

The Istanbul manuscript does not show the dislocations of the Iranian manuscript tradition and fills in the gap left there by the loss of a folio. On further examination, it seems in general to preserve a much superior text. The readings of the quotations from Shahrastānī's book correspond more closely to the better readings of the manuscripts of that work. The Iranian text tradition contains a few modifications in substance most likely made by Tūsī himself, perhaps at the time when he added the quotations from the books of the philosophers. However, he did not revise the whole draft thoroughly or produce a final clean copy. Both traditions thus contain the same few slips in the argumentation, which seem to be the result of the haste in which the work was written, and some of the same errors, presumably caused by difficulties in reading his draft. Most of the variants of the Iranian text tradition in relation to the Istanbul version are clearly later alterations and additions by a second hand.

The Istanbul manuscript is not free of faults and problems. It would certainly be helpful if at least one other manuscript of this earlier text version were found. Yet on the basis of the full range of manuscript tradition now available, it may be expected that it will do justice to the original thought and style of Shahrastānī and Tūsī.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ISLAMIC MANUSCRIPTS

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'Nūn. By the Pen, and that which they write.'

(Qur'ān, LXVIII:1)

'Say: Though the sea became ink for the Words of my Lord, verily the sea would be used up before the Words of my Lord were exhausted, even though We brought the like thereof to help.'

(Qur'ān, XVIII:10)

The people (*al-ummaḥ*) who were destined to receive the revelation in which the above verses are contained, could not remain unaffected on the human level by either the central significance of the Pen which God takes to witness in the verse cited above, nor by the inexhaustibility of the treasury of the Words of God. The *ummaḥ* which created Islamic civilization could not but live by the pen and its fruit in the form of the written word. Nor could it cease to produce a great number of works written primarily in Arabic, secondarily in Persian, and then in nearly all the vernacular languages of the Islamic world ranging from Turkish to Malay and Bengali to Berber. The civilization which received the imprint of the Qur'ānic revelation produced a vast corpus of writings which has probably not been matched in quantity by

the literature of any other civilization before the discovery of printing. It also produced a body of writings which contains not only the thought, art, and sentiments of that notable segment of humanity which comprises the Islamic people, but also many of the intellectual and scholarly treasures of the civilizations of antiquity to which Islam became heir and much of whose heritage it preserved in accordance with its function as the last plenar religion of this humanity. Moreover, manuscripts were written by Muslims or minorities living within the Islamic world which contain knowledge of other civilizations and peoples.

As far as the Islamic heritage is concerned, the manuscripts written over the ages and surviving to this day cover nearly every aspect of Islamic thought and culture, although the significance of the oral tradition which complements the written text must not be forgotten in many fields. Despite the fact that nearly everything asserted about Islamic manuscripts in general must remain provisional because of our present state of knowledge, it is still safe to say that the largest part of these manuscripts belong to the 'field' of the religious sciences ranging from Qur'anic commentaries to manuals of prayer. Although many manuscripts have been studied and printed during the past century and a half, ranging from the major commentaries and collections of *ḥadīth*, to works of jurisprudence, the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), Islamic economics and political thought, *kalām*, and works concerning everyday piety, it would not be an exaggeration to state that the majority of extant works, even in this central field, remain still in manuscript form and have never been edited as can be seen so clearly in the field of later *kalām*, both Sunnī and Shī'ī. Moreover, many of the works which have appeared in printed form, including a number of well-known commentaries, are not available in critical editions, and reference to manuscripts of them remains necessary for a serious study of their content. It is hardly an exaggeration to state that such manuscripts are crucial for present and future generations of Muslims to have a correct understanding of not only their religious heritage but also themselves as Muslims, for every generation defines and sees itself in the light of its understanding of the traditions which, like the trunk of a tree, connect each branch to the root which is the revelation itself.

A second major category of manuscripts, and perhaps the second most numerous after works on the religious sciences, concerns language and literature. Here again, despite the great effort of a number of scholars during the past century and a half since modern printing began in the Islamic world and the publication of the *dīwāns* of many outstanding poets as well as prose works, much remains still in manuscript form. While the works of many secondary writers remain unedited, even the writings of major figures have often been printed defectively and there is the greatest need to consult

manuscript copies to establish a definitive text for them. Just to draw an example from my own mother tongue, even the *dīwān* of perhaps the greatest poet of the Persian language, Ḥāfiz, has been revised during the past generation as a result of the discovery of new manuscripts, while the more definitive edition of the *Mathnawī* of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī is finally seeing the light of day this year. There are even those who still hope to discover the manuscript of the *dīwān* of Rūdākī, the father of Persian poetry, in some far away library in India.

The role of manuscripts is even more central in some of the vernacular languages such as Malay where very few of the works which are landmarks of Malay literature as an Islamic literature have been edited critically to this day. And then there are the African languages with a rich Islamic literature, such languages as Somali and Fulani, where most of the literature has remained oral but some is preserved in manuscript form. The written documents in such cases are especially significant for the preservation of the record of the literary life of a whole people often in danger of losing their literary heritage. Islamic manuscripts as yet not fully studied or unknown to the world at large comprise one of the richest literary treasuries of the world, reflecting the deepest ethos and the profoundest thoughts of people as far apart as Andalusians and Filipinos, and languages as different as Berber and Chinese, which possesses an important but as yet rarely studied Islamic literature, not to speak of Arabic and Persian which are two of the world's richest languages from a literary and especially poetic point of view.

Throughout their history, Muslims have based themselves on the Qur'anic model in which ethical injunctions are intertwined with episodes of sacred history, and have paid a great deal of attention to historical writing. Islam must in fact be considered, along with China, as the most historically aware of the classical civilizations, by which is not meant a theological interpretation of history wherein truth becomes incarnated in history resulting ultimately in historicism, but an awareness of, and interest in, the writing of history and its significance in the life of the community. Of course, many of the histories written by Muslims were chronicles of events, but there were also histories with a vision concerning the meaning of history in terms of trans-historical realities. In any case, Muslims wrote a large number of works on history, mostly in Arabic and Persian, but also in Turkish and other languages, and produced a body of works which are our only source of knowledge for not only the lives of Muslim nations in the past, but also the activities of many other peoples ranging from Mongols to Africans. Again in this field most of the major classical histories such as those of al-Ṭabarī and al-Mas'ūdī have been printed, but many local histories remain in manuscript form. Moreover, even some of the most renowned historical works are still in need of a critical edition based on the

most trustworthy of the existing manuscripts. Such works include even the *Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldūn which, despite all its fame, suffers from the lack of a critically edited Arabic text.

Muslims wrote fewer works in the fields of philosophy and the natural and mathematical sciences than in the religious sciences and literature, but they nevertheless produced a large number of treatises many of which remain still in manuscript form. One might say that there are still whole continents to discover in these fields. It is remarkable that in the field of philosophy there is not a single major Islamic philosopher all of whose works have been critically edited and printed. If, for some reason, all the manuscripts of the works of Kant or Hegel were to be lost, the definitive texts of their writings would nevertheless survive in the many printed editions of their works. But what would happen if, God forbid, all the manuscripts of the works of the most famous of Islamic philosophers, Ibn Sīnā, were to be lost? One can surmise the answer by remembering that his most famous and voluminous work, the *Kitāb al-shifā'*, printed over a thirty year period in Cairo, contains so many errors in certain volumes that there is still the need to consult a manuscript to make sense of some of the passages.

If this is the situation with Ibn Sīnā, one can imagine the case of lesser known philosophers such as Ghiyāth al-Dīn Manṣūr Dashtakī, nearly all of whose works remain in manuscript form, of figures belonging to the history of seven centuries of Islamic philosophy in the Ottoman world, or India, in both of which numerous manuscripts await to be studied in order to make known the intellectual history of these lands. This later history, often combined with that of *kalām*, remains almost totally hidden within the pages of all those manuscripts, many greatly endangered, which still survive in public and private collections.

As for science, it hardly needs to be mentioned here that most of the study of the history of Islamic science has been carried out by western historians of science, who, for that very reason, have been mostly interested in earlier periods of Islamic science where they have concentrated almost all of their efforts until fairly recently. As a result, a greater number of earlier works have been edited, printed, and studied. But despite the notable amount of scholarly work already accomplished, vast areas remain to be explored. During the last few decades alone, E. S. Kennedy discovered a completely new chapter in the history of Islamic astronomy associated with the school of Maraghah, beginning by simply examining one manuscript of Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī in the British Library, while D. King has added whole new fields in the study of Islamic astronomy by discovering hitherto unknown manuscripts of Mamluk and Yemeni astronomy, as well as of what might be called folk astronomy associated with finding the direction of the *qiblah*, the times of prayer, etc.

A great deal remains to be discovered in the domain of Islamic science through the examination of the many manuscripts which have not as yet been studied, and the unveiling of works of which scholars remain presently unaware. This is especially true of science during the past seven or eight centuries, particularly medicine, which had a major late flowering in Persia and India from the tenth/sixteenth century onward. One must also remember the field of Ottoman science which is finally beginning to attract the attention of scholars, thanks mostly to the efforts of Turkish scholars, foremost among them Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu. Furthermore, one must emphasize here again the importance of the manuscript heritage for the establishment of even the well known and definitive texts of Islamic science, many of which exist in printed form but have not been critically edited, including some of the masterpieces of al-Bīrūnī, while other important works are well known but have never been edited and printed, a prime example being *al-Tuḥfah al-shāhiyyah* of Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī.

Another important category of manuscripts, in both Arabic and Persian as well as other Islamic languages, involves Islamic spirituality and Sufism. Besides Sufi poetry, which some might consider under the category of 'literature', there are numerous works of prose which remain to be edited and printed. The existing manuscript collections are very rich in unedited material, and there is also every reason to expect unforeseen discoveries in collections which have not yet been studied. In even earlier centuries of Islamic history, where much of the scholarly endeavour has concentrated itself, new discoveries are constantly being made, such as the recent studies of the works of Abū Manṣūr Iṣfahānī which have revealed for the first time a whole branch of early Ḥanbalī Sufism unknown even to scholars of the field until today. As for later centuries, only a small number of manuscripts pertaining to Sufism have ever been scientifically described much less edited and printed. The libraries of India are a perfect example of this fact. Any even cursory study of one of the major manuscript collections, whether it be in Rampur, Patna, or Hyderabad, reveals important Sufi treatises which have remained unnoticed or little studied to this day. Even the works of the greatest masters such as Ibn 'Arabī remain to a large extent in manuscript form, and his major opus, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, is being critically edited only now thanks to the life-long effort of O. Yahya.

In the field of Sufism, as in most other fields of Islamic scholarship, even works available in printed editions often need to be re-edited critically on the basis of existing manuscripts. Many Sufi works which have been printed in the Islamic world are based on only one or two manuscripts and rarely on an appraisal of all the existing manuscripts. This includes even the ever popular works of al-Ghazālī many of whose books, including the famous *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, available so widely in the well-printed Bulaq edition, need to be

critically edited in the light of all the important manuscripts available. The tradition of Islamic spirituality and Sufism is of course written to a large extent upon the tablet of the souls of men and women who follow the Path to God. But also much of it is written in manuscripts scattered all over the Islamic world and still unavailable to the scholars of the Islamic community as a whole. The manuscript treasury of Islamic civilization also contains in its as yet unstudied pages the doctrines, practices, and history of Sufism, and all of its ramifications in Islamic history, a treasury of knowledge much of which remains unknown to the scholarly public given the present day knowledge of manuscripts pertaining to this field.

And then there is the subject of art, ranging from calligraphy to music. Much of Islamic art has been transmitted orally and practically from master to disciple, and we might never discover a text describing how the cobalt blue tiles of the Timurid period of geometric designs of a Cairene mosque were made. But there still exists the hope and possibility of finding texts which will reveal the secrets of such marvels and also finally unveil the methods by which Muslim architects created the buildings which stand among the greatest achievements of Islamic civilization. There are, of course, fields of Islamic art such as calligraphy in which many treatises have been written, but even here only some have been printed and much remains in manuscript form. But even in areas in which few or no treatises are available, the treasury of Islamic manuscripts remains an extremely precious source which is indispensable for a better understanding of not only the history of various Islamic arts, but also the techniques, symbolism, language, and meaning of these arts. This is a field in which little research has been done until fairly recently and much remains to be accomplished.

It is interesting to note that one kind of manuscript related to art received early attention from the thirteenth/nineteenth century onward, and much of it was in fact removed from the Islamic world to be preserved in Western collections. This category is that of illustrated texts, especially of the later centuries when the art of the miniature developed fully in Persia and later in Turkey and India. It is of interest to note that there are more Islamic manuscripts with fine Persian miniatures in an area within a fifty mile radius around London than in all of Persia. And yet, even in this domain, investigated so avidly over a hundred years, there are still important manuscript collections which remain unstudied and which contain in their pages many chapters of the history of the pictorial arts in Islam.

A word must also be said about the crafts, certain so-called 'occult sciences' (*al-'ulūm al-gharībah*), and technology, all of which are related in certain aspects, although the 'occult sciences' also possess branches related to other disciplines. Islamic manuscripts pertaining to the building of mechanical devices (*ilm al-hiyā*) have been studied to some extent, as have

a number of treatises on alchemy and the 'science of materials' (*khawāṣṣ al-ashyā'*). But in this, as in other fields, most of the material is still in manuscript form and there are many works still unstudied or possibly even undiscovered which may answer questions concerning irrigation, metallurgy, dyes, and many other technologies and techniques of dealing with various materials, whose fruits adorn our museums although the knowledge underlying their production remains veiled from us.

One could continue with other fields of Islamic thought and culture for the knowledge of which the existing manuscript collections in the Islamic world play a central role, but these major fields suffice to indicate the significance of Islamic manuscripts in nearly all that can be called Islamic. The self-knowledge of the Islamic people as a living community as well as the preservation and resuscitation of fourteen centuries of Islamic religious, intellectual, and artistic history depend upon this vast treasury of handwritten documents which lie scattered throughout the Islamic world and much of the rest of the globe.

As indicated at the beginning of this essay, the significance of Islamic manuscripts, as great as it is for Muslims themselves, is not confined to the Islamic world; rather, Islamic manuscripts are also of much value in the understanding of several other cultures and are pertinent to many fields of scholarship outside the domain of Islamic studies. First of all, manuscripts, especially in Arabic, contain valuable knowledge of ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Byzantine civilizations, as well as of the pre-Islamic societies of the eastern Mediterranean world, such as the so-called Sabaeans of Harraṇ. Arabic is not only important for a knowledge of Semitic philology, but is also the language in which a great deal of information concerning eastern Christian churches, Gnostic sects, and eastern forms of Judaism as well as certain elements of Mesopotamian and Egyptian science and religious thought is to be found.

The Arabic language, of course, also became a major repository for both Hellenic and Hellenistic thought, ranging from the natural sciences to metaphysics. One need hardly mention the significance of Arabic works, many still in manuscript form, for a better understanding of eastern Neoplatonism, Neoplatonic Aristotelianism, Hermeticism, Neopythagoreanism, later Greek medical thought associated with the name of Galen, and much of Alexandrian science. Many a western scholar in fact became attracted to Islamic and especially Arabic manuscripts while he was in search of the works of late Greek antiquity. In a sense, because of the basic role of Islamic thought, both in itself and in its preservation of Graeco-Alexandrian thought, in the genesis of medieval and to some extent Renaissance European philosophy, science, literature, and even theology,

Islamic manuscripts may be said to be also of importance for Western intellectual history. This is especially so since, despite the century-old efforts of Western scholars, many Arabic works pertaining to the heritage of Greek antiquity remain in manuscript form, and again some of the already printed texts need to be re-edited critically on the basis of manuscript material.

Islamic manuscripts, primarily in Arabic, but also in Persian, are also important sources for a better understanding of the religions and cultures of pre-Islamic Persia ranging from Zoroastrianism to Manichaeism. Many Sassanid works were translated into Arabic while their original Pahlavi version was lost, especially treatises pertaining to statecraft. Islamic manuscripts are in fact indispensable for a better understanding of many aspects of late Zoroastrian thought as well as the beliefs and practices of certain Manichaean communities. Likewise, these manuscripts are important for a better understanding of ancient Persian history reflected later not only in Persian works of the Islamic period such as the *Shāh-nāmah* of Firdawsi but also in many Arabic works of universal history. Islamic manuscripts have still much to reveal about Sassanid history as well as Iranian religions, especially Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, which played important roles in the religious life of many communities beyond the confines of Persia itself.

One can see a similar situation in India as far as history is concerned. It is true that in contrast to Persia, where very few Pahlavi texts have survived, numerous Sanskrit and Pali works remain extant containing the treasury of Hindu and Buddhist wisdom. But strangely enough most of the history of India is in the Persian language, and Islamic manuscripts, this time mostly Persian, are indispensable for the understanding of Indian history during the past millennium. The widespread attempt made during the past four decades to translate the sources of Indian history into Hindi attests to this fact. But even with such attempts, Islamic manuscripts remain an important source for historians of both Hindu and Muslim India as well as for those interested in the various reactions which took place on the spiritual and religious planes between Islam and Hinduism. Even for medieval Hinduism itself, Islamic sources, remaining to this day to a large extent in manuscript form, constitute an indispensable source without which many currents of even Hindu religious thought and practice cannot be fully understood. Here, other languages used by Muslims, such as Urdu, Bengali, and Panjabi, also play an important role.

There is less known about Chinese Islamic manuscripts than practically any other major area, but enough is known to be able to assert that there are valuable manuscripts both in Chinese, but written by Muslims, and in various Turkic tongues used especially in what the Muslim geographers called Eastern Turkestan and which today is contained in the province of

Sing-kiang in western China. Here again Islamic manuscripts contain valuable knowledge not only of the practices, beliefs, culture, and history of the Muslims of China, but also of the relations of the Islamic world with China going back to the very beginning of the Islamic era. Only a fuller study of this precious but little known manuscript area can reveal all of its contents, but its very presence and age reaching back to the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries attest to its significance as a source for study of certain aspects of Chinese history and culture.

As for Southeast Asia, Islamic manuscripts are the most important source of knowledge for the history of that vast region as it was transformed from Buddhist and Hindu kingdoms to one of the most densely populated regions of the Islamic world. It was Arabic and Persian works translated into Malay which set the background for the rise of Malay as an Islamic language and as the dominant literary and cultural force in what is today, Indonesia Malaysia, the southern Philippines, Brunei, and certain regions of Thailand. Many of these works remain in manuscript form, including some of the most famous, and constitute the most important written source for knowledge of not only the Islamic Malay world but the whole of that region prior to the rise and spread of Islam and the processes as a result of which that region became part of *dār al-islām*.

Islamic manuscripts are also the most important existing written sources for the history of Sub-Saharan Africa. The libraries of such cities as Timbuctu are rich in works pertaining not only to Islam in Africa but also to non-Islamic Africa, with which the Muslims had so much interaction both before and during the period of European colonization. These manuscripts include not only Arabic ones dealing with history and religion, as well as those containing travel accounts, but also manuscripts in local languages, some with several centuries of written history. In a continent where so much has remained oral and so much has been destroyed as a result of turmoil and disasters both natural and man-made, the knowledge contained in manuscripts associated with various Islamic languages is of the greatest value. Without preservation and study of these manuscripts, the history and culture, and much of the folk practices, including medicine, of Africa will never be known.

Finally, it must not be forgotten that Islamic manuscripts are of great significance for knowledge of many aspects of European history. Whether it be the history and culture of both the Jews and Christians of Spain, or of the Russians of the Upper Volga, Islamic sources contain material of great value, much of which has not as yet been studied and remains solely in manuscript form. Moreover, Islamic manuscripts play a special role in relation to the history and culture of Byzantium and Eastern Europe, some parts of which were part and parcel of the Ottoman world for half a millennium. Much of

the information concerning the history of these countries must be sought in Turkish archives and in works written not only in Turkish but also in Arabic and Persian. To these archives one must add those of Bosnia and Albania, with their own long Islamic traditions. Here the role of Bosnian Islam must be especially mentioned since this five-century-old Islamic community of Slavic ethnic origin lies at the heart of the Balkans and has had a long history of relations with both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches and European and Ottoman worlds. Its manuscript collections, preserved relatively better than in many other areas, are bound to contribute a great deal to the knowledge of not only the history of Islam in Europe but also five hundred years of Balkan history in general.

Besides their great import for both Islamic and several non-Islamic civilizations, Islamic manuscripts also have a great significance for Islamic art, not only in what they contain upon their pages but also in themselves as works of art. They contain most of the masterpieces of that supreme sacred art of Islam which is calligraphy, and some of the great works of Islamic art, such as Mamluk Qur'āns, are in the form of manuscripts. Moreover, as already stated, they contain nearly the whole pictorial creation of Islamic civilization in the form of illuminations, illustrations, and fully developed miniatures. And then there is the art of bookbinding with its magnificent achievements which adorn so many manuscripts in libraries throughout the world. From the technical point of view, there is the art of paper-making reflected in the various manuscripts written over the centuries, and even the question of the technology of ink and the growing of reeds which are directly related to the history of technology, agriculture, and art. Altogether, it can be said that perhaps no other major civilization has so much of its artistic creation tied to the art of the book. To understand the significance of Islamic manuscripts for the whole of Islamic art, one needs only ask what would remain of Islamic art if, through some catastrophe, Islamic manuscripts were to be wholly destroyed. Certainly much less would remain than in the case of Western, Indian, or Far Eastern civilizations, were such a tragedy to befall them. When one ponders over the significance of Islamic manuscripts one must remember not only their intellectual and literary content, but also their artistic significance and the role they played over the centuries in the artistic life of a civilization which never forgot the *ḥadīth*: 'God is beautiful and He loves beauty.'

As a result of complex factors which cannot be outlined here, this vast treasury of Islamic manuscripts is scattered today not only in various areas of the Islamic world itself, but also in libraries throughout the Western world, and also in certain other countries which are neither Islamic nor Western.

Some of these collections are kept in safety while others are in danger of gradual or imminent destruction. Internal and external causes are threatening many of these collections, both within the Islamic world and where Islam is a minority, such as in India and China, yet paradoxically at the present moment of history less so in the West. While in some countries such as India, the political and socio-economic factors of the past four decades have caused certain notable collections to fall into ruin or be kept under completely inappropriate conditions, in other places manuscripts have been threatened and in fact partly destroyed by internal rebellion or external wars as events in China and Iraq have demonstrated during the past year alone.

Almost wherever there is a civil war, revolution, or other type of upheaval, whether it be in Ethiopia, Yemen, or Nigeria, during the past few decades, or a falling apart as in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia today, there is the fear of the destruction of some part of that invaluable heritage contained in Islamic manuscripts. Even in this age of cultural destruction, few treasures of this magnitude are threatened as much as Islamic manuscripts. And even where they are well-preserved, as at Oxford or the Vatican, catalogues remain at best incomplete and the identity of many works remains unknown.

It is in the light of this situation that the significance of the efforts of Al-Furqān Foundation to survey existing collections, to help to catalogue those manuscripts which have remained uncatalogued to this day, to aid in the preservation of endangered manuscripts wherever possible, and finally to help in reproducing the content of this vast collection spread over the four directions of the compass becomes evident. The Prophet has said that the ink from the pen of the true scholar is more precious than the blood of martyrs. Islamic manuscripts may therefore be said to contain in a sense something more precious than the blood of those who are promised paradise. Likewise, those who preserve and disseminate the knowledge contained in these works must share something of the exalted reward promised to those whose ink the Prophet considered precious. In thanking on my behalf all who have made the establishment of Al-Furqān Foundation possible, I pray that this Foundation will take its place as a major centre of Islamic culture and that with the help of God the further stages of activity envisaged by Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani will be realized, for those activities cannot but be of the greatest value to the Islamic world, to scholars interested in Islamic studies, and in fact to the whole of humanity in need more than ever before of that traditional knowledge of which the Islamic intellectual and literary heritage is one of the main repositories in the present-day world.