Qur'an bifolium in Eastern Kufic script

North Africa or Eastern Mediterranean region
Late 10th century
Sura 99 (Ziyat), vv. 2-8; Sura 100 (Al-'Adheem), vv. 1-6; Sura 101 (Al-Asghar), vv. 2-3; Sura 104 (Al-Humaid), vv. 1-9; sura heading only of Sura 103 (Al-Adha).

Bifolium from an Arabic manuscript written in Eastern Kufic script on parchment with seven lines per page. There is only partial use of letter-pointing. Vocalization is applied using the system of Khalil b. Ahmad al-Farabidi in red. There are no single verse divisions. Fifth verse divisions are marked with a stylized Kufic letter ha. Tenth verse divisions are marked in the margins with illuminated medallions containing the word 'ashura in gold. Sura headings are written in gold Eastern Kufic script and each has a stylized palmette extending into the margin.

FOLIO: 12.6 x 9.5 cm

This charming bifolium is probably an early example of the use of so-called Eastern Kufic script in the Mediterranean region around the late tenth century. We know that Eastern Kufic script was used in this region for Qur'ans in the late tenth century from a parchment manuscript copied at Palermo in Sicily in 928-83 CE. The calligraphic style of the present example is a fairly standard Eastern Kufic type, but the fact that the material used is parchment is indicative of a western rather than eastern origin. Parchment continued to be used for the writing of Qur'ans in North Africa and the Maghrib later than in the east, witness the aforementioned Palermo codex and the famous Mushaf al-Hadina (Nurse Qur'an) copied on parchment at Qayrawan in 1019-20 (see cat. 15). In contrast, a Qur'an in a related Eastern Kufic script copied at Isfahan in 953 is on paper, as is the famous Raskh Qur'an of Ibn al-Bawwab copied in 1001 at Baghdad. In Morocco and Islamic Iberia parchment continued to be used for Qur'an manuscripts until at least the fourteenth century (see cat. 21).

An unusual aspect of the present script is that it lacks almost all letter-pointing. The vocalization has been fully applied, so it cannot be that the manuscript was unfinished, as letter-pointing generally preceded the application of vocalization and, anyway, letter-pointing is present on twelve instances across the four pages. But the letter-points are certainly not present on all letters that require them. This phenomenon has been noted in relation to Kufic scripts of the late ninth century (see cat. 7 and 8). It is also worth noting the unusually small size of this bifolium. The complete codex may well have been designed as a portable Qur'an for travelling. The closest comparisons in terms of size, calligraphy and illumination can be found in a juz' in the Khalili Collection.

1 Not present here, but visible on another bifolium from the same Qur'an; see Sotheby's, 14 October 1999, lot 1.
2 Nuruosmaniye Library, Istanbul, Ms. 23; Khalili Collection, inv. nos. QUR261, 368. See Déroche 1992, no. 81, pp. 146-51.
3 Déroche terms this script NS.e. See Déroche 1992, pp. 136-37.
4 Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, Istanbul, Ms. 453-56; Khalili Collection, inv. no. RQFQ30. See Déroche 1993, no. 83, pp. 154-55.
5 Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ms. 1431. See Rice 1955.
6 Déroche 1992, no. 80, pp. 144-45. See also Christie's, 4 July 1985, lot 71; Quaritch 1991, no. 6; Sotheby's, 12 October 2000, lot 10.
Illuminated Qur'an leaf in Maghribi script

Spain, probably Granada or Valencia
13th century
Surat 64 (al-'Aqabah), vv. 15-17; Surat 65 (al-'Aziz), vv. 1

Folio from an Arabic manuscript written in five lines of large brown Maghribi script on peach-coloured paper. Vocalization has been rendered in gold, outlined in black, and in green. Single verse divisions marked with gold roundels containing the exact verse count according to the abjad system. Sura heading consists of an illuminated panel containing the title and verse count in gold Kufic letters on a blue ground. An illuminated medallion projecting from the panel into the right margin contains the name of the sura in gold Kufic letters on a red ground. Endowment inscription reading fahus marked with pin pricks in top right margin.

**Folio** 25.8 x 33.6 cm

The Qur'an from which this leaf originates is one of the most celebrated western Islamic manuscripts in existence and was probably produced for a royal or noble patron in either Granada or Valencia. Only a small number of Qur'ans copied on paper survive from the western Islamic lands, where vellum copies in square format were the standard for most of the medieval period. On the rare occasions that paper was used, it was normally coloured, and seems to have been reserved for luxury copies.\(^1\)

The distinctive pinkish paper used for this Qur'an is generally thought to have been produced in Jativa (Arabic Shatila), though it is possible that similar paper was also manufactured elsewhere. Jativa was home to the earliest recorded paper mill in Spain and was frequently praised by medieval writers for the quality of its smooth paper, which was exported all over the Mediterranean.\(^2\) It was from paper mills in Islamic Spain that papermaking was introduced to the Latin West. Though the paper for this Qur'an may have been made in Jativa before James I of Aragon's conquest of the town in 1248, it could have been imported to the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada from mills in Christian hands. Islamic paper was probably being imported to Christian Spain as early as the twelfth century, and with the Christian conquest of al-Andalus already existing paper-mills were maintained as well as new ones established.\(^3\)

In addition to their coloured paper, leaves from this Qur'an are distinguished by the monumental, evenly spaced Maghribi script in brown ink and the richly detailed illumination. The illuminated sura heading on this folio is made particularly striking by the contrasting use of blue for the central compartment of the sura heading and red for the projecting medallion. The detail on the illumination is remarkably well preserved: the black vegetal scroll around the border of the illuminated sura heading, the white of the abjad letters in the verse markers and the ring of pointed black circles surrounding them stand out boldly against the gold ground, which has been pricked to catch the light.\(^4\)

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1 A partially complete volume from the same manuscript in the Bibliothèque Ben Youssouf, Marrakesh, inv. no. 431, is illustrated in New York 1992, no. 81, p. 31. For a bifolium in the David Collection, Copenhagen, see Folsach 2001, no. 5, p. 57. For a leaf exhibited in the 1985 Treasure of Islam exhibition in the Musée d'art et d'histoire in Geneva, see Geneva 1985, cat. 7, p. 39.
2 See, for example, a possibly Tunisian Qur'an copied in silver ink on chocolate paper in the Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, or. arabe 392, illustrated in Paris 2001, cat. 25, p. 49.
4 Ibid., pp. 206-09.
عالم الغيب والشهيد
العذر المحكم
بحمد الله الرحمن الرحيم
فأمد الله نورا أكملهم
ILLUMINATED QUR'AN LEAF IN MAGHRIBI SCRIPT

North Africa or Spain
About 1250–1350
Sura 7 (Al-A’ma), vv. 203-05; Sura 8 (Al-Anfar), v. 1

Folio from an Arabic manuscript on vellum, seven lines of brown Maghribi script to the page. Vocalization in red, green and yellow. Individual verses marked with gold trefoil device, fifth verses marked with a gold ha. Sura heading consists of title and verse count in small gold ornamental Kufic on a blue ground within polygonal cartouches set in a panel of strapwork outlined in gold and gold vegetal scroll, with a gold palmette extending into the margin.

Folio 19.7 x 19.7 cm

Vellum Qur’ans of square format were the standard in North Africa and Spain from the middle of the twelfth century to the end of the medieval period. The standardization of Qur’an production in this period may well have been related to the preoccipation of the Berber Almohad dynasty (1145-1269) with regularizing worship and proclaiming the unity of God.

Qur’ans copied in this period continued to vary in size and the number of lines to the page, however. The thin, large Maghribi script and seven-line format of this Qur’an leaf can be compared with a bifolium of similar dimensions in the Khalili Collection, and two volumes from a monumental Qur’an in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, Istanbul.

Unusually for Qur’ans of this format, the sura heading on the present leaf consists of the title in small gold ornamental Kufic contained in an elaborately illuminated panel of strapwork and geometric cartouches. The pattern of alternating stars and geometric cartouches found in the sura heading can also be seen in fourteenth-century woodcarving and stonework. More typical of manuscripts of this format were headings of large gold ornamental Kufic with no form of surround, such as those found on cat. 19 and both the Khalili and Istanbul manuscripts.

1 Khalili Collection, inv. no. QUR591; see James 1992b, no. 55, pp. 218-19.
3 See, for example, a wooden panel in the Museo de la Alhambra, Granada, inv. no. R.E. 4207, and a marble tombstone also in the Museo de la Alhambra, R.E. 238. Both are illustrated in Granada 1995, cat. 155; 168, pp. 396-474.
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

يسألون عن إلهام
قال لا إله إلا الله والرسول
فإنزوا الله وأصلحوا بكم وأصبعوا الله
Qur'an leaf in gold Maghribi script

Marinid Morocco or Nasrid Kingdom of Granada

About 1300

Sura 10 (Yanus), vv. 59-63

Folio from an Arabic manuscript written on parchment in gold Maghribi script with nine lines per page. The wasli and ashar are marked in blue, hamzar al-wasi is marked with a green dot and hamzar al-qu' with a yellow dot. Each verse division is marked with an illuminated roundel within the text area containing the word ayy reserved in Kufic script on a blue ground. From other published folios it is known that fifth verse divisions were marked with a winged roundel containing the word Allah in gold on a blue ground; seventh verse divisions were marked in the margin with an illuminated roundel containing the word 'ashar in reserve on a blue ground; and that sura headings were written in bold ornamental Kufic script in blue outlined in gold, with an illuminated medallion of gold, red and blue interlace extending into the margin.

Folio 19 3/4 x 17 cm

This impressive folio comes from a manuscript of the Qur'an written throughout in gold Maghribi script, one of only two Qur'ans in Maghribi script in which the entire text is written in original gold. The other is a manuscript in the John Rylands Library, Manchester University. The script of the present folio is of a large, looping type, with letterpointing also in gold, and the manuscript must have originally been bound in several volumes. This would perhaps indicate an original function in a mosque or royal library. It has been suggested that this Qur'an was made for a king of Granada or Morocco, which is certainly a plausible origin for what must have been a gloriously grand manuscript when complete.

Other sections and leaves from the same manuscript are in the following collections: (sections) Topkapi Saray Library, Istanbul, EH 219; Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, MS 1424; Eton College Library, Windsor; Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, S.L. 217; the Keir Collection, London; (single folios) Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Ms. 37, 21; Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan Collection, Geneva; National Library, Cairo; Tareq Rajab Museum, Kuwait; QUR.0127; TSR; Khalili Collection, London, QUR 520.11

1 Sotheby's, 29 April 1998, lot 15; Tareq Rajab Museum, Kuwait, inv. no. QUR.0127, TSR.
3 Déroche 1985, no. 304, pl. III.
4 Ms. 18 (Lings 1976, no. 96), although other Maghribi Qur'ans have certain significant pages of text written in gold; see Sotheby's, 12 October 2000, lot 39.
5 For a discussion of the different types of Maghribi script see cat. 21.
7 Lings 2005, nos. 161-63.
8 Archer 1967, no. 119, pl. 43; Lings 1976, no. 95, pp. 205-06; James 1980, no. 91.
9 Paris 1987, no. 11, pp. 36-37; Déroche 1985, no. 304, pl. III.
10 Robinson 1976, no. VII.7, p. 285, pl. 140
12 Welch and Welch 1982, no. 2, pp. 22-23.
13 Sotheby's, 29 April 1998, lot 15.
14 James 1992a, no. 53.
Bifolium from a Qur’an in Maghribi script

North Africa or Spain

About 1350-1370
Sura 56 (Al-Navv') vv. 61-66, 95-96; Sura 57 (Al-Hadid) vv. 1-2

Bifolium from an Arabic manuscript written in five lines of large brown Maghribi script on vellum. Vocalization has been rendered in blue, green and red. Single verse divisions marked with gold trefoil devices pointed in blue and red. Tenth verses marked in margin with gold teardrop containing roundel with the word 'asbhar in white Kufic script on a blue ground. Sura heading of Sura 57 (Al-Hadid) is marked with star titles and number of verses in Sura in dense gold Kufic script highlighted in red with illuminated palmette extending into the margin.

Folio 41.6 x 22 cm

Multi-volume Qur’ans in nearly square format in few lines of oversize brown Maghribi script were popular in Spain and North Africa in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, though it is possible that such copies were being produced as early as the second half of the twelfth century. Both this large ‘Maghribi’ script and its smaller counterpart, often referred to as ‘Andalusi’, appear to have taken shape in the second half of the eleventh century, perhaps in connection with the rise of the Berber Almoravid dynasty which founded Marrakesh in 1062 and assumed control of Spain in 1090. The geographical distinction implied by these names is probably misleading, however, as the confluence of artistic traditions in Spain and North Africa reflected the political and cultural integration of the whole area.
Most Qur'an leaves and manuscripts of comparable dimensions and script have been dated to c. 1250-1350. Of the same size and format as the present bifolium is a thirty-volume Qur'an apparently written by the Marinid Sultan Abu'l-Hasan 'Abdallah b. 'Ali and endowed to the al-Aqsa Mosque in 1344. Sultan Abu'l-Hasan's Qur'an also shares many decorative elements with this bifolium, including the red highlighting around the sura heading in compact Kufic script and the trefoil verse markers pointed in red and blue. Though the script in the Sultan Abu'l-Hasan manuscript is a much darker brown, the thick hand is similar and shares the exaggeratedly extended tooth of the initial ba of the basmallah.

1 See discussion in Stanley 1995, pp. 22-23.
2 Ibid., pp. 21-22.
3 For similar Qur'ans, see James 1992a, no. 55, pp. 218-19; Stanley 1995, no. 18, pp. 111-12.
4 Al-Haram al-Sharif Islamic Museum: Maghribi Rab'ah, inv. no. 3; see Khader 2001, pp. 66-83.

W.K.
Large Qur'an manuscript in Maghribi script on parchment:

Probably Marinid dynasty, Morocco, Marrakesh or Fez
Dated end of Rabi’ al-Awwal 718 AH / late May 1318 CE

Arabic manuscript on parchment with 165 folios written in dark brown Maghribi script with twenty-one lines per page, and two blank folios. Juz’ al-wasit is indicated by green dots and Juz’ al-qur’ by yellow dots that have faded to a thin brown colour. The single verse divisions are marked with gold trefoil devices made up of three small overlapping circles. The fifth verse divisions are marked in the text with small gold winged vegetal motifs and in the adjacent margins with larger devices of similar design containing the word ‘khara’ in small gold letters. The tenth verse divisions are marked in the text with small gold rosettes and in the adjacent margin with gold roundels containing the word ‘asrar’ in small gold letters. ‘Hab and haj’ divisions are marked in the margins with large illuminated medallions of geometric or radial design containing the relevant word in red letters. The suda loci are marked in the margins with large elaborate devices of a variety of designs (see below). Sura headings are written in gold ornamental Kufic script with red edging and with stylized palmettes of gold vegetal interlace extending into the margins. The suras headings for Sura 1 (Al-Fatiha) and Sura 2 (Al-Baqara) are more elaborate, with large rectangular illuminated panels containing the sura title in tall ornamental Kufic script in blue or gold and stylized palmettes of vegetal interlace extending into the margins. There are two fully illuminated double pages. The opening double page has large square panels with central lobed roundels containing geometric interlace surrounded by gold inner border bands and four spirals of vegetal interlace in gold. A palmette medallion of similar interlace extends into the margin from each outer border. The closing double page has large square panels of geometric interlace punctuated by panels and roundels of white interlace on blue ground. Again there are two palmette medallions extending into the margins. The colophon on the final folio of text (f. 162r) is written in large and bold white cursive script of a diatype on a ground of gold scrolling interlace on a blue background. The binding is contemporary with the manuscript and appears to be the original binding. It is of brown leather with central medallions and border bands of blind-stamped reticulated knot-work punctuated with small gold-stamped florets.

FOLIO 20.6 x 28 cm

This magnificent copy of the Qur’an is a superb example of manuscript production from the western Islamic lands and a rare survival, with a colophon informing us of the patron and date of production. It is notable for its large size, its exquisite and abundant illumination, its remarkably good state of preservation and its original leather binding.

The individual who commissioned this Qur’an is described in the colophon (see overleaf, page 74) in the fullest and most respectful terms. The wording is as follows:


"The blessed glorious manuscript was completed for the noble, the most exalted, the most steadfast, the brightest, the highest seeker, Abu Talib, son of the most exalted, the brightest, the highest, the luminary of knowledge, the pinnacle of power and understanding, Shaykh Abu Faris ‘Abd al-‘Aziz son of Sa‘id son of Isma‘il son of ‘Abd al-‘Aziz son of Sa‘id al-Juhani and that was in the last tenth of the month of Rabi’, the first of the year seven hundred and eighteen, and God’s blessing on our Lord Muḥammad."

The wording and information in the colophon tell us a good deal about the patron. His family name was al-Juhani. This was the name of an Arab tribe that had been prominent in Iraq and Syria during Umayyad times; some of them no doubt emigrated west with the remnant Umayyad dynasty in 750 CE. The colophon lists six generations of the family, which, with an average of around twenty-five years per generation, takes us back to the last quarter of the twelfth century. We cannot identify for certain who our patron was, but there was a qadi of Marrakesh called Abu Faris ‘Abd al-‘Aziz in the late thirteenth century who might well have been the father of our patron. This would account for the very laudatory terms used to describe our patron and his father. Furthermore, the terms indicate a respect and eminence more in the religious or legal line than in the political, military or dynastic context, and this, too, would fit with a family of religious shaikhs and qadis. If our patron was the son of the Qadi of Marrakesh, then he very probably would
have followed him into the world of religious or legal orders, whether he remained in Marrakesh or moved to Fez or any other of the major Marinid cities, where this codex was probably copied and illuminated. However, without an absolutely positive identification of the patron we cannot discount the possibility that he was based at the Nasrid court of Granada and that the codex was produced there, even though stylistic evidence also points more towards Marinid Morocco than Nasrid Granada (see below).

The main script of this manuscript is of medium size in relation to the scale of the manuscript, and the nib of the stylus must have been rather pointed one as the script has a relatively thin and wiry appearance. There appear to have been three principal types of 'Maghribi' script used on Qur'ans in the Muslim west. The classic 'Maghribi' script is a large-scale, emphatically looped script applied with a wide nib and often used with only five or seven lines per page; it can be seen for instance in cat. 17 and 18. Secondly there is the very small, rather neat script applied with a thin, pointed nib that is often known as 'Andalusi' script and is associated with several small format Qur'an manuscripts made at Valencia in the late twelfth century. Thirdly there is a medium-scale script applied with a relatively thin nib that is somewhere between the first two in style, spacing and proportion. The script of the present Qur'an is a good example of this third type, which was also used in another Qur'an of remarkably similar size, illumination and orthography.  

In the past scripts from the Muslim west have been given names based on their possible geographical origins — 'Andalusi' for the very small, neat script and 'Maghribi' (meaning north-west Africa as opposed to the Iberian peninsula) for the large, looping script — but there are no firm grounds for this convention, save perhaps that the majority of manuscripts which have colophons locating their production in Islamic Iberia are in the small neat script, particularly the group made in the scriptorium at Valencia between 1156 and 1200. However, these codices are all of a small, single-volume format that would anyway have required the use of a small neat script with tightly spaced lines in order to fit the whole text of the Qur'an into a single volume. Certainly both scripts were used in both regions during the whole period of the eleventh to fourteenth centuries. Furthermore, medieval non-Qur'anic religious manuscripts such as Malik b. Anas's Kitab al-Muwatta and secular texts from the Muslim west were very often copied in a small, neat so-called 'Andalusi'-style script wherever they were produced, and there are numerous extant examples from both Morocco and Iberia, and further east as far as Bougie (Bijaya) in Algeria. Indeed the presence all over the Muslim west of both styles of script is not surprising, since both Morocco and southern Iberia were ruled by the same dynasties during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries and scribes certainly moved around the different regions taking styles and influences with them. Furthermore, with the gradual re-conquest of Iberia by the Christian kingdoms, many Islamic scribes emigrated to North Africa. Again, the two main styles of script cannot be classified by period or dynasty, since both scripts were used from the eleventh century onwards, and continued to be used through to the modern era in Morocco and Algeria.

It seems likely that the type and scale of the different 'Maghribi' scripts had more to do with function than with region, dynasty or period. The majority of manuscripts in small 'Andalusi' scripts are of a small square format, typically measuring between 15 and 20 cm in height and breadth. They are all single-volume codices. It seems likely that they would have been designed for personal use, perhaps as portable Qur'ans for travelling. The larger looped scripts are predominantly written in five or seven lines per page, and the manuscripts in which they are found are therefore usually multi-volume codices, even though the dimensions of each folio are often not very much larger than the so-called Andalusi format. But their multi-volume format would have made them bulky and difficult to transport, and they are more likely to have been produced for mosques, madrasas and palace libraries — institutions where they could stay permanently and would not need to be moved far or often, and perhaps where the need to read the text aloud from a clear and well-spaced text was of greater importance.

The different functions of these Qur'ans may also account for the survival rates of the manuscripts themselves. When the Christians re-conquered southern Iberia between the twelfth and fifteenth century they are known to have destroyed Islamic manuscripts, and particularly Qur'ans, in a shockingly vandalistic way. Legend has it that when Granada finally fell in 1492 the Christian commander ordered that all copies of the Qur'an be burnt. Because the Christians soldiers could not read the language, they assumed that every manuscript in Arabic was a Qur'an, and apparently countless Islamic manuscripts were burnt in the town square in one night. Add to this the bibliolcasms that often accompanied the change of Muslim dynasties, especially if the new dynasty did not quite agree with the theological approach of the previous one, and the local