

Codicology Paper

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CH 108

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3/23/15

Author: Al-Ḥalabī, byname of Burhān Ad-dīn Ibrāhīm Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Ibrāhīm (c. 1460-1549)¹

Title: Multaqa al-abḥur

Place: Istanbul

Printer: unknown

Date: c.1517

Format: print

Leaf Height: 21 cm

Binding: Purple leather on wood

Provenance: unknown

Burke Library Catalogue: Arabic ms. 13

This 16th century book is 21cm in height, 10 cm wide and 2.5 cm deep. The cover of the book appears to be made of wood covered in purple leather. On the front and back covers of the book, there are impressions in the upper and bottom corners which are characteristics of tooled and stamped letter binding. The impressions in the corners of the book were made by a method of stamping the books with irons, a technique prominent in early Islamic bookmaking. Another characteristic of tool and stamped letter binding would be the “flap” design of the cover of the book, where the flap must be lifted up so that the contents of the book can be accessed. The flap which is a part of the cover, is



¹ Schacht, J.. "al-Ḥalabī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2015. [Reference](#). Columbia University. March, 12 2015.

4.5 cm in width from the longest point of the flap to the edge of the cover, and 3.5 cm at its shortest point to the edge of the cover. This traditional Arab style binding had Persian influence and dominated leather binding from the 16th century onward and was a method of binding similar to yet different from Ottoman style binding which used intricate European influenced floral patterns and art in the book².



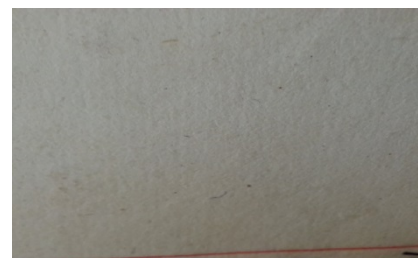
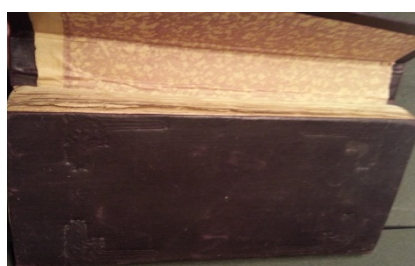
On the flap, there are no button or string closures used to keep the book tightly closed. The edges of this book are slightly frayed due to use, however being a 16th century book, I am inclined to believe that at some point the book may have been rebound due to the good condition of the binding. When the book is closed, lettering is visible on the top of the pages (figure 5).

There is also threading on the bottom and top pages of the book to indicate that the pages were sewn together at the binding and the front and back covers have a small amount of wear and tear.

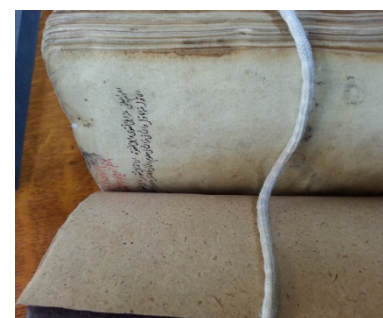
Once opening the book, the binding seems to be fairly sturdy, which could also support the notion of this book having been rebound at some point after its original production. There is a thin paper lining in the inside cover of the book that is cream colored with a purple marbled design. The edges of this lining seem to not have been cut by a machine as the edges are quite uneven. The few centimeters on the top and bottom of the marbled paper are also uneven. The

² “Yale University Near Easter Collection: Islamic Books and Bookbinding.” April 9, 2010. Yale University Library. 2009. Web. March 12, 2015.

cutting on the top of this paper was done right along the marbled design, whereas on the bottom the lining is not cut at the marble design, instead there is more than one centimeter of cream colored paper between the marbled design and the edge of the parchment. On top of the marbled patterned paper but not completely covering it, there is a checkered/plaid composite paper that connects the cover to the body of the book. This paper extends to the entire height of the book and is thicker than the purple marbled paper.



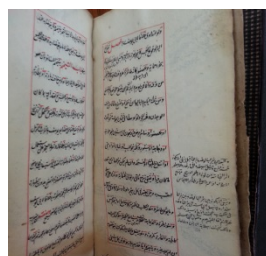
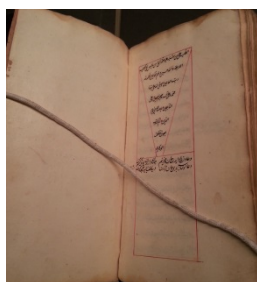
When turning the pages of the book, there are blank pages before the text begins. The material of these pages remains moderately consistent throughout the entire book. The pages themselves do not seem to be made from vellum, but the materials seem to have been woven together, perhaps with scraps of hemp or linen which was what was used to create paper during this



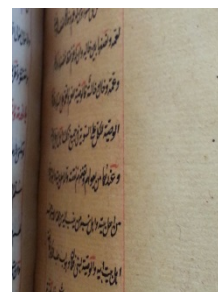
time in the Islamic world³. Some of the pages are damaged by some sort of liquid and there aren't an excessive number of holes in the pages throughout the book. Along with the liquid damage, there is also some foxing as well on many of the pages. The first page of writing in the book include two short lines using red ink in the upper left corner of the page and under that two

³ Sardar, Marika. "The Arts of the Book in the Islamic World, 1600–1800 ". In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000. Web. March 12, 2015.

longer lines using black ink (figure 9). As was customary during this time, it seems as though this book was not printed but written by a scribe. There are more pages of lines written in black ink until we reach a page that is distinct from the rest. It contains a rectangle drawn in red ink, in which the top half contains an upside down pyramid and within the pyramid there is writing in black ink. On the bottom half of the rectangle, there are two lines written in black ink.



The book continues with this



format of a red rectangle with lines written inside using black ink however there are words scattered throughout the lines that are written using red ink. On various pages throughout this book, particularly towards the end,

there is quite a bit of marginalia. Towards the back of the book are a few pages that are darker than the other pages and they seem to be made out of a heavier material. Perhaps these pages were replacements or an addition made after the book was originally constructed, and so the paper used to make these pages may have come from a different material. There are splotches of ink in various places throughout the book, and very small number of pages have significant damage, most of which is contained to the last few pages in the book. Overall book is in good condition.

The construction of this book, including the sturdy binding and flap style cover, lends to the hypothesis that this book may have been carried around quite often. It's lightweight as well as not cumbersome in size, which would have been ideal for a book that was meant to be read several times throughout the day or traveling. Given the stated hypothesis of this being a well-

traveled book, I believe that it is likely that this book may have been rebound and recovered at some point after its original construction. There are a details which lead me to this, one being that the cover and binding of the book, despite being several hundred years old, seems to be in very good condition. Another reason which leads me to believe that this book may have been rebound and recovered is the quality of the lining that is glued to the cover and attaching the cover to the pages of the book. As mentioned prior, the cream colored paper with the marbled design is cut very unevenly, seemingly without regard to uniformity. My hypothesis is that this lining could have been added as a part of the rebinding/recovering and therefore the restorer may not have been as interested in uniformity as they were in repairing the book. Another thought is that if this is the original cover and binding, the unevenly cut lining could very well be a result of the mass production of books that was very popular during the 16th century. If the latter were the case, and the producers of this book were trying to generate as many copies as possible, they may not have used the highest quality of care when assembling the books, which could reflect in the quality of its assembly. The lack of imagery in this book also supports the notion that this particular book was mass produced, as the production of pictures would not only have taken a substantial amount of time, but it would have also cost more to use the dyes and inks needed.

After having spent a significant amount of time with this book, I do believe it was designed to be taken from place to place. Design however differs from the purpose of the book. I am not certain if the reason that this book may have been taken with its owner for the purposes of reading it, or if perhaps it was taken because the owner may not have had anywhere to store his possessions. For example, if the owners of this book spent most of their lives traveling from place to place, it would make sense that the book would be designed in such a way to make it easier to transport. However, the contents of the book may also be the reason that it was traveled

with, as it could have had a cultural or religious significance attached to it, which required its owner to read quite often. Given my analysis of this book, particularly in consideration of the context in which it was written, I do believe it to have been a product of mass production given the quality and lack of expensive dyes and inks that would have been used for elaborate imagery. I don't believe that the lack of these images or less than perfect quality takes away from the importance of the contents of the book, as there are many books written in a modern context that hold significance either culturally or religiously (i.e. the Bible), however not every copy is printed equally. A family Bible for example, may be made with premium leather and beautiful imagery inside; while the Bible that is taken to church and used most often may be smaller and made of a less expensive material. Whichever the method used to produce the book, the contents however, remain equally as important.

Bibliography

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3. "Yale University Near Easter Collection: Islamic Books and Bookbinding." April 9, 2010. Yale University Library. 2009. Web. March 12, 2015.