

Sub-project B05

Forms and Functions of Layout in Arabic Manuscripts as Based on Copies of Religious Texts

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Description of the Project

The layout of Arabic manuscripts with its manifold manifestations has been studied only superficially and in an unsystematic way. Thereby the focus has been on the more elaborate and lavish codices, while manuscripts produced for daily life have been widely ignored. More extensive data based on larger corpora are still missing. Therefore the analysis of the layout of utilitarian manuscripts and its dependence on time and place of their provenance, literary genre, context of use and other aspects is highly desirable. The same applies to the interplay of practices of the transmission of knowledge and its organization in the manuscript that is achieved through the layout.

For the research in subproject B05 a number of utilitarian copies of religious texts have been selected that distinguish themselves through their huge diversity of layouts. The texts that are dealt with are the following: a) the Quran; b) al-Buḥārī (st. 870): *aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥ* (tradition of the prophet); c) al-Būṣīrī (st. 1294): *Qaṣīdat al-Burda* (manual of blessings of the prophet) with commentary and expansions (*Taḥmīs* etc.); d) al-Bayḍāwī (st. 1316): *Anwār at-tanzīl* (commentary on the Quran); e) al-Ġazūlī (st. 1465): *Dalā'il al-ḥayrāt* (prayerbook etc.); f) al-Ḥalabī (st. 1549): *Multaqā l-abḥur* (handbook on hanafite law from the Ottoman period).

Objectives

The subproject B05 will collect data on layout in a systematical way for the first time: dependencies of different parameters will be analyzed and the conventions of layout and their historical development will be described on the basis of selected groups of manuscripts. The analysis will be focusing especially on the following features: a) measurement and proportion of the writing area, b) framing (creation of panels) c) different types and sizes of script, d) use of different colors of ink, e) indentation/centering, f) number of lines and character density, g) script that diverges from the horizontal direction of writing, h) breaks/demarcation of breaks and lemmas and their frequency, i) beginning of texts (in selected cases, e.g. in collections). The features of the layout will be analyzed with regard to their ornamental function as well as to their function for the organization of knowledge. The results will be surveyed for individual copies of a text and then be brought into a development series, arranged by time and place of origin. Finally the results for the manuscripts of all six texts will be compared.

The Layout of Arabic Manuscripts



Fig. 1: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. or. oct. 1228

The two images shown illustrate some of the layout characteristics. They are samples of earlier undated copies of al-Ġazūlī's *Dalā'il al-ḥayrāt*, a prayer book from the 15th century. The first copy (Fig. 1) was written in the Maghreb, the second (Fig. 2) in the Iranian area.

1. Similarities: In both cases the writing area is framed, different colors of ink were used for the text and the subdivision (the end of the first third or the beginning of the seventh ḥizb) is decorated with ornaments similar to those used in copies of the Koran.
2. Maghrebian features: The square format of the page and writing area as well as the usage of other colors than red to highlight the beginning of a new section, namely green, are typical features of religious texts written in the Maghreb. (The script, called Maghribi, is the script of the western Arab region. The catchword on the right page, that is missing in figure 2, however, in the latter codex is only omitted on the decorated double pages. In all other cases it is present.)
3. Eastern features: Typical for the Iranian region in later times and the eastern manuscript production in general is the upright format of the page and the writing area as well as the restriction to red as labeling color for the text; in this case red ink was used for important words and the interlinear translation. In the West, gold is rarely used for ornamentation. In this example it is not only used for the frame, but also for the framing of the font outlines of the Arabic text. In the east gold is even used in utilitarian manuscripts (of higher quality).



Fig. 2: King Saud University Library Riad, Ms. 5865