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Renaming (and Reshaping) The University of Edinburgh's “Oriental” Manuscript Collection

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Abstract

The University of Edinburgh holds a substantial collection of manuscripts in Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and South Asian languages, formerly known as the “Oriental Manuscript Collection”. This article reports recent steps taken to make this collection, which consists largely of manuscripts collected by Scottish East India Company officials between the late 18th and mid 19th centuries C.E, relevant to the present day global audience, and to widen access to it. This includes its renaming as "Manuscripts of the Islamicate World and South Asia", and the creation of a digitally searchable catalogue on the ArchivesSpace platform, largely through the use of “legacy data” from a 1925 printed catalogue, yet with a focus on making provenance information readily available. We discuss the challenges involved in renaming, and indeed reinterpreting, a historical collection whilst adhering to the principles of archival and library science. We share the methodology used to create our digitally searchable catalogue, a relatively simple model that may well prove useful for those curating similar collections.

Keywords

manuscripts, collecting practices, colonial legacy, cataloguing, finding aids, renaming, Oriental, Islamicate World, South Asia, Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Ethiopic

Introduction

The University of Edinburgh holds a collection of over 700 manuscript volumes from the Islamicate world and South Asia.⁷¹ Largely in Persian and Arabic but also including materials in Turkish, Sanskrit, Urdu, and other South Asian languages. They range in date from the 10th to 19th centuries C.E., the majority being later than 1500. Their contents range from sacred texts pertaining to Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Christianity, Islamic jurisprudence, historiography (both of India and Islam), and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad and Shi'i Imams, to works treating natural, and religious sciences, medicine, philosophy, poetry and grammar. The collection includes iconic items such as a richly illustrated substantial fragment of Rashid al-Din's *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh* (Or Ms 20), and a copy of al-Biruni's *al-Āthār al-bāqiya 'an al-qurūn al-khāliya* (Or Ms 161), both dating to the 14th century C.E., Qur'anic fragments on vellum in Kufic script dating to around the 10th century (Or Ms 175), and a richly illustrated 18th century Sanskrit scroll of the Hindu *Mahābhārata* measuring over 70 metres (Or Ms 510). It is a significant collection indeed, but its formation, composition, and existence are inextricably linked to the legacy of Scottish involvement in colonial activities in South Asia. A recent initiative from within the library has seen a drive to confront that legacy, to delve into the provenance information available for each item, researching the backgrounds of the donors and former owners to shed light upon where and how they might have acquired the manuscripts, and sharing the findings with full transparency. On

⁷¹ In the great majority of cases, one volume contains one work, and corresponds to one Or Ms number. However, a small proportion of items contain different texts bound together. In these situations, former curators made the choice to assign several Or Ms shelfmarks to the same volume, not necessarily in a sequential order. These "compilation manuscripts" can be composed of up to nine texts, and cover nine different shelfmarks.

considering this collection in the context of its history, further challenges became apparent. Formed and named during the colonial period, we must ensure that it is described in a way that shows due respect to the global community who may wish to access it today.

The items described above were formerly grouped together with other manuscripts in non-European writing systems, such as Ethiopic Christian texts and Tibetan Buddhist scrolls, under the title “The Oriental Manuscript Collection”, catalogued under Or Ms reference numbers. To represent its contents more informatively, and, moreover, to phase out the use of outdated and problematic terminology, in September 2022 the title of the collection was changed to “Manuscripts of the Islamicate World and South Asia” (MIWSA). This article discusses the complexities involved in making this change, examining the history of the curation of the collection, and explaining how we have dealt with the lexical challenge of renaming it.⁷² It seeks to engage with those involved in the curation of similar manuscript collections internationally, many of which will have similarly complex histories. Those managing them may well face challenges akin to ours — balancing legacy titles and older cataloguing methods with presenting their collections in a way that is relevant to the modern day, whilst adhering to the fundamental principles imperative to archival and library science.

Furthermore, the name change and slight restructuring of the collection that we report here has taken place in the context of a project involving the collaboration of an archivist, Aline Brodin, and a researcher in the field of Islamic Studies, Lucy Deacon, to create a digitally searchable catalogue for the collection.⁷³ We take this

⁷² The consultations over the name change took place between Daryl Green, Co-Director of Heritage Collections, Rachel Hosker, University Archivist & Research Collections Manager, Kirsty Stewart, Scottish and University Collections Archivist, Andrew Grout, Honorary Fellow at the University of Edinburgh, and the authors. The views expressed in this article are the authors’ own.

⁷³ *University of Edinburgh Archives Online* “Manuscripts of the Islamicate World and South Asia,” Heritage Collections, Or Ms, <<https://archives.collections.ed.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/86063>>. We thank those named in the note above for their input and support during the project, and

opportunity to share the methods and interim outcomes of this project, sharing a solution to what is a widely experienced challenge amongst those responsible for curating manuscript collections – the retroconversion of legacy data from printed catalogues to a digital platform. The process that we describe is relatively easy to implement, and uses an open source web application. It makes efficient use of existing resources, bypassing the need for external funding, and might be particularly useful for smaller institutions. It also allows for the provenance information available for each item to be shared with ease.

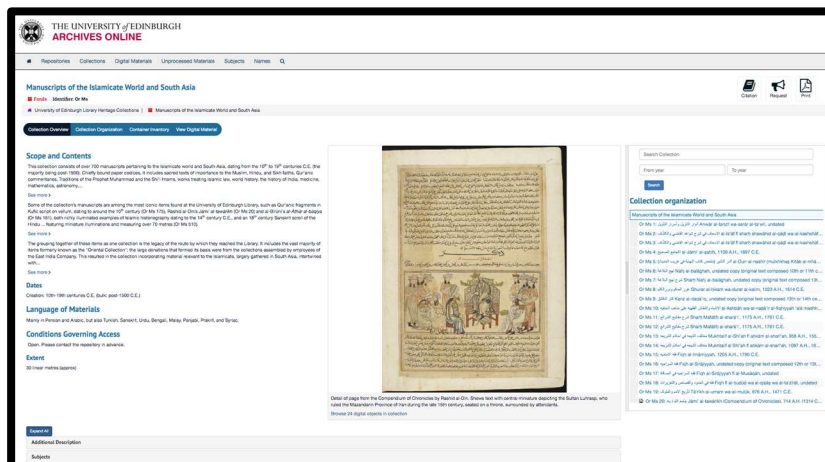


Figure 1: Top-Level Description of MIWSA Collection on UoE Archives Online.

History of the Collection and its Curation

Edinburgh’s old Oriental Collection has been augmented slightly through purchase over recent years and includes individual items given to the Library from the 17th century onwards. But the large donations that formed its basis had belonged to collections assembled in South Asia by employees of the East India Company (EIC). Prominent among such individuals are Lieutenant-Colonel John Baillie of Leys (1772-1833), a Professor of Arabic, Persian, and

MIWSA cataloguing intern Sarah Osama Abouzied for her work in the creation of this resource.

Islamic Law at Fort William College in Kolkata and EIC Political Agent at Lucknow, collector of 166 donated manuscripts; David Anderson (1750-1828), an EIC clerk and later diplomat, donor of 113 items; and Lieutenant James Anderson (1758-1833), Persian interpreter and EIC official, collector of 57 donated items. All three men were alumni of the University of Edinburgh.⁷⁴ The Anderson brothers were close associates of Warren Hastings, the first British Governor-General of Bengal, Hasting's inner circle being known for their interest in Indian and Muslim cultural heritage.⁷⁵ The collection also includes 39 items donated by Robert Blair Munro Binning (1814-1891), a linguist, and official in the Madras Civil Service of the EIC.⁷⁶ The profiles of the individuals whose donations constitute the vast majority of the remainder of the collection are generally similar to those above — most having worked for the EIC or British Crown in South Asia.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ For biographical information on John Baillie of Leys see Alexander Charles Baillie, *Call of Empire: From the Highlands to Hindostan* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 264-312, treating the period from 1791-1815, which extends from his arrival in India to his time as Political Resident at the Court of Awadh in Lucknow. For an interesting scholarly use of David Anderson's correspondence, including much biographical detail, see Alan M. Guenther, "Seeking Employment in the British Empire: Three Letters from Rajah Gubind Ram Bahādur," *Fontanus* 12 (2010).

⁷⁵ Joshua Ehrlich argues convincingly that this interest was deeply connected with Hastings' strategy of conciliation, seeking to fend off criticism of the EIC as a ruling power through patronage of both Indian scholarly elites and European officials as scholars — seeing the trade in intellectual goods as well as material ones ensuring the endurance of Company rule. See Ehrlich, *The East India Company and the Politics of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

⁷⁶ For Binning's own account of purchasing manuscripts from booksellers in Shiraz, Iran, see Robert Blair Munro Binning, *A Journal of Two Years' Travel in Persia, Ceylon, Etc.* (London: W.H. Allen, 1857), 309-315.

⁷⁷ For further information on such donors see "Custodial History"; and "Immediate Source of Acquisition", *UoE Archives Online* "MIWSA Collection." For a narrative introduction to the East India Company, see William Dalrymple

The manuscripts collected by the Anderson brothers were donated to the University in the first half of the 19th century. David Anderson bequeathed his items directly and they reached the Library in 1834. The donation of James Anderson's collection was made by his nephew Adam Anderson in 1844. However, the cataloguing of this growing collection, and use of the Or Ms reference numbers did not begin until the early 20th century. The creation of a printed catalogue was a meandering and somewhat fraught process, taking two decades and involving a number of contributors.

The donation of Baillie's collection (made by his grandson John Baillie Baillie of Leys in 1876) included a stipulation that a descriptive catalogue be created. This catalogue was not begun until 1905. The minutes of the Library Committee for that year show that negotiations for the creation of the catalogue had originally taken place with "an intelligent Persian" resident in Edinburgh by the name of Mr Shirazi.⁷⁸ However, for reasons unknown, Shirazi was not to pursue the project. Rather, the majority of the cataloguing work was done by Mohammad Ashraf Hukk (b. Delhi, India, 1879), who studied medicine at the University (matriculating in 1897 and graduating in 1907), with the assistance of Mohammad Bey Badre, (b. Zagazig, Egypt, 1883) a Science student at the University (matriculating in 1906).⁷⁹ Despite

The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company (London: Bloomsbury, 2019). For important recent research concerning the web of influences through which its power in South Asia was constructed and sustained, see Christina Welsch, *The Company's Sword: The East India Company and the Politics of Militarism, 1644–1858* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); and Callie Wilkinson, *Empire of Influence: The East India Company and the Making of Indirect Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

⁷⁸ University of Edinburgh Library Heritage Collections, Library Committee, 1877-1905, EUA IN1/COM/L1.

⁷⁹ UoE Library Heritage Collections, matriculation and graduation ledgers 1897-1907. The help of Grant Buttars, University Records Archivist, has been invaluable in researching the connection of the individuals discussed in this article to the University. It is noteworthy that, any medical career aside, Hukk subsequently authored a catalogue of the Persian and Hindustani manuscripts

the catalogue created by Hukk and Badre being in type by 1906, there was a delay in publication. In 1910, the Library identified a substantial number of manuscripts additional to those already catalogued, and the preparation of their entries was undertaken by Professor Hermann Ethé, of Aberystwyth, between 1910 and 1914. Julius Eggeling, Professor of Sanskrit and the then Curator of the University Library, was reviewing the final proofs at the outbreak of World War I. The process was paused during the war and taken up again in 1921. Eggeling had passed away in 1918. The Library Committee requested Edward Robertson, Lecturer in Arabic at Edinburgh, and later Chair of Semitic Languages at the University of Bangor, to complete the process. The catalogue was finally published in 1925.⁸⁰ The allocation of Or Ms reference numbers begins with the first entries to the catalogue, which, whilst commencing in a methodical way — categorising the items by donor, language and subject — later reflects the convoluted nature of its composition, its later additions being arranged solely by language.

The Library's use of the term "Oriental" to describe the manuscript collection in the early 1900s was, at that stage, a reflection of how such materials and cultures were discussed by western scholars; the term was formerly in widespread use to denote anyone or anything from the geographical area east of Europe. There is little need to reiterate here the criticism famously launched by Edward Said on the field and mode of thinking that he coined "orientalism", save to say that it groups together the people and production of lands vastly different in culture, creed and society, intimating that they are fundamentally different from the European.⁸¹ Furthermore, in light of

held by the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft in Leipzig, published in 1911, by which time he was a Doctor of Philosophy.

⁸⁰ Mohammed Hukk, Hermann Ethé, and Edward Robertson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Arabic and Persian Manuscripts in Edinburgh University Library* (Hertford: Stephen Austin, 1925). See the catalogue's preface, by Frank Nicholson, for further elaboration, *ibid*, iiv-iv. A digitised version of this book is available at <<https://archive.org/details/descriptivecatal00hukk>>.

⁸¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1978).

the colonies established in many of the lands denoted by this term, the geographical concept is entangled with colonial ideas of cultural superiority.

It is important that the history of colonial practices and their associated intellectual trends should not be forgotten or concealed.⁸² Those curating materials brought to Europe during the colonial period have a vital responsibility in this respect — to do whatever is possible to democratise access to these collections and to make them available to interested parties from across the globe. The route by which they reached their current holding institutions must be laid plain, set forth with maximum transparency, and made subject to an inclusive discussion. Such discussion might touch upon how these materials can find relevance in the present day as a global resource, recognising the multiple levels of narrative to which they bear witness, from the composition of the work, to the creation of the material object in question and its journey through the hands of different custodians to those of the colonial collector. In some cases, the discussion might arrive at the question of restitution; in most it will want to consider the relevance of these manuscripts to heritage communities in the local area, and to seek their involvement. In the case of the MIWSA collection, this means connecting with the Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh communities in Edinburgh, and native speakers of the languages that the collection encompasses. This is, of course, an enormous undertaking that needs an outreach effort requiring a team beyond curators and archivists.⁸³ However, easily accessible finding aids that

⁸² For the argument that antiquarian collections brought from South Asia to Britain during the colonial period, including manuscripts, contributed to constructing an understanding of the region as inferior, justifying British rule, see Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 76-105. For Cohn's analysis of how the work of linguists among the East India Company (which would include a number of the MIWSA collection's donors) was key to what he argues was a "conquest of knowledge" see *ibid.* 16-56.

⁸³ While much remains to be done, some efforts have been made to reach an audience for the MIWSA collection beyond academia, and beyond Scotland. In May 2023, Heritage Collections hosted the two-day hybrid symposium on *Islamicate World and South Asian Manuscripts*, organised by Deacon and Mira Xenia Schwerda. This included presentations by researchers and curators from

describe the materials in a language that is clear, and respectful of the communities involved, is an essential first step.

The name change that we outline here comes as part of a broader movement, with other scholarly institutions seeking, similarly, to move away from the use of the term “Oriental” to describe the range of cultures with which their activities are concerned. Further such examples are the University of Oxford having changed the name of its “Faculty of Oriental Studies” to the “Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies” in August 2022, and in April 2023 the University of Chicago renaming the former “Oriental Institute” museum as the “Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, West Asia & North Africa”.

Europe, the Middle East, and the US. The event was attended online by 200 participants in countries including India, Turkey, Indonesia, and Japan. See Deacon, “Taking the Past into the Future: Studying, Preserving, and Understanding Islamicate Manuscripts,” uploaded August 31, 2023, *The University of Edinburgh, Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities*, <<https://www.iash.ed.ac.uk/news/taking-past-future-studying-preserving-and-understanding-islamicate-manuscripts>>.

Also, Heritage Collections have recently collaborated with *Khamseen: Islamic Art History Online*, an open-access online platform offering digital resources to aid the teaching of Islamic art, architecture, and visual culture, to produce a series of videos about manuscripts from the MIWSA collection, and related rare printed materials. See *The University of Edinburgh, Media Hopper Create*, Christiane Gruber, “Images of the Prophet Muhammad in Rashīd al-Dīn’s *Jāmi‘ al-tawārīkh* (Or MS 20),” uploaded February 20, 2024, video, 16:22, <https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/t/1_x8dazv92>; Lucy Deacon “The Provenance of the Edinburgh Fragment of Rashīd al-Dīn’s *Jāmi‘ al-tawārīkh* (Or MS 20),” uploaded February 20, 2024, video, 8:04, <https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/t/1_dzohjbki>; Mira Xenia Schwerda “The Bryce Miniature Qur’an and its travel across the globe (RB.S.4656),” uploaded February 20, 2024, video, 15:40, <https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/t/1_pzvy18ec>.

Giving a New Title: Preserving the Old Reference Numbers

In searching for an appropriate new title, “Manuscripts of the Islamicate World and South Asia” was chosen for a number of reasons. We will first explain the choice to use the term “Islamicate World”. The reasons for keeping the materials described by that term together with the South Asian manuscripts that it does not cover will be further discussed below. The term Islamicate was coined by revisionist historian Marshall Hodgson (1922-1968) in his *The Venture of Islam*, published posthumously in 1974. Hodgson introduced the term as an alternative to “Islamic” or “Muslim” to denote social or cultural output, or phenomena, connected to the Arabic or Persian literary traditions that are not explicitly associated with religion. Indeed, this also includes the literary and artistic output of non-Muslims from regions of the globe where Islam is, or has been, the predominant religion. It covers the artistic and architectural styles originating from such lands, even when found in other geographical and cultural contexts. Without attributing the materials or phenomena in question to the religion of Islam, it attests the influence of the Islamic cultural complex upon them.⁸⁴

The term Islamicate has not been without its critics. Shahab Ahmed objects to the way in which Hodgson’s neologism differentiates between “religion” and “culture”.⁸⁵ He summarises Hodgson’s understanding of “religion” as being associated with personal piety — thus, as matters move outward from the intimate, they move beyond religion and become culture.⁸⁶ For Ahmed this risks a definition of Islam that is too narrow, the contradictions within Islam, what he sees as the “human and historical Islam” being conveniently dealt with by the creation of the category of “Islamicate”, as opposed to being seen as testament to the potential for pluralism

⁸⁴ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, Volume One, *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

⁸⁵ Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 157.

⁸⁶ For Ahmed’s thorough engagement with the term “Islamicate” see *ibid.* 157 – 175.

with Islam itself.⁸⁷ Thus, the idea of the Islamicate is taken to be at odds with Ahmed's own thesis, that Islam is not an "essence," but "a process of human discursive and social activity, and that the discourse is characterised by a multiplicity of voices."⁸⁸ Ahmed argues persuasively that "outright contradictions of Truth and Meaning are ... internal and intrinsic to Islam. Contradiction hence emerges as not merely inherently Islamic, but as coherently Islamic."⁸⁹

In choosing to use the term "Islamicate world" in the name of the collection, despite such critique, we do not seek to perpetuate a narrow view of what can be considered "Islamic", nor to detract from an understanding of Islam as encompassing a broad range of expressions, lived experiences, and calibrations. Rather, the vast scope of the materials that we seek to describe necessitates a terminology that allows for considerable versatility. Describing the manuscripts not as Islamicate, but as originating from the Islamicate world (the geographical areas in which Islam is, or was, the most prevalent religion), allows for the inclusion of the collection's Christian materials. These are items such as a Persian translation of the Gospels, transcribed at Akbarabad (Agra, India) in 854 A.H. (1450 C.E.),⁹⁰ and an Arabic treatise on the Evangelists, likely to originate from Aleppo, Syria, donated to the Library in 1690 by George Sandrie, one of Edinburgh's earliest coffee shop proprietors.⁹¹ It is, of course, valid to ask whether the "Islamicate world" is one entity, or whether, to

⁸⁷ Ibid., 169.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 297.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 366.

⁹⁰ Or Ms 176: انجيل مقدّس Injīl-i muqaddas, 854 A.H., 1450 C.E. Manuscripts of the Islamicate World and South Asia, Or Ms. University of Edinburgh Library Heritage Collections. *UoE Archives Online*, <https://archives.collections.ed.ac.uk/repositories/2/archival_objects/220878>.

⁹¹ Or Ms 147: المقدسة اناجيل الاربعة al-Arba'at anājīl al-muqaddasah, undated. Manuscripts of the Islamicate World and South Asia, Or Ms. University of Edinburgh Library Heritage Collections. *UoE Archives Online*, <https://archives.collections.ed.ac.uk/repositories/2/archival_objects/220857>.

represent the “multiplicity of voices” cited by Ahmed and to recognise the diversity of those who have embraced Islam, we should better talk about “worlds”. However, the need for concision and clarity in the new title prevailed.

A natural further question is, why leave the manuscripts pertaining to the Islamicate world and South Asia together as one collection? Indeed, we found that the contents of many of the manuscripts bridged these two definitions. Most of them were created in South Asia when much of the sub-continent was under the Mughal Empire (1526-1857). The Mughals were a Muslim dynasty, and in particular, the reigns of the emperors: Akbar (r. 1556-1605), Jahangir (r. 1605-28) and Shah Jahan (r. 1628-57) were known for their cultural patronage and religious tolerance; Hindus occupied high positions in administration and systems of local governance. Persian, and later Urdu (sharing much vocabulary and grammar with Hindi) were the languages of court and high culture; the artistic and literary production patronised drew from both Hindu and Islamic heritage.⁹² Indeed, regardless of the place of composition of the text to which they are witness, many of the manuscripts of the MIWSA collection transcribed in South Asia have material and decorative qualities particular to the region, one example being Or Ms 106, *Dīvān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, the collected poems of "Hafiz" of Shiraz (ca. 1315-1390), undated but appearing to pertain to the 17th century. CE, and including twelve miniature paintings, distinctly Indian in style.⁹³

⁹² For a useful overview see Ira M. Lapidus, *Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History*, (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 521-526.

⁹³ Or Ms 106: دیوان حافظ *Dīvān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, undated copy, original text composed 14th cent. C.E. Manuscripts of the Islamicate World and South Asia, Or Ms. University of Edinburgh Library Heritage Collections. *UoE Archives Online*, <https://archives.collections.ed.ac.uk/repositories/2/archival_objects/211158>.

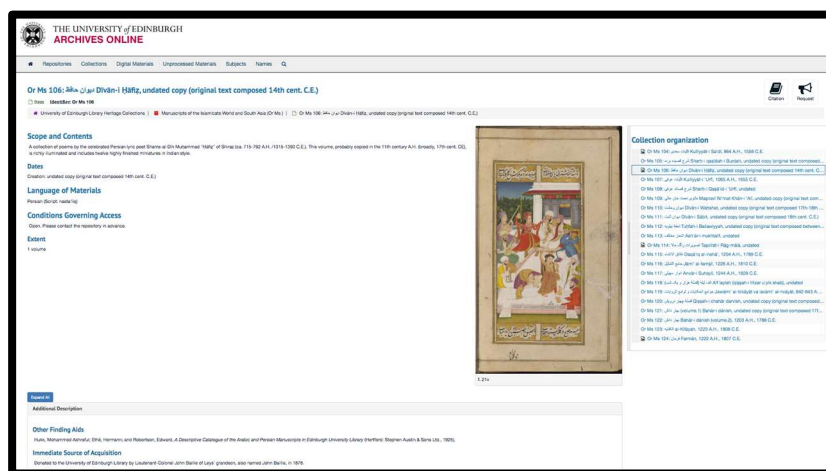


Figure 2: Or Ms 106, *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, UoE Archives Online.

Mughal patronage aside, other local rulers, and transregional networks of poets, artists and craftsmen influenced the nature of the materials produced in South Asia during this period. For example the Nawwabs of Awadh, a Muslim dynasty and great patrons of the arts, made Lucknow a thriving capital of cultural production and exchange.⁹⁴ The elites of the Deccan region had strong connections to Iran and Persianate Islamic culture.⁹⁵ This facilitated the movement of goods, both intellectual and physical, and also people and techniques. Or Ms 373, *Qit'āt-i khūshkhaṭṭ*, exemplifies (in this case quite literally) the potentially multi-layered nature of what was produced. Donated to the Library by Robert Munro Binning, it is a *muraqqa'* (album), mounted on marbled paper, featuring calligraphy specimens

⁹⁴ See Maya Jasanoff. *Edge of Empire: Conquest and Collecting in the East, 1750–1850* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), 52–62.

⁹⁵ Keelan Overton, “Introduction to Iranian Mobilities and Persianate Mediations in the Deccan,” in *Iran and the Deccan: Persianate Art, Culture, and Talent in Circulation, 1400–1700*, ed. Overton (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2020), 3–49.

by famous masters, the earliest sample having been completed in Isfahan in 1571, and also featuring two tinted drawings of Deccani youths, and two (European) woodcut illustrations.⁹⁶ Jake Benson has identified the marbling on the album's support as highly likely to be the work of Muhammad Tahir, a Iranian master of this craft who emigrated to India.⁹⁷ Binning is known to have procured manuscripts both in Iran and India, in this case we have no record of where he acquired the album but, interestingly, either location seems possible.

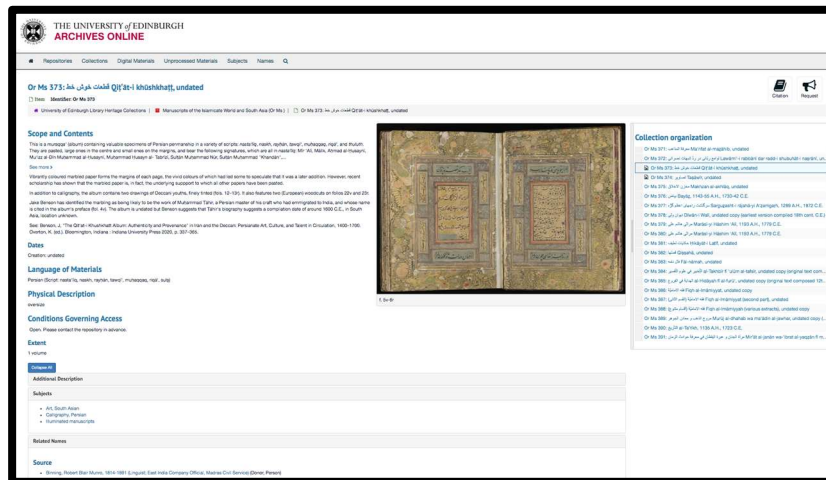


Figure 3: *Or Ms 373, Qit'āt-i khūshkhatt, UoE Archives Online.*

Furthermore, in terms of textual content the collection includes many works in which the Islamicate world and South Asia are very

⁹⁶ Or Ms 373: *قطعات خوش خط Qit'āt-i khūshkhatt*, undated. Manuscripts of the Islamicate World and South Asia, Or Ms. University of Edinburgh Library Heritage Collections. *UoE Archives Online*, <https://archives.collections.ed.ac.uk/repositories/2/archival_objects/221398>.

⁹⁷ Jake Benson, "The *Qit'at-i Khushkhatt* Album: Authenticity and Provenance," in *Iran and the Deccan: Persianate Art, Culture, and Talent in Circulation, 1400-1700*, ed. Overton (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2020), 337–365.

much intertwined. If separating these two, what would we do, for instance, with Or Ms 456, a book of civil ordinances bearing the seal impression of Tipu Sultan of Mysore, with entries in Persian and two Indian languages?⁹⁸ And, where would works pertaining to the politics and government of the Mughal Empire belong if making this division?⁹⁹ What of a manuscript such as Or Ms 238, *Sarguzasht-i Rājahā-yi A‘zamgarh*, that gives an account of the rulers of Azamgarh (in Uttar Pradesh) beginning with the life of Abhman-Singh, son of Chandar-Sen-Rai of the Gutam tribe, who received the title of Nadir-Dawlat-Khan from the Mughal Emperor Akbar (1542-1605 C.E.), and ending with the transfer of the district to British rule in 1801 by the Nawwab of Awadh Wazir Sa‘adat ‘Ali Khan (1752-1814)? This copy was transcribed by the author Sayyid Amir ‘Ali Razwi in 1289 A.H. (1872 C.E) for the donor James Robert Reid (1838-1908), an Edinburgh born administrator with the Indian Civil Service of the British Raj.¹⁰⁰ There are many other, similar examples. Indeed, due to the layered narratives present in so many of these manuscripts relevant to the culture and history of the Islamicate world and South Asia, and showing the interactions of Scottish colonial officials within these spheres, keeping them together as one collection is the clearest method through which to share their evidence with readers.

Given the complexity of renaming the collection, whilst effectively choosing to conserve much of its composition, one might

⁹⁸ These languages are pending identification. Or Ms 456 does not yet have a full cataloguing description and is among the items currently covered only by an old handlist. UoE Library, “Handlists of manuscripts, H 8.2,” <https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/h8_2_oriental_manuscripts_continued_from_hukk.pdf>.

⁹⁹ The MIWSA collection includes 16 manuscripts to which we have linked the subject heading “Mogul Empire -- Politics and government.”

¹⁰⁰ Or Ms 238: اعظم گڑہ سرگنشت راجہای Sarguzasht-i Rājahā-yi A‘zamgarh, 1289 A.H., 1872 C.E. Manuscripts of the Islamicate World and South Asia, Or Ms. University of Edinburgh Library Heritage Collections. *UoE Archives Online*, <https://archives.collections.ed.ac.uk/repositories/2/archival_objects/221355>.

well ask, why change the name at all? A revisionist thinker Marshall Hodgson's comments on terminology are relevant to the problem that we faced here. In defending his introduction of the term Islamicate (and other new expressions), he discusses the potential approaches to problematic phrasing or categorisation — essentially the misuse of language:

There are two approaches to conventional misusages: the admonitionist approach and the revisionist. The admonitionists, admitting a given usage or practice is misleading, prefer to maintain the continuity of communication which even false conventions make possible, but to add a warning that such and such a usage or categorization must not be taken in the most likely way. The revisionists prefer to replace outright the conventional misuseage (or biased categorization) with a sounder one.¹⁰¹

We have chosen the revisionist approach. However, while we did rename the collection, we opted to keep the original “Or Ms” reference numbers, even though they reflect the former title. There are several reasons for this choice. First, the protection of the physical items was a priority. Changing the reference numbers would have required that the manuscripts be re-labelled, an invasive process to be avoided unless absolutely necessary. Secondly, the manuscripts have already been cited and discussed in the scholarship according to their “Or” numbers for more than a century. Changing them now could potentially create confusion, and make the manuscripts less visible and less easy to find. Finally, one could argue that, in conjunction with renaming the collection, dropping the use of the “Or” numbers would risk creating a silence in the history of these items. Of course, a note indicating the older reference and explaining the rationale behind a change could have been added to each catalogue entry. But this may well have gone largely unnoticed; leaving the old reference in place is a more direct route by which to draw the attention of future readers to the item's history.

¹⁰¹ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, Volume One, The Classical Age of Islam, (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 46.

The Cataloguing Project and its Guiding Principles

Deacon's work with the Library's Arabic and Persian manuscripts began as a short pilot project, commissioned by Heritage Collections, to research the provenance of the, then, Oriental Collection. Creating an online catalogue with item-level entries was not the principal aim. However, we found it to be an effective way to create a record of the findings concerning the manuscripts' provenance, and to make that freely accessible. It was also an opportunity to bring the skills of the archivists together with those of a researcher with the language skills and academic background to interpret the collection with an understanding of its cultural context(s).

Before beginning the cataloguing work, certain principles were defined that would guide our approach. Firstly, our online resource needed to use clear, concise, and informative language, and a user-friendly format so that it could reach a broad range of readers, widening access to the collection. The entries were created largely using "legacy data" from the 1925 catalogue by Mohammed Hukk et al.¹⁰² It covers manuscript numbers Or Ms 1 to Or Ms 429. Apart from seven manuscripts in Urdu (referred to as Hindustani), these are all in Arabic or Persian.¹⁰³ This catalogue is an invaluable source, yet its metadata needed to be updated. This included converting Arabic, Persian, and Urdu transliterations into the Library of Congress system, and revising certain terminology, editing the term "Mohammedan" to "Islamic" or "Muslim" being an obvious example.

In addition to this, descriptions of historical events that included glorification of the exploits of colonialists were reformulated to recount the occurrence in neutral language, or given as quotes in the case of flyleaf annotations. While this is so, the entry for each item

¹⁰² Hukk et al., *Arabic and Persian Manuscripts*.

¹⁰³ The majority of the Turkish manuscripts included in the MIWSA collection are described in John R. Walsh, "The Turkish Manuscripts in New College, Edinburgh," *Oriens* Vol. 12, No. 1/2 (1959), 171-189. The addition of their metadata to the MIWSA collection ArchivesSpace online catalogue, and the creation of item level descriptions for the manuscripts currently only covered by a handlist, including the Sanskrit manuscripts and those in South Asian languages, are anticipated further levels of the project.

includes mention of the 1925 catalogue, and a link to a digitised version is given on the collection's ArchivesSpace landing page, to facilitate direct reference to it.¹⁰⁴

The desire to “decolonialise” our finding aids brings us to our second principle: a commitment to transparency over the provenance of the collection and each of its manuscripts, including – and especially – when this custodial history raises potentially contentious issues relating to acquisition practices. In many cases new metadata was added to the Hukk at al. catalogue's descriptions relating to the provenance of the manuscripts. Likewise, information on the careers of the former owners and donors of the manuscripts, that was not available in earlier finding aids, has been included in their entries. Our third guiding principle was to present the manuscripts in a way that respects the communities and cultural groups whose heritage they represent, facilitating their access to them. To this end we have given titles in (searchable) Arabic script as well as transliteration, making them more easily understood and found by native speakers; these titles include dates in both the Hijri (Islamic) and Gregorian calendars (where the manuscript is dated). When the remainder of the collection is catalogued, it will be feasible and desirable to include titles in further scripts. Finally, any initiatives taken should prioritise the physical conservation of the manuscripts.

Cataloguing Standards: Chosen Approach

With these principles established, the next step was to define the process and standards to follow, in a way that would best suit our resources and cataloguing systems. The collection is predominantly composed of bound paper codices. In terms of our in-house online cataloguing practices, such items fall between the requirements of rare books and manuscripts, and we had to adopt a flexible approach to be sure to produce an accurate, respectful, and user-friendly resource.

It was decided very early on to treat this collection as archival material, and therefore to use archival standards and a finding aid platform to catalogue it. It is relevant to note here that the priority of this project, and of the collaboration between Deacon and Brodin, was

¹⁰⁴ See footnote 10 for a link to this resource.

to make this underused collection more visible and accessible, as opposed to producing a highly detailed catalogue with expanded scholarly descriptions of each manuscript. This would have necessitated additional staff capacity and expertise beyond our resources. Using archival descriptive standards was the most practical way of achieving our goal within the context of Heritage Collections, and it was also the most efficient approach to integrate the legacy data into an online platform in a user-friendly manner.

One particularly compelling argument was the success of a similar project spearheaded by Brodin a few years ago. Its objective was to modernise and provide online accessibility to the early 20th century catalogue of the Western Medieval Manuscripts collection (in many ways MIWSA's sister collection).¹⁰⁵ This offered a tried and tested method for integrating and displaying complex manuscript descriptions into our online cataloguing system ArchivesSpace, using archival metadata fields.

Furthermore, the hierarchical nature of archival standards facilitated the seamless and efficient presentation of the manuscripts as a collection on ArchivesSpace. As part of our approach, we created an extensive and user-friendly "collection-level description" to which all the individual entries are linked. This was an essential element to explain the manuscripts as a grouping, and to provide context for their presence in the University of Edinburgh's Library. Indeed, as explained above, researching and presenting the collection's provenance and chains of custody in a transparent manner was a priority of our endeavour. We found that this was best done by using in-depth custodial history notes, as well as "agent" records, including lengthy biographies of the individuals involved, making clear their relationships to the different items and, indeed, to each other. Archival descriptions as presented in ArchivesSpace integrated these aspects very well, better than our cataloguing platform for printed material, creating a more seamless and consolidated online experience.

¹⁰⁵ *UoE Archives Online*, "Western Medieval Manuscripts," MS, <<https://archives.collections.ed.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/86700>>.

Arrangement of the MIWSA Collection: Minimising Disturbance to the Legacy Order

Once it had been decided to use archival standards, the first step of our cataloguing process was to look at the arrangement of the MIWSA manuscripts. While they are not printed books, they are a *collection*, as opposed to being an archival *fonds*. This means that contrary to most archival groupings, each unit within the collection could be a standalone item, unrelated or only loosely related to the other manuscripts. The concepts of *collection*, used in library sciences, and of *fonds*, used in archives, are different:¹⁰⁶ a *fonds* is created “organically”, the documents within it share the same origin and follow an original order, whereas a collection’s components have been assembled or brought together “artificially”, usually because they belonged to the same person or share a similar theme.¹⁰⁷ This distinction is important. Since the Oriental collection was deliberately assembled, as we have seen, according to the arbitrary concept of “non-Western-ness”, one could argue that when we decided to rename it and work on its provenance, we could have also chosen to re-arrange it.

At the University of Edinburgh Library, both the former “Oriental Manuscripts” and the “Western Medieval Manuscripts” collections were created and numbered around the beginning of the 20th century as part of the process to produce printed catalogues for each of them.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ According to the Society of American Archivists’ Dictionary of Archival Terminology, a *fonds* is “the entire body of records of an organisation, family, or individual that have been created and accumulated as the result of an organic process reflecting the functions of the creator”. Meanwhile, a collection is “materials assembled by a person, organisation, or repository from a variety of sources; an artificial collection” and “a thematic aggregation of sets of otherwise unrelated archival materials”. Society of American Archivists, *Dictionary of Archival Terminology*, <<https://dictionary.archivists.org/>>.

¹⁰⁷ Geoffrey Yeo, “The Conceptual Fonds and the Physical Collection,” *Archivaria* 73 (2012), 43-80.

¹⁰⁸ A catalogue of the “Western Medieval Manuscripts”, compiled by Catherine Borland, was published in 1916; as discussed above, the catalogue by Hukk and other contributors was published in 1925, but was begun in 1904. See Catherine Borland, *A descriptive catalogue of the Western Mediæval Manuscripts in*

The manuscripts were brought together according to their formats, their dates of creation, and their geographical origins; and were sometimes extracted from existing collections, in particular the large collection bequeathed by antiquary, bookseller, and librarian David Laing (1793-1878).¹⁰⁹ The current arrangement of the MIWSA collection is not particularly tidy or easy to navigate and reflects the complex history of the creation of its printed catalogue, as described above, as well as the way that the collection has grown over the last century. The reference numbers of the manuscripts that were added to the collection after the publication of the 1925 catalogue by Mohammad Hukk et al. (Or Ms 430-732) simply reflect the order in which they entered the collection. Certain items among the MIWSA collection formerly belonged to New College, home of the University's School of Divinity. They were moved to the Main Library between 1991 and 1999 and integrated into the old Oriental collection.¹¹⁰ Once their descriptions (currently only covered by succinct handlists) are created and uploaded into the ArchivesSpace catalogue, their former shelfmarks will be recorded under a "Custodial History" note labelled "Previous reference", in line with local cataloguing practice.

With the arbitrary and somewhat haphazard nature of its original order in mind, re-arranging the MIWSA collection could have been justified as part of the effort to modernise and widen access to it. Especially given the provenance research, one possibility would have been to re-organise the manuscripts according to their donors to the

Edinburgh University Library (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1916); Hukk et al. *Arabic and Persian Manuscripts*.

¹⁰⁹ UoE Archives Online "Laing Collection," La., <<https://archives.collections.ed.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/85248>>.

¹¹⁰ These include the vast majority of items with sequence numbers Or Ms 511-676. For items with reference numbers Or Ms 511-607 see R.B Serjeant, *A Handlist of the Arabic, Persian and Hindustani Mss of New College, Edinburgh* (London: Luzac & Co., 1942). For items with reference numbers Or Ms 608.1-627.2, in Turkish, see Walsh, "The Turkish Manuscripts in New College." Details of Or Ms 430-676 can be found in Handlist H.8.2.

University. The result would have been a number of smaller collections bearing the names of their donors, such as the “Baillie Collection”, regardless of the topics, creation dates, and geographical origins of their contents. This approach was not pursued for several reasons: not all manuscripts had sufficient provenance information, and a small proportion of them had been purchased. More importantly, this would have involved imposing another kind of Western bias on non-European materials. Arranging these manuscripts according to the names of colonial officials — keeping in mind that some are likely to have been procured under circumstances that we would now consider dubious — would go against the guiding principles that we had defined. This would cause the materials to be categorised according to the identity of the collector as opposed to other qualities. Besides which, the capacity of ArchivesSpace to include “agent” profiles allows for searching by donor, and upon opening the donor’s profile, a list of all manuscripts donated by that person is automatically generated, thus serving provenance research purposes.

Another option was to re-classify the manuscripts by language, creed, country of origin, or type. However, the functionalities of modern finding aids make this unnecessary. Indeed, online catalogues are searchable and “browsable” by subject terms (this can include language, geographic origin, topic, genre, etc.). This means that if a user is interested in a particular type of work, they simply have to click on a subject to bring up all related entries. Therefore, even though the current arrangement is not perfect, entirely re-classifying the manuscripts would not have been an effective use of time, and, moreover, would have risked creating more complexity and confusion for future curators and users of the collection.

We decided that the collection’s legacy arrangement should be disturbed as little as possible. The very way that the collection was created and organised over a century ago is a part of its custodial history, and reflects the cultural and academic context of a European university library at that time. To change this now would be to add a further layer of interpretation. However, there were two important exceptions to the decision not to disturb the original order. The old Oriental Collection included a small number of Ethiopic and Tibetan manuscripts: the Ethiopic items being Christian materials, the Tibetan items Buddhist. Given that they pertain neither to Islam, nor originate in the geographical areas denoted by the new “MIWSA” title, and that

this difference in geographical origin is likely to belie differences in the patterns of their procurement, we decided that they would be best represented by creating of them two separate small collections.¹¹¹ Preserving the legacy order as much as possible did not mean perpetuating errors or inaccuracies; there was no way to include the Tibetan and Ethiopic manuscripts without repeating our predecessors' mistake of creating a sort of "catch-all" collection of non-European material.

Cataloguing Description: Chosen Platform

We had the choice between two possible platforms on which to catalogue the manuscripts: Alma, used for cataloguing printed material, and ArchivesSpace, a system designed for archives and manuscripts. Choosing the latter made sense. As mentioned above, a project in 2018-2019 to modernise and enhance the cataloguing of the Western Medieval Manuscripts had used the legacy data of the early 20th century printed catalogue to create an extensive ArchivesSpace resource.¹¹² Although our efforts with respect to the MIWSA collection did not have the funding enjoyed by the earlier project, we were able to reuse its methodology, and adapt it to our purposes. ArchivesSpace uses archival online standards, namely ISAD(G) (International Standard for Archival Description (General)) and EAD (Encoded Archival Description), which are, admittedly, neither exhaustive nor optimal for describing bound manuscripts in full detail. However, the precedent of the earlier project had shown that it was more than capable of creating the user-friendly and dynamic resource that we wanted. Moreover, our local practice and system implementation did not allow us to use and publish other standards

¹¹¹ *UoE Archives Online*, "Ethiopic Manuscripts Collection," Coll-2068, <<https://archives.collections.ed.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/87369>> ; and UoE Library Heritage Collections, Tibetan Manuscripts Collection, Coll-2069 (cataloguing pending). There are reasonable grounds to debate whether Tibet pertains to South or East Asia. However, it is usually categorised as East Asia and we have treated it as such.

¹¹² *UoE Archives Online*, "Western Medieval Manuscripts."

specifically developed to describe manuscripts, such as DCRM(MSS) and TEI, without significant additional staff training and developer input. While this is so, these standards were not completely ignored, as we explain below, the initial template used to convert the legacy data was designed to be compatible with FIRHIST (TEI) requirements.

One of the greatest advantages of ArchivesSpace is its facility for the creation of “agent records”. “Agents” are all entities – persons, families or corporate organisations – involved in the creation and custodial history of an item or a collection. The main agent is the creator, but it can also be a former owner, donor, collector, scribe, seller, marginalia writer, editor etc. In the case of the MIWSA and Ethiopic collections we have focused primarily on donors and former owners to highlight chains of custodial history, from whose hands to whose the items have passed on their way to Edinburgh. We have also created profiles for scribes to ensure that the physical labour of manuscript production is included in the record (even to a limited extent). The concept of agent records is far from being restricted to archival cataloguing, and Alma also incorporates name authorities. However, the advantage in ArchivesSpace is that these records include biographies that can be as lengthy as needed, and each entry includes a “biographical/historical” field that enables cataloguers to include additional information about the relationship of an agent with a specific item or collection.¹¹³ These functionalities are particularly interesting in the context of our attention to manuscript provenance.

The creation of these agent biographies has been an opportunity to address some silences in the record. A prominent example is the case of Anne Baillie (1809-1847), the daughter of the aforementioned manuscript collector John Baillie of Leys, and his second wife Lulu Begum (full name unknown), a lady of high standing from the court of Awadh.¹¹⁴ Anne inherited her father’s manuscript collection, and it was her son, John Baillie, who later donated these 166 manuscripts to the University of Edinburgh. Until the current project, the role of this

¹¹³ The vast majority of the biographies are the work of Andrew Grout, Honorary Fellow at the University of Edinburgh.

¹¹⁴ Baillie, *Call of Empire*. 304.

woman of Indian-Scots ethnicity as a custodian of these important items had been entirely absent from their cataloguing records.

A second advantage of ArchivesSpace is that it enables cataloguers to structure descriptions in a hierarchical manner, to create all kinds of sub-groupings depending on the collections' arrangement and needs.¹¹⁵ This is not surprising given that archival cataloguing is based on the concept of *fonds*, or administrative and custodial groupings of records. This includes a "top-level description" that gives information on the collection as a whole. This was not possible in our local practice of using Alma, and such description would have had to be hosted on a different website, separate from the actual catalogue. The creation of a top-level description was essential in this case, providing a platform not only to give an overview of the collection's contents and its connection to colonial legacy, but also to detail the inherited cataloguing issues, renaming, and slight reshaping reported here.

Finally, as the screenshots in the figures above show, ArchivesSpace allows archivists to embed high-quality digital surrogates into catalogue entries – something which is not currently configured in our local implementation of Alma. The images are not directly uploaded into ArchivesSpace, but instead the cataloguer creates what is called a "Digital Object" which contains two URLs (one for the thumbnail, one for the actual link) taken from the University's online imaging platform LUNA. The result is a clickable image embedded into the manuscript's description, which takes the user to higher-quality surrogates on LUNA. This functionality improves the user experience, and creates a dynamic and attractive catalogue.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ The capacity to structure descriptions at different levels is particularly useful in the case of bound manuscripts containing several texts that may or may not be related to one another, an issue that is relatively common across both our Western Medieval Manuscripts and MIWSA collections.

¹¹⁶ In the future, these images of the MIWSA collection will be included in the new discovery platform for digital objects currently being developed for the University of Edinburgh Library, using the Archipelago Commons software; it will bring together metadata from different cataloguing systems in Heritage

Cataloguing Description: Process

The process of creating the online catalogue required a close collaboration between archivist and researcher, bringing together the skills to tackle a technical conversion involving archival metadata fields, with knowledge of Arabic and Persian as languages and familiarity with the manuscripts in question. As explained above, the objective was to use data from the 1925 printed catalogue to create a modernised and more easily accessible resource, a practice sometimes called “retroconversion”. It was important to determine *which* information to include in the new catalogue.

The metadata selected was what we considered the minimum necessary to meet our objectives, to create a clear and user-friendly catalogue, with transparency over the provenance of the collection, and respectful of the communities whose heritage it represents. We did not include the entirety of Hukk et al.’s descriptions; for example, we omitted the volumes’ incipits and explicits, and physical information such as precise dimensions (and in some cases binding descriptions). Recreating the entirety of Hukk’s catalogue was beyond the scope of the project; instead, as mentioned above, we reference it in each entry.

In order to “retro-convert” this data, we created an Excel template comprising a number of fields tailored to enable us to import it into ArchivesSpace. The columns mostly matched EAD and ArchivesSpace fields, and the cells’ contents were formatted by using EAD tags to italicise relevant words and to structure the texts into paragraphs when required. The spreadsheet also contained a small number of additional fields that would not be included in our online catalogue, but that will allow us to share our data with FIHRIST, a union catalogue of manuscripts from the Islamicate World held by institutions in the UK.¹¹⁷ It was important for us to keep a flexible

Collections, including ArchivesSpace (archives and manuscripts) and Alma/DiscoverEd (printed material).

¹¹⁷ *FIHRIST*, Union Catalogue of Manuscripts from the Islamicate World <<https://www.fihrist.org.uk/>>.

approach in order that our dataset can be shared, revised, and reused as necessary in the future.

Each catalogue entry on ArchivesSpace contains a title section that includes the reference number, the title in Arabic script, a transliteration of the title in Latin script, and the manuscript's date. It merits comment that this is the first time that Arabic script has been used on the University of Edinburgh's ArchivesSpace platform. We were pleased to discover that not only does it import and display the script properly, but it also makes it browsable and findable by word search. The inclusion of the reference numbers in the title field aims to make navigation of the catalogue easier, in particular for readers not familiar with the languages of the materials. While the descriptions of the manuscripts make use of legacy data from the 1925 catalogue by Mohammad Hukk et al., due to the limitations of time, the entries in "Scope and Contents" sections are kept brief, with a view to their being expanded in time. All available provenance information (whether drawn from said catalogue or resulting from recent in-house research) has been included between the fields "Immediate Source of Acquisition" and "Custodial History", the details of former owners and donors linking to their biographies.

We have also added subject headings. This has allowed us to highlight overlooked areas of the collection; for example, the inclusion of the "Art, South Asian" subject heading gives visibility to items such as Or Ms 374, a *murraqa*' (album featuring calligraphy and miniatures) that includes 29 full page paintings from Mughal India,¹¹⁸ and Or Ms 114, an album of paintings of the Ragamala genre, depicting the modes of classical Indian music.¹¹⁹ Being categorised as manuscripts, these and other similar items have, until now, been

¹¹⁸ Or Ms 374: تصاویر Taṣāwīr, undated. Manuscripts of the Islamicate World and South Asia, Or Ms. University of Edinburgh Library Heritage Collections. *UoE Archives Online*, <https://archives.collections.ed.ac.uk/repositories/2/archival_objects/221399>.

¹¹⁹ Or Ms 114: تصویرات راگ مالا Taṣvīrāt-i Rāg-mālā, undated. Manuscripts of the Islamicate World and South Asia, Or Ms. University of Edinburgh Library Heritage Collections. *UoE Archives Online*, <https://archives.collections.ed.ac.uk/repositories/2/archival_objects/211166>.

effectively hidden from those who might be interested in them as artworks. The curators of the University's art collection are now linking to the items that we have given this subject heading from within the art collection's finding aids.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the processes described in this article have been driven by the idea that cataloguing is not a neutral practice. We cannot erase the way that some collections were gathered and assembled, but we can make conscious and informed choices about how to represent and describe them. Whilst we have faced some resistance to the renaming of the collection from isolated voices within the field, appearing unsettled by change, the move has been widely welcomed. A catalogue cannot be neutral, but it can be respectful and transparent, and it must strive for the sound use of language — hence our revisionist stance. At the time of writing, entries for 434 manuscripts have been published on the ArchivesSpace platform for the Manuscripts of the Islamicate World and South Asia collection, and all twelve Ethiopian manuscripts held by the Library are detailed on their respective page. The entries created thus far for the MIWSA collection include all of the manuscripts listed in the 1925 catalogue by Hukk et al. and a handful of other items. The simplicity of the methodology allowed for the relatively swift completion of this task.

In the knowledge that the MIWSA collection is largely the legacy of empire, it is all the more important that the items it encompasses do not fade into obscurity, their existence overlooked and unbeknown to those for whom they have relevance — albeit in terms of their research value, or as objects of cultural heritage. It is our hope that by increasing the visibility of the collection through the creation of an online catalogue, it will be consulted more widely either through direct visits or use of the remote consultation facility. We would endeavour that the insights of researchers and others with specialist knowledge be captured and used to expand our annotations on the items in question. In the short time since the publication of the ArchivesSpace platforms, requests from readers have already increased.

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