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Within-text and Out-of-text Structures of Islamic- Iranian Manuscripts

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Abstract

Despite some differences, Islamic-Iranian manuscripts have special common out-of-text and within-text structures. These structures were followed by authors, scribes and transcription centers during centuries when transcription tradition was dominant throughout the Islamic world. In this article, these common features were considered in detail. Some manuscript folios preserved in National Library and Archive of the Islamic Republic of Iran (NLAI) were included for better clarification.

Keywords: Islamic-Iranian Manuscripts, Transcription Tradition, Manuscript Structure

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Introduction

Muslims' interest in science, culture, literature and art resulted in scientists, artists and scribes devoting their best times and efforts to compiling, transcribing, decorating and illuminating the manuscripts of scientific works primarily authored by many scientists (*ūlamā'*) throughout the Islamic world.

As the case in other civilizations, writing, book making and transcribing in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and other languages had religious, cultural, economic and political motivations in the Islamic civilization. In reality, a combination of such motivations caused the formation of great transcription tradition.³ In the introduction of *Kashf oZŻunūn*, Ḥājī Khalīfa (Kâtip Çelebi, d. 1067/1657?) stated that because of the development of Islam, expansion of Islamic geography, dispersion of the companions of the Prophet_(pbuh) in various Islamic cities, religious disagreements and different opinions and beliefs, many scientists started to compile Quran-related sciences, juridical knowledge (*fiqh*) and narrations (*ḥadīth*) as well as reasoning and interpreting Islamic knowledge, organizing book chapters and sections, responding to doubts, and developing appropriate terms and methods, all requiring the formation and development of procedures for transcription and bookmaking.⁴

Undoubtedly, the religious principles were the main effective factors in manuscript transcription and book illumination among Muslims. Such factors made Islamic scientists to write valuable books and motivated knowledgeable scribes to transcribe and produce gilded and embellished works in order to ask the favor of God and afterlife.⁵

³ Ghulām-Reḍā Fadā'ī Irāqī, *An Introduction to Arabic and Persian Manuscripts and Rare Books* (Tehrān: SAMT Pub, 2007), 13 [in Persian].

⁴ Ḥājī Khalīfa, *Kashf oZŻunūn 'an Asāmī al-Kutub wa-l-Funūn* (Stanbūl: Maktaba Wikāla al-M'ārif al-Jaliyya, 1364 A.H.), Vol. 1, Introduction.

⁵ Nājib Māyil Hirawī, *Text Criticism and Correction* (Mashhad: Āstān Quds Raḍawī, Islamic Research Foundation, 1990), p 25. [in Persian].

Quran, *Nahj al-Balāgha* of Imām ‘Alī (pbuh) (the first Imām of Shī’a) and *Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya* of Imām Sajjād (pbuh) (the fourth Imām of Shī’a), and other religious books, including blessing and prayer books were the main books transcribed repeatedly.

In the Islamic civilization, “words” (*kalām*) and “book” (*kitāb*) are the dominant features and respectful elements, because Quran, as the miracle of the Prophet (pbuh) was manifested as a book in Arabic words. Emerging with “book miracle”, Islamic civilization developed and expanded. As a result, the Islamic Nation (*Umma*) developed book tradition during centuries, as possible.

After being familiar with paper-making industry from Chinese and establishing the first paper-making manufacturer in the 2nd century A.H. in Samarqand city, Muslims expanded paper-making workshops in various cities in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Therefore, handmade papers were increased and easily accessed throughout the Islamic world during the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.H. As a result, the number of manuscripts and extent of transcription efforts increased in Iran and other Islamic countries. Various scribes gradually started to transcribe the first and original books that scientists and/or their students had authored or drafted. In the 7th and 8th centuries A. H., the number of authors, scribes, book-makers, book-painters and book-dealers increased and consequently, transcription, book-making and book illuminating centers were established here and there. Some Arabic and Persian books and treatises were authored on the procedures of writing, transcribing, corresponding, painting, illuminating, ink and pen producing, writing scripts and so on during the 3rd and 4th centuries A. H.

The Structure of Manuscripts

General appearance

In some manuscripts of high value, mostly written in Iran or by Iranian scribes or scientists, *turanj* (citrus-shaped) embellished design with an epigraph including the name of ordering person, the author or

the title were included in the first sheet of the manuscript. In some manuscripts, embellished designs of the epigraph and colored tables and lines around the text were included in the upper middle of the first page before starting the main text and the margins of the first two pages were covered with other embellishments. Gold-written and silver-written headings and subheadings were observed at the first time writing of the names of Quran's *Sūras* (chapters). Islamic-Iranian manuscripts were very rich in using various inks and pens in their texts, titles and headings.

With an increase in the number of scribes, book painters, book-decorators and consequent establishment of more transcription centers during the 7th and 8th centuries A.H. throughout the Islamic world, many manuscripts were produced with a special structure of writing and transcription in various transcription centers located in Iran. The structure can be studied from within-text (inner) and out-of-text (outer) aspects. The former refers to the structure of items embedded between the two covers (*Bayn al-daffatayn*), i.e. the text of manuscripts embedded in sheets and the latter refers to the physical manifestation of manuscripts and ways of binding and covering them.

Within-text (Inner) Structure

By reviewing many manuscripts transcribed in Iran in various Islamic historical periods, we can explore a similar and common structure for the “text” of these manuscripts. This structure was followed firstly by the scientists and authors originally writing them. In other words, they prepared an original manuscript by their own handwriting in the accepted and common structure (as a drafted *Musvadda* copy or a corrected *Mubyaḍḍa* copy)⁶ and delivered it to their students to use and/or to scribes to transcribe. In consequent phases, the pupils of the authoring scientist or other interested knowledgeable individuals might start to transcribe the original

⁶ The former refers to a raw draft with some possible errors or crossed-out lines and the latter refers to the corrected and grammatically revised and spell-checked final draft.

manuscript for personal usage or its distribution, again and again. The persons working in the centers of book-dealers, book-makers and scribes prepared many other manuscripts from the original one for the scientific community.

The within-text structure had been accepted and followed by transcription centers, scribes, book-makers, authors and secretaries as a common framework for writing and transcribing the texts of manuscripts. This common structure and framework included among others, these features:

1. Spacing some lines in the upper part of the first sheet: Almost in all manuscripts, the main text is started by spacing 4-5 upper lines (leaving them blank) in the back side (*ẓahr*) of the first sheet. In other words, the scribe or writer wrote “Basmala” (abbreviated *Bismillāh ar-raḥmāni ar-raḥīm*) after spacing 4-5 starting lines of the first page. This location left blank aimed to include the book title and perhaps the author’s name in the copies of transcription centers and illustrate the gild and bejeweled cornice (*katība*) and epigraph (*sarlovh*), as well as including the title within the cornice, especially in court secretarial manuscripts, after writing or scribing their text (Fig. 1).

Fig 1. Spacing some lines in the upper part of the first sheet of *Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya* of Imām Sajjād_(pbuh), transcribed in 1121 A.H.

2. Writing “Basmalah” and “Ḥamdalah”: Authors as well as scribes started to write a book or transcribe a manuscript with the name of God (*Bismillāh ar-raḥmān ar-raḥīm*, so-called *Basmala* in abbreviation) and continued with so-called abbreviated *Ḥamdalah*, meaning *al-ḥamdulillah* (as a sermon on praising Allah) in the first part of the introduction, often including the praise for God and the greetings of the Prophet_(pbuh), *Ahl al-bayt* _(pbud) (his family) and their followers.

The manner of writing *Ḥamdalahs* and the included items in them were relatively in line with the subject and content of the book or manuscript under process and in many cases, with reviewing this section, one can explore that whether the book is philosophical, theosophical, juridical, or so on (Fig. 2).

3. Writing “*Ammā Ba’diyya*”: In many manuscripts, the authors or scribes continued to write or transcribe the second subsection of the introduction -following *Basmalah* and *Ḥamdalah*- by mentioning *Ammā Ba’d* (so-called *Ammā Ba’diyya* meaning “but after”). In this subsection, the author wrote his/her name and perhaps stated his/her motivation of writing, the writing style, cited resources, the titles and chapter headings and so on. Our ancestors named the subsections *Basmalah*, *Ḥamdalah* and *Ammā Ba’diyya* as “*Muftatiḥ*” (i.e. an introductory section) in overall⁷ (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. A sheet including “Basmalah” and “Ḥamdalah” as well as “Ammā Ba’diyya”

4. Writing and transcribing the text with “*rikāba*”: After phrasing *Ammā Ba’diyya*, the book was authored originally or transcribed based on the original copy. After finishing the writing or transcribing each page, the author or scribe wrote *Rikābe* (i.e. explorer) at the bottom end and left side under the last line of the page –as conceived as back side of the sheet- and in a pen narrower than that of the main text. *Rikaba* or *Rādda* was one or two words of the first words included in the next page and its

⁷ Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā Ṣawli, *Adab al-Küttāb*, Researched by Muḥammad Bahja al-Atharī and Maḥmūd Shukrī Ālūsī (Baghdād: al-Maktaba al-‘Arabiyya, n.d.), 29; Aḥmad ibn-‘Abd Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd al-Farīd*, Commented by Mufid Muḥammad Qamiḥa (Beirut, 1986), Vol. 6, 243.

inclusion acted as sheet pagination and their ordering had to be followed when binding (Fig. 3).

Fig 3. A sheet with “rikābe”, a word at the bottom end and left side under the last line of its right page

5. Inclusion of headings and sub-headings with a different pen or color: After finishing the transcription, the scribe who had left the locations of chapter and section headings and subheading blank transcribed them with a broader pen and in many sheets, with red or vermilion colored ink and finished the transcription of the manuscript completely. This transcription tradition followed by transcription centers eased the recognition of book heading and subheading (*abwāb wa fuṣul*) for the reader community (Fig. 4).

Fig 4. Two sample sheets including headings and sub-headings with a pen or color other than that of the text

6. Writing the postscript: After finishing the book, its author expressed its finishing by some concise phrases such as “Tamma al-kitāb bi-awn al-malik al-wahhāb” (The book was finished with the help of the Donor), “Tamma al-kitāb” (The book was finished) and “Tammat” (it was finished). Sometimes, before stating such phrases, the author or scribe wrote a concise phrase praising Allah for their success in finishing the book. In some manuscripts, the writer included phrases such as “Allafahū” (It was authored by), “Ṣannafahū” (It was compiled by), “Savvadahū” (It was drafted by), “Anshadahū?” (It was created by), “Ḥarrarahū mu'alifu-hū al-ḥaqir al-faqir” (It was written by its abject and poor author), followed by the name of its writer/scribe, or “Tamma taḥrīruhū bi-yadi mu'alifih” (Its writing was finished by the hand of its author), not followed by the author or scribe name (Fig 5).

Fig. 5. The postscript written in 1004 A.H. by Şadr aD-Dīn Shirazī in his book, "Philosophical Treatises" and Poets

7. Writing “anjāma” or “tarqīma”: One of the transcription traditions in Islamic-Iranian transcription centers was that scribes had to safeguard the original text and be loyal to it from its beginning to its end (from the “b” of “Basmalah” to the “t” of “Tammāt”) and quoted the items accurately from the original copy. After finishing the transcribed book, a space was assigned to the scribes to include some phrases of their own, named *anjāma* or *tarqīma* (i.e. the pointer or ending). After finishing the main text, the scribe of each manuscript could write his/her name, transcription date and place, and perhaps other information such as the book title and the author’s name or ordering authority name in the *anjāma*. Its content mostly included at least one of the three main and important codicological? bibliographical elements: the scribe/author’s name, transcription date and transcription place. In some manuscripts, some other bibliographical information, such as the book title and author’s name was written in the *anjāmas* of manuscripts (Fig. 6). Scribes usually selected the pen and script as different from those of the main text as well as writing style other than that of the text in order to make the reader explore the historical identity of each individual manuscript by reading the end phrases included in the *anjāma*. Physical appearance of many *anjāmas* was triangular. However, that of some was rectangular, quadrangular, trapezium or other geometric shapes. In some cases, the phrases within *anjāmas* were upper-lined in red or vermilion. In most cases, even in Persian ones, the phrases included in *anjāmas* were in Arabic and transcription date was written alphabetically rather than numerically.

Fig. 6. The *anjāma* or *tarqīma* of a manuscript from "Kitāb al-Kāfi", transcribed in 1105 A.H., showing scribe’s name and transcription date

8. Leaving the back (*zahrriyya*) pages blank in the beginning and end of the manuscripts: After finishing the transcription of manuscripts' sheets, scribes left one or two sheets in the beginning and end of the manuscript blank and space? (*bayḡā*) as dorsal sheets and delivered the manuscript to the binder. The binder arranged the sheets, cut, sewed and bound them at the first (what?) and then, after flattening the edges of the sheets (using a tool named *eshkonj* (binding constraint)), began to bind them. One transcription tradition was that the back side (*zahr*) of the first sheet was left blank and "basmalah" was written in its other side. This blank page was conceived as the *zahr* (back) of the first sheet. The probable reason for leaving the page blank was that the scribe or other future owners of the manuscript would include some various notes (Fig. 7). Some other various items could be written here by the owners as "*zahrriyya* notes".⁸ Some other blank sheets could be added to the manuscripts before binding them, all identified as "*zahrriyya* papers".

Fig 7. Two samples of "zahrriyya notes" introducing the owners/buyers of the manuscripts

Out-of-text (Outer) Structure

As mentioned above, out-of-text structure in Islamic-Iranian manuscripts refers to their physical appearance, cover format and visible features. Four different physical structures can be identified in these manuscripts, as follows:

⁸ In court transcription centers, the geometric shapes of "shamsa" (sun-like decorated painting) or "turanj" (citron-shaped painting) were painted here and the title and the author's name were written within the shapes.

1. Common book structure: Since when writing and transcription had been done on papyri and animal skin in the early Islamic period until handmade papers were in use in the 2nd and 3rd centuries to 13th century A.H. when the printing industry was invented causing manuscripts to be replaced by printed copies, the common binding and covering structure of manuscripts was in the form of a bound book. In other words, sheets were cut, sewed and bound lengthways and held between two covers (Figure 8). This structure was applied for printed books, as well.

Fig. 8. Common book structure of a manuscript

2. *Bayāḍ* structure: In the ancient codicology? tradition, *bayāḍ* structure was applied to some manuscripts in which, in contrast to common structure, the sheets were cut, sewed and bound width ways. In this case, opening and closing papers were being done? lengthways. This structure can be seen in the books including prayers, pilgrimage sayings and selection of ethical and literary remarks in prose or poetry. Such books were used as pocket-sized ones and their owners carried them easily everywhere. As blank *zahriyya* pages of these books were usually more than one or two pages, their knowledgeable and educated owners wrote valuable literary and scientific items and even their travelogues on these blank pages. As *Bayāḍ*s were often a collection of prayers, literary items and ethical notes, they did not include an independent subject to be conceived as a book with a distinct title or an identified author. If the case, they are cataloged under “Literary Bayāḍs” or “Prayer Bayāḍs” as the conventional titles. When including miscellaneous items, *Bayāḍ*s are conventionally cataloged under “Anthology Bayāḍs”. (Figure 9).

Fig 9. “Bayāḍ” structure of a manuscript

3. Scroll (*Ṭūmār*) structure: In this structure, the text for transcription? often included one or two Quran sections (*Juz'*), prayer books (including those of protecting or guarding, so-called *ḥirz* and *ta'vidh*), governmental regulations and documents deeds for endowments (*vaqf nāmas*) (Fig. 10). This text was transcribed within a relatively short width and short, medium or long length and with a narrower pen and light ink. The sheets were sewn together in scroll form. The beginning of the scroll was connected to a thin pipe somewhat wider than the text within the scroll and its end was connected to a leather piece –in the same width or somewhat wider than that of scroll sheet- as its cover. The end edge of the leather cover was made triangular so that after rolling the scroll around its pipe, the leather connected to the end of the scroll could cover and protect the scroll-shaped long sheets. A leather string was rolled around this cover and fastened. Sometimes, a leather or metal compartment was made for keeping the rolled scroll into it (Fig. 11). Quran text and prayer items were written in scroll structure for soldiers and the armed forces to hang these manuscripts from their necks by a leather string, to put them in their pockets or to fasten them around their arms when fighting.

Fig. 10. Opened scroll of a manuscript including a prayer

Fig. 11. Closed presentation of an scroll-shaped manuscript

4. *Muraqqa'* (patched or separated) structure: Extracted from *ruq'a* (patch or piece), *muraqqa'* means in codicology a kind of book including individual script and painting pieces. Selected narrations (*aḥādīth*) or couplets (*abyāt*) were written with legible penmanship and narrower or broader pens on any piece of papers accompanying other decorations such as tables, illuminations, and mouse-teeth gilding pieces added among their lines. *Waṣṣals* (ones (what?) tying pieces together) tied some *ruqqa'*s and provided a book embedded between two covers (*daffatayn*). In this structure,

front *daffa* or *Ṭabla* (front cover) was connected to the beginning of the first *ruaqq'a* and back *daffa* (back cover) was connected to the end of the last *ruaqq'a*. As *ruaqq'as* were one-sided and their backs were blank, their backs coincided with each other in one hand and their fronts did so in the other hand?. Therefore, when *ruaqq'as* were collected altogether, the end edge of each *ruaqq'a* connected to the first edge of the following one. The two *daffas* covered this collected *ruaqq'as*. The opening-closing statues of *ruaqq'as* were in a folding shape, known among Chinese as accordion wood walls (Fig. 12). *Muraqqa's* were the uncontested manifestation of calligraphy, illumination, gilding, table-drawing, painting and binding arts⁹ (Figure 11). *Muraqqa'* structure was generally dedicated to script and painting pieces and its content consisted of one or more *ruaqq'as* that might include the poems from one or more poets, penmanship of one or more penmen, or one or more verses of Quran or narrations from the Prophet_(pbuh) and his family_(pbuh). Some of these pieces are identifiable as to their creators (signed) and some not (unlabeled).

Figure 12. A “muraqqa” manuscript

Concluding remarks

In parallel with the increase in the number and extent of books and written items in the Islamic civilization, some common structures for manuscripts were formed in the transcription tradition and followed by authors, scribes and transcription centers during past centuries. These structures mostly can be seen in Islamic-Iranian manuscripts. Regardless of the type of the manuscript, its author or its transcription scribe or center, these structures have common features as to their within-text, and out-of-text appearances.

⁹ Najīb Māyil Hirawī, “Transcription”, *In the Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science* (Tehran: the National Library and Archive of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2002-2006), I, 180-186, 201.