

Digitization and Digital Preservation of Manuscripts and Access in Organization of Libraries, Museums and Documents Centre of Astan Quds Razavi Library in IRAN: A Case Study

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Abstract

Manuscript is a hidden literature or knowledge to the present generation. The present human civilization is nothing but published information. The other side of the coin most of us not aware is the story of knowledge not published and remains in manuscripts. Securing, processing and protecting such valuable documents is the primary duty of the present information systems.

The paper discusses about digital preservation, current and future trends, collection and details about ongoing digitization of manuscripts program in Organization of Libraries, Museums and Documents Centre of Astan Quds Razavi Library of Iran and how manuscripts is available for users ultimately it concludes with suggestions and references.

Keywords: Digitization, Digital Preservation, Rare Manuscripts, Museums and Documents Centre of Astan Quds Razavi Library, Iran

1. Introduction

The impact of current information revolution and information technology have changed library totally in to an important media of communication of knowledge. In the information age, demands will be focused on knowledge and knowledge of what to gather, how to gather and how to process communicated. Using modern information technology, the libraries of today have changed the methods of collection, storage, dissemination and retrieval of information.

Today, digitization has become one of the important activities in the library and information centre which is an excellent way of providing open access to library resources. Through digitization, libraries are able to access, preserve, maintain the digital collections easily and provide effective services to the user requirements. The digital age create new delivery and access alternatives for libraries as well as new preservation challenges. The goal of a digital preservation system is that the information it contains remains accessible to users over a long period time.

The library of Astan Quds is one of the most important and the largest library in the Islamic world in Iran that digitizes its manuscripts and provides access to users all over the world. This historical library was founded in 363 A.H. /973 A.D., about 1027 years ago. There is a copy of the Holy Quran preserved in the library endowed by Muhammad ibn Kathir, the minister of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni dating back to the year 393 A.H./1002 A.D.

This library is one of the largest repositories, and also is the main research source for historians, writers and students.

Astan Quds Library documents the history of culture and presents many religious, political and social events in Iran, from the time of the prophet to the present day.

1.1 Collection in Astan Quds Library

Astan Quds library is a major cultural collection, which contains many historical manuscripts that are centuries old. Astan Quds Archives, which contains many historical books that are centuries old, is a major cultural collection.

Astan Quds Library is a treasure house of reference materials especially on Islam in Iran. More than 100,000 books, manuscripts, documents and letters about the people and events that have shaped Islamic and Iranian heritage have been collected in this library. Astan Quds museum library contains archives, which range in date from before Islam until today. This archive documents the social, religious and even political history of Iran, with an emphasis on Islamic aspects. This library museum also contains more than 26400 unique historic manuscripts.

1.2 Department of Documents and Manuscripts in Astan Quds Library

This unit has been organized with the purpose of providing facilities for the researchers who are in quest of original documents and manuscripts. In this department valuable source such as scriptures, deeds, microfilms, archive press, manuscripts are carefully preserved.

This section contains 32485 rare manuscripts and 36000 microfilms from the rare manuscripts of home and abroad. The catalogue of the manuscripts preserved in this section are compiled and published in 16 volumes.

2. Purpose of Digitization in Astan Quds Library

Digitization has become a practical necessity and reality with technological interventions to provide improved access to information resources, preservation and dissemination as required, anywhere at any time. Ensuring long term access to the digitally stored information process a significant challenge, and is increasingly recognized as an important part of digital data management.

The main purposes of digital preservation of Astan Quds Library are as follows

- ◆ To provide user-friendly interface to access the news content.
- ◆ Accessibility to all or part of the content of manuscripts and books
- ◆ To search across the different title and to draw together materials relating to a wide range of research and learning topics;
- ◆ To make available the reading specially rare and fragile materials;

- ◆ Maintain historical value of information and preserve and conserve the national and cultural heritage through digitization

2.1 Technical Requirements for Digital Preservation

- ◆ Proper preparation of the original in sequence
- ◆ High quality microfilming of the documents
- ◆ High quality Optical Character Recognition of the scanned images
- ◆ Quality assurance of the scanned images
- ◆ Software to index individual articles and to enable search facility
- ◆ User-friendly software to provide a host for the data, and to permit users to access it via Internet.

2.2 Universal Initiatives in Digital Preservation of Manuscripts

Thinking the importance of digital preservation, in world too, numbers of projects are taken by different organizations for the preservation of the valuable Manuscripts in digital format.

It is a long term plan for protecting and promoting the availability of digital heritage of the country. National Digital Memory Iran (Haram) started from 2001 and digitization according to the National Library of documents and priorities.

UNESCO has launched the Memory of the World Programme in 1992 to guard against collective amnesia calling upon the preservation of the valuable archive holdings and library collections all over the world ensuring their wide dissemination. India and Iran have registered some of their cultural heritage in the memory of the world programme

Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library located in Patna, Bihar has taken a pilot Project of Digitization of Manuscripts in October, 2005, which has a mighty collection of about 21,000 manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish, Hindi and Sanskrit written on Palm- Leaves.

Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC) was established in 2001 to foster joint action to address the urgent challenges of securing the preservation of digital resources in the UK and to work with others internationally to secure the global digital memory and knowledge base.

The National Library of Australia's Preserving Access to Digital Information (PADI) gateway to international digital preservation resources and initiative aims to provide mechanisms that will help to ensure that information in digital form is managed with appropriate consideration for preservation and future access

Ramana (2005) has studied about digital preservation, digitization of manuscripts and preservation techniques which are currently use in India. Narang (2006) and Chepesiuk(2002) have examined different aspect of preservation of rare materials and manuscripts.

Devi (2008) says manuscripts are one of the precious materials of our cultural heritage, acting as a valuable source of history and knowledge and offering perspectives on contemporary society.

3. Access to Manuscripts in Astan Quds Library

Manuscripts are one of the precious materials of our cultural heritage. They are valuable sources for the reconstruction of the history and culture of a country. They reveal their contemporary society and provide vital link to culture and knowledge. In order to manage and preserve our cultural heritage for use now and for future generation it is necessary to create the context in which cultural heritage agencies and organizations can pursue the rising standard of stewardship .A great deal of work has to be done to improve the level and profile ensuring that the public gets access to these information resources has become one of the priorities for those providing services.

In Astan Quds library original manuscripts are not accessible to research scholars. Therefore by digitization of manuscripts they provide access in the library collection. This is a long-range programme, which is covering all manuscripts in the library. Steps have been initiated to acquire on a selected basis of manuscripts from the collection of the library. Digitized manuscripts are available on website for the access.

4. Conclusion

Books, manuscripts, are decaying. Some of them are still useful, but the damage is beyond restoration. To preserve their information contents it is urgently needed to digitize them. Digital preservation of recourses is finding ways to maintain our cultural heritage. Digital preservation will ensure the long term maintenance of a byte stream sufficient to reproduce the document and provide continued accessibility of the contents over time and through evolving technology.

If the manuscripts are digitized and made available on web, then they are easily accessible from every nook and corner of the entire world; the manuscripts users will not come to those places where the manuscripts are physically preserved. The importance of digital preservation cannot be ignored.

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