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 Evyn Kropf at the University of Michigan Library and is available online at: [http://guides.lib.umich.edu/islamicmsstudies](http://guides.lib.umich.edu/islamicmsstudies).

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](https://soas.ac.uk/library/collections), and national and international union library catalogues:

- COPAC (Research Libraries UK Union Catalogue)
- KVK Karlsruher 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

  - 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](http://www.ghazali.org/articles/brockelmann.pdf) (Written by Richard S. Cooper, originally published in *MELA Notes* 3, October, 1974.)
- Various *tabaqāt* (biographies) for different periods and kinds of people (see some under P920-922, PM920-922, PRA920-922, etc. in SOAS Library)
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**  

- **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)
  

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 (خانه نمایندگان), [http://www.ical.ir/](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](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)

- **Union catalogues of manuscripts**  
Fihrist: [http://www.fihrist.org.uk/](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:


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

- In the rest of Europe:
  - 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.ihiw.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/CursodeManuscritosenelislamUcm?ref=hl

- Worldwide:  
  - Alexandria, Egypt: Bibliotheca Alexandrina workshop: Training on cataloguing of Arabic manuscripts - Alexandria  

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 / كرديولوجيا  
  (http://codicologia.irht.cnrs.fr/), a glossary of codicological terminology in French and Arabic

3. A short bibliography


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