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Twitter Thread by Tweeting Historians



Tweeting Historians



I want to talk about the key textual elements you might find in an Islamic manuscript. I'll focus on this manuscript, roughly 18th century, of an Arabic history of the rulers of Egypt called Nuzhat al-n**H**ir**I**n, by Mar**II** al-Karm**I** (d. 1623/4). Budeiry Library (Jerusalem) MS 593 -jm

These texts have many elements designed to help the reader understand what they're saying, and choices by the scribe who copied the manuscript often help as well. Let's see what's here. -jm

First, almost every Islamic text begins with the invocation "in the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful." The wording is never changed, and it's always in Arabic, no matter what language the text is, although you might add phrases like "and we ask God for help." -jm

Christians were able to do more experimentation with their invocations, as you can see from the examples here. <u>https://t.co/wEPWRitCWA</u> -jm

These little prayers are fun pic.twitter.com/hJYk2M01bO

- Josh Mugler (@J_mugs) February 16, 2019

After the invocation (basmalah), you might have what this text has, which is an introduction of the author in the form "the poor slave of God [so-and-so] said..." often followed by a quick prayer for the author. -jm

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Then there's almost always a section of praise to God (**■**amdalah), generally in elaborate rhyming prose, although some authors use a more simple formula of praise and move on. The praise often uses phrases relevant to the subject of the text. -jm

On this text, the ■amdalah is "Praise be to God who remains though everything upon [the earth] passes away, whose authority (sul■■n) endures after every sultan, [and] who taught humanity by the pen." "Passes away" (f■n), "sultan," and "humanity" (ins■n) all rhyme. -jm

You can see how al-Karm is praising God in terms that are related to his text on the history of the rulers of Egypt. -jm

Then there is a prayer for peace and blessings upon the Prophet Mu∎ammad and his family and companions, in similar style to the ∎amdalah. -jm

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Then the text turns with the phrase "wa-balld" or "amm balld," basically "so then." This is where the author starts to talk about what the text is and why they wrote it (often humbly saying some friend begged them to do it even though it won't be any good, etc.) -jm

Some texts will give the author's name here, after "amm∎ ba∎d," instead of at the beginning. -jm

At some point in that introduction, the author often says "and I named it..." and gives the title. So you can sometimes find all the information about the author, title, date of composition, and so on, even if there's no title page (I'm hoping to cover title pages later). -jm

Sometimes they even give you a table of contents at this point, but this text doesn't have one. Most texts, and most manuscripts, have most of these elements, but it depends on language and genre too. This layout is especially consistent for Arabic scholarly texts. -jm

Notice too how the scribe of the manuscript helps you understand what you're reading by marking these key elements with red text. This too is not universal, but it is very common. Many, many manuscripts are copied with both black and red ink. -jm

Another scribal element: the catchword at the bottom of the page, to tell you the first word on the next page. This helps you know what's coming if you're reading, and helps make sure all the pages are kept in the right order. -jm

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Manuscript in this thread: https://t.co/5X3X47U8Ra