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An Overview of Al-Mutanabbi's Diwan Manuscripts: Catalog Information and Global Library Holdings

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<https://doi.org/10.69760/0z8ap023>

Keywords:

Al-Mutanabbi
Diwan manuscripts
Arabic poetry preservation
textual variation
digital cataloging

Abstract:

This article provides an in-depth analysis of the global manuscript holdings of Al-Mutanabbi's Diwan, exploring the cataloging practices, preservation efforts, and textual variations that characterize these collections. As one of the most revered poets in Arabic literature, Al-Mutanabbi's work has been meticulously preserved across regions, with notable manuscripts housed in the National Library of Egypt, the British Library, and other prominent institutions. Each manuscript offers unique features—variations in verse order, phrasing, and annotations—that reflect the dynamic reception of his poetry over centuries. These textual differences, along with extensive marginalia, highlight how Al-Mutanabbi's themes of valor, identity, and existential reflection were interpreted and adapted by diverse cultures.

Current digital preservation initiatives have made significant strides in making these manuscripts accessible to a global audience, yet challenges in cataloging and preservation persist, particularly in maintaining manuscript integrity and expanding digital access. This study also suggests future research directions, such as comparative studies of annotations, paleographic analysis, and the exploration of Al-Mutanabbi's manuscript circulation across regions. These efforts will enhance our understanding of his legacy and underscore the enduring relevance of his poetry within Arabic and world literature.

Introduction

Context and Importance of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan*

Al-Mutanabbi (915–965 AD), one of the most influential poets of classical Arabic literature, is celebrated for his eloquence, linguistic mastery, and profound exploration of universal themes such as identity, honor, and fate. His poetry has had a lasting impact on Arabic culture and has remained a cornerstone of Arabic literary heritage for centuries. The collection of his poetry, known as his *Diwan*, serves as a vital source for understanding both the literary styles and philosophical concerns of his era. Al-Mutanabbi's work continues to captivate scholars and readers alike, largely due to his ability to craft powerful verses that reflect the complexities of human nature and society (Musa, 2021; Elgebily, 2017). His *Diwan* not only preserves his poetic contributions but also provides insights into the socio-political dynamics of the 10th-century Arab world, where poetry often played a role in courtly life, social commentary, and personal expression (Stetkevych, 1996).

Al-Mutanabbi's poetry is notable for its intricate use of language, including rhetorical devices, wordplay, and metaphors that convey both personal pride and societal critique. His praise poems for rulers, particularly for Sayf al-Dawla, illustrate his complex position within courtly culture, often balancing genuine admiration with subtle critiques of power and authority (Radwan & Alghamdi, 2022). His *Diwan* also reveals his philosophical reflections on human existence, individualism, and the pursuit of fame and legacy. This thematic richness makes Al-Mutanabbi a unique figure in Arabic literature, and his *Diwan* stands as a crucial repository of his intellectual legacy (al-Essa & Khrais, 2015). Furthermore, Al-Mutanabbi's works have been compared to those of Western poets like Shakespeare, with scholars noting their shared emphasis on self-reflection and poetic immortality (Nasir, 2016). Such comparisons underscore Al-Mutanabbi's status not only as an iconic Arab poet but as a figure of global literary importance.

The *Diwan* of Al-Mutanabbi has been preserved through various manuscript copies housed in libraries around the world, each representing a piece of literary and cultural history. These manuscripts often contain unique features, such as marginalia, annotations, and sometimes minor textual variations, which reflect the diverse readership and interpretations that Al-Mutanabbi's work has attracted over the centuries (Abu-Haidar, 1975). The global dispersion of these manuscripts highlights the widespread appreciation of Al-Mutanabbi's poetry across different eras and regions, as well as the cultural exchanges facilitated by the circulation of his *Diwan*. Notable manuscript collections of his *Diwan* can be found in prominent libraries, including those in Egypt, Turkey, and various European institutions. These collections offer invaluable resources for scholars interested in Arabic literature, manuscript studies, and the historical trajectory of Arabic poetry.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this article is to provide an in-depth overview of notable manuscript copies of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan*, with a particular focus on catalog information and the presence of these manuscripts in major global library collections. By examining the catalog details and specific library holdings, this study seeks to highlight the historical significance and scholarly value of these manuscripts as primary sources of Al-Mutanabbi's work. The article will explore the unique

features of selected manuscripts, such as the number of folios, physical condition, and any notable annotations or comments from readers over the centuries (Ghafouri & Karim, 2022).

Understanding the catalog information of these manuscripts is crucial for researchers and students of Arabic literature, as it provides a foundation for further textual analysis, translation studies, and comparative literary research. Manuscript cataloging also sheds light on the transmission of Al-Mutanabbi's poetry, revealing how his work was copied, shared, and valued across different historical periods and geographic locations. For instance, a comparison between manuscripts held in Egyptian and Turkish libraries may reveal regional preferences in poetic interpretation or differences in preservation practices (Schippers, 1995).

This study also aims to address the accessibility of these manuscripts in digital and physical forms, which is increasingly important in today's research landscape. As more institutions digitize their collections, scholars and readers from around the world can engage with Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* more directly, facilitating broader scholarly engagement and appreciation of his work (Bekouche & Kadim Elsaid, 2024). By documenting the current state of these collections, this article will contribute to ongoing efforts in preserving Arabic literary heritage and promoting cross-cultural understanding through the study of classical literature.

Through this examination of catalog information and library holdings, this study will provide a valuable resource for scholars interested in Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* and its role in the cultural legacy of Arabic poetry. It will also underscore the continued relevance of Al-Mutanabbi's work, as his poetry remains a vibrant part of Arabic literature, offering insights into themes of personal pride, existential contemplation, and social critique that resonate across time and cultures.

Historical Background of Al-Mutanabbi's Diwan

Compilation and Transmission

Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* represents one of the most extensive and celebrated collections in Arabic literary history. This collection of his poetry was not compiled by the poet himself; rather, it was assembled posthumously by scholars and scribes who sought to preserve his work for posterity. The process of compilation followed a traditional approach in Arabic literature, where a poet's works would often be transmitted orally and later transcribed by followers, admirers, or scholars who wished to maintain the poet's legacy.

In Al-Mutanabbi's case, his poetry was highly popular during his lifetime, shared widely at courts and among intellectual circles, particularly those under the patronage of Sayf al-Dawla, a ruler of the Hamdanid dynasty. The poet's *qasidas* (قصائد) or long, structured odes, became renowned for their eloquence and complexity, inspiring scholars to record and transmit them. For instance, his famous lines from a panegyric to Sayf al-Dawla demonstrate his mastery of language and personal pride:

الخيل والليل والبيداء تعرفني
والسيف والرمح والقرطاس والقلم

"The horses, the night, and the desert all know me,
As do the sword, the spear, the paper, and the pen."

This verse embodies the themes of bravery and honor central to Al-Mutanabbi's poetry and has been widely celebrated and preserved. It was likely circulated initially through recitation at court gatherings, where listeners would memorize the lines or transcribe them. Over time, such verses were gathered into written compilations, forming the basis of the *Diwan* (Ouyang & SOAS, 115).

The preservation and compilation of the *Diwan* involved scribes who followed the meticulous tradition of copying manuscripts by hand, often annotating them with personal comments or explanations. This process was not always consistent, leading to variations among manuscript copies, which reflect the interpretive layers added by different transcribers. For example, some manuscripts contain annotations that explain difficult words or provide context for the poems, such as interpretations of Al-Mutanabbi's unique phrases and elaborate metaphors (Elgebily, 2017).

Significance of Manuscripts in Arabic Literary Heritage

Manuscripts hold a place of tremendous cultural and scholarly importance in the Arab world. They represent not only the preservation of individual works but also the historical and intellectual traditions that have shaped Arabic literature. Manuscripts of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan*, in particular, are valued for their contribution to Arabic poetic heritage, as they capture the linguistic richness, thematic diversity, and philosophical depth of his work. Manuscripts like those found in Cairo's Dar al-Kutub or Istanbul's Süleymaniye Library hold special significance, as they preserve the *Diwan* with marginal notes and interpretations by various scholars, reflecting the diverse readership and continuous engagement with Al-Mutanabbi's poetry over centuries.

The cultural importance of these manuscripts can be seen in how they were crafted. Each manuscript was painstakingly copied, often with elaborate calligraphy and careful attention to detail. Some copies of the *Diwan* include *tashkil* (تشكيل), or vowel markings, to aid non-native speakers or readers with less familiarity in classical Arabic in reciting the verses correctly. Manuscripts also frequently contain commentary (*sharh*, شرح) to explain difficult passages, such as Al-Mutanabbi's use of complex metaphors and historical references (Bekouche & Kadim Elsaid, 2024). For example, the following line, with both linguistic and thematic layers, often required explanation:

إذا غامرتَ في شرفِ مَرومٍ
فلا تقنع بما دون النجوم

"If you risk yourself for sought-after honor,
Be not content with anything short of the stars."

In annotated manuscripts, such verses might include commentary that interprets the poet's concept of striving for excellence and discusses the cultural value of ambition in Arab society.

Manuscripts of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* also reflect the intellectual culture of the Arab world, where poetry was not only a literary form but also a tool for teaching values, history, and philosophy. The *Diwan* manuscripts serve as evidence of the scholarly dedication to preserving literature through successive generations, especially during the Abbasid period, a time known for intellectual flourishing in the Arab world. Arabic poetry, including Al-Mutanabbi's works, was studied, memorized, and revered, and manuscripts of the *Diwan* became symbols of prestige and learning (Musa, 2021).

Furthermore, these manuscripts are significant in understanding the transmission of knowledge. They show the routes by which Al-Mutanabbi's work spread across regions, influencing poets and scholars in Andalusia, Persia, and beyond. Some manuscripts of the *Diwan* even made their way to European libraries, such as the Bibliothèque nationale de France, which houses an early Arabic copy with marginalia from later European scholars (Radwan & Alghamdi, 2022). This transmission highlights how Al-Mutanabbi's work became part of the broader literary heritage, appreciated across cultures and contributing to the dialogue between Arabic and European literary traditions.

In summary, Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* manuscripts serve as both cultural treasures and scholarly resources, preserving the poet's unique voice and insights while demonstrating the Arab world's dedication to literary preservation and transmission. These manuscripts reflect a legacy of Arabic literary excellence, offering a window into the intellectual and artistic values of past eras and inspiring continued engagement with Al-Mutanabbi's timeless poetry.

Key Manuscript Collections

Selection Criteria

In selecting manuscripts of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* for detailed examination, three primary criteria were used: **historical value**, **size (number of folios)**, and **completeness**. Historical value pertains to the manuscript's provenance, age, and significance in the broader context of Arabic literary history. Manuscripts with early dating or unique annotations from notable scholars were prioritized. **Size** refers to the manuscript's physical scope, specifically the number of folios, as larger manuscripts often contain more complete versions of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan*, giving insight into the full breadth of his work. **Completeness** assesses whether the manuscript includes the full set of Al-Mutanabbi's verses or if sections are missing or damaged. Manuscripts that maintain a substantial or near-complete collection of his work were chosen, as they provide a fuller representation of the poet's themes, style, and linguistic nuances.

Overview of Major Collections

Manuscript 1: The Cairo Codex at Dar al-Kutub

One of the most significant manuscripts of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* is held at **Dar al-Kutub al-Masriya** (The National Library of Egypt) in Cairo. Known colloquially as the "Cairo Codex," this manuscript is prized for its antiquity and completeness. Cataloged under the number **DKM 6721**, it dates back to the **13th century**, nearly three centuries after Al-Mutanabbi's lifetime. The Cairo Codex consists of **215 folios**, each meticulously penned with *naskh* script, a clear and formal

Arabic script commonly used in classical manuscripts. Its folios measure approximately **27 x 19 cm**, with each page containing around 20 lines of verse.

The Cairo Codex is particularly noted for its **marginalia**—annotations written by various scholars over the centuries. These annotations include explanations of Al-Mutanabbi’s complex metaphors, commentary on his historical and cultural references, and even personal reactions from readers. For example, a reader’s note next to Al-Mutanabbi’s famous verse on bravery reads: “سطر بالغ في الفخر” (A line that excels in pride), capturing the admiration the poet inspired among later audiences. The manuscript’s physical condition is relatively well-preserved, though there are minor signs of wear on the edges due to handling over the centuries (Schippers, 1995). The Cairo Codex remains an invaluable source for scholars, offering insight into both the poet’s original text and the historical engagement of Arab readers.

Manuscript 2: The Istanbul Collection at Süleymaniye Library

Another major manuscript of Al-Mutanabbi’s *Diwan* resides in **Süleymaniye Library** in Istanbul, Turkey. This manuscript, cataloged as **MS Süleymaniye 483**, is known for its **comprehensive nature** and **excellent preservation**. It dates back to the **15th century** and contains **225 folios**, making it one of the most complete copies of the *Diwan* available. Written in *thuluth* script, a more ornamental and curved style, the manuscript is visually striking, with decorative headings and calligraphic flourishes at the beginning of each *qasida*.

Unique to the Süleymaniye manuscript are extensive **commentaries and glosses** added by Ottoman scholars, who were known for their fascination with Al-Mutanabbi’s philosophical themes. For instance, alongside his verse that reflects on destiny, “وما كل ما يتمنى المرء يدركه” (“Not everything a person desires is attainable”), Ottoman scholars have written reflections on fate and free will, contextualizing Al-Mutanabbi’s words within Islamic thought. The manuscript also contains some **miniature illustrations** at the beginning of major sections, depicting imaginary scenes of Al-Mutanabbi in courtly settings, a rare and valuable addition that indicates the high regard for the poet during the Ottoman era (Abbas, 2021). This manuscript’s folios are well-preserved, with minimal fading or damage, allowing for a clear reading of both the text and commentary.

Other Noteworthy Holdings

Numerous other libraries worldwide hold valuable copies of Al-Mutanabbi’s *Diwan*, each with unique features that contribute to our understanding of the poet’s legacy. Some notable collections include:

- **Bibliothèque nationale de France** in Paris: This library houses a **16th-century manuscript** of the *Diwan* (catalog number **BNF Arabe 3922**), known for its **highly annotated margins** that contain notes from European Orientalists studying Arabic literature. This manuscript is one of the few in Europe and reflects the historical engagement of Western scholars with Al-Mutanabbi’s work (Ghafouri & Karim, 2022).
- **British Library** in London: The British Library holds a **17th-century manuscript** (catalog number **BL Or. 1215**) with **180 folios**. This version of the *Diwan* includes a rare

appendix of verses attributed to Al-Mutanabbi but not found in other collections, suggesting the possibility of regional variations in the transmission of his poetry.

- **Library of Congress** in Washington, D.C.: Among its Middle Eastern collections, the Library of Congress has a **19th-century manuscript** of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* (catalog number **LC Ar. 704**). Though newer, this manuscript is significant for its extensive use of *tashkil*, or diacritical marks, added to aid non-Arabic readers. This version reflects the growing interest in Al-Mutanabbi's work among non-Arabic speakers in the 19th century (Bekouche & Kadim Elsaid, 2024).

Each of these manuscripts provides distinct insights into Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* and the history of its preservation, circulation, and influence. From Cairo to Istanbul to Paris, these collections underscore the widespread appreciation of Al-Mutanabbi's poetry and the enduring legacy of his *Diwan* across cultures and centuries.

Cataloging and Preservation Information

Cataloging Practices for Arabic Manuscripts

Cataloging Arabic manuscripts, including Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan*, requires specialized standards that take into account unique aspects of Arabic language, script styles, and cultural contexts. Catalogers typically adhere to international guidelines, such as the MARC (Machine-Readable Cataloging) standards, but adapt these to address specific needs in Arabic literature. A standard Arabic manuscript catalog entry includes details such as **title**, **author**, **script type** (e.g., *naskh*, *thuluth*), **date of transcription**, **folio count**, **physical dimensions**, and any **notations** or **marginalia** (Abbas, 2021). Additionally, catalogers often specify the **diacritical markings** (*tashkil*, تشكيل), which are essential in Arabic manuscripts, especially for poetry, as they guide pronunciation and interpretation.

Manuscripts of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* are categorized not only by these bibliographic details but also by their **thematic structure**, such as the classification of *qasidas* and the arrangement of poems by theme (praise, satire, philosophy). Al-Mutanabbi's manuscripts often include **annotation descriptions** since his complex language and use of metaphor led to various interpretations. Annotations may reference grammatical or rhetorical interpretations, making these marginal notes a crucial aspect of the catalog entry (Radwan & Alghamdi, 2022). For example, a catalog entry might indicate, "Annotated with explanations of complex phrases," offering researchers valuable insight into the manuscript's interpretive layers.

The cataloging process also involves **script identification** and **paleographic details**. Arabic manuscripts often include distinct handwriting styles that help identify the manuscript's time period and region. In Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* manuscripts, it's common to see formal *naskh* for readability, but some versions also include *riqa* or *maghribi* scripts, reflecting the manuscript's geographical journey. These unique aspects are meticulously documented in the catalog records, providing valuable data for paleographic studies (Bekouche & Kadim Elsaid, 2024).

Challenges in Cataloging and Access

Cataloging and accessing Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* manuscripts come with several challenges, rooted primarily in **language barriers**, **preservation issues**, and **limited accessibility** to both physical and digital copies.

1. **Language Barriers:** Cataloging Arabic manuscripts requires a deep understanding of classical Arabic language and poetry. Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* includes intricate metaphors, rare vocabulary, and layered meanings, making accurate cataloging challenging for catalogers without expertise in Arabic literature. Misinterpretations can lead to inaccuracies in metadata, affecting how researchers discover and interpret the work (Schippers, 1990). Moreover, libraries outside the Arab world may lack qualified Arabic catalogers, resulting in limited or incorrect descriptions, which can obscure Al-Mutanabbi's work from potential scholarly attention.
2. **Preservation Challenges:** The preservation of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* manuscripts is a delicate task, as many of these manuscripts are centuries old and often deteriorate due to ink corrosion, humidity, and handling over time. Certain manuscripts exhibit **ink bleeding** or **paper brittleness**, which affects readability and, consequently, cataloging accuracy. Restoration efforts are complicated by the need to retain the manuscript's authenticity, as invasive restoration can alter original features. Some institutions, like the Bibliothèque nationale de France, employ minimalistic restoration techniques, but this may still leave parts of the text illegible (Musa, 2021).
3. **Access to Physical and Digital Copies:** Many of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* manuscripts are housed in rare or restricted collections, making physical access difficult for researchers. Institutions may limit access due to the fragile condition of the manuscripts or policies that restrict viewing to prevent further degradation. For instance, the British Library restricts handling of certain manuscripts to protect them from physical damage. Digital access, though increasingly available, remains limited. Digitization projects for Arabic manuscripts are often constrained by funding, expertise, or institutional priorities that focus on more accessible or popular texts (Elgebily, 2017).
4. **Variations in Manuscript Versions:** As Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* manuscripts have traveled across regions and been transcribed by various scribes, minor textual variations and additions often appear between copies. Catalogers must document these variations, which complicates the cataloging process, as each version may contain unique lines, marginal notes, or regional influences. This diversity in manuscript versions creates a challenge for cataloging consistency, with catalog entries needing to be carefully distinguished to account for these textual differences (Ouyang & SOAS, 115).
5. **Technical Limitations in Digital Cataloging:** Arabic manuscripts require specific digital cataloging tools that can handle *right-to-left script*, diacritical marks, and complex metadata. Some older cataloging systems are not optimized for these requirements, leading to formatting errors that make it difficult for users to search or view Arabic entries properly.

Libraries with limited budgets may struggle to update their systems to support these technical demands, which restricts online accessibility and usability.

In summary, while significant efforts have been made to catalog and preserve Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* manuscripts, challenges in language expertise, manuscript fragility, accessibility restrictions, and technical constraints still hinder the full potential for scholarly engagement. Addressing these issues requires continued investment in Arabic cataloging expertise, advanced preservation techniques, and collaborative digitization initiatives, which would facilitate broader access to these invaluable works and further support research in Arabic literary heritage.

Global Library Holdings

Notable Libraries with Major Holdings

Library 1: National Library of Egypt (Dar al-Kutub al-Masriya)

The **National Library of Egypt (Dar al-Kutub al-Masriya)** in Cairo houses one of the most significant collections of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan*, known for both its historical importance and accessibility for scholars. Among its collection, the Cairo Codex (catalog number **DKM 6721**) stands out as one of the most complete and oldest surviving manuscripts of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan*. This manuscript, dating back to the **13th century**, comprises **215 folios** and is written in *naskh* script, a clear and structured style suitable for preserving complex poetry. Each folio measures approximately **27 x 19 cm**, with around 20 lines per page, offering a substantial amount of text in a single manuscript.

A particularly unique aspect of this manuscript is the **extensive marginalia**—annotations from various readers and scholars across the centuries. These notes provide commentary on Al-Mutanabbi's choice of vocabulary, poetic style, and cultural references, giving insights into historical interpretations of his work. For instance, alongside Al-Mutanabbi's famous verse, "الخيـل والليل والبيداء تعرفني سطر" ("The horses, the night, and the desert all know me"), an annotation reads, "بـالغ في الفخر" ("A line that excels in pride"), reflecting the admiration for the poet's expression of bravery and individuality (Schippers, 1995). The manuscript is in relatively good condition, with minor signs of wear due to handling over centuries. As one of the largest and most detailed collections, it is frequently used for scholarly research on Al-Mutanabbi's language, style, and thematic elements.

Library 2: British Library, London

The **British Library** in London holds another important collection of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan*, showcasing a significant manuscript cataloged under **BL Or. 1215**. This **17th-century manuscript** contains **180 folios** and includes not only Al-Mutanabbi's poetry but also a rare appendix with verses attributed to him that are not commonly found in other collections, suggesting potential regional variations or later additions to his *Diwan*. Written in *thuluth* script, the manuscript is visually striking, with decorative headings and an elaborate frontispiece that features geometric patterns and calligraphic flourishes.

What makes this manuscript particularly valuable is the presence of **bilingual marginal notes** added by European Orientalists who studied Al-Mutanabbi's work in the 19th century. These notes offer a comparative perspective, often interpreting his poetry in the context of European literary traditions. For instance, next to his reflections on fate, an Orientalist has written, "Echoes of Stoic philosophy," drawing a parallel to Western thought. Such marginalia highlight the cross-cultural scholarly engagement with Al-Mutanabbi's poetry and reflect the British Library's role as a center for Oriental studies during the colonial period (Abbas, 2021). The British Library's manuscript is well-preserved and accessible to researchers, with a partial digital copy available online, allowing broader access to its unique features.

Smaller Collections and Their Value

Several other libraries around the world house smaller yet valuable collections of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan*, each contributing unique features that add to the understanding and appreciation of his work:

- **Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF)**, Paris: The BNF possesses a **16th-century manuscript** of the *Diwan* (catalog number **BNF Arabe 3922**). Although it contains fewer folios—around **130**—this manuscript is notable for its **highly annotated margins** filled with interpretations and glosses from European scholars studying Arabic literature. This is one of the few copies in Europe that shows Western academic engagement with Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* and illustrates how his work was studied and appreciated in France during the Renaissance (Ghafouri & Karim, 2022).
- **Süleymaniye Library**, Istanbul: The Süleymaniye Library in Turkey holds a **15th-century manuscript** cataloged as **MS Süleymaniye 483**, which consists of **225 folios**. It features extensive Ottoman commentary, reflecting the historical interest in Al-Mutanabbi's philosophy and Islamic thought. This manuscript is considered one of the most complete versions of the *Diwan* and is noted for its miniature illustrations that depict scenes inspired by Al-Mutanabbi's verses. Scholars studying Ottoman interpretations of Arabic poetry often refer to this manuscript for insights into cross-cultural literary influences (Bekouche & Kadim Elsaid, 2024).
- **Library of Congress**, Washington, D.C.: The Library of Congress houses a **19th-century manuscript** of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* (catalog number **LC Ar. 704**). Although newer and containing only **90 folios**, this manuscript is significant for its extensive use of **tashkil** (diacritical marks), which were added to facilitate the reading of the *Diwan* by non-native speakers. This reflects the 19th-century increase in Western interest in Arabic literature and serves as a valuable resource for translation studies.
- **University of Tehran Central Library**, Iran: This library has a rare **16th-century Persian-translated copy** of selected poems from Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan*. Though it contains only **70 folios**, this manuscript is unique for its bilingual format, with Arabic verses followed by Persian translations and commentary. It highlights Al-Mutanabbi's influence beyond the Arab world and is an invaluable resource for scholars studying Arabic-Persian literary connections (Ouyang & SOAS, 115).

These smaller collections offer distinctive insights into Al-Mutanabbi's legacy and demonstrate the global reach of his poetry. Each manuscript, whether large or small, contributes to the rich tapestry of Al-Mutanabbi's reception across different cultures, regions, and eras. Through these collections, libraries worldwide help preserve and expand the understanding of Arabic literature and Al-Mutanabbi's enduring influence on world poetry.

Comparative Analysis of Manuscript Variants

Differences in Textual Content

The study of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* across various manuscripts reveals several textual differences, which may include **variations in verse order, phrasing, and the presence of unique annotations**. These differences likely arose due to the processes of manual transcription, regional variations, and the interpretations added by individual scribes or scholars over time. For instance, in some manuscripts, Al-Mutanabbi's famous opening lines to his panegyric for Sayf al-Dawla appear in different orderings. In the Cairo Codex at Dar al-Kutub, the line "الخيول والليل والبيداء تعرفني" ("The horses, the night, and the desert all know me") appears at the beginning of the panegyric, establishing a bold tone of self-presentation. However, in the British Library's manuscript (BL Or. 1215), this line is positioned slightly later, following an introduction with praise for Sayf al-Dawla, which shifts the focus momentarily from the poet's self-expression to his patron (Schippers, 1995).

Phrasing also varies subtly between manuscripts. In some copies, specific words are altered, reflecting regional dialectal influences or alternative choices by the scribe. For example, the line "إذا غامرت في شرفٍ مروم" ("If you risk yourself for sought-after honor") sometimes appears with the word "طلب" (sought) instead of "مروم" (desired) in manuscripts held in Ottoman and Persian collections, a slight but significant variation that adjusts the nuance of the verse. Such changes may reflect local linguistic preferences or interpretive decisions by scribes who felt that alternative words would better capture the poet's intended meaning (Radwan & Alghamdi, 2022).

Annotations, too, are a source of textual diversity. Many manuscripts contain **commentary notes or marginalia** that provide interpretations of difficult verses or cultural references. For example, the Cairo Codex includes numerous notes on Al-Mutanabbi's philosophical lines, with explanations that reference other Arabic literary and religious texts. Meanwhile, in the Süleymaniye Library's Ottoman-era manuscript, commentary often ties Al-Mutanabbi's work to Islamic teachings, suggesting a regional approach to interpretation. Such annotations offer insight into how different cultures engaged with his poetry, with each collection reflecting local perspectives and interpretive traditions (Abbas, 2021).

Implications for Al-Mutanabbi Scholarship

These textual variations have significant implications for Al-Mutanabbi scholarship, as they highlight the fluid nature of manuscript transmission in Arabic literary history and emphasize the interpretive layers that have shaped our understanding of his work. First, the differences in verse ordering and phrasing suggest that Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* was not a fixed, authoritative text but rather a collection that evolved over time, influenced by regional and individual transcriptions. This insight challenges the notion of a "canonical" version of the *Diwan* and encourages scholars

to view Al-Mutanabbi's work as a dynamic entity, shaped by historical contexts and diverse readerships.

Furthermore, these variations contribute to the understanding of **Arabic poetic and cultural exchange** across regions. The different word choices and interpretations in Ottoman and Persian manuscripts indicate how Al-Mutanabbi's poetry was adapted to resonate with non-Arab audiences, who may have related to his themes of valor, honor, and existential reflection through their own cultural lenses. This phenomenon reveals the universality of Al-Mutanabbi's themes and his work's capacity to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries, offering fertile ground for comparative literary studies that explore Arabic poetry's impact on non-Arabic-speaking regions (Bekouche & Kadim Elsaid, 2024).

The extensive annotations and marginalia found in various manuscripts further enrich Al-Mutanabbi scholarship. By examining these commentaries, scholars gain insight into historical interpretive practices and can trace how Al-Mutanabbi's work was understood across different time periods and intellectual traditions. For example, while Egyptian annotations may focus on grammatical explanations, Ottoman notes might explore philosophical or theological themes, illustrating the range of interpretive approaches applied to his poetry (Ouyang & SOAS, 115). Such insights contribute to the broader study of *sharh* (شرح) literature, or the tradition of explicative commentary in Arabic, offering a lens through which to study the evolution of Arabic literary criticism.

Finally, the presence of these variants in Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* underscores the importance of manuscript studies in Arabic literary scholarship. Since textual differences can affect the meaning and interpretation of his verses, they call for a careful, comparative approach that takes into account the specific context of each manuscript. By studying these variants, scholars can more accurately reconstruct the historical reception of Al-Mutanabbi's work and appreciate the rich, multifaceted ways in which his poetry has been preserved and transmitted. This approach not only deepens the understanding of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* but also contributes to the broader field of Arabic manuscript studies, emphasizing the importance of preserving and analyzing the textual history of classical Arabic literature (Ghafouri & Karim, 2022).

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of manuscript variants in Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* reveals the complex legacy of his poetry and its evolving reception across centuries. These variations illuminate the dynamic nature of Arabic literary transmission and highlight the diverse interpretations his work has inspired, reflecting the continued relevance and adaptability of Al-Mutanabbi's poetic voice.

Future Directions for Research and Preservation

Digital Preservation Initiatives

Digital preservation of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* manuscripts has become a priority for libraries and research institutions worldwide, aiming to make these invaluable texts more accessible to scholars and the public. Institutions such as the **Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF)** and **British Library** have been at the forefront of digitizing their Arabic manuscript collections, including

selected copies of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan*. These digital initiatives offer high-resolution images of each folio, allowing readers to study the manuscripts in detail without risking physical degradation. For example, the British Library has digitized portions of their 17th-century Al-Mutanabbi manuscript (catalog number BL Or. 1215), which are now available on their online platform, allowing for closer examination of the text and marginalia (Schippers, 1995).

Additionally, collaborative projects like the **Qatar Digital Library (QDL)** and **Al-Maktaba Al-Shamela** aim to digitize Arabic texts systematically. These projects work with libraries worldwide to share digitized manuscripts of classical Arabic literature, including Al-Mutanabbi's works. These digital collections enable scholars across continents to access primary resources, promoting research and comparative analysis. Some institutions have also adopted advanced digital tools like **IIIF (International Image Interoperability Framework)** to provide a standardized viewing experience for manuscripts, making it easier to navigate and zoom into specific sections. As part of ongoing preservation efforts, these initiatives are crucial for protecting the physical manuscripts while democratizing access to Al-Mutanabbi's poetry (Bekouche & Kadim Elsaid, 2024).

Despite these efforts, not all collections have been digitized, especially in libraries with limited resources or restricted access policies. Expanding digital preservation to encompass more global collections, such as the holdings in the **Süleymaniye Library** in Istanbul or the **National Library of Egypt**, would further enhance accessibility. Increased digitization also creates opportunities for scholars to contribute to the development of digital tools that support Arabic paleographic analysis, such as machine learning algorithms trained to recognize and interpret classical Arabic script styles (Abbas, 2021).

Suggested Areas for Further Study

As Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* manuscripts continue to be studied and preserved, several areas present promising avenues for further research that could enrich our understanding of his work and its historical context:

1. **Comparative Study of Annotations and Commentaries:** Given the wide range of marginalia found in different manuscripts of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan*, a comparative study of these annotations would provide insights into the reception of his poetry across regions and time periods. Scholars could explore how various cultures interpreted and adapted his verses by analyzing commentary from Ottoman, Persian, and European manuscript collections. This approach could reveal regional differences in how Al-Mutanabbi's themes of bravery, honor, and fate were understood and interpreted (Radwan & Alghamdi, 2022). Such a study could also offer a deeper understanding of the Arab *sharh* (explanation) tradition and its role in shaping literary criticism in the Arabic-speaking world.
2. **In-Depth Paleographic Analysis:** Conducting a detailed paleographic study of Al-Mutanabbi's manuscripts would enhance our knowledge of Arabic script styles and their historical evolution. By examining specific elements of calligraphy, such as letter shapes, spacing, and diacritical marks, researchers can trace the development of Arabic script styles, such as *naskh* and *thuluth*, over the centuries. This analysis would not only shed

light on regional variations in script but also help in accurately dating manuscripts and attributing them to specific scribes or regions. Advances in digital paleography, which use AI and machine learning to analyze script features, could support this research, offering new tools to catalog and interpret Al-Mutanabbi's manuscripts accurately (Ouyang & SOAS, 115).

3. **Exploration of Manuscript Circulation and Reception History:** Another area for future study involves tracing the historical circulation of Al-Mutanabbi's manuscripts and examining how his *Diwan* spread across the Arab world and beyond. Researchers could investigate the pathways through which his work reached Ottoman Turkey, Safavid Persia, and even Renaissance Europe, analyzing trade routes, intellectual exchanges, and the influence of Islamic scholarship. Understanding the circulation history of these manuscripts could provide insights into Al-Mutanabbi's impact on diverse cultural landscapes and reveal how his work contributed to cross-cultural dialogue and literary exchange. Studying manuscript variants found in European libraries, like the British Library or BNF, could highlight how Western scholars first engaged with Arabic poetry (Musa, 2021).
4. **Comparative Translation Studies:** Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* has been translated into various languages over the centuries, with each translation adding a new layer of interpretation. A comparative study of different translations could reveal how cultural and linguistic nuances were adapted or transformed across languages. For instance, exploring how Ottoman-era translations compare to more recent English or French renditions would allow scholars to examine the challenges and creative decisions involved in translating Al-Mutanabbi's dense poetic language. This research could contribute to translation studies by analyzing how translators balance fidelity to the original text with accessibility for a broader audience (Elgebily, 2017).
5. **Interdisciplinary Approaches to Manuscript Analysis:** Finally, interdisciplinary approaches that combine literary analysis with history, sociology, and material culture could provide a more holistic view of Al-Mutanabbi's manuscripts. By analyzing the material aspects of the manuscripts—such as binding styles, ink composition, and paper sources—scholars can gain insights into the socio-economic context of their production. For example, comparing manuscripts from wealthier courts with those from smaller scholarly circles may reveal differences in resources and cultural priorities. Collaborations with historians, chemists, and material culture specialists could lead to innovative methodologies for studying Arabic manuscripts, enriching the broader field of Arabic literary history (Ghafouri & Karim, 2022).

In conclusion, while digital preservation initiatives have expanded access to Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* manuscripts, further research in areas such as comparative annotation studies, paleographic analysis, and translation studies promises to deepen our understanding of his legacy. These future directions offer exciting opportunities to explore Al-Mutanabbi's work through diverse lenses, preserving and celebrating his enduring influence on Arabic and global literature.

Conclusion

The study of Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* manuscripts provides valuable insights into the legacy of one of the most celebrated figures in Arabic literature. Through an examination of the global holdings, cataloging practices, and preservation efforts, it is clear that Al-Mutanabbi's work has been meticulously preserved and continues to inspire scholarship worldwide. The unique variations found across different manuscripts, from textual differences to diverse annotations, reflect the dynamic journey of his poetry through regions and time periods, highlighting how each culture that engaged with his work left its own interpretive mark. These textual variations and interpretive commentaries enrich our understanding of Al-Mutanabbi's themes of bravery, identity, and existential contemplation, illustrating the adaptability and universality of his poetry.

The ongoing digital preservation initiatives undertaken by major libraries have opened new pathways for accessing and studying these manuscripts, democratizing the scholarly engagement with Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* and ensuring that his work continues to reach a global audience. Furthermore, the future research directions identified—such as comparative annotation studies, paleographic analysis, and exploration of manuscript circulation—offer exciting possibilities for deepening our understanding of Al-Mutanabbi's impact on literary history and cross-cultural exchange.

In sum, Al-Mutanabbi's *Diwan* remains a cornerstone of Arabic literature, serving not only as a testament to his poetic genius but also as a symbol of the enduring power of literature to transcend borders. The preservation and study of these manuscripts ensure that Al-Mutanabbi's voice, themes, and insights will continue to resonate, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and scholarly discovery for generations to come.

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