

Manuscripts and the National Mission on Manuscripts

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Manifest Pedagogy

UPSC has these days moved away from the traditional target areas of political history and moved to the sources of history. Manuscripts have been an area of importance from the start in the preliminary examination. These areas which are under the consideration of UPSC as they have relevance to the current events and are in news.

In news

Heritage of Indian Manuscript tradition and National Mission on Manuscripts

Placing it in the syllabus

Indian Heritage and Culture; salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature.

Dimensions

- Definition of manuscripts
- How manuscripts are a better source of information compared to oral history
- Rock edicts of ancient India examples
- Medieval illustrated manuscripts examples
- Calligraphy as an art of manuscripts.
- Preservation of manuscripts and National Mission on Manuscripts

Content

Definition of manuscripts

- A manuscript was, traditionally, any document that is written by hand or, once practical typewriters became available, typewritten as opposed to being mechanically printed or reproduced in some indirect or automated way.
- Manuscripts are not defined by their contents, which may combine writing with mathematical calculations, maps, explanatory figures or illustrations. Manuscripts may be in book form, scrolls or in codex format. Illuminated manuscripts are enriched with pictures, border decorations, elaborately embossed initial letters or full-page illustrations. A document **should be at least 75 years old to be considered a manuscript.**
- The art and science of scripting found different modes of expression such as inscriptions on clay tablet, stone, copper plate, palm-leaf, handmade paper, bark, and wood carrier.

How manuscripts are a better source of information compared to oral history?

Because when the oral transmission of knowledge system began to experience the threat of discontinuity but the palm-leaf manuscripts have revolutionized the sphere of preserving oral traditions of several millennia.

Examples of Rock Edicts of ancient India

- The major, minor rock edicts ancient India are found across India are in the languages of Bramhi, Prakrit, Greek, and Kharoshti etc, among them Ashoka's rock edicts are earliest written documents. Following are the examples of Ancient Indian Rock Edicts;

1. Kandahar Bilingual Rock Inscription
2. Bairat

3. Barbara caves
4. Sannati
5. Junagadh
6. Dhauri
7. Yerragudi
8. Palkigundu and Gavimath
9. Brahmagiri
10. Minor Rock edict of Maski
11. Major Rock edicts of Khalsi
12. Pillar edicts of Kausambi.
13. Hathigumpha inscription etc

Medieval illustrated manuscripts examples

Pala rulers of Bengal and Bihar were the first to initiate the tradition of illustrating the palm-leaf Buddhist scriptures.

In the tenth century, the Buddhist illustrated palm-leaf manuscript tradition evolved as a potential idiom, in its visual and textual dynamics. **Following are the examples of illustrated manuscripts;**

- Buddhist text Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita
- Jaina texts; Kalpa Sutra Kalkacharya Katha, Yashodhara charita, Adipurana, Mahapurana, Chorapancha Shikha. Dhavala, Jaya Dhavala and Maha Dhavala (large size illustrated manuscripts)
- Sangrahanisutra.
- Babarnama
- Rasamanjari.
- Gitagovinda.
- Rasikapriya.
- Ragamala.
- Palm-leaf manuscript (Christian era)
- Guru Granth Sahib.

Calligraphy as an art of manuscripts.

Calligraphy, the art of beautiful handwriting. The term may

derive from the Greek words for “beauty” (kallos) and “to write” (graphein). It implies a sure knowledge of the correct form of letters—i.e., the conventional signs by which language can be communicated—and the skill to make them with such ordering of the various parts and harmony of proportions that the experienced, knowledgeable eye will recognize such composition as a work of art. Calligraphic work, as art, need not be legible in the usual sense of the word.

In the Middle East and East Asia, calligraphy by long and exacting tradition is considered a major art, equal to sculpture or painting. **In Western culture,** the plainer Greek- and Latin-derived alphabets and the spread of literacy have tended to make handwriting **in principle an art** that anyone can practice.

Preservation of manuscripts and National Mission on Manuscripts

Background

- In the year 2003, our then prime minister Sri Atal Bihari Vajapeyi, understanding the immediate need of digitizing the ancient scriptures and documenting them from private and public collections, established the National Mission for Manuscripts.
- The National Mission for Manuscripts was established in February 2003, by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Government of India. A unique project in its programme and mandate, the Mission seeks to **unearth and preserve the vast manuscript wealth of India.** India possesses an estimate of ten million manuscripts, probably the largest collection in the world. These cover a variety of themes, textures and aesthetics, scripts, languages, calligraphies, illuminations and illustrations.
- The Mission has the **mandate of identifying, documenting, conserving and making accessible the manuscript heritage of India.**

- A national effort in the form of a mission for manuscripts as a logical, radical and urgent response to a very contemporary challenge- of reclaiming the inheritance contained in manuscripts, often in a poor state of preservation.
- National Mission for Manuscripts is a **National level comprehensive initiative which caters to the need of conserving manuscripts and disseminating knowledge contained therein**. NMM is working towards fulfilling its motto, 'conserving the past for the future'.
- It has emerged as a movement, undoubtedly the most popular and effective among all the heritage conservation initiatives in the country.
- The National Manuscript Mission from the campus of IGNC A Delhi, with a single mission of documenting uncared and neglected manuscripts scattered in every nook and corners of Indian states, is helping to safeguard the manuscript heritage of India.