

## Research Article

## The Value and Types of Manuscripts

Obaidullah Agheez<sup>1\*</sup>, Saharmal Sahar<sup>2</sup>, Kazim Gujar<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup> Department of Pashto Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, Ghor Institute of Higher Education, Chagcharan, Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> Department of Hindi, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Nangarhar University, Jalalabad, Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> Department of Pashto Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, Bamyān University, Bamyān, Afghanistan.

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## ABSTRACT

Manuscripts refer to written texts created manually by hand. These are texts that have neither been printed nor produced through any mechanical means. In this context, the focus is on ancient and historical handwritten manuscripts. Such texts represent the historical, scientific, literary, religious, and cultural values and identity of a nation. The significance of manuscripts lies in their antiquity, elegant calligraphy, and their academic, literary, and cultural dimensions. Moreover, their bindings were often adorned with gold and lapis lazuli inks, further enhancing their value and prestige. The manuscripts were often rich in miniature illustrations and decorative art. These texts were widely used before the advent of modern printing technology, serving purposes such as record-keeping, documentation, preservation of religious and literary texts, and communication. These handwritten efforts began when humans first acquired the ability to write, using natural dyes on bird feathers, animal skins, bones, tree leaves, and bark reflecting the cultural practices and technological limits of that era. Later, papyrus sheets became a common writing material. In the modern era, printed and digital formats have replaced these handwritten forms, making the previous laborious processes more efficient and accessible. Manuscripts vary greatly in terms of quality, condition, value, and form. External materials used in their creation include paper, ink, writing boards, pens (reed or nib pens), bindings, feathers, scissors, pen sharpeners, brushes, burins, punchers, rulers, strings, and more.

**KEYWORDS:** *Calligrapher, Culture, Handwriting, Historical, Manuscripts, Values.*



## Introduction

Manuscripts have a long-standing history both globally and within Pashto literature. Long before the emergence of Islamic civilization, handwritten texts existed in regions such as Aryana, Egypt, Greece, and China inscribed on wood, animal skins, palm leaves, cloth, metal, and gold sheets. People of those times used manuscripts to preserve and transmit their intellectual, literary, and cultural heritage across generations. Before the invention of modern technologies and mechanical writing tools, manuscripts served as the principal medium for documenting spiritual and cultural values. They represent the original form of what we now know as printed books, created by hand to preserve human thought and identity. These manuscripts are categorized based on their quality, form, physical condition, and content. The external materials used in their production included paper, ink, boards, red or nib pens, bindings, feathers, dyes, pen sharpeners, brushes, burins, punchers, rulers, threads, and many others. Manuscripts are reflections of historical depth and the value of their respective periods, indicating how far back their origins can be traced. These aspects will be elaborated upon throughout the article.

## Objectives of the Research

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand handwritten manuscripts, identify their types and forms, investigate their historical background, and become familiar with the tools and materials used in their production. The study aims to clarify what qualifies as a manuscript and to highlight the academic and cultural significance of such works.

\*Corresponding Author: (Agheez. O)

 Email: [Obaidullahagheez91@gmail.com](mailto:Obaidullahagheez91@gmail.com) <https://doi.org/10.70436/nujah.v1i02.17> © 2024 The Authors. Published by Nangarhar University, this is an open access article published under the CC-BY license <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

## Research Questions

1. What are manuscripts, and what external materials were essential in their creation?
2. What are the types and forms of manuscripts?
3. Which works can be categorized as handwritten or manuscript texts?

## Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative, descriptive, and explanatory research design. Because the topic concerns the nature, value, types, history, and materials of manuscripts, the researcher relied on textual description, conceptual explanation, and interpretation of existing scholarly definitions. Our approach to explore the topic is descriptive. This article describes what manuscripts are, their forms, external materials, and historical background. Also, the research depends entirely on existing books, dictionaries, codicology works, historical texts, and online lexical sources. No fieldwork or interviews were conducted.

### Data Collection Method

Primary Data: *None*, because the article does not use field research.

Secondary Data: Information collected from: Dictionaries ([Dehkhoda](#); [Cambridge](#); [Almaany](#))

Books on codicology, writing, and manuscript studies ([Azimi](#); [Fidayi](#); [Hotak](#); [Hewadmal](#), etc.)

Historical studies and translated works ([Friedrich](#))

Academic articles ([Mirzaee](#))

These sources provide definitions, historical context, types, material elements, and scholarly opinions.

### Data Analysis Method

Thematic Content Analysis: The researcher identifies themes such as *definition*, *history*, *value*, *types*, *materials*, and *functions* of manuscripts.

Comparative Analysis: Different scholarly definitions and manuscript classifications are compared to produce consolidated explanations.

Interpretive Analysis: Cultural, historical, and scholarly significance of manuscripts is interpreted through referenced materials.

## Findings of the Research Article

Based on the content of the article, the main findings are:

1. Manuscripts are historically significant cultural artifacts.

They preserve the intellectual, religious, literary, and cultural heritage of nations. Their antiquity increases their value.

2. Manuscripts existed long before printing.

Ancient civilizations such as Aryana, Egypt, Greece, and China used handwritten materials on wood, stone, skins, papyrus, and leaves.

3. Manuscripts possess multiple types and forms.

The study identifies:

Scroll manuscripts

Pocketbook manuscripts

Album manuscripts

Codex manuscripts

Original, copied, corrected, authorized, comparative, composite, and ancient manuscripts

These categories show the wide variations in how manuscripts were produced and transmitted.

4. The value of manuscripts depends on more than age.

A manuscript is valuable because of:

Its calligraphy

Illustrations and miniatures

Rarity

Scholarly content

Historical period

Quality of materials (paper, ink, binding)

5. Manuscripts require specialized materials and tools.

Important components include: paper, ink, reed pens, quills, rulers, brushes, styluses, parchment, and binding materials. The tools reflect the artistic and technical skill of scribes.

6. Manuscripts served multiple essential human functions.

They were created for:

Scholarly and scientific purposes

Cultural and literary preservation

Educational and training purposes (madrasas, mosques, hujras)

Artistic and aesthetic expression

7. Codicology and manuscript editing remain essential disciplines.

The article stresses the need for:

Proper editing

Accurate reading

Correction of scribal and authorial errors

Preservation of old manuscripts for modern scholarship

8. Manuscripts remain the foundational sources of human knowledge.

Even today, edited, and printed versions of manuscripts form the basis for research in religion, history, science, literature, and linguistics.

### The Value and Types of Manuscripts

The term 'handwritten manuscript' is a compound noun composed of two words. The first element, 'handwritten,' is a relational adjective derived from the word 'handwriting,' which refers to writing done manually with the hand and fingers, as opposed to printing ([Dehkhoda, 1998, p.1184](#)).

The second element, 'manuscript' (nuskah), refers to a book written by hand, a book from which another is copied, or a handwritten note in which a physician prescribes medicine for a patient ([Dehkhoda, 1998, p.1188](#)).

Any written material that takes the form of a book on paper, parchment, or other materials is classified as a manuscript. One scholar explains:

The word naskhah is derived from nasakh (with a fatḥa on the 'nun'), which implies erasure, cancellation, invalidation, or replacement. When a calligrapher transcribes a book from an original source, the newly written text

invalidates the authority of the previous one. Therefore, the newly written document is termed a naskhah ([Hotak, 1390 AH, p. 34](#)).

The [Cambridge Dictionary](#) and other lexical sources define a manuscript as:

“A piece of writing that is done by hand, especially one that has not been printed.” ([Dictionary, n.d.](#))

#### Etymology of the Term “Naskhah”

Various forms and derivations of the word naskhah have been used historically, including:

Nasakh (نسخ): One of the six classical styles of Arabic calligraphy; also known as the script used for Qur’anic writing.

Nussākh (نساخ): A person who transcribes or copies manuscripts.

Nassākh (نساخ): A scribe, copyist, or calligrapher who reproduces texts by hand.

Nuskhata (نسخة): A written document, note, draft, or record.

Nuskha (نسخه): A document handwritten by an individual on paper or parchment, often used for prescriptions written by a medical practitioner ([Fidayi, 2013, p.11](#)).

#### Brief Introduction of Manuscripts

Manuscripts refer to ancient books written by specific authors on particular subjects prior to the invention of paper and printing presses. These texts were manually inscribed by hand and fingers on stones, animal skins, clay tablets, tree bark, and leaves. Alternatively, calligraphers used various tools to transcribe such works in decorative scripts. These are what are referred to as manuscripts or handwritten copies (qalamī naskhah). It is important to distinguish these from official documents, contracts, letters, and minor handwritten notes.

Additionally, scholarly, literary, and historical texts written by authors by hand and later submitted to a printing house can also be considered manuscripts. Regardless of the origin or etymology of the term naskhah, any text composed with quills, reed pens, metallic styluses, and written using ink or natural dyes, especially when transcribed from another book, qualifies as a manuscript.

#### The Value of Manuscripts

Manuscripts embody the historical, intellectual, and cultural identity of a nation and its people. They represent a society’s intangible heritage and reflect the richness of its knowledge traditions. One of the most important features contributing to the value of manuscripts is their antiquity. A complete and original manuscript written by the author himself or produced at the author’s request by a skilled calligrapher in fine handwriting, is considered especially valuable.

Such manuscripts are a nation's precious historical treasures, resilient relics that have endured the passage of time and have been passed down to contemporary generations.

“Manuscripts represent the preserved and illuminating legacy of a nation’s past, having withstood the dust and erosion of time.” ([Mirzaee, 1393 AH, p. 107](#)).

Manuscripts possess distinct types and values. In the following section, we will briefly discuss some of their key characteristics and historical significance:

##### A. Antiquity of the Manuscript

This refers to the historical age, time period, and chronological value of a manuscript, indicating how ancient it is and to which era it belongs. The signs of antiquity are manifested through various features, such as:

The date of composition, historical period, and era;

The style and type of script used;

The materials employed include paper, ink, and binding techniques;

##### B. Rarity and Artistic Value (Antiqueness)

This highlights the artistic, visual, ornamental, and material worth of a manuscript. It refers to a manuscript that is not only old but also valuable due to its distinctive characteristics. Such manuscripts receive considerable attention and are marked by the following notable features:

Aesthetic script and calligraphy;

Artistic, illustrative, and decorative elements;

Rare content with scholarly, religious, literary, or historical importance;

The scholarly status of the scribe or author;

Representation of significant historical events and periods;

Rarity meaning the manuscript exists in one or very few copies, making it unique.

It is also important to note that while an antique manuscript is necessarily old, not every old manuscript qualifies as antique. A manuscript can be considered antique only when its value is not limited to age alone, but is also associated with its content, artistic beauty, illustrative elegance, and rarity.

### C. The Scholarly and Research Aspect of the Manuscript:

If a handwritten and pen written manuscript is edited, published, and printed opens the door to scholarly and research activities related to the text, stylistics, and stylistic studies ([Fidayi, 1392, p. 12](#)).

Manuscripts are mainly given attention from two perspectives. First, from the perspective of textual editing and compilation, where the work of a codicologist covers the material, market, and museum aspects of the manuscript. Second, from the perspective of both the text researcher and the codicologist, the quality and type of the manuscript's paper, the form of handwriting, margins, golden colors, illumination, illustrations, and miniatures are of high importance. However, in this value, the interests and fascinations of both sides have separate directions ([Hotak, 1390, p. 35](#)).

Another value of handwritten manuscripts, in the context of text research, is the correct reading of the text, this is the final aspect. Reading manuscripts is as necessary as it is difficult. Based on experience, most common manuscripts are found in doubtful and confused states and are heavily filled with errors. The errors of manuscripts may have occurred either by the authors or by the calligraphers ([Hewadmal, 1389, p. 214](#)).

It is essential for the editor to correct the textual errors of the manuscript(s) with full attention and scholarly competence and present a valuable version of the manuscript to the readers. If an older printed version of a text is found, it is of high importance, because it would have been completed from a credible manuscript. Another value of the printed version is that perhaps the first publisher might have discovered many unknown points about the text ([Hewadmal, 1389, p. 289](#)).

### Efforts in Writing Manuscripts

The writing of manuscripts stems from various motivations, driven by purpose, necessity, passion, and inspiration. These efforts and movements are actions taken by humans out of love, taste, and interest in important tasks until fruitful results are achieved. In the history of humanity, people have vigorously pursued the writing of manuscripts to pass on religious, scholarly, historical, and cultural heritage to future generations. These efforts were made for various necessary goals and needs, such as:

#### For Scholarly and Historical Purposes:

Throughout history, humans have turned to manuscript writing to preserve and disseminate texts of various sciences, histories, and disciplines for the benefit of future generations. Today, there are hundreds of thousands of examples of such manuscripts around the world in different fields, which, after being corrected, are made available for use by modern societies.

#### For Cultural and Literary Purposes:

Every human society has engaged in manuscript writing to preserve and maintain its cultural and literary values, and many manuscripts have been left as a legacy to future generations.

### For Educational and Training Purposes:

In educational centers and institutions, necessary handwritten manuscripts were written for the purpose of teaching and training, to carry forward instructional activities. The main goal of these manuscripts was to transmit sound and proper education and training to society and its generations. Such manuscripts were written in mosques, madrasas, hujras (traditional learning spaces), and Sufi monasteries (khanqahs), and were considered of great value and respect.

### For Artistic and Aesthetic Purposes:

Each society has its unique artistic tastes and features, and each individual's artistic sensibilities differ as well. Art reflects human creativity and innovation, while aesthetic taste is the ability to perceive beauty both are interconnected. On this basis, artistic, illustrated, and miniature manuscripts were also beautifully calligraphed in colorful and diverse styles. Enthusiasts would create colorful and illustrated manuscripts, which reflected artistic and aesthetic appreciation and were also visually captivating. Examples of such manuscripts also exist around the world.

### Types of Ancient Manuscripts

Manuscripts vary in terms of quality, format, condition, and historical value. Below are several notable categories:

#### 1. Scroll Manuscripts (Ṭūmārī Naskhah)

These represent some of the oldest forms of manuscripts, written on long continuous pieces of parchment or leather. The text was inscribed on lengthy strips, which were often rolled at both ends. Scrolls date back to ancient Egypt between 2600–3000 BCE. A well-known example is The Book of the Dead, an Egyptian funerary text ([Friedrich, 1368 AH, p. 144](#)).

#### 2. Pocketbook Manuscripts (Bayāz Nuskahāh)

These manuscripts resembled small booklets and were typically bound along the long edge. Common in some communities, they included prayers, poetry, wise sayings, and other short texts. These served as precursors to modern pocketbooks (Mu 'jam al 'Arabī, online).

#### 3. Album Manuscripts (Muraqqa 'Nuskahāh)

These manuscripts were composed of artistic calligraphy and illustrations assembled into albums. Bookbinders would compile individual sheets into decorative formats. Known for their fine writing and visual appeal, these works represent valuable examples of artistic and cultural heritage. This style was adopted by ancient Aryans from the Chinese and was developed using similar methods.

#### 4. Codex Manuscripts (Kitābī Nuskahāh)

These are manuscripts written in book format, like today's printed books. The term codex originally referred to short, thematic handwritten texts that were sometimes compiled into complete books. Codices were among the first forms of manuscripts bound in separate pages, like modern books. "Today, most widely known manuscripts in the world are of this type." ([Hewadmal, 1385, p. 288](#)).

It is worth noting that not all manuscripts possess equal historical or scholarly value. Some are primary manuscripts written by original authors, while others are copied versions created unofficially from those originals. There are also secondary manuscripts, which may relate to an original text but lack authorial attribution or clarity regarding the scribe. ([Azimi, 1386 AH, p. 168](#))

### Forms and Classifications of Manuscripts

#### 1. Original Manuscript (Nuskah-e- Asli)

This is the manuscript directly handwritten and signed by the author. It holds the highest scholarly and historical value, as it preserves the author's authentic language and intellectual creation.

#### 2. Copied Manuscript (Naskhah-e- Naqli)

This refers to a manuscript transcribed from an original version by a scribe or calligrapher. If the copyist is credible and skilled, the manuscript can still be considered of significant value.

#### Corrected Manuscript:

This refers to a manuscript that has been critically reviewed and corrected by a recognized manuscript expert or academic researcher during the transcription process. Errors are rectified, and the text is carefully organized and structured to ensure accuracy and coherence.

#### Authorized Manuscript:

This type of manuscript is one for which permission has been formally or informally obtained by a researcher or manuscript expert from the original author to copy and publish it. The editor typically identifies and outlines all characteristics of the manuscript, presents it in an organized format, and provides background information regarding its origin and structure.

#### Comparative Manuscript:

A manuscript that has been carefully compared with several other versions of the same text. After thorough comparison, one version is selected as superior, corrected, and structurally edited before being presented as the most reliable edition.

#### Composite Manuscript:

This type is compiled by comparing and combining multiple versions of a manuscript. It represents a synthesized version, resulting from the correction and merging of various sources into a unified and consistent form.

#### Ancient or Old Manuscript:

A manuscript that is considered ancient due to its age and historical significance. Even if it is a copy, its value is preserved due to its antiquity and the historical insights it may offer (Mu 'jam al- 'Arabi, online).

It is also worth noting that manuscripts may be classified based on quality and condition:

A high-quality manuscript,

A moderate or standard manuscript,

A poor-quality or error-laden copied manuscript.

#### Physical and Material Components of Manuscripts

The external and physical elements used in the production of handwritten manuscripts include:

paper, ink, inkpot, pen (reed pen), writing board, quills, ruler, stylus, sharpening tools, brushes, perforating tools, straightedge rulers, and thread, among others. These were the tools employed by scribes and calligraphers during the process of manuscript production.

Before the invention of paper, when writing skills had already developed, humans used various materials to record their ideas and convey messages. These included clay tablets, stones, metals, animal skins, bones, papyrus, tree bark, and leaves. Writing on these surfaces was the only option until paper was invented.

The invention of paper in the second century CE marked a revolutionary development in human history, significantly enhancing the dissemination of knowledge. One of the earliest known types of writing material is papyrus, which was made from the inner layers of a tall plant and used in Egypt as early as 2000 BCE.

The Chinese are credited with the first known invention of paper around 105 CE, followed by Indian innovations in the 10th century, where paper was made from a tree known as Tāri ([Husām, 1393, p. 29](#)).

In modern times, paper is produced in hundreds of types, colors, and textures in countries around the world and is utilized across a wide range of fields.

## Discussion

The role of manuscripts in safeguarding and transmitting humanity's historical and cultural heritage is of exceptional and irreplaceable importance. Manuscripts not only provide an authentic reflection of the scientific, religious, literary, and historical thought of earlier civilizations, but they also serve as living records of the languages, scripts, customs, and social values of their respective eras.



Recognizing, assessing, and preserving these manuscripts is therefore a vital scholarly and cultural responsibility. The study of manuscripts is indispensable not only for the protection of intellectual and cultural legacies but also as a reliable foundation for academic inquiry into the authentic sources of knowledge, literature, and history.

From diverse perspectives, historical, geographical, intellectual, literary, cultural, and civilizational manuscripts hold extraordinary value. They reflect the cultural identity and intellectual evolution of nations. Within their pages are preserved the spiritual, philosophical, and civilizational progress of societies, providing unique insights into the development of human thought and expression.

In this paper, we have sought to present the topic from a distinct analytical standpoint, differing from previous studies. Our objective was to examine the value, types, and multidimensional significance of manuscripts in a more comprehensive manner. We believe that this attempt has achieved a measure of success and offers a meaningful contribution to the scholarly understanding of manuscript heritage.

## Conclusion

The origin of the manuscript, in its various forms, revolves around handwriting and the act of writing with the hands and fingers. Manuscripts are handwritten innovations from ancient times that represent the historical and valuable heritage of a nation or country works that have withstood the dust of time and reached the present generations. The writing of such manuscripts had diverse motivations, driven by purpose, necessity, inspiration, and personal inclination. These efforts reflect the deep passion and commitment of individuals who engaged in such vital intellectual tasks.

In ancient times, manuscripts were inscribed on tree bark, leaves, clay tablets, stones, and animal skins. Numerous examples of such works still exist today. Throughout human history, the creation and preservation of religious, scientific, literary, and cultural knowledge for future generations represent some of the most significant intellectual achievements treasured legacies that hold immense moral and academic value.

Manuscripts hold distinct significance due to their antiquity, uniqueness, scholarly content, and physical characteristics. They vary in type and structure and are composed using diverse external materials. These manuscripts were written by calligraphers and often adorned by painters with colorful margins and miniatures, making them visually rich and aesthetically appealing.

Before the invention of paper and printing machines, these manuscripts served as vital tools for recording and transmitting knowledge, theories, arts, history, and cultural heritage. They are considered the primary sources for today's sciences and disciplines. Even now, these works are preserved, edited, and studied by manuscript scholars and researchers who work diligently to make them accessible and beneficial for new generations. These collective efforts remain of great scholarly value.

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