



Volume 98

Arranged alphabetically by subject and/or concept, the present handbook has been conceived, for convenience sake and quick reference, as an aid to students and researchers who are often puzzled or even sometimes intimidated by the 'mysterious' world of Arabic manuscripts and the technical language that goes with it.

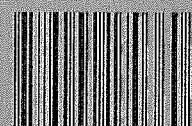
A companion volume to the recently published *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition* (2001) and its *Supplement* (2008), the vademecum comprises some 200 entries of varying lengths dealing with almost all aspects of Arabic manuscript studies (codicology and palaeography). It is richly illustrated with specimens from manuscripts and expertly executed drawings. The main sequence is followed by a number of appendices covering abbreviations, letterforms, sūrah-headings, major reference works and a guide to the description of manuscripts, as well as charts of major historical periods and dynasties.

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ISBN 978 90 04 17036 0



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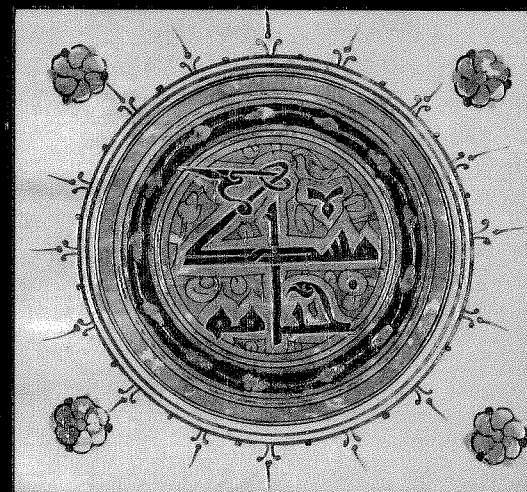
vol. 98

Gacek · Arabic Manuscripts

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# Arabic Manuscripts

## *A Vademecum for Readers*



by  
**Adam Gacek**

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# Handbook of Oriental Studies

Section 1, The Near and Middle East

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VOLUME 98

# Arabic Manuscripts

A Vademecum for Readers

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BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON  
2009

On the cover: Detail of Tab. 47a, see page 262.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gacek, Adam.

Arabic manuscripts : a vademecum for readers / by Adam Gacek.

p. cm. — (Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section 1, the Near and Middle East ancient Near East ; v. 98)

Summary: The main sequence is comprised of approximately 200 entries dealing with almost all aspects of Arabic manuscript studies (codicology and paleography); includes appendices covering abbreviations, letterforms, surah-headings, major reference works, and a guide to the description of manuscripts, as well as charts of major historical periods and dynasties.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-90-04-17036-0 (hardback : alk. paper)

1. Manuscripts, Arabic—History—Handbooks, manuals, etc. 2. Paleography, Arabic—Handbooks, manuals, etc. 3. Codicology—Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Title. II. Series.

Z115.LG33 2009

011'.31—dc22

2009010953

ISSN 0169-9423

ISBN 978 90 04 17036 0

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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to my colleague Steve Millier for his expert reading and commenting on the text of this work. My gratitude also goes to Saskia Roukema who created such beautiful drawings to accompany the various entries in this book.

## INTRODUCTION

When, in 1978, I first came in contact with Arabic manuscripts I was surprised to find that there was so little material of practical significance to be found for a beginner in this field. After all, in the fields of Hebrew, Greek and Latin manuscript studies there were a number of good aids and guides. Yes, I could have read such excellent works as Arnold and Grohmann's *The Islamic book* (1929), Grohmann's *Arabische Paläographie* (1967–71), and even Pedersen's *Den Arabiske Bog* (1946), had I known Danish. I could also have referred to a number of albums of palaeography by W. Wright, B. Moritz, E. Tisserant, A.J. Arberry, G. Vajda and S. Munajjid. However, the information on various codicological and palaeographical phenomena, such as the composition of the codex, inks, typology of Arabic scripts and paper, abbreviations, corrections, marginalia, dates and dating, ownership statements and the like was very sketchy and scattered across various monographic and serial publications. In fact, the very word 'codicology' was not to be encountered in these publications. Moreover, catalogues of Arabic manuscripts concentrated on the identification of texts rather than providing data about the manuscripts themselves as archaeological objects.

Although interest in Arabic manuscripts and in particular palaeography is traceable in the West to the second half of the 18th century, when the first catalogue of Qur'anic codices was described by Jacob Adler, a substantial boost came only with the first ever World of Islam Festival organized in London in 1976. This major event, which was responsible for the publication of a number of catalogues, was followed by the first colloquium in Istanbul in 1986 (*Journées de paléographie et codicologie*) on Middle Eastern palaeography and codicology organized by François Déroche and sponsored jointly by the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Institut d'études anatoliennes. From then on a number of initiatives and publications have contributed significantly to a more systematic study of Middle Eastern manuscripts in the West.

This progress is clearly visible when viewing the section on 'Bibliography' in my recently published *The Arabic manuscript tradition* (AMT) and its supplement (AMTS), which list, among other publications, the first monograph on the codicology of manuscripts in Arabic script, *Manuel de codicologie des manuscrits en écriture arabe*, put together by a number of scholars under the direction of F. Déroche in 2000, and recently made available in English and

Arabic versions, entitled *Islamic codicology: an introduction to the study of manuscripts in Arabic script* and *al-Madkhal ilá 'ilm al-kitāb al-makhṭūṭ bi-al-ḥarf al-'Arabī*, respectively.

In spite of this undoubted progress, however, the field of Islamic manuscript studies is still in its infancy with hundreds of thousands, if not several millions, of manuscripts, yet to be properly explored. Furthermore, very few universities offer credit courses in Arabic palaeography and codicology, and this despite the fact that most Arabic works have not yet been critically edited or stand in need of being re-edited.

Arabic manuscripts in the form of handwritten books have hitherto been studied first and foremost as vehicles of thought and not as objects in themselves. Some Arabists even today are primarily interested in the intellectual content of the book and not necessarily in understanding the mechanics of copying, text transmission, and styles of handwriting.

Much research remains to be done on almost all aspects of Arabic codicology and palaeography. This research, to be successful, has to concentrate on gathering data for various regions and historical periods. We cannot have a complete picture of the history and development of various practices in Arabic manuscripts unless this research is first conducted.

Here the researcher of Arabic manuscripts is confronted with two major sources of information. On the one hand, there is the literature that was produced by those engaged in manuscript making (Gacek 2004), and on the other, the artefacts themselves. The question that needs to be asked is: What do those who produced manuscripts say about their work and how does it square with the surviving specimens? In other words, the theoretical has to be confronted with the empirical. Although the theory may appear at times to contradict the reality at hand, to avoid or minimize this rich Arabic tradition would be a serious mistake.

Furthermore, Arabic manuscripts, in the form of codices, cannot be considered in isolation. Firstly, knowledge of the Persian and Turkish languages and manuscript traditions is helpful because many Arabic manuscripts were copied by Persian- and Turkish-speaking scribes who left their mark not only in their application of local practices but also in various manuscript notes and statements, not the least important being colophons penned in their indigenous tongues.

Secondly, many of the practices in Arabic codicology and palaeography are also encountered in other manuscript traditions such as Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Awareness therefore of the correct terminology and techniques of investigation used in non-Islamic manuscripts is indispensable. Here mention should be made of such recently published works as *The archaeology of medieval bookbinding* by J.A. Szirmai (1999), *Lire le manuscrit médiéval: observer*

*et décrire* edited by Paul Géhin (2005), and *Writing as handwork: a history of handwriting in Mediterranean and Western culture* by Collette Sirat (2006), which provide information on practices involving Islamic manuscripts in their larger contexts.

Thirdly, the study of Arabic manuscripts cannot be fully appreciated and/or understood without thorough grounding in Arabic philology, and recourse to such sister disciplines as epigraphy (inscriptions on hard surfaces), diplomatic (the study of documents, including epistolography and papyrology), and history of art. In addition, research into Arabic manuscript making necessitates, not only a solid grounding in various codicological and palaeographical phenomena, but also familiarity with such specialized areas of study as filigranology (i.e. the study of watermarks and with it heraldry and blazonry), sigillography or sphragistic (the study of seals and seal impressions), and cryptography (the study of notes and inscriptions in secret alphabets), onomastics and prosopography (the study of family names). And finally, one should not forget that books printed by the lithographic process can also be very useful for the study of 19th century palaeography.

Having said all this, it is obvious that the present publication, *Arabic manuscripts: a vademecum for readers* (AMVR) can at best be considered a general summary of the various elements or aspects of Arabic manuscript studies. In fact, the compilation of this monograph has been conceived not as a comprehensive manual of codicological and palaeographical phenomena, but as an aid to students and researchers, who are often puzzled or even sometimes intimidated by the 'mysterious' world of manuscripts and the technical language that goes with it. Indeed, it was my students who urged me to come up with a handy companion for Arabic manuscript studies: something that they could carry around with them when identifying, reading and/or writing about manuscripts and their makers: scribes and scholars.

For convenience sake and quick reference, I have, therefore, decided to arrange this work alphabetically by subject and/or concept. The work is richly illustrated with specimens from manuscripts (some with parallel transcriptions as an aid to readers) and over 50 drawings expertly executed by my enthusiastic colleague and amateur bookbinder Saskia Roukema. The main sequence is followed by a number of appendices covering abbreviations, letterforms, *sūrah*-headings, major reference works and a guide to the description of manuscripts, as well as charts of major historical periods and dynasties.

The technical Arabic terms given here are based on my afore-mentioned *The Arabic manuscript tradition* (AMT), as well as its supplement volume (AMTS). Both volumes can be considered as companions to the present handbook for further investigation of, or reading on, various phenomena encountered in Arabic manuscripts.

In the final analysis, the reader should always bear in mind that each manuscript (unlike a printed book) is unique (even if copied by the same scribe). Indeed, idiosyncrasy and individualism are often hallmarks of many manuscripts and they cannot conveniently be placed in this or that category or compartment. In other words, there are always exceptions to the rule.

## TRANSLITERATION TABLE

ا - alif	ز - zāy/zā'	ف - fā'
ب - bā'	س - sīn	ق - qāf
ت - tā'	ش - shīn	ك - kāf
ث - thā'	ص - ṣād	ل - lām
ج - jīm	ض - ḍād	م - mīm
ح - ḥā'	ط - ṭā'	ن - nūn
خ - khā'	ظ - ḏā'	ه - hā'
د - dāl	ع - 'ayn	و - wāw
ذ - dhāl	غ - ghayn	ى - yā'
ر - rā'		

N.B. The *hamzah*, normally indicated as ' (e.g. *mā'il*) is not shown in transliteration at the beginning of the word. The *alif maqṣūrah* is indicated by an acute accent (e.g. *fatwá*). Normally the *tā' marbūtah* (ة) is transliterated as 'h', except in the construct state where it is rendered as 't' (e.g. *ḥāshiyat al-kitāb*). In Persian the letters: ث, ذ and ض are rendered as s, z and ḏ.