

### **The Minasian Islamic Manuscripts Collection**

The Minasian Collection of Islamic manuscripts, which is one of the most extensive and precious collections of its kind in the Americas, consists of over 720 Persian, and over 2120 Arabic, manuscripts, in addition to over 1000 Persian and Arabic *majmū'ā*, or “bound collections,” with the bulk of the manuscripts being composed during the Safavid period.

The approximate breakdown of the collection is as follows: 600 Persian manuscripts in disciplines other than medicine; 120 Persian medical manuscripts; 120 Arabic medical manuscripts; 2000 Arabic manuscripts in disciplines other than medicine; 500 Turkish and 5 Urdu manuscripts; and 1000 Arabic and Persian “bound collections,” each of which encompass from 3 up to 34 different treatises, some in one hand, but mostly in different scribal traditions. These “bound collections” are especially important for the study of Iranian and Islamic intellectual history in general and for the study of Arabic and Persian philosophy, logic, and theology in particular.

The major portion of the manuscripts dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with roughly 20 from the 13<sup>th</sup>, a few from the 12<sup>th</sup>, and 150 from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the manuscripts have been produced, that is, copied, collated, and bound, in the city of Isfahān in Iran, which from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the most important center of Islamic learning in Iran, if not in the Middle East in general.

All of the manuscripts are written in black ink, some with headings in red ink, and a considerable number with frontispiece illuminations, and about 12 with illustrations (some of “museum quality”), on hand-made papers of various types, thickness and sizes. Many of the manuscripts are in folio size, with carefully hand-stitched regular 8/16-folio quires, and many are in the one-half folio size, and some in quarter folio size. The majority of the manuscripts are well preserved; a few show water damage, termite holes, and other types of damage. The collection also includes a large number of royal, government, and legal documents—letters, decrees, and contracts of various types—that have not been studied at all. This part of the collection may prove to be of unique importance for the study of the social, religious, and political history of Iran and Shiism, and to a lesser extent, of the Middle East in general.

Among the subjects treated with the manuscripts are the following:

(1) *Persian and Arabic lexicography*: Several medieval general dictionaries and many technical ones that cover subjects such as philosophy and the sciences, as well as jurisprudence.

(2) *Persian literature*: Several *dīvān* (collected poetic works) of a wide range of Persian poets, including a magnificent illuminated *dīvān* of the famous 14<sup>th</sup> century Persian poet Hāfez and many other types of literary compositions both in prose and poetry. This aspect of the collection is of special interest for the study of Persian literature. A few of the manuscripts such as Nizāmī's Quintet and Jāmī's *Bahārestān* include magnificent illustrations. Some of these manuscripts may rightly be designated "museum pieces."

(3) *History*: Several manuscripts on universal history mostly compiled during the Safavid period in Iran.

(4) *Shiite theology and jurisprudence*: This is one of the strongest holdings of the collection that consists of a few Persian, as well as a large number of Arabic treatises. The majority of the manuscripts were part of the medieval scholastic curriculum of the Madrasa. Such works as *Sharāyi' al-Islām* by Hillī, written in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, were among the first specifically Shiite canonical compilations of jurisprudence, and were used by the Safavid state to establish Shiism as a state religion.

(5) *Practical arts*: A unique feature of the collection are a substantial number of manuscripts on subjects such as archery, equestrian arts, cook-books, manuals for teaching calligraphy and others.

(6) *Philosophy and logic*: The manuscripts on philosophy and logic are perhaps the most valuable ones in the collection for scholarship. The collection includes several unpublished major works, a number of unique autographs, and a few Persian translations of major philosophical works, hitherto unknown. A few examples are as follows:

(6.1) Arabic translations of Aristotelian texts, mostly from the *Metaphysics* and the logical segments of the *Organon*.

(6.2) Treatises and aphorisms (usually no longer than one or two folios) attributed to the "Divine Plato." It is difficult to identify all of them, but a few can be shown to be paraphrases of texts such as *Phædo* and the *Timaæus*.

(6.3) Three of Averroes' epitomes, middle, or major commentaries on Aristotelian texts, such as *The Categories*.

(6.4) A large number of philosophical texts by Avicenna, such as his *Shifā* and his *Ishārāt*, plus Persian translations of the Arabic texts. Many include “glosses” and “super glosses” on the texts in Arabic and/or in Persian. This aspect of the collection is of unique significance to the study of post-Avicennan philosophical traditions in Iran, a domain of scholarship, which remains mostly unknown.

(6.5) A large number of Arabic texts of the post-Avicennan tradition of non-Aristotelian Islamic philosophy, known as the “Philosophy of Illumination.” Works such as: *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* and *Talwīḥāt* by Suhrawardī, *Nuzhat al-Arwah* by Shahrāzūrī, and of singular significance Ibn Kammūnah’s Commentary on Suhrawardī’s *Talwīḥāt*.

(6.6) A large number of manuscripts on logic, many of which were texts used in the Schools for the purpose of teaching logic. Examples are: *Isagoge* of Abharī, *Hidāya* of Abharī, and *Shamsiyya* of Qazvīnī. One may add that there are a large number of commentaries, glosses, and super glosses of these texts all of which were part of the medieval scholastic tradition of Islamic philosophy, especially in Iran.