

# The Malek National Library and Museum, (MLM)

Saeid Khoddari Naeini

I will try to create a virtual visit by my description and show the Malek library and museum by text and photos. Then I will focus on the manuscripts.

The late hajj Hussein Agha Malek was from one of the important families in late Qajar period . His name comes from Malek al-Tujjar (meaning “the King of the Merchants” i.e. the chief merchant). His father was a merchant and politician. The founder of the collection studied in traditional schools and was fascinated by collecting rare books from an early age. His interest in old books and relics was the main reason for the gradual establishment of the library and museum. He was very interested in collecting books but many people brought other objects such as coins, stamps and paintings to sell and he bought them till it became a large collection of rare objects. This is one of the biggest private collections in Iran.

The MLM has a special and legal supervisor, who is the daughter of Hajj Hussein Malek.

Hajj Hussein Agha Malek donated all his collection and a great amount of land in Mashhad and Tehran, in order to support the costs of administration and the expansion of the collection. The property donated by Malek to the Imam Reza holy shrine is the biggest donation in the last 1000 years. The Library and museum and farmlands, shops, gardens and a hospital were donated between 1937 and 1961.

He lived for almost 100 years and finally passed away in 1972.

The old building of MLM in Tehran’s big bazaar is a fine Qajar building which has been registered as part of the national heritage. This building is now being restored to revive as a museum or similar. The building was in a bad condition for preserving such masterpieces in the crowded bazaar, which resulted in a change of the location of the library and museum.

In 1996 after 12 years of work a new building was constructed on 6 floors and 2 basements, totalling 9000 square meters, in traditional and Islamic architecture.

The new building is located in a better situation for access and security, design and facilities.

The basement (-2) is the treasury of museum objects.

The basement (-1) is the stamp museum and the collection of carpets.

The first floor of the building is dedicated to 5 collections. The calligraphy and miniatures that include some rare pieces of calligraphy by Mirza Gholamreza Isfahani, Mir Emad, Mir 'Ali, and 'Alireza 'Abbasi. Some Indo-Iranian miniatures and 15 folios of a Shahnama of the (17<sup>th</sup>) century are the other objects that are exhibited there.

There is some periodical exhibition according to relation and subjects and we exhibited a big collection of Safavid works last year with the Iranian Academy of Art. Our last exhibition was those manuscripts related to architecture and town history. Among them was a treatise about building a minaret and some designs of *muqarnas*.

Other collections like artifacts and pen boxes and coins are on show on the first floor.

Last year a new collection was endowed by MLM's supervisor. This part is newly designed and consists of those manuscripts and paintings which were donated last year by Izzat-e Malek, the daughter of the founder.

On the second floor is the library reading room. Journals, newspapers, microfilm readers and reference books are available here. It is possible to use computers or cards to find books and manuscripts. Lithographic books are kept on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor, manuscripts are on the 5<sup>th</sup> and printed books are on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor.

The Malek library nowadays has about 70,000 printed books and more than 3,000 lithographic books, 6,537 manuscripts and 7,000 books in European languages. Those who need a manuscript have to submit a form and wait a few days. The evaluating committee will consider the condition of the researcher and manuscript. The library is being enriched constantly by purchasing new printed books.

The Malek endowment deed, which was published by Hajj Hussein Agha Malek in English and Persian, says that books, manuscripts and historical objects should be bought for the MLM. Only a few coins, stamps and manuscripts have been endowed to MLM by other people.

Another point is that according to the Malek deed, none of the books can be borrowed and people can use books only in the library.

The Malek collection is proud of having one of the best bookbinders. In the preservation section manuscripts are bound and preserved using traditional methods and new scientific techniques. The conservation section, another section of MLM, has been equipped with the best devices needed for conservation.

### **Cataloguing:**

All the manuscripts in the Malek collection were collected during the founder's life. Ahmad Soheili Khansari, who published many of manuscripts and is a famous researcher in art history, was the first library curator of the Malek collection.

He and Malek recorded all the manuscripts and made lots of cards. The first catalogue of the manuscripts published in 1948, in collaboration with Alinaghi Monzavi, Javaherkalam, Danesh Pajouh and Afshar, and included one thousand and five hundred Arabic mss.

In catalogues for each manuscript cataloguers have given a title for the manuscript which is followed by a brief description of the author and his bibliography. Then the first and last sentences are written and number of the manuscript and manuscript codicology is final part.

Because of the growing number of researchers, in 1951 a new department was built in Malek old house for users. Gradually, based on the slips prepared by Khansari, Danesh Pajouh and Afshar new catalogues were completed, and 9 volumes are now published.

Documents which were discovered from an old house are the first drafts of catalogues that were written by Soheili.

Catalogues include 9 volumes:

- vol.1: Arabic and Turkish ms which are independent ms,
- vols. 2, 3,4: Persian ms. independent ms,
- Vols. 5-9: anthologies and collections.

The late Hajj Hussain Malek was the supervisor for producing catalogues and he inspected them regularly.

In the last decades 4 volumes of indexes have been published according to the ms copyists, authors, chronology, owners, and date of copy and ms name.

### **Manuscripts:**

The oldest manuscript in our collection is Al-thamara of Batlamyus copied by the son of 'Abd ur-rahman sufi, (son of commentator) dated 371 hejri (AD ) (no. 5924).

The newest ms is a religious text of Kalbasi, copied by Mohamad hussaein Shirazy (no.524); some mss which were copied by the founder (Malek) himself are among the newest mss.

We can see that some of the mss in our collection belonged to Farhad mirza Qajar, whose library we know had more than 16,000 mss and printed books(according to notes on one manuscript in our collection).

The oldest illustrated manuscript in our collection is a famous Shahnama from Baysonghor's court dated 833 (14 ). It has 2 images, one of which is unfinished. This ms is very important because it is similar in date to Baysonghor's Shahnama in the Golestan palace.

I want to mention that these illustrations are not the oldest because I discovered that at least 2 miniatures belonging to the 8<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century are kept in the collection. I am preparing a descriptive catalogue of illustrated manuscripts and miniatures, which will take more time to complete. The newest illustrated manuscript is concerned with the founder too. A manuscript that is 5 parts of the Haft awrang (seven thrones) (5 awrang) was illustrated by Abul-hassan, and in 1322 ( ) Malek rewarded the painter for his work with a house. This can be found in a written note in the ms.

The scope of the Malek collection consists of Persian, Arabic and Turkish mss, although there is also a Tabary language ms and one in Hebrew language written in the Persian alphabet (Judaeo-Persian) in the collection.

The geographical range is from Syria to India and far east : for example a ms history of Halab (Aleppo) which was produced in Syria, or a Shahnama belonging to Bokhara, some Indian miniatures and a Japanese miniature. About 60 mss are Turkish that are in first volume. Some photos of Arabic mss are available at the end of first volume.

### **Some of the masterpieces of library:**

The oldest printed book is Khajeh Nasir Tusi's *Tahrir osule Oghlidos*, published in Constantinople in 996 ( 1587 ); also the *Qanun* of Avicenna printed in Rome in 1593. There is a Quran printed in Hamburg in 1694 by Hinkelmann, which has a lot of latin and Hebrew inscriptions.

In the manuscript collection some special mss are:

*Shahanshahnama* of Saba with 25 nice illustrations by Mohammad Hassan afshar,

Calligraphy of famous scholars, scientists and kings.

Nastaliq of Obeid e zakani, which is from the first Nastaaliques of 721 hejri.

Kufic Qur'an on parchment, attributed to Imam Hassan but which belongs to the 4th century.

And many other mss.

There are more than 35 Moraqqaas (albums) in the library which are not catalogued. I'm trying to work on them and most of them are finished and will be published soon.

These moraqqaas are in different sizes. One of them is a big moraqqa of nastaliq with leather that is pasted on paper and is Imam Ali's prayer in Arabic and is about 40 to 30 cm.

Some moraqqas have calligraphy only but most of them are collected works of miniatures and calligraphy (thuth, nastq, shekasteh, taaliq, and nashk) and are handwritten by the most famous Persian artists. Among the miniatures portraits, flowers and birds can be found. There is a deed in very fine naskh of Ahmad Neyrizy, some firman of Qajar period and a unique moraqqa of Ala Eddin Tabrizy of the beginning of 11 century that is Mofradat thuth for safavid princess to teach them calligraphy.

I can strongly say that some of best Miremads work are in our collection that refer to his mastership time. 2 moraqqa called Pand name loghman in very fine nastliq attract many calligrapher and may be published as facsimile.

For more beautiful works ,I should mention to some ms of mohammade khandan that is in nastaliq and each line is in one color.

When I was working on lithographic books last year I found 5 albums of historical photos. Now they are catalogued and ready to be published. They are very important for history of towns and many buildings which are destroyed and Qajar traditions.

Many new works in the library and museum are waiting for researchers; literature, history, philosophy, and art are the most visited ms by researchers. I should note that according to my survey the number of decorated mss in this collection is not low. Despite some states, I think Malek had bought decorated manuscripts as philosophical ones, because we can see such illustrated manuscripts can only be found in royal library of Golestan Palace. The cataloguers have not given exact and sufficient descriptions of decoration, like tazhib, miniatures and artist. (Except the Golestan catalogues which have more artistic details.).

Some of the problems which arise in using the catalogues are:

- 1- there is insufficient information about covers,
- 2- typical mistakes in ms numbers,
- 3- Ignoring some parts in those mss which have many parts and are not easy to read.
- 4- The difference of dating in text and illustration, or in different parts of some mss.
- 5- Binding some mss with printed books and considering them as printed books,
- 6- Naming the papers by traditional method,
- 7- Distinguishing original and fakes among miniatures and old mss.

Because mss should not be brought out in any condition, if we want to use new technology to analyse pigment or paper or leather, we should wait till the future when we can bring new equipment, if possible. At the moment therefore there are no any external exhibitions from our collection, although Malek has had some joint exhibitions with the National Museum of Iran.

Indeed we do not have a complete definition of a manuscript. Some of the lithographic books contain much handwritings and should be considered. A

large number of Letters and inserted folios through the lithographic books should be collected and perhaps considered as mss.

### **The role of Malek collection in Islamic culture:**

As I mentioned before, the library curator and bibliographer, Sohaili Khansari bought many books for this collection, and many books have an inscription by him behind them. If we take a glance at Persian and Islamic art and culture we can see that many of the main *divans* (collected works) of the main Persian poets are published on the basis of our mss. In most cases, the base mss are from the Malik collection:

Khajuye kermani Taaliq (3 years before the death of author), 2 mss out of the 4 used were from MLM

The complete Divan of Jami, 4 out of 8 mss

Divan of Asefi Haravi, 4 mss

Divan of Shah Ni'matollah, the oldest ms

Divan of Aahli shirazi, 4 from 7 mss

Divan of Saeib tabrizy from some ms with the poet corrections

And many others, like Qodsi mashhadi, Nazari ghohestani, Suzani samarghandi, Masoud sade salman, Baba Faghani, etc. Apart from literature, works of history, such as *Arafat al-agshheghin*, *Kholasat ot-tavarikh*, , *Teklamat ol-akhbar* of Abdibeig and in philosophy and Sufism *Sharafnama*, *Sharh e talvihah* of ibni kamune, have been published on the basis of our manuscripts.

One the most important manuscripts in history of Persian literature is *Arafat alasheqin* that should be published as facsimile. Every week we should make a new copy for researchers.

In the history of medicine, travel writings, Persian dynasties, science, art, botany, Irfan, Tafsir of Qoran and many other subjects' important mss can be found.

Although there are many books which are published about coins, Persian paintings, stamps, calligraphy and carpets, but if we want to omit MLM collection many of them could not be published.

While many mss and objects in the MLM have not been discovered yet even by specialists, it's obvious for all researchers that ignoring this collection is a big imperfection in their work.

### Digitisation:

As I said, using manuscript is usually by microfilms, though in special cases the manuscript can be presented. A new program is being started by Mr. Soudavar, the grandson of Malek. A new scanner is bought and all the manuscripts will be scanned over a period of time. The scanner is from Zeuchel factory that save pictures in a computer. This will provide color images that are much better than black and white microfilms, as some microfilms are not suitable for use. This is the newest plan of the collection. Therefore a committee of librarian, conservator, computerist and cataloguer will be essential to avoid repetition works, damaging mss and preparing complete information and correct old catalogues. Although it will take more time but when it finishes we can service from different aspects immediately. New information will be collected and international standards should be considered.

The scan staff will study to find which mss should be scanned first and how they can be presented to researchers. I am sure that this program will facilitate access to our mss and researchers will be encouraged to come there more.

We should run over mss leaves. This project need to inspect all the ms again and those which are in bad conditions be sent to conservation section. those which are our masterpieces or are rare, unique and references may be first scanned.

Last year our website began a service for overseas visitor and users. The collections of the museum and library are introduced, although it must be improved to give better services for manuscripts than is ready now.

Another program that should be considered is digitising the catalogues (the new and corrected one). This will help us to find similarities between mss and make searching easier for copyists, authors, names and other headings.

### Future plans:

Publishing facsimiles of our masterpieces, organizing scientific committees to define codicological standards with regard to decorated manuscripts should be considered, as there are many words which to describe many kinds of Tazhib, tashir, jadval even colors, Sarlowhs, covers, and so on. This committee will decide how to use the bequest for buying new collections and manuscripts.

New generations of manuscript cataloguers are not well-trained, and most of them do not really deal with many kinds of manuscripts, because manuscript are kept in a tightly controlled way and access is difficult.

Cataloguers should learn or be familiar with at least the 3 main languages in the Islamic world (Arabic, Persian, and Turkish) to prepare correct comments; in fact the cataloguing of manuscripts is not the end of a process but the start of a new project.

I wish we had university courses on different aspects of manuscripts in Iran. There are some ideas of transforming manuscript texts into a computer program so that we can have them as word instead of PDF forms. We hope the new scanner of our collection will be a window to this world.

I think the best outcome from these conferences would be some directives such as we see in ICOM, ICOMOS and ICCOROM, which will be sent to worldwide collections of either Islamic or non Islamic ms.