library hold about 2,700 manuscripts, of which 800 are from the Middle East and Central Asia and/or in the languages of these regions.

Here is a short guide on how to start your search for Middle Eastern manuscripts (in Arabic, Persian and Turkish mainly).

An excellent research guide to Islamic manuscript studies has been published by Eryn Kropf at the University of Michigan Library and is available online at: <http://guides.lib.umich.edu/islamicstudies>.

### I. LOOKING UP THE UNION CATALOGUES

In order to check if a published edition of the manuscript has already been done.

Search the [SOAS online catalogue](#), and national and international union library catalogues:

- [COPAC \(Research Libraries UK Union Catalogue\)](#)
- [KVK Karlsruhe Virtueller Katalog](#)
- [WorldCat](#), etc.

Check also the PhD dissertations catalogues in the UK and worldwide:

- Index to Thesis of Great Britain and Ireland,
- Ethos (UK PhD theses),
- Proquest Digital Dissertations (US Dissertations),
- Foreign Doctoral Dissertations (Center for Research Libraries),
- The DART-Europe E-theses Portal (DEEP), etc.

### II. LOOKING UP IN BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHIC WORKS TO ESTABLISH PERSONS' IDENTITY AND WORKS

- Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur*. 2 vols. 1st edition, Weimber: Felber, 1898 & 1902 (2nd edition, Leiden: Brill, 1943-49). Supplement band, 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1937-1942.
  - See also the BRILL online edition.

The GAL is notoriously difficult to use. A brave librarian wrote a guide on how to use it:

<http://www.ghazali.org/articles/brockelmann.pdf> (Written by Richard S. Cooper, originally published in *MELA Notes* 3, October, 1974.)

- Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums*. 12 vols. to date. Leiden: Brill, 1967-.
- Zirkili – *al-A'lām*. 11 vols. In 12 + suppl.. al-Qāhirah : al-Mu'allif, 1970.
- Various *ṭabaqāt* (biographies) for different periods and kinds of people (see some under P920-922, PM920-922, PRA920-922, etc. in SOAS Library)

- Onomasticon Arabicum <http://aedilis.irht.cnrs.fr/onomasticon>
- The Online Bibliography of Ottoman Turkish Literature (<http://www.ottomanliterature.com/>)
- Thésaurus d'Épigraphie Islamique (<http://www.maxvanberchem.org/en/thesaurus-depigraphie-islamique>)

### III. LOCATING MANUSCRIPTS COLLECTIONS

There is no such thing at the moment as an online world union catalogue of manuscripts, but there are lots of national and local endeavours to present those institutions' holdings online.

- **Printed catalogues of Manuscripts**

Each library/institution may have a more or less detailed catalogue of their manuscripts holdings.

A very useful survey (though in need of updating) is :

Geoffrey Roper (ed.), *World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts*. 4 vols. London: al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation; Leiden: Brill, 1992-1995.

- **Digitized/Online catalogues of Manuscripts (worldwide)**

- See the Alphabetical List of Open Access Islamic Manuscripts Collections on AMIR blog [http://amirmideast.blogspot.co.uk/2010/12/alphabetical-list-of-open-access\\_10.html](http://amirmideast.blogspot.co.uk/2010/12/alphabetical-list-of-open-access_10.html)
- The Furqan Foundation has launched its Digital Library Portal in 2016, enabling anyone to freely access to the rich and updated data of the *World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts* online: [http://www.al-furqan.com/world\\_library/](http://www.al-furqan.com/world_library/)

Other manuscripts collections may be on restricted access, either upon subscription or paying of fees for downloading material:

- Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism has created an online database (see [www.yazmalar.gov.tr](http://www.yazmalar.gov.tr)), see their database of more than 200,000 Turkey Manuscripts: [http://www.yazmalar.gov.tr/detayli\\_arama.php](http://www.yazmalar.gov.tr/detayli_arama.php)
- Iran Parliament Library (خطی نسخ گنجینه), <http://www.ical.ir/> see their database of manuscripts : [http://www.ical.ir/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=735:%DA%AF%D9%86%D8%AC%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AE-%D8%AE%D8%B7%DB%8C&Itemid=22](http://www.ical.ir/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=735:%DA%AF%D9%86%D8%AC%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AE-%D8%AE%D8%B7%DB%8C&Itemid=22)
- National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran: [see their mss database](#)

- **Union catalogues of manuscripts**

Fihrist : <http://www.fihrist.org.uk/> This catalogue provides a searchable interface to basic manuscript descriptions from some of the major manuscript collections in the UK. With the continuing contribution of manuscript records from UK libraries, Fihrist aims to become a union catalogue for manuscripts *in Arabic script*.

#### IV. USING THE MSS KEPT IN SOAS SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

SOAS Library currently holds more than 2,700 individual manuscripts. Of these about 2,000 are in the languages of Asia and Africa. The remainder are in western languages, chiefly English, comprising letters, diaries, unpublished memoirs and reports. 800 of these manuscripts are from the Middle East and Central Asia and/or in the languages of these regions.

For an overview of the manuscripts at SOAS Library please consult the [Collections Guide](#).

For other manuscripts, users are advised to consult the Library's card catalogue, kept inside the Special Collections Reading Room on Floor F of the Library. Entries for manuscripts can be found in the main (Name-Title) sequence and also in the separate manuscript sequence towards the end of the catalogue, which is organised by language. Each manuscript is identified by an 'Ms' reference number of up to 6 digits.

There are a number of published guides to some of the language material held in the SOAS manuscript collections, including:

Gacek, Adam, *Catalogue of the Arabic manuscripts in the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, (London, SOAS, 1981) (also available [online](#))

For more information: <http://squirrel.soas.ac.uk/dserve/ATCManMat.htm>

#### V. DECODING AND USING MSS FOR RESEARCH

##### 1. Codicology and palaeography skills workshops

- In the UK:
  - TIMA (The Islamic Manuscript Association) organises a codicology workshop annually led by Prof. **François Déroche** in Cambridge.  
<http://www.islamicmanuscript.org/training/PastWorkshops.html>
  - The Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation organises some mss editing workshop in different countries irregularly.  
<http://www.al-furqan.com/en/al-furqan-foundation/islamic-manuscripts/board-of-directors>
- In the rest of Europe:
  - Paris, France: IRHT (Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes) offers a "Stage d'Initiation aux Manuscrits Arabes" every year. In French only.  
<http://www.irht.cnrs.fr/formation/stage-dinitiation-aux-manuscrits-arabes-2012>
  - Berlin, Germany : Scholars at the "Intellectual History of the Islamicate World" Research Unit organized by Professor Sabine Schmidtke of Freie Universität Berlin, in cooperation with the Berlin State Library, organized a workshop to introduce young scholars to Arabic manuscript studies. The workshop "Arabic Manuscript Studies: An Introduction" held on March 19 to 23, 2012, was aimed at advanced graduate students of Arabic and Islamic Studies as well as other interested parties. Funded by the Center for International Cooperation of Freie Universität Berlin, it was led by Dr. Adam Gacek, a lecturer in Arabic Studies and former head librarian of the Islamic Studies Library at McGill University (Montreal). Gacek gave an opening lecture on

March 16, 2012. It was held in English and was open to the public.

<http://www.ihw.de/w/media/workshop-arabic-manuscript-studies-an-introduction/>

- Madrid (San Lorenzo en El Escorial), Spain. In 2014, a summer course called “**Arabic codicology: The Islamic Handwritten Tradition and its Reception in the El Escorial Collection**” was co-organised by Al-Furqan Foundation and the Complutense University, which aimed to provide the students with the basic codicological knowledge and the research procedures they will need when studying and analyzing Arabic manuscripts, as well as at providing them with a familiarity with the libraries of the Arabic Islamic world in Medieval and Modern times, more especially that which belonged to the Moroccan sultan Muley Zaydân. Course directed by Nuria Martínez-de-Castilla, was taught by specialists of Arabic manuscripts, among them two of the foremost experts in this field, François Déroche and Adam Gacek. In English. Fee-paying. Selection of candidates applied.

<https://www.facebook.com/CursodeManuscritosenIslamUcm?ref=hl>

- Worldwide:

- Alexandria, Egypt: Bibliotheca Alexandrina workshop: Training on cataloguing of Arabic manuscripts - Alexandria [http://www.manumed.org/en/news/18-training\\_on\\_cataloguing\\_of\\_arabic\\_manuscripts\\_november\\_2011\\_alexandria.htm](http://www.manumed.org/en/news/18-training_on_cataloguing_of_arabic_manuscripts_november_2011_alexandria.htm)

## 2. Useful links

- The Arabic Papyrology Database: <http://orientw.uzh.ch:8080/apd/project.jsp>
- The National Archives: Palaeography: reading old handwriting 1500 – 1800: A practical online tutorial : <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/default.htm>
- Codicologica: *Codicologia* / كوديكولوجيا (<http://codicologia.irht.cnrs.fr/>), a glossary of codicological terminology in French and Arabic

## 3. A short bibliography

**Déroche, François et al.** 2005: *Islamic codicology: an introduction to the study of manuscripts in Arabic script*. London : Al Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation.

**Déroche, François** 2004 : *Le livre manuscrit arabe : préludes à une histoire*. [Paris] : Bibliothèque nationale de France.

**Déroche, François et al.** 2000 : *Manuel de codicologie des manuscrits en écriture arabe*. [Paris] : Bibliothèque nationale de France.

**Déroche, François and Francis Richard** [eds.] 1997 : *Scribes et manuscrits du Moyen-Orient*. Paris : Bibliothèque nationale de France.

**Gacek, Adam** 2009: *Arabic manuscripts: a vademecum for readers*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.

**Gacek, Adam** 2001-2008: *The Arabic manuscript tradition: a glossary of technical terms and bibliography* by Adam Gacek. Boston: Brill.

**Görke, Andreas and Konrad Hirschler** 2011: *Manuscript notes as documentary sources*. Würzburg : Ergon Verlag in Kommission.

**Matthews, N. & Wainwright, M.D.** 1971 : *A Guide to Manuscripts and Documents in the British Isles relating to the Middle East and North Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Pearson, J.D.** 1993: *A Guide to Manuscripts and Documents in the British Isles relating to Africa*. London: Mansell.

**Pedersen, Johannes** 1984: *The Arabic book*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

**Richard, Francis** 2003 : *Le livre persan*. [Paris] : Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Ṭūbī , Muṣṭafá and Aḥmad Shūqī Binabīn 2004: *Muʿjam muṣṭalaḥāt al-makḥṭūṭ al-ʿArabī : Qāmūs kūdīkūlūjī* . [Rabat]: al-Khizānah al-Ḥasanīyah.

**Wiesmüller, Beate and Stefanie Brinkmann** 2009: *From codicology to technology: Islamic manuscripts and their place in scholarship*. Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2009.

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