Report for Francis Mathew Stationers' Company Scholarship: Rachael Seculer-Faber

Receiving a Francis Mathew Stationers' Company Scholarship enabled me to attend the annual *Intensive Introduction to Islamic Codicology* short course held by TIMA (The Islamic Manuscript Association) at the University of Cambridge from 23rd – 27th September 2013. I was keen to attend the course as a means of gaining a basic insight into the world of Islamic books, with the eventual aim of working as a conservator of Islamic and South Asian books and paper materials. The course proved to be an excellent introduction to the subject, and I am hoping to build upon the knowledge I gained by attending the Islamic Art module of the *Postgraduate Diploma in Asian Art* at SOAS (University of London) in summer 2014, and then by undertaking an MA project related to the conservation of Islamic books at West Dean College (University of Sussex) in summer 2015.

The course day-by-day

Day 1

The course began with an explanation of what is meant by 'Islamic Codicology' and how it can be helpful to scholars. Codicology, put simply, is the study of the material aspects of (codex-format) books. This close study can add to scholarly knowledge of how books were historically produced and transmitted; it can also help to identify falsifications, and help those studying the transmission history of a text. The course's tutor Professor François Déroche, a central figure in the discipline, interprets Islamic Codicology in a broad sense, encompassing any texts written in Arabic script – whatever the writer's religion or language – and overlapping with the field of Palaeography. The relatively recent emergence of the discipline makes it an exciting area, as the boundaries of the field are not steadfastly fixed and there is plenty of room for new discoveries. After an overview of some points to take into account when approaching Codicology, the morning continued with an introduction to paper and parchment – how and when they were produced and used, how Islamic

processes differ from Western, and what to look out for when examining a manuscript. The afternoon was then spent examining manuscripts in Cambridge University Library (CUL) under the guidance of Professor Déroche and Dr. Nuria Martínez de Castilla Muñoz, looking out for features such as the burnished surface of Islamic paper and the waviness (compared with European paper) of the chain and laid lines. Much fun was had peering through a light sheet and counting the number of laid lines per 20mm with an Ikea paper ruler.

Day 2

Back in the classroom on Tuesday morning, our second lecture was on the structure of the Islamic codex. The quires (sections) of an Islamic codex are formed in a fairly simple way, by putting together several separate bifolia (folded sheets), as opposed to the more complex Western process of folding a large sheet several times to form a quire. We learnt that the Islamic quire is most commonly a 'quinion' – formed of five bifolia – and we were taught the formulae necessary for indicating a manuscript's quire structure and referring to individual folia, as well as how to recognise and notate missing, repaired or added-in folia.

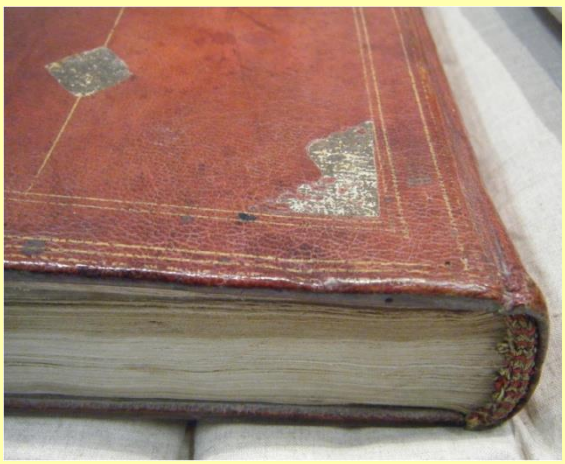
In the afternoon we headed to the Library again for a tour with Yasmin Faghihi, Head of the Near Eastern Department, and an introduction to the Library's collection of books in Arabic script. Now numbering over 6000 manuscripts, the collection dates back to acquisitions in the 1600s, and these days the focus is on increasing digital accessibility to images and descriptions of the manuscripts, for users all over the world. We were introduced to the difficult dilemmas surrounding the purchase of Islamic manuscripts at the present time – whilst some argue that Western institutions ought to purchase as many of the manuscripts coming onto the market as they can, in order to give them a chance of long-term survival that they might not have elsewhere, others feel that the risk of unethical practice, when purchasing items of dubious sourcing and removing them from their place of origin, is far too high.

The day finished with a session examining the quire structure of books from the collection, in preparation for beginning our task for the week – to each produce a Manuscript Description for an item in the Library's collection, which would be kept on file to add to the information available to researchers using the Library's Islamic manuscripts.

Day 3

Professor Déroche's morning lecture on day 3 covered 'the page and page settings', familiarising us with a number of distinctive features of the text layout in Islamic manuscripts. A title page is a common element, with the text itself usually starting on the verso of a page. Markings for borders and lines of text are created with a tool called a *mustara*, and a coloured ink (usually red) is often used to demarcate verse headings and important sections. Catchwords at the bottom of pages can help with identifying missing or incorrectly sequenced pages when examining a manuscript, even without knowledge of Arabic script. A particularly useful feature for scholars is the triangle-shaped colophon often present at the end of a manuscript, which can contain useful information such as the date, place and persons involved with its creation.

After a visit to the CUL conservation studio to see some of the fascinating projects that conservators there are working on, we started on our manuscript descriptions, putting our new knowledge to use. The manuscript I worked with, ADD. 412, is an eighteenth century copy of the *Jahangir-nama*, in a red leather Islamic–style binding with traditional red-and-yellow-silk endbands. It is not an ornate book, but beautiful in its own way, evoking a sense of the past. In the 'history of the manuscript' section, my description included mention of stamps, repairs (historic and modern), insect holes, water damage and a pressed flower, as well as inconsistent use of paper-tinting (only folios 1-56 of 200 are coloured brown) – altogether a very 'characterful' book.



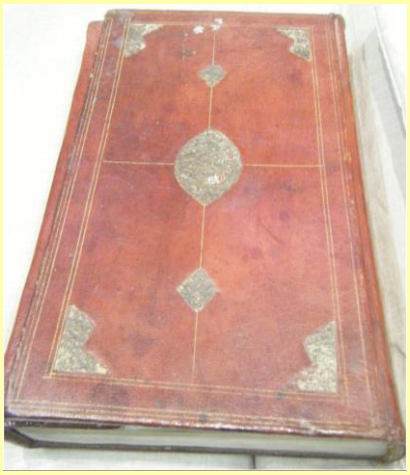
Day 4

On the fourth day of the course topics included a brief overview of calligraphic styles and scripts, decorated papers, materials and the working practices of craftsmen. The latter is a subject about which there is still a fair amount of mystery, as well as variation according to time and place – with craftsmen sometimes working within royal workshops and sometimes alone, and in some cases carrying out a wide range of tasks and in others working within a highly specialised area (e.g. the copying of a particular text).

In the afternoon, whilst working on our manuscript descriptions, we were able to identify traces of some of the techniques used by these craftsmen, such as blade marks at the head and tail where the pages were trimmed during the binding process.

Day 5

With the course drawing to a close, Professor Déroche gave lectures on Islamic bookbindings and their decoration, reading the history of a manuscript, and ornament and illumination.



We completed our manuscript descriptions and finished off by viewing a few more books from the Library's collection, before receiving our certificates of attendance and saying our goodbyes. After a busy and truly fascinating week it was hard to leave, but a great feeling to have covered so much within the five days. The course was a thoroughly enjoyable and worthwhile experience, and I am extremely grateful to the Stationers' Foundation for enabling me to attend.