Due to the economic and cultural impact of Muslim traders and travellers on the countries they visited, Islam gradually spread from the Near and Middle East to regions where it was not the dominant faith. With the advance of Islam into these new areas – South East Asia, China and its border with Central Asia – institutions such as mosques, schools and religious academies (madrasas) were needed to meet the requirements of the new Muslim communities. Because the Qur'an and its teachings are central to the Muslim way of life, religious scholars and teachers consequently left Arabia and the Indian subcontinent to teach in these new areas, while locally trained teachers were sent to study at major institutions in Mecca and Medina and other centres of the Arab world, such as the al-Azhar in Cairo, the world's oldest university. At the same time, the growing need to provide the Muslim communities with copies of the Qur'an for prayer and study made it necessary to train calligraphers drawn from their own communities. This resulted in the assimilation of local traditions in manuscripts produced in areas not normally associated with the art of Islamic calligraphy and illumination. While the illumination and decoration have the same function in all Qur'ans, the influence of local style and culture is manifest, without infringing Islamic practice in sacred art.
Qur'ans from China

In the eighth century Muslim merchants were already trading in China. A community is known to have been established in Xi'an, where a mosque was built in 742. However, the impact of Islam in China and Central Asia was not strongly felt until the period of Mongol rule in the thirteenth century. The network of trade routes from Europe via Samarkand in Central Asia to China was a major factor in this development; this network, known as the Silk Road, became the conduit for the spread of religious and cultural influences as well as for goods and merchandise. In China, as in other parts of the Muslim world, Qur'ans manuscript production followed traditional Islamic methods and practice, with the bound volume (codex) as the preferred format; these Chinese Qur'ans were generally produced in thirty-volume sets. The script, a variation of munaqa, is penned in a way which suggests that the pen strokes were influenced by Chinese calligraphy, and is often referred to as sini ('Chinese') Arabic. A central panel is a prominent feature of Chinese Qur'ans on their decorated pages, which usually contain as few as three lines of text, with only a few words on each (figs. 47 and 48).

Another Chinese influence is evident in the decorated pages — particularly in the page designs of the first and last openings of the text — as seen in a seventeenth-century Qur'an, with its use of vibrant colours or gold for typical motifs such as crescents and banners (fig. 49). Many Chinese Qur'ans incorporate intricate circles in the upper and lower panels of their decorative pages; these can be seen here to overlap, producing half circles alternating in gold and blue. A cluster of red dots on a green and blue ground gives emphasis to the central ovals within the panels. The motif for these panels seems to have been dictated by the shumah (sun burst) illumination which dominates the preceding page of this Qur'an (fig. 50). This is in the form of a large medallion, the central feature of which is an intricate design based on overlapping circles to give the impression of petals. The cluster at the centre of the medallion is replicated by smaller versions in each of the outer circles, while the outer ring of the medallion itself is in gold, which again is surrounded by two outer rings in black. As with other shumah medallions, the whole effect of this Chinese shumah is one of illuminated brilliance. This medallion carries no inscription; however, when Arabic script is used in other Chinese Qur'ans to inscribe text within an ornament, the script often suggests Chinese decoration and imagery. This can be readily appreciated in the calligraphic style of a Qur'anic inscription
The inscription on this page is in naskh script, part of a set originally in thirty volumes. In Q. 96:1, it is: 

\maketitle

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87 \textit{Quran Manuscripts}
59. A chahma medallion from a 17th-century Chinese Qur'an. Note the intricate design of overlapping circles, creating the impression of petals.

60. Or.15796, f. 17 (detail, enlarged).

57. A chahma medallion from an 18th-century Chinese Qur'an, part ten of a set originally in thirty volumes. The Qur'anic inscription states: 'Seek refuge in Allah from the accursed Satan'.

60. Or.15796, f. 17 (detail, enlarged).

52. RIGHT: A text page from a 17th-century Chinese Qur'an. The decorative leaf functions as a marker, indicating the halfway point in part six of a set originally in thirty volumes.

60. Or.15796, f. 193v.
in another shamsh medallion, where the lettering of the inscription ('I seek refuge in Allah from the accursed Satan') is reminiscent of Chinese dragons and snakes (fig. 52).

The adaptation of symbols common to Chinese art and culture is felt even more strongly in the final opening of a seventeenth-century Qur'an, where a lantern motif has become the visual vehicle for text in its decorated pages (fig. 52); the diamond at the centre of the lantern carries text which – as in the incipit pages and final openings of most Chinese Qur'ans – accommodates no more than three lines. Here the structure of the lantern is outlined in gold, the whole of which is set within a red double-lined rectangle. The impression of a Chinese lantern is further reinforced by pendulous tassels attached to the hooks on the outer side of the structures. Even textual markers can have a distinctive Chinese flavour as exemplified by the use of local flora in decorative designs (fig. 52).

Qur'ans from the Malay world

Islam was probably introduced to Indonesia and the Malay world by merchants from South India; it became firmly established there when the rulers of Pajal

in North Sumatra converted in the thirteenth century, the religion of Islam spreading soon to other parts of the archipelago, the Malay Peninsula and Java included.

Qur'an manuscripts in the Malay world were written on paper. The paper used for Qur'ans in Java was of a particular kind called duuang paper, made locally from the beaten bark of the mulberry tree. Typical of Javanese Qur'ans, the text is written in black ink with chapter headings in red (fig. 54). On the text pages of Javanese Qur'ans, the last few words (in black) of the preceding chapter are sometimes inserted in the heading panel of the next chapter. A feature of this page design is the placing of text within frameworks of finely ruled lines. By contrast, the decorated first opening of text is constructed within a starkly simple and abstract design, with each ornamental frame – dramatically outlined in black and red ink – fully symmetrical on a central axis (fig. 55). The text area on each page is enclosed within a lozenge with a v-shaped indentation at top and bottom; nonetheless, the simplicity of the design, with its restrained use of colour, is maintained and remains uncluttered, despite the ornamental tendrils and finials, and the large and small semi-circles which protrude into the margin.

54 A text page from a Javanese Qur'an written on local duuang paper, early 17th century.
The inscription of a 19th-century Qur'an from the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula. (K. Yiğit, 27, ff. 30-4.)
Unlike those from Java, Malay Qur’ans from the late sixteenth century onwards were often produced on paper that had been manufactured in Europe. European paper was used here, as in other parts of the Muslim world, possibly because it was a trading commodity in the exchange of goods. In contrast to the paper made in the Middle East, which carried no markings, European paper was watermarked. The letters ‘AG’ are often found as watermarks in the paper of Malay Qur’ans. These are the initials of Andrea Galvani, the nineteenth-century Italian papermaker who worked in Pordenone, a centre of papermaking near Venice. A distinctive characteristic of Malay Qur’ans is seen in their use of vibrant colour as an integral part of the design. Particularly illustrative is a nineteenth-century Qur’an from the East Coast of the Malay Peninsula with its broad range of colours, the most prominent of these being red, yellow, green and blue, with white for emphasis (fig. 56). In this first opening of the volume—containing chapter one and the beginning of chapter two—the text is excised in central panels. Typical of Qur’ans from this region, their rectangular frames are elaborately ornamented on three sides only, here with wave-like arches protruding into the margins. Again, as in China, local flora and vegetation appear to have been the inspiration for the stylized background of petals and leaves within the overall design. As for the text itself, the Arabic script has not been influenced by local calligraphy, as in the case of Chinese Qur’ans. The script is traditional naskhi in black, with yellow roundels to mark the end of each verse.

Sub-Saharan Qur’ans
Another distinct region of Islam, significant for the production of Qur’an manuscripts, is the sub-Saharan and West Africa. In these areas Qur’ans were made to be portable, as they were generally carried by nomadic tribesmen. Hence, the leaves were generally unbound, not sewn together, but loose between boards, and thus more easily stored in a pouch or saddle bag (fig. 57). Like Malay Qur’ans, Qur’ans from sub-Saharan Africa were also produced on paper manufactured in Italy for export to the Muslim world. The text of these Qur’ans is written in maghribi script.

Possibly more representative of sub-Saharan Qur’ans is the manuscript written by a Hausa scribe from Nigeria (fig. 58). As in some maghribi Qur’ans from North Africa, the script is dense and compact leaving wide margins. Invariably the text is in black ink, with chapter headings, vowel signs and other spelling symbols in red, and verse endings indicated by yellow circles. Text within ornaments is also inscribed in red. Here in the left-hand margin, the wording of the medallion (sa‘dat Allah) indicates when to prostrate during the recitation of the Qur’an.

In keeping with the practice of sub-Saharan scribes, the text of West African Qur’ans is also in black, again with chapter headings, vowel signs and spelling symbols in red (fig. 59). However, local colour-preference is strongly felt in the wide use of orange-red and yellow in round and semi-circular ornaments. The end of verses, too, is marked by yellow trefoils outlined in red, while yellow is also the colour for the letter ha’. Here outlined in black, indicating the end of a fifth verse. Orange-red and yellow are also the dominant colours of the illuminated lattice panel which separates the chapters from each other. Yellow was possibly used because it is the nearest colour to gold and certainly less costly to obtain.