STANDARD EDITIONS

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Formation of the Society for the Study of Islamic Manuscripts at the University of Cambridge which aims to investigate appropriate methods of facilitating scholar's access to manuscripts is an important development. The Research Center for the Written Heritage hopes to communicate some of the lessons that it has learned in the course of its activities in standardization of Persian and Arabic textual studies in this brief communication.

Objectives and Historical Background:

Much of Iran and Islam's rich classical culture survives in a vast reservoir of Islamic manuscripts. These manuscripts are Islam and Iran's intellectual patrimony and it is incumbent upon every researcher to safeguard and study this important treasure in order to shed some light upon those areas of Iran's Islamic civilization that may still remain somewhat obscure. However, in spite of the many important endeavors that have recently been launched, and although hundreds of important tomes and treatises have recently been edited and published, much remains to be done. Thousands of manuscripts and other documents in Iranian and non-Iranian collections remain unpublished. Many others exist only in poor editions and are in need of the attention of competent scholars.

Before the Islamic Revolution, all editing and publishing efforts were focused on the publication of manuscripts in Persian language or those codices that concerned the pre-Islamic culture of Iran. Iranian Culture Foundation (Boniyād-e Farhang-e Iran), established on September 16th, 1964, was the largest institution that published some Persian manuscripts—usually from the 4th century AH—found in Iranian or in foreign collections. This Foundation, however, paid no attention to making available Arabic manuscripts that celebrated the Islamic aspect of Iranian culture. Indeed, it did not publish a single Arabic text from Iran's intellectual heritage either in facsimile or in edited form, and limited itself to making Persian translations of texts such as Ebn Hawqal's *Surat al-Ard* or Tabari's *History* available. The Iranian Culture Foundation's publication record shows the nature of its' focus. Of the 250 titles that were published by this institution in the course of its fifteen years of activity, 90 were Persian edited texts.

For different reasons following the Islamic revolution in Iran, the total number of titles that were annually published in the country grew significantly. Moreover, far greater attention began to be paid to the publication of book and treatises that were written in Arabic. At the present time, over 50 scholarly publishers concentrate on making scholarly editions of a vast number of Persian and Arabic texts available to the interested reader; and the number of new published titles has gone beyond 50,000 each year. More frequent scholarly criticism of published titles in trade journals as well as intense competition between different publishers has promoted scholarly editing in Iran in two parallel directions: editing according to traditional Muslim scholarly methods exemplified in the work of the late Mohammad Qazvini (1877 – 1949), and editing according to Western editorial principles exemplified by scholars such as Helmutt Ritter (1892 – 1971) and Reynold A. Nicholson (1866 – 1945).

Among the many different organizations that are involved in textual research in Iran, the Research Centre for the Written Heritage is the only institution that exclusively specializes in and concentrates on producing scholarly critical editions of Persian and Arabic texts. This center was established in 1994 in order to support textual scholarship and to cooperate with other cultural organizations that are involved in this activity. The aim was to make a well-edited body of primary sources available to the scholarly community.

Goals and Objectives:

Owing to the fact that until the fourth century hejri (10th century AD) Arabic was the language of scholarship in our country and many Iranian scholars such as Fārābi (d.951 AD), Miskawayh (d. 1030 AD), Ebn Sina (d. 1037 AD), Biruni (d.1049 AD), and many others either wrote exclusively or chiefly in Arabic, Iran possesses one of the richest collections of Islamic manuscripts in the world. According to recent published statistics 340,000 Persian and Arabic manuscripts in Iranian institutions have been identified and catalogued to date. The number of un-catalogued manuscripts in private and public collections is at nearly 200,000; and as manuscript catalogues of more libraries become available, the urgent needs to research and edit these codices is more acutely felt.

The Research Centre for the Written Heritage has from the outset focused on producing high-quality editions, and has not allowed the urgency of the task adversely influence the quality of its scholarly editions. In order to maintain the high quality of our publications, we have developed and followed the following guidelines:

1. Holding training and investigative workshops led by such authorities as Professors Iraj Afshar, Abdollah Anwār, and a number of other highly experienced specialists.

2. Organizing 60 conferences and roundtables on textual editing. These have focused not only on our own publications but also on the publications of other scholarly institutions; and have been motivated by the knowledge that critical assessment of what has been done so far may provide invaluable lessons for what needs to be done in the future.

3. Founding a specialized library and archives that concentrates on editorial technique and theory and houses all important Persian and Arabic works on the subject of textual scholarship.

4. Publishing a manual entitled *Guideline of Textual Editing* that may be useful to the younger generation of editors.

5. Collecting all important essays and treatises about different techniques and approaches to editing that have been published during the past fifty years in a single volume. This collections is at the final stages of publication.

6. Establishing the "Codicology and Editing Taskforce" in our center. This taskforce, which has recently been accredited by the Islamic Republic's Ministry of Science and Technology, is working on the creation of a comprehensive handbook of editing and codicology, which will be prepared in cooperation with ten well-known authorities in the field.

7. Preparing a comprehensive bibliography of edited texts since the beginning of printing in Iran. This bibliography will help scholars to determine whether or not a text has been edited and if so, whether or not a modern critical edition of it is required. We hope to help scholars avoid duplicating the labor of the previous generations. Although this bibliography is not completed yet, but it shows that over 15,000 Persian and Arabic texts have been edited and exist in lithograph or typeset editions. Over half of these have been edited in the last 25 years. This bibliography will be completed by Spring of 2008 and will be made available online at our center's website: http://www.mirasmaktoob.ir

We believe these steps are indispensable in promoting standards in textual scholarship and in creating a standardized method of editing Persian and Arabic texts. It is true that textual scholars tend to emulate the methods of their prominent predecessors. For instance scholars who edit Arabic texts may follow such great editors as Mohammad `Abd al-Salām Hārun, Salāh al-Din al-Monajjed, and Mohammad Abolfadl Ibrahim who are considered outstanding in the field of Arabic textual criticism. However, most younger editors feel bewildered by the intricacies of editing Islamic texts and sense the need for a standardized handbook. We hope that by pursuing the projects that we have explained in this short report, our center may be able to contribute to the alleviation of this need.

Characteristics of a Desirable Edition:

No scholarly critical edition may proceed before a number of conditions for its successful implementation are brought about. The following are among the most important:

1. The editor must be able to identify and have access to different existing manuscripts of the work that he seeks to edit. This means he should have easy access to manuscript catalogues.
2. The editor should be able to collect usable reproductions of the manuscripts of the text that he plans to edit.
3. He should have easy access to scholarly sources that help him better understand his chosen text and are useful to him when he embarks upon preparing his editorial and explanatory notes to his edition.
4. He must be technically qualified not only to approach his chosen text but also the subject with which that text deals.

In cooperation with the Database of Iranian Manuscripts that Mr. Naser Golbaz has designed and directs, the Research Center for the Written Heritage has taken several steps to assist textual editors. The Database of Iranian Manuscripts contains the full text of the published catalogues of all libraries in the cities of Tehran and Qomm. To date, it includes over 220,000 records and may be searched using 30 different search parameters that help investigators locate manuscripts of interest to them. At the present time, our center provides information to researchers who would like to consult this database by email. By the end of 2008 this database will include all 340,000 records of the catalogued manuscripts in Iranian institutions. Naturally, our database will grow as new lists of manuscripts are made available.

The Research Center for the Written Heritage is interested in co-operating with other scholarly institutes in the Middle East, the Indian Subcontinent, Central Asia, and Turkey in order to include their holdings in this database. A number of important area institutions have joined with us in this project and we are preparing the catalogues of the manuscripts of the University of Punjab at Lahor, the National Library of Punjab, and fourteen volumes of the catalogue of the Noor Microfilm Center at Delhi that will add some 20,000 records to our database. We believe this databank will be indispensable to all researchers who work with Persian and Arabic manuscripts because it enables them to quickly identify the institutions that house manuscript copies of the text that they may be interested in.

Every editor faces numerous obstacles in gaining access to useful reproductions of texts that he may need for his edition. Fortunately, owing to our Center's high scholastic standing in the country, it is in a position to provide a great deal of help to researchers who seek access to manuscript reproductions by providing them with reproductions of the manuscripts that they may need for their research. Another problem is the high cost of procuring these reproductions and the time-consuming process of ordering and receiving them. In 2006 our center spent 10,000 Pounds on procuring manuscript reproductions from Iranian and foreign libraries for the use of our researchers. This is an expense that we cannot continue to incur indefinitely.

Once the editor has located and gained reproductions of the manuscript that he aims to edit from different libraries in the world, he must pay meticulous attention to the manner of his edition's presentation to the scholarly community. All scholarly editions must have the following parts.
1. A comprehensive introduction: Modern scholarly editing is an interdisciplinary field. The editor must be able to operate in a number of disciplines with ease. The editor who is unable to discuss the following points in his introduction has produced an unacceptable edition:
    - Linguistic features: The editor who works on an old literary text should be well versed in philology and historical linguistics so that he may distinguish archaic usage or dialectal variations from error in his manuscripts.
    - Codicology and Paleography: Although earlier generations of editors of Persian and Arabic texts rarely discussed codicology

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and paleography in any useful manner, the modern editor can communicate a great deal of information in his introductory essay by paying attention to these topics.

- Art-history: A great deal of information is contained in miniatures and other decorative aspects of manuscripts. A competent editor points to the most important of these in his introduction.
- Seals and Marginalia: A modern critical edition of manuscripts that may have seals or marginalia should not neglect the information that such extra-textual markings may provide.

2. Modern editors must also be mindful of the literary, sociological, psychological, and cultural-historical significance of the codices with which they work and be able to communicate something of these to their readers. Often a competent discussion of these topics justifies the effort and expense of editing the text in the first instance. The Research Center for the Written Heritage has been mindful of the significance of these issues and has established a team to design guidelines that address these points. At the present time, in addition to the handbook of textual criticism, we are supporting the production of a handbook of codicology in our center. Furthermore, studies that approach classical Persian and Arabic texts from a variety of analytical points of view are in different stages of pre-publication at our center. One of the more important of these studies is *Principles of Mathnavi's Structure* that is being prepared by Dr. Salman S̲afavi.

3. Editorial Notes: A modern scholarly edition should have extensive notes that can help the reader understand editorial decisions and assist him in understanding the historical or literary contexts of the text.

4. Indexes: No edition is complete without adequate indexes that help the reader easily locate names, subjects, words, and other important information in the edited text. The great majority of the texts that have been published by our center have comprehensive indexes.

Publications:

In the past 13 years, The Research Centre for the Written Heritage has published 150 titles (in 180 volumes) in such diverse subjects as Koranic sciences, literature, history, philosophy, mysticism, science, and art. Thirty of these volume are in Arabic (e.g., Biruni's *al-āthār al-bāqiya*, Sā`ed-e Andalusi's *tabaqāt al-umam*, and `Emād-e Kāteb's *kharidat al-qasr*. We

have also published facsimile editions of a number of important manuscripts. The manuscript of Khāqāni's *khatm al-gharā'eb* was published in 2006, and a newly discovered manuscript of the *History of Herāt* will soon be published. The manuscripts of *al-abniyah `an haqā'eq al-adwiyah* and the mathematical treatises of Jamshid-e Kāshāni will be published by the end of 2007. We have also published 36 issues of our center's quarterly journal, 10 issues of our monthly journal, and 13 issues of our journal's supplements. Abridgements and re-writings of 110 classical texts in a series entitled: *Record of Iranian and Muslim Scholars* in a language that may be easily understood by the younger generation is another one of our center's achievements.

The Research Center for the Written Heritage, however, is chiefly focused on publishing books, journals, or papers about textual criticism and codicology in order to make the latest advances in these fields available to the scholarly community in Iran.