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CRITERIA AND PRINCIPLES FOR THE BIBLIOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF TURKIC WRITTEN SOURCES OF THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CENTURIES

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Abstract. The bibliographic description of medieval Turkic written sources constitutes one of the fundamental directions of manuscript studies, codicology, paleography, and textual criticism. The present study examines the theoretical and methodological foundations of the bibliographic description of Turkic written sources produced during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Particular attention is devoted to the historical and sociolinguistic environment in which these sources emerged, the principles of manuscript identification, and the methodological criteria required for their scientific description. The study demonstrates that the bibliographic description of medieval Turkic sources should not be limited to recording the title of a work, its author, or its repository, but must also incorporate codicological, paleographical, textual, linguistic, and historical-functional characteristics.

Keywords. Bibliographic description, Turkic manuscripts, Arabic script, codicology, paleography, textual criticism, manuscript studies, Mamluk period, colophon, ijāzah, dating, bibliographic passport.

The XIII-XIV centuries occupy a distinctive place in the history of the Near and Middle East as a period characterized by profound political transformations, ethnic and social reconfiguration, and the intensification of cultural and communicative integration. In particular, the Mamluk Sultanate, established in Egypt and Syria, became the principal historical arena for the development of multifaceted relations between Arab and Turkic peoples. Within this environment, new forms of linguistic interaction, writing practices, translation, and scholarly mediation emerged. Consequently, the bibliographic description of Turkic written sources from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries should not be regarded merely as a matter of bibliography or cataloguing. Rather, it represents a complex philological task directly associated with the scientific identification of manuscripts produced within a particular historical and sociolinguistic environment, the determination of their functional status, and the reconstruction of their textual history.

One of the defining characteristics of this period was the long-term interaction between the Turkic political and military elite and the Arabic scholarly tradition. This interaction resulted in the production of Arabic dictionaries of Turkic languages, grammatical treatises, and translation manuals. Therefore, the bibliographic description of these works cannot be confined to recording only their titles, authors, or locations. It must also encompass the historical reasons for their production, their social functions, their linguistic environment, their manuscript tradition, and the chain of textual transmission, all of which constitute indispensable components of scientific description [1,20].

From this perspective, when the theory of bibliographic description is applied to the Turkic written heritage of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it rests upon three principal foundations. The first is the identification of the historical and functional context of the work. The second is the documentation of the codicological and paleographical characteristics of the manuscript or printed edition. The third is the determination of the textual relationships among surviving copies. These principles constitute the methodological basis of the bibliographic passport model developed in the present study.

The Turkic written heritage of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries represents a philological corpus composed of works written in the Arabic script, preserved in multiple manuscript copies,

characterized by considerable generic diversity, and exhibiting a highly complex textual structure. Consequently, this corpus requires a specialized methodological approach within modern Turkology and Arabic studies [4.76]. These works are valuable not only for investigating the historical development of Turkic languages, lexicography, and grammatical thought, but also for reconstructing the long-standing cultural and intellectual interaction between Arab and Turkic civilizations. Therefore, bibliographic description should not be regarded merely as an auxiliary scholarly apparatus but rather as an independent instrument of philological research.

The primary objective of this study is to establish the theoretical foundations and methodological principles necessary for the bibliographic description of Turkic written monuments from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. To achieve this objective, the article examines the concept and types of bibliographic description, the criteria for manuscript description, codicological and paleographical parameters, textual principles, and internationally recognized standards of scholarly documentation [2.29-33].

Bibliographic description is understood as the scientifically systematized, standardized, and verifiable description of a particular work. Its purpose is to present the principal identifying and philological information concerning a source within a unified descriptive format. In contemporary bibliographical theory, bibliographic description is regarded as one of the principal instruments for information retrieval, source identification, scholarly documentation, and the harmonization of data among different cataloguing systems. However, in the case of the Turkic written heritage of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the function of bibliographic description extends far beyond these conventional purposes. It also serves to reveal the textual history of a manuscript, the relationships among surviving copies, the linguistic characteristics of the text, and its historical function. Within the framework of this research, bibliographic description is classified into three principal categories: manuscript description, edition description, and critical description.

Manuscript description is based upon the principles of codicology and paleography and is primarily concerned with the physical and external characteristics of manuscripts. This form of description records such parameters as the type of paper, watermarks, the characteristics of the ink, the style of handwriting, the structure of folios, the number of lines on each page, seals, marginal annotations, ownership notes, colophons, and the physical condition of the manuscript. Since the overwhelming majority of Turkic written monuments of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries have survived only in manuscript form, manuscript description represents the first and most essential stage of their scholarly investigation.

Edition description encompasses printed versions of manuscripts, facsimile reproductions, scholarly critical editions, and revised publications. This type of description makes it possible to determine the position of a work within modern academic scholarship, to trace its publication history, to evaluate editorial principles, and to identify the manner in which the text has been utilized by researchers. Whenever several scholarly editions of the same work exist, particular attention should be devoted to identifying the manuscript upon which each edition is based, the editorial methodology employed, and the degree of scholarly reliability achieved by the editor [3.61].

Critical description is founded upon the principles of textual criticism and is intended to identify differences among extant manuscript copies, including textual variants, omissions, additions, scribal errors, and editorial interventions. This form of description constitutes an indispensable stage in the reconstruction of an authoritative scholarly text, particularly in the case of works preserved in multiple manuscript copies. Through critical description it becomes possible to reconstruct the historical development of the text, establish the genealogy of manuscript copies, and determine which manuscripts preserve the most reliable textual tradition.

The bibliographic description of medieval Turkic works should be based upon a clearly defined system of scholarly criteria. These criteria facilitate accurate identification of individual works, eliminate inconsistencies among manuscript catalogues, and contribute to the establishment of a standardized descriptive model accepted across different academic traditions.

The titles of medieval works frequently appear in different forms within manuscript catalogues, bibliographical records, and printed editions. In some cases the original Arabic title has been preserved, whereas in others abbreviated forms, free translations, or titles assigned by cataloguers are encountered. Consequently, a scientific bibliographic description should include the original Arabic title, its standardized Latin transliteration, and all known alternative titles. This principle is particularly important for the identification of works such as Kitāb al-Idrāk li-Lisān al-Atrāk, al-Tuḥfa al-Zakiyya fī al-Lugha al-Turkiyya, and Tarjumān Turkī wa ʿAjamī wa Mughūlī, whose titles often differ considerably across manuscript catalogues and scholarly editions.

The term colophon originates from the Greek word kolophōn, meaning “completion” or “conclusion”. In the manuscript tradition of the Islamic world, a colophon is the concluding statement written by the scribe at the end of a manuscript. It commonly begins with expressions such as tamat or khātima, indicating that the copying of the manuscript has been completed [8.45]. Nevertheless, the significance of the colophon extends far beyond the simple indication of textual completion. It functions as the documentary passport of the manuscript by preserving essential bibliographical and historical information. A colophon commonly records the title of the work, the name of the scribe, the date and place of copying, and occasionally prayers or invocations. Consequently, it occupies a central position in codicological and manuscript research. When a manuscript represents an author's autograph copy, the colophon becomes one of the strongest forms of evidence for establishing authorship.

A colophon’s importance also lies in the information it preserves concerning the title of the work. In many manuscripts the title is either omitted or abbreviated on the opening folios, whereas the concluding section frequently records the complete and more authoritative form of the title. In addition, the scribe generally records his personal name and, in certain cases, his father's name, kunya, honorific title, or nisbah. Such information makes it possible to identify the individual responsible for copying the manuscript, reconstruct the activities of particular scribes, and determine the intellectual and geographical environment in which the manuscript was produced. Colophons also commonly record the date of completion according to the Hijrī or Gregorian calendar, and in some instances according to both systems. Likewise, they may identify the city, educational institution, or library where the manuscript was copied. These data enable scholars to establish the chronological and geographical coordinates of the manuscript with a considerable degree of precision.

Another distinctive feature of colophons is the inclusion of prayers, supplications, expressions of humility, and requests for divine forgiveness. Scribes frequently prayed for themselves, their teachers, the owner of the manuscript, or future readers of the text. Although such expressions may appear to possess merely religious significance, they also illuminate the intellectual and social environment in which manuscripts were produced and transmitted. Consequently, the colophon should not be regarded solely as a technical statement marking the completion of copying, but rather as an important textual source reflecting the ethical values, scholarly traditions, and manuscript culture of the medieval Islamic world.

Derived from the Arabic root meaning “to grant permission”, the term ijāzah refers to the formal authorization issued by a teacher allowing a student to study, transmit, teach, or reproduce a particular work. It should not be understood merely as a pedagogical recommendation. Rather, it constituted one of the principal institutions through which scholarly knowledge was transmitted accurately and continuously within Islamic intellectual culture. The ijāzah ensured both the preservation of textual integrity and the continuity of scholarly tradition across generations.

Although colophons and ijāzahs perform complementary functions, their purposes differ substantially. The colophon primarily records the technical and historical circumstances of manuscript production, whereas the ijāzah documents the scholarly transmission of knowledge and the intellectual chain through which the text was communicated. In other words, the colophon explains when, where, and by whom a manuscript was copied, while the ijāzah reveals the scholarly environment and educational tradition within which the work was transmitted.

These two documentary elements possess particular importance in the bibliographic description of Turkic manuscripts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In numerous manuscripts, the author's name or the complete title of the work does not appear on the opening folios but survives only in the concluding statements or marginal notes. Consequently, the colophon enables scholars to determine the chronological and geographical context of the manuscript, whereas the ijāzah reveals its scholarly school, chain of transmission, and intellectual milieu. Together, these two elements constitute complementary documentary sources that play a fundamental role in bibliographic description, textual criticism, manuscript identification, and the determination of authorship.

The bibliographic description of Turkic written sources from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries should be regarded not merely as a technical procedure of cataloguing manuscripts but as a comprehensive philological methodology integrating codicology, paleography, textual criticism, historical linguistics, and manuscript studies. Owing to the complex textual tradition of medieval Turkic works, a scientific description must extend beyond basic bibliographic information to include historical and functional context, codicological and paleographical characteristics, linguistic features, genre classification, manuscript genealogy, and the history of textual transmission.

The present study has demonstrated that manuscript description, edition description, and critical description should not be treated as independent approaches but rather as complementary components of a unified methodological framework. Within this framework, documentary evidence such as colophons, ijāzahs, dating, ownership notes, and other codicological features plays a decisive role in establishing authorship, reconstructing manuscript history, determining textual authenticity, and identifying the intellectual environment in which a work was produced and transmitted.

The proposed model of the bibliographic passport provides a standardized methodology for the scientific description of medieval Turkic manuscripts. Its application contributes to the accurate identification, cataloguing, preservation, and comparative analysis of written monuments while promoting consistency across different manuscript collections and scholarly traditions. Furthermore, this model offers a reliable methodological foundation for future research in Turkic studies, Arabic-Turkic philology, manuscript studies, and the history of medieval intellectual culture.

Ultimately, the adoption of an integrated bibliographic description system will facilitate the broader international recognition of the Turkic written heritage of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and strengthen interdisciplinary research on the historical, linguistic, and cultural interactions between the Turkic and Arab worlds. It is therefore expected that the methodological principles developed in this study will serve as an effective scholarly framework for future investigations and for the systematic documentation of medieval Turkic manuscripts preserved in libraries and manuscript collections throughout the world.

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