

UCLA Library

L.A. Stories

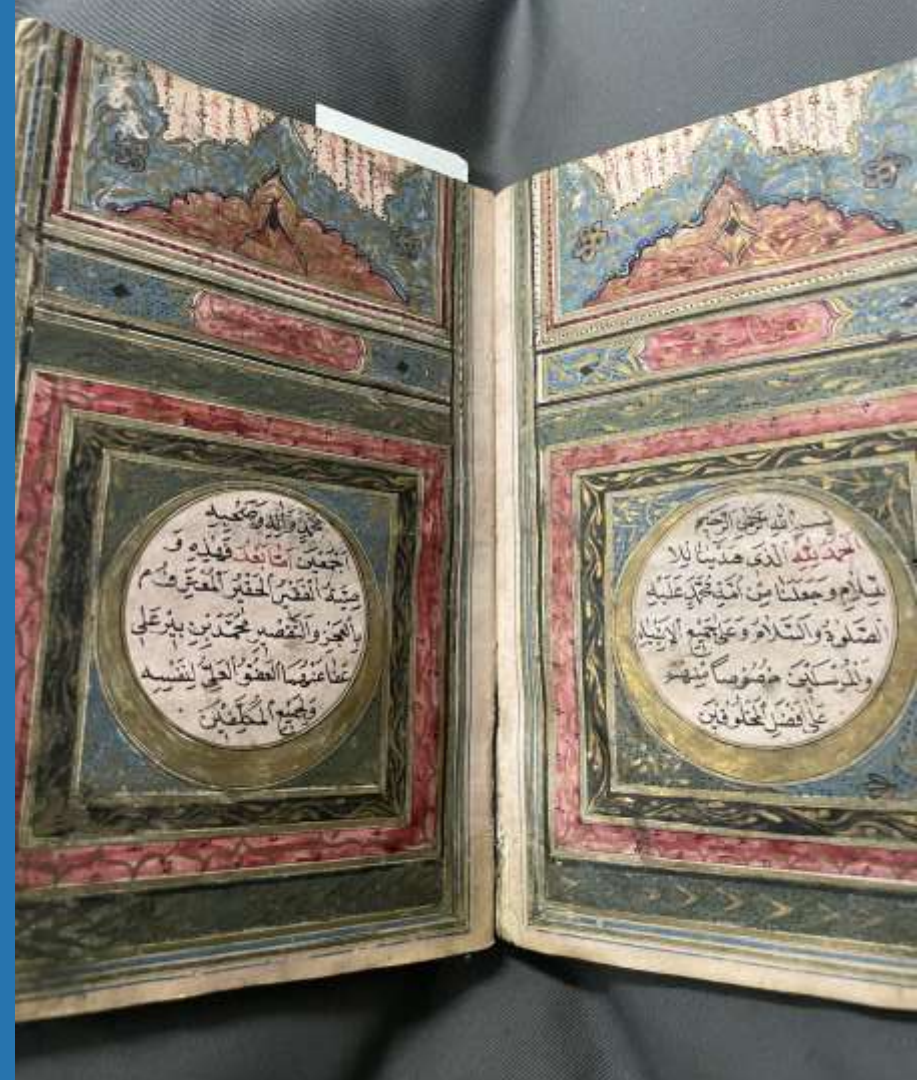
*Engaging Muslim Communities in Southern
California through Islamic Manuscripts*

Sohaib Baig, UC Los Angeles

MELA/MELCOM Conference, Cairo 2026

UCLA Library Manuscript Collections

20 collections totalling at least 8,000 volumes in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and other languages



UCLA Library Manuscript Collections

20 collections totalling at least **8,000** volumes in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and other languages

Collections include:

- Caro Minasian collection
- Aintabi collection
- Collection of Egyptian Manuscripts



UCLA Library Manuscript Collections

20 collections totalling at least **8,000** volumes in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and other languages

Collections include:

- Caro Minasian collection
- Aintabi collection
- Collection of Egyptian Manuscripts

At least **2,600** volumes in Ottoman Turkish



UCLA Library Collections

Center for Near Eastern Studies founded in
1957





Andreas Tietze (d. 2003)





Islamicate Manuscripts Initiative

This initiative will ensure that UCLA Library's remarkable Islamicate and Arabic-script manuscript collection, the second largest in North America, is accessible to scholars and the general public.

Add5@library.ucla.edu

About the Collection

The Question of Community Engagement

Why community engagement?
Objectives? Scope? Outcomes?



The Question of Community Engagement

Why community engagement?
Objectives? Scope? Outcomes?

Goal 1: Deepen our engagement with Los Angeles 

Goal 2: Expand our reach as a global university 

The Question of Community Engagement

Why community engagement?
Objectives? Scope? Outcomes?

Deepening our engagement with Los Angeles will:

- enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity;
- enhance curriculum, teaching, and learning;
- prepare an educated, engaged public;
- strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility;
- address critical societal issues; and
- contribute to the public good.

The Levels of Community Engagement

Constituencies included:

- Muslim Student Associations
- K-12 Islamic schools and homeschooling groups
- Mosque communities
- General community
- Philanthropists/donors



MSA UCLA and USC Event, April 2025

Overview

MSA students from USC and UCLA visiting YRL to view and learn about Islamic manuscripts.

Learning Goals

1. Appreciate the historical, cultural, and religious significance of Islamic manuscripts
 - Recognize the cultural, historical, and intellectual significance of Islamic manuscripts in preserving knowledge and heritage across various Muslim regions and languages.
2. Explore the Material Aspects of Manuscripts
 - Identify and appreciate the physical features of manuscripts, such as binding, paper, ink, scripts, and illumination styles.
3. Recognize the role of libraries in preserving, organizing, and sharing Islamic heritage.
4. Foster a Personal Connection to Heritage
 - Encourage students to reflect on how these manuscripts relate to their own cultural identity and heritage.

MSA UCLA and USC Event, April 2025

Time (minutes)	Topic	Activity
5	Intro to Manuscripts (What are manuscripts?)	
5	Walk-through of Ibn al-Nafis and Gaza Manuscript	
5	Walk-through of 2nd manuscript endowed by a Muslim woman	
7	Small Group observation	What are some interesting features that stand out in the manuscript, things that you might not find in a published book perhaps, or anything you feel is especially noteworthy? You do not need to understand the language, but feel free to use Google translate if you want. (Think about the material, colors, script, margins, doodles, etc)
10	Large Group discussion	
5	Big picture of manuscripts and global Muslim history and emotional reflections	Did you feel something different handling these manuscripts compared to holding a regular published book?
5	Q/A	
	Walk around	



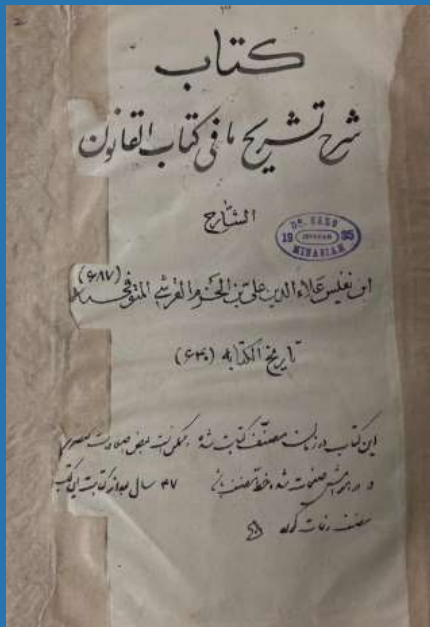
MSA UCLA and USC Event, April 2025

Time (minutes)	Topic	Activity
5	Intro to Manuscripts (What are manuscripts?)	
5	Walk-through of Ibn al-Nafis and Gaza Manuscript	
5	Walk-through of 2nd manuscript endowed by a Muslim woman	
7	Small Group observation	What are some interesting features that stand out in the manuscript, things that you might not find in a published book perhaps, or anything you feel is especially noteworthy? You do not need to understand the language, but feel free to use Google translate if you want. (Think about the material, colors, script, margins, doodles, etc)
10	Large Group discussion	
5	Big picture of manuscripts and global Muslim history and emotional reflections	Did you feel something different handling these manuscripts compared to holding a regular published book?
5	Q/A	
	Walk around	



MSA UCLA and USC Event, April 2025

Time (minutes)	Topic	Activity
5	Intro to Manuscripts (What are manuscripts?)	
5	Walk-through of Ibn al-Nafis and Gaza Manuscript	
5	Walk-through of 2nd manuscript endowed by a Muslim woman	
7	Small Group observation	What are some interesting features that stand out in the manuscript, things that you might not find in a published book perhaps, or anything you feel is especially noteworthy? You do not need to understand the language, but feel free to use Google translate if you want. (Think about the material, colors, script, margins, doodles, etc)
10	Large Group discussion	
5	Big picture of manuscripts and global Muslim history and emotional reflections	Did you feel something different handling these manuscripts compared to holding a regular published book?
5	Q/A	
	Walk around	



MSA UCLA and USC Event, April 2025

Time (minutes)	Topic	Activity
5	Intro to Manuscripts (What are manuscripts?)	
5	Walk-through of Ibn al-Nafis and Gaza Manuscript	
5	Walk-through of 2nd manuscript endowed by a Muslim woman	
7	Small Group observation	What are some interesting features that stand out in the manuscript, things that you might not find in a published book perhaps, or anything you feel is especially noteworthy? You do not need to understand the language, but feel free to use Google translate if you want. (Think about the material, colors, script, margins, doodles, etc)
10	Large Group discussion	
5	Big picture of manuscripts and global Muslim history and emotional reflections	Did you feel something different handing these manuscripts compared to holding a regular published book?
5	Q/A	
	Walk around	



MSA UCLA and USC Event, April 2025



Did viewing and handling the manuscripts make you feel more connected to your heritage? Please explain why or why not.

12 responses

- I felt connected to the author
- Yes, I felt it different than when viewing contemporary mashaf
- Yes, read a handwritten quran for the first time
- Yes absolutely, but gloves would have been appreciated.
- Yes, it made me feel connected to the past and allowed me to appreciate the efforts which went into them.
- Yes! It is always amazing to see the preservation of the Qur'an.
- 100%. I have seen old manuscripts in museums before, but the fact that we actually got to hold these books in our hands, the exact books written hundreds of years ago to preserve the Islamic message, was such an incredible experience.
- Yes, it helped me appreciate the rich history of Islamic scholarship and the perfection they aspired for in academics

High School Visit





Announcement

UCLA Library awarded CLIR grant to increase accessibility and deepen understanding of primary source material and the Islamic World

The grant will move the library closer to its goal of describing and conserving the 10,000-bound manuscript volumes that comprise its Islamic and Arabic-script manuscript collection.

Written by Ariane Sichi
December 15, 2025

Development efforts

- **Funding menu**
 - **Endowed position**
 - **Collections endowments**
 - **Current-use funds**

Development efforts

- **Funding menu**
 - **Endowed position**
 - **Collections endowments**
 - **Current-use funds**
- **Different kinds of outreach**
 - **Private viewings in the Library**
 - **Salons at residences**
 - **Community events**
 - **Social media, videos, articles**

Development efforts

First collections endowment for Middle Eastern and Islamic studies



We have made a commitment, with the help of the community to establish the Universal Heritage Endowment for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, the first endowment in this area of study at the UCLA Library.


Public outreach

*"A Glimpse Into 1,200 Years
of the Islamic Textual Tradition"*

AN INTRODUCTION TO ISLAMIC MANUSCRIPTS

A LECTURE BY
DR. SOHAIB BAIG, PH.D. (HISTORY)

Islamic manuscripts are handwritten books from Muslim history, from Qur'ans to works on **science, poetry, and art**. They are treasures of **knowledge and beauty**, often decorated with stunning calligraphy and designs, and show how Muslims preserved and **shared wisdom** for centuries.



Westside Community & Cultural Center
1235 4th Street
Santa Monica, CA 90401

Monday, **September 29** at **7:00 PM**
EASY PARKING ACROSS THE STREET (LOT 2)


Public outreach

"A Glimpse Into 1,200 Years
of the Islamic Textual Tradition"

AN INTRODUCTION TO ISLAMIC MANUSCRIPTS

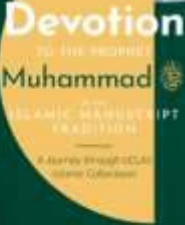

A LECTURE BY
DR. SOHAIB BAIG, PH.D. (HISTORY)

Islamic manuscripts are handwritten books from Muslim history, from Qur'ans to works on **science, poetry, and art**. They are treasures of **knowledge and beauty**, often decorated with stunning calligraphy and designs, and show how Muslims preserved and **shared wisdom** for centuries.



Westside Community & Cultural Center
1235 4th Street
Santa Monica, CA 90401

Monday, **September 29** at **7:00 PM**
EASY PARKING ACROSS THE STREET (LOT 2)





Devotion
TO THE PROPHET
Muhammad


ISLAMIC MANUSCRIPTS
TRADITION

A Journey Through UCLA
Islamic Collections

DR.
SOHAIB
BAIG
Librarian, UCLA
SER. ST. Room 101



REGISTRATION
Baly/IAC Webinars



Public outreach



ARTICLE

[Glimpses of Islamic manuscript culture in Palestine](#)

October 9, 2025

Recently described manuscripts illustrate the rich history of Islamic manuscript culture in Palestine from the medieval period to...

Articles



ARTICLE

[Sacred endowments: Muslim women patrons of Islamic manuscript culture](#)

June 17, 2025

Individual manuscripts endowed by Muslim women are held in UCLA Library Special Collections as part of the Islamicate manuscript...

