QUR'ANS AND BINDINGS
FROM THE CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY
A Facsimile Exhibition

WORLD OF ISLAM FESTIVAL TRUST

DAVID JAMES
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DAVID JAMES
Islamic Curator
Chester Beatty Library and Gallery of Oriental Art

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Short vowels are transcribed as follows: fathe - a, damma - a, kura - a. Long vowels are written ā, ī. The two diphthongs appear as āi and āj. Double j at the end of a word is written as y and of marba' as r, i.e. mahrīya. The definite article is always written as al, even in compound names, i.e. 'Abdālāh, 'Abdāl-Ḥamīd.

Foreword

The purpose of this exhibition is to provide an opportunity to appreciate the variety and styles of calligraphy and design from the principal centres of Qur'anic art.

The impetus for creating such an exhibition stems from the display of Qur'āns presented in the British Library in London during the World of Islam Festival of 1976. Never before had so comprehensive a collection of original Islamic manuscripts been gathered together in one place. Although that exhibition was seen by many thousands, it was however inaccessible to the far greater numbers who would have wished but were not able to visit London at the time of the Festival.

Therefore the World of Islam Festival Trust decided that a comparable, if somewhat smaller, exhibition should be assembled in a form which would enable it to be presented in any country where it would find an interested audience. To this end the Trust has employed the medium of colour photography to show the manuscripts in facsimile in their original sizes, so that the skills of the calligraphers and artists, and the beauty of their work, should be reproduced with the high degree of accuracy permitted by modern techniques.

The Trust and the Library gratefully acknowledge the support given to this project by the Islamic Solidarity Fund.

Alistair Duncan, Director
World of Islam Festival Trust
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Alistair Duncan, Director
World of Islam Festival Trust
Acknowledgements

During the past several years I have had the opportunity to examine most of the great collections of Qur'ans in the Middle East as well as those relatively substantial collections existing in Western Europe. In the course of my investigations I have come to realise that the Chester Beatty collection of Qur'ans is one of the finest in the world. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to assert that from the points of quality, historical significance and in the broad embrace of its scope, the collection is only rivalled by that of Topkapi. These were also the sentiments of the late Professor Arberry, catalogue of the Chester Beatty material (Koran Illuminated, p.XV).

When Alistair Duncan, Director of the World of Islam Festival Trust, suggested making a substantial portion of the collection permanently available in the form of exact facsimiles, I was happy to undertake the task of selection and the preparation of a catalogue. My aims in selecting the manuscripts have been to present the most beautiful and historically important items from the Chester Beatty collection and to show the full development of Qur'anic illumination and calligraphy down to the beginning of the present century, incorporating an example from every part of the Islamic World.

In compiling the catalogue I have endeavoured to indicate publications in which Chester Beatty manuscripts have appeared and to list the few exhibitions in which the items have been shown after their acquisition by the Library. In several cases other portions of the manuscripts reproduced exist in private and public collections throughout the world. With these I have been content to note their location and refer to the most recent (in most cases) publications and exhibitions in which they have featured.

The catalogue is, in part, based on information collected over a period of several years. In giving opinions and supplying comparative material Dr Martin Lings and Mr Yasin Safadi of the British Library, and Dr Michael Rogers of the British Museum have been particularly helpful. My thanks also go to Dr Nurhan Aynoy of the University of Istanbul, Dr Gabriel Moriah of the Mayer Institute, Jerusalem, and Nabil Sa'di of Sotheby's for help and information.

In examining comparative material in Turkey I was very much aided by Des Füzi Çâğman and Zeyn Tanand of Topkapi Library, the Director of the Süleymaniyê Library, Muzammir Ullker, the Director of the Turkish and Islamic Museum, Atil Durnaç and his staff. In Iran I was given facilities to examine material by the authorities of the Iran-Bastan Museum, the National Library - especially by Seyyed Abdollah Anvar - the University Library, the Library of the Masjhed Shrine, and the Pars Museum, Shiraz. In Cairo, the Director of the National Library, Mahmud Shini, was very helpful in allowing me to examine the Library's Mamlûk material. I would also like to extend my thanks to Dr Norman Daniel, formerly Head of the British Council, Cairo.

My sincere thanks also go to the Ambassador of the Republic of Ireland to Egypt, Mr Brian O'Callagh, and to the Irish Chargé d'Affaires in Tehran, Mr Donal Hurley, for their assistance during my stays there.

This exhibition would not be possible without the uniring efforts of Mr David Davison, of Pieterse-Davison International, Photographers, Dublin, who has produced all of the material, and with whom I have worked in close collaboration. I would also thank Dr Patrick Henchy and the Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library and Gallery of Oriental Art for their support.

Finally I extend my gratitude to Alistair Duncan for his constant encouragement and to the Trustees of the World of Islam Festival Trust and to the Islamic Solidarity Fund, whose generosity has enabled this project to be brought to fruition.

David James
Chester Beatty Library
and Gallery of Oriental Art
Dublin 1980
Introduction

For many years the arts of Qur'anic calligraphy and illumination have received only cursory attention from scholars of Islamic art. The reasons are not hard to find. Islamic art studies originated in the West and until very recently have been entirely dominated by Western scholars. When dealing with the arts of the book it was inevitable that preference would be shown towards the exquisite miniature paintings of Iran, Turkey and Mughal India. The fundamentally pictorial, naturalistic and representational qualities of Western art meant that those same aspects in Islamic art would be the most comprehensible and most 'researchable', as well as being more interesting to the public whose appreciation of Western art had been唤醒ing. There would have been little point in concentrating on those elements within Islamic art that were the most remote from Western understanding and appreciation. Furthermore, Islamic art had been thought of as 'decorative' in a rather patronizing sense and to show that this was not so, and that there was a rich representational tradition within Islamic art, historians emphasised the work of the miniature painter. The result is that, with the exception of architecture, manuscript illustration has become the most intensely studied aspect of Islamic art.

It is no way a denial of the beauty and significance of miniature painting to say that it was produced for and seen by a narrow segment of Islamic society since it was essentially an art created for the court. Qur'anic illumination and calligraphy on the other hand, could, and did, touch the lives of many more people: not that we should judge any merely on the size of its public.

If the art of the Qur'an illuminator and calligrapher has any primacy over that of the miniature painter it is because the acts of copying, illuminating and appreciating the Holy Qur'an were always totally 'legitimate' in Islamic theological and cultural terms. The best Qur'anic calligraphy has total perfection and precision; Qur'anic illumination produced by a great master has a deep and concentrated power. However, it would be impossible to say the same about 'secular' calligraphy written by the Ottomans and Safavid masters, or about the paintings of Timurid Herat. The vehicle of expression may differ, but the crux of the comparison is the same in all cases. It has been circumstances related not to the Islamic World, but to the intellectual climate of the West in the twentieth century, that have spotlighted one aspect of Islamic art and avoided the other.

It is to Chester Beatty's credit, that while collecting Islamic painting on a huge scale, he maintained a strong interest throughout his life in Qur'anic manuscripts. Indeed a persistent rumour has it that it was the beautifully written and illuminated copies of the Qur'an with which he came into contact in Cairo in the 1870s that aroused his enthusiasm for Islamic art in the first place. The result is that today the Chester Beatty Qur'an collection is without rival in Europe and the United States. There are of course larger collections in Cairo, Mesched and Istanbul. Nevertheless, for whatever quality and comprehensiveness, the collection is only rivalled by that of the former palace in the Topkapi Palace, Istanbul.

Two attempts were made to catalogue the collection. The first, by D.S. Rice, never went beyond rough notes; the second, the published Handlist by Professor Araber. While being quite adequate for much of the collection it is considerably in need of revision, particularly for the Mamluk and Ilkhid sections.

The Patrons

The manuscripts displayed here were almost all commissioned for a specific purpose. Large format Qur'ans in thirty, seven or four parts were made for public use in the mosques or masjids. These were ordered by patrons for new buildings, or those in the course of reconstruction, usually while work was in progress. On completion they were endowed to the building, and its library, to be retained in perpetuity for the benefit of those who, by day or night, read, studied or copied the Holy Qur'an. Often, though not always, the patrons are of unspecified commissioning appointed at the beginning or end of the manuscript, or its separate parts stating for whom the work was being done. Calligraphers, and occasionally illuminators, signed at the end, with or without the date and very rarely – the place of completion. The vast majority of manuscripts make no mention of their origins and this must be established by other means, such as the certificate of commissioning, the styles of illuminators and by comparison with non-Qur'anic manuscripts which have more data. Nevertheless there are enormous gaps in our knowledge, particularly as far as Kufic Qur'ans are concerned. In fact the entire period prior to the four centuries of Iran in the 7th/13th century is only vaguely understood.

On its endowment to the intended location the manuscript was normally given a gold certificate stating the conditions under which it was made a tawaf (endowment); i.e., that it was under the charge of the librarian of the mosque, or master or shaykh of the hhankugh (dervish 'monastery') and was never to be sold, pawned or loaned. The name of the tawaf (endower) and the place to which the endowment was made and the date are given. The tawafyy (deed) would be witnessed by one or more religious dignitaries.

From the reign of long-lived monarchs, such as Al-Nasir Muhammed, the Mamluk sultan, 693/1293-741/1340, or active builders of madrasas and mosques, the Ilkhid Qajari, 703/1304-718/1316, and the Mamluk Al-Ashraf Sha'ban, 746/1346-778/1376, we have large numbers of manuscripts with complete 'pedigrees'. From other eras – the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad, the Umayyad amirs and caliphs of Islamic Spain etc. – nothing survives. This was often depite extensive patronage. The famous vizier, Rashid al- Din, d. 718/1318, established a special Qur'an scriptorium, the Diri Al-Masihf in Tabriz, which did nothing but produce Qur'ans and religious works. For all these reasons it can be said that Al-Nasir's commission by Rashid is known to survive.

Other Qur'ans were commissioned for personal use, or by the patron's children. Sometimes records of manuscripts which were usually single volume works of small format. No. 78 records that it was produced for Rashid's daughter, 1239/1779-1242/1800, by one born in an unmentioned patron. No. 37 states that it was made for a Mamluk prince who was only six at the time. It must have been ordered for the child's home by his father, the book, hand-tipped, by the didactic layout of each page. No. 73, on the other hand, is obviously a Qur'an made for the personal use of the Ottoman Grand Vizier, Muhammed Sokollu Pascha, in 1797/1579 by the leading Turkish calligrapher of the day.

Qur'ans may also have been commissioned as gifts to foreign monarchs, though available evidence points to the fact that manuscripts already existing were taken from the royal library for this purpose.

The Calligraphers

The men who produced these manuscripts were famous calligraphers (khattab) who devoted themselves to their art and spent much of their time copying Qur'ans. Given the long list below, it is not surprising that some were government officials of various kinds.

Individual members of these two groups may have produced only very limited numbers of Qur'ans in the course of their public careers. No. 40 for example, copied by the future Mamluk governor of Damascus, was obviously done as a special present for its recipient, Sultan Qalawun, 667/1270 (1941), by a master who perhaps never wrote another one. It is otherwise difficult to account for the lack of more manuscripts by the same hand as the same must be established by other means, such as the certificate of commissioner. The compilers of the Mongols or the followers of Timur could explain this in Iran and Central Asia, but it cannot apply to Egypt after the fall of the Mamluks, since the country was never again invaded by a despotizing conqueror after that date. Although Qur'ans may have been carried off to Europe, Iran has always been respected and destroyed only by accident. Many Qur'ans survive from 8th/14th century Egypt, yet only three are known to be in his lifetime: Ahmad al-Mutabbibb, scribe of No. 30, copied another two manuscripts now in the National Library, Cairo.

Calligraphers and biographers, executed many Qur'ans in their lifetimes. Yaqout is supposed to have copied two manuscripts every month; his pupil, Abdullah al-Sayyufi, on the other hand is said to have completed only thirty-nine in the course of his life. Unfortunately, without much more research on a proper scientific basis, it is impossible to establish the genuineness of the numerous manuscripts by masters like Yaqout and his pupils, or the Turkish Hamdallah b. al-Shaykh, because their work was reproduced in 'facsimile' by later calligraphers, in many cases no doubt from authentic originals. It is recorded that even the great masters themselves would, on occasion, imitate the work of their famous predecessors, Ibn al-Bawwab could reproduce Ibn Maqai; Yaqout annoyed by the continued admiration of his royal master, Al-Musta'sr, gave him his handwriting so perfectly that even the connoisseur's eye of the caliph was deceived. There is no doubt that many authentic manuscripts were traced by a later master, for example, Ahmad al-Din, an avid collector of Qur'ans, by 718/1318 – the year of his death – had collected 20 Qur'ans by Al-Suhrawardi, which were sometimes recorded as the master's output in Qur'ans. All appear to have been destroyed when the suburb built by Rashid was sacked after the death of his master. Today there are very few genuine Suhrawardi Qur'ans – perhaps not more than two or three.

Initially Qur'ans throughout Islam were written in Kufic. We know the names of several Kufic calligraphers, but because Kufic Qur'ans were usually unsigned we have no example of their work. Kufic is one of the most powerful and monumental scripts used to transmit a religion in any epoch. It reflects all the vigour, simplicity and conviction of the early Faith. It also reflects the same, in the same cultural milieu of Islamic in the first three centuries after the death of the Prophet.

Kufic continued to be used for sura titles and inscriptions until the 9th/13th century, after which it disappeared from manuscripts except those copied in North Africa.

Cursive scripts were in use for the Qur'an from at least the year 391/1001 (No. 18). These were first Nashk also known as 'Turk' which resembles the normal Arabic script of today. Secondly Muhahqqiq (Turk. Muhahbuk) the earliest of the large format scripts, which most easily recognizable. No character is the flattening of the tails of letters which extend below the line. This script which is perfectly suited for Qur'ans was in use from at least the 6th/12th century (No. 25), but achieved its greatest glory in the Mamluks and Ilkhid. It was used by both Timurid and Safavid calligraphers, as well as by the Ottomans, but tends to appear in the hands of Thuluth and Thuluth Nouhi. Thuluth (Turk. 'Sühi') was
rarely used for the Qur'anic text by itself, but in combination with other scripts was frequently employed. Its distinguishable feature is its fuller, more cursive character, especially of the parts of letters extending below the half-way line. In combination it is a rather ‘slow-moving’ script. It came to be used for ‘sura headings and inscriptions along with ‘tajini and ‘rili. All three were purposes throughout the Islamic World except North Africa. ‘tajini and ‘rili (Turk. Teekhi, ‘Rikab) are distinguished from ‘taksi by their appearance and by the joining up of letters which are usually separated from a following letter. They are distinguished from each other by size. ‘Tajini is the larger of the two.

‘Rayhani, or ‘Rayhani (Turk. Rehman) is one of the most beautiful and delicate of all forms of the Arabic script. Its outstanding practitioner was ‘Yaquti and almost all the ‘Yaquti ‘Qur’ans are in this hand. It is at its best in small to medium format (No. 74) and looks like a small version of Muhajjiri, but with the letter ‘al‘ tapered in its medial/formal form and with finely written vowels. It was employed in Iran and Ottoman Turkey, but only rarely by the Mamluks (No. 35). A rare cursive script is ‘Al‘wari, apparently a mixture of ‘Thuluth and Muhajjiri. According to a contemporary Mamluk chronicler, the famous Qur’an written for Baybars al-Jashangi in the British Library (Ms. Add. 22406-15) is stated to be in this script, which is a type also used in the early 14th century Mamluk Qur’ans for ‘sura headings.

These were the main Qur’an scripts of Islam. Others existed, like ‘Nasta‘liq, which was sometimes used for the ‘Qur’an text. ‘Yaquti (No. 66), but their use in transmitting the sacred text was rare. The time taken to copy out Qur’ans varied greatly from one hand to another. The large thirty-part manuscripts took the longest. Subsequently produced between five and six sections (‘sura) a year of his outstanding masterpiece (No. 43), but other masters took less. ‘Yaquti, we are told, wrote two Qur’ans every month, though these would have been of ordinary format. The well-known 15th century Mamluk calligrapher, ‘Abd-al-Rahman b. al-Saqi, completed one large single volume Qur’an in sixty days, according to his own testimony.

The entire process of copying may not have been carried out by the copyist. When a Qur’an was written in gold, every letter had to be outlined in black, and this may have been undertaken by someone else, an apprentice for example, if particularly promising. Vowels were often added by another person, who sometimes recorded this in a note. Finally the manuscript was checked for accuracy and this was sometimes certified on the completed manuscript.

The Illuminators

After the calligrapher had completed his task the manuscript was passed to the illuminator (mustahkham). In many cases it would be possible for the illuminator to begin his work while the calligrapher was still writing since illumination involved only specific areas in the text. If the calligrapher was also the illuminator then he would normally complete his primary task first. However, in the case of the very large manuscripts the calligraphers sometimes stopped half-way through the manuscript and illuminated the first fifteen sections before copying and illuminating the remaining ones. This, at any rate, is the only way we can explain the gap of several years in the middle of a Qur’an copied for Olijayti in Mosul (No. 44). It is scarcely possible that any other of the Ottomans it was much rarer for illuminators to be scribes. Most 12th-18th and 13th-19th century Ottoman manuscripts are signed by illuminators whose names are different to the men who copied out the text. Sometimes manuscripts — even single volume copies — were the work of a team. We only know this when various different styles of illumination are used, or on the few occasions when members of the production team all signed and finished the manuscript. One such team produced the British Library Qur’an for Baybars al-Jashangi. It was led by a master called Sandal and consisted of three, possibly four men, in addition to the calligrapher. Sandal’s work can be traced in Mamluk manuscripts, through his pupil(s) right down to the 730/1330s. We can see the work of this team in various manuscripts despite the absence of signed examples, that causes us to think that the illuminators’ art as anonymous and self-subsisting. Evidence suggests that certain types and compositions were the prerogatives of certain artists and their pupils. Also, after reaching a certain level of development their work rarely changes; their style becomes, in effect, their ‘trade mark’ which is also passed on to pupils.

In early times illumination was confined to a band which divided the sura (Nos. 1 and 10). As it became necessary to provide reference points in the text, markers were provided in the margin to enable the reader to find his way through the sura and locate certain ‘ayat (verses) more readily. Eventually each ‘sura heading and each marginal ornament became a work of art in its own right, though all were purely functional in the last analysis. A ‘sura heading had always to consist of the title, number of ‘ayat and place of revelation, whatever ornamentation was added. Marginal medallions consisted of the words ‘khamasa (five), ‘shabha (ten) and its multiples in a circle, or in the case of ‘khamasa within a pear-shaped emblem derived from the Arabic numeral five. Others indicated quarter and half-way points in a ‘me‘ (section) and points where pronunciation was required (‘adda).”

The most interesting aspect of the illuminator’s art was found on the opening double-frontispiece, or carpet-page, often referred to these days by the Arabic word ‘amman. These serve no functional purpose whatsoever. They began as pages of pure decoration and always retain the character of a virtuoso performance by the illuminator, though this element was taken over by the opening pages of text under the Ottomans and Safavids. More important than their demonstration of the painter’s skill is the undoubted metaphysical character of these pages, which by any standards must be reckoned among the great works of religious art produced by mankind. This metaphysical aspect is enhanced by the inclusion of special Qur’anic ‘ayat, particularly LIV, ‘Al-Waqâa‘ 77-80, “Verily it is a Noble Qur’an, a book well-guarded, Let none touch it but it purified, Revelation from the Lord of the Worlds.” A verse which occurs frequently on the opening pages of text, initial roundels, and on the binding. The great period of the frontispiece was the 8th/14th century, when under the Mamluks and Ilkhânid it achieved heights that were never surpassed. It appears in Mamluk manuscripts of the next century and in Ottoman manuscripts from the same period. Afterwards it virtually disappears from all Qur’ans except those produced in North Africa.

Much of the illuminator’s decorative repertoire, and many of the designs of the early centuries were adapted from the art of the territories that were incorporated into the young Islamic state. Many of these have an antiquity which antedates Christianity, Judaism and the pre-Islamic faiths of Iran, Strabism, or interlace, and the scrollwork arabesque, both fundamental of Islamic pattern, have an antiquity which can be traced back into the remote past. Precursors of the palmette occur in the arts of Coptic Egypt and Sassanid Iran. These were the most enduring elements of Islamic decoration. The arabesque and the palmette continue to play a major part in manuscript illumination until the 10th/16th when it disappeared except for North Africa.

The original contribution of Muslim artists to manuscript illumination was the geometric one. Geometry was unknown in Hellenistic and Roman art, but it was in Islam that its full potential was realised. Although it occurs in Iran down to Ilkhânid times its true home was the southern Mediterranean from Spain across to Syria. In this area it lingered long after it had faded from the artistic repertoire of Iran and Anatolia.

From time to time new features were incorporated from other areas. The lotus, peony and cloud-scroll were introduced from China via Iran to Mamluk Egypt and Ottoman Turkey. All parts of the Islamic world contributed some local motifs, the longest-lasting of which were the carnation and saw-edged leaves introduced in the Ottomans which survived well into the 13th/19th century.

Notes
For consistency the names of the various forms of Arabic script are given as ‘rili, ‘tajini, Muhajjiri, Naskh, ‘Thuluth, Rayhani (see Naskhi, ‘Thuluth, Rayhani). However, ‘Bihâr, ‘Sidân, Aini and Maghribi, being derived from places are given in their jurisdictional forms. Kufic is not called ‘Kufi, because the term Kufic is now universally accepted.

This catalogue is the product of a long research. This catalogue the Chelster Beatty manuscript number is given after each entry and the number under which it may be found in Arberry, The Koran Illuminated: A Handbook of Korans in the Chelster Beatty Library, Dublin 1967. In several cases it has been necessary to re-classify manuscripts, Mamluk’s Ilkhânid and vice versa etc. Consequently these manuscripts do not appear in the sections in which they are located in Arberry.

I have used several modern editions and translations of the Holy Qur’an in preparing the catalogue. The one I have referred to most is the simultaneous text and translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, printed in Lahore in 1934 and which has been reprinted several times.
Early Kufic Qur’ans

Although the dating of Kufic Qur’ans is difficult due to the almost total absence of copies with correctly dated colophons, it is possible to establish the broad outlines of development down to the 4th/10th century.

Tradition asserts that the sacred scripture of Islam was written down on sheets of vellum, usually of horizontal format, in bold, unpointed and unvocalised script. Illumination was non-existent at first, but as it became necessary to provide marginal and textual devices so that the reader could find his way about the Qur’anic text, interest in decorating these arose. Following this, other areas such as the sura titles and finally the opening and closing pages came to be beautifully illuminated in gold and other colours. Although this practice was condemned by some theologians others felt that it was better that gold be put to such a purpose than squandered in mundane pursuits.

As early as the 1st/7th century attempts were made to improve the Arabic script. A system of coloured dots for vowels and other orthographic signs was devised by Abū’l-Aswād al-Du‘alī (d. 69/688). Al-Ḥājij b. Yūnūf (d. 96/714) is said to have invented a method of distinguishing the sounds represented by identical characters, using dots or vertical strokes. Finally Al-Ḫalašī b. Ahmad introduced the system which is in use today. Following his death in 170/786 and the 5th/11th century this system gained general acceptance in Egypt and the East, though not in North Africa. The manuscripts on display here show the development of this system and the development of the Arabic script from simple beginnings. They also show how illumination became transformed from primitive origins, (No. 1), into a thing of great beauty involving the intellects and skills of gifted artists, (No. 4).

Some of the manuscripts in this section raise important questions, which have barely been considered. No. 1 is a very early manuscript yet uses a cursive-type script and a system of vocalisation similar to that said to have been devised by Al-Ḫalašī. Cursive scripts existed from earliest times for secular correspondence alongside the Qur’anic scripts, Kufic, Muqāḥ and Mā’lūd (to which No. 1 appears related), however the first example of a Qur’an in truly cursive script does not occur until several centuries later. This copy seems to be a survival of a type which existed for a time, probably in the Hijāz, and then disappeared in favour of the monumental scripts.

The format of No. 1 is also interesting as is that of No. 10. Although horizontal Kufic Qur’ans became the norm, it is apparent that other vertical-format Qur’ans existed in earlier times. In this context, it is worthy of note that the well-known Qur’an in Mā’lūd script in the British Library, considered to be of 2nd/8th century date, also has a vertical format. Precisely why the horizontal format came to dominate, why this peculiar method was employed, and furthermore, what its origins were, are all matters that have never been properly explained. As far as the latter is concerned, the answer is undoubtedly to be found in the types of written scriptures of the non-Muslim communities in Arabia at the time of the Prophet. Although none of these have survived, by analogy, we can conclude that the method of presenting these scriptures influenced the way in which the early Muslim scribes chose to present their own sacred text.

Illumination would initially have been based on the book art of Iran and the Mediterranean. It was from this that Islamic illumination as we understand it originated. Among the manuscripts on display we can see examples of these earlier styles, as well as mature fully-formed Islamic art. No. 10, for example, is unquestionably Coptic in inspiration, No. 8 has Byzantine antecedents, while No. 4 employs a pattern for which an almost exact parallel exists in the 1st/7th century Book of Durrow. The winged palmettes of this same manuscript also occur in the pre-Islamic art of Sassanid Iran. Yet both Nos. 4 and 8 are fully Islamic in character and display all the essentials of Islamic decoration – geometry, interface and arabesque.

So few Qur’ans contain mention of their place of origin that it has become customary to attribute them to the places in which they have been located for the past several centuries. The well-known gold Qur’an written on blue vellum (No. 9) is now considered to be of North African provenance, due to its having been in Qairawan since at least the 7th/13th century. There does seem to be a strong argument for attributing some of the Kufic Qur’ans to Spain and North Africa, since we know that the Umayyad rulers of Spain, at least, consciously imitated the art and architecture of Umayyad Syria and this must have included Qur’ans. No. 6 almost certainly comes from Islamic Spain or North Africa. The strikingly vivid colour scheme used in its pages is identical to that used in later Maghribi manuscripts.

Among the manuscripts displayed here are a number of Kufic Qur’ans bearing dated inscriptions (Nos. 11 and 7). Of these the latter is the more important with its fine illumination and specific mention of Damascus in the waqf (endowment) dated 298/911.
1 Portion of a Qurʾān

Two folios containing XXXIX Al-Zumar (The Crowds), 46-47, 74-75 and Al-Muʾmin (The Believers), 1-7. 36.3 x 27.6cm.

Hijrah, 2nd/8th - 3rd/9th cents.

Archaic cursive script on vellum, twenty-five lines to page. Ayat indicated occasionally by four dots. No vocalisation. Diacritics occur intermittently. Sūra XXXIX ends with black and red zigzag panel. An unusual feature is the extension of i and a backwards underneath several preceding words.

This rare script has some resemblance to inscriptions of the 2nd/8th cent., and to the Muʾāil script of the Qurʾān in the British Library (OR 2165), which also has a vertical format. See Lings and Safadi, No. 1a.

For an identical script, see Moritz, pl. 44, also Sotheby Catalogue 23.4.79, Lot 13.

CBL Ms. 1615, fol. 19V-20R (Arberry No. 40)

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2 Fragment of a Qurʾān Section (Juz) 13

Two folios containing XIV Ibrahim (Abraham), 1-9, 21 x 16.2cm.

Near East, 3rd/9th cent.

Fine miniature Kufic script, twenty-two lines to a page, on vellum. Vowels in red, green and yellow dots. Diacritics in the form of strokes. Ayat are unmarked, but gold knot with surrounding colours indicates point half-way through the juz'. Sūra heading has a simple band of gold interface.

Although damaged these folios are a good example of a convenient vertical format Qurʾān.

See also, Moritz, pls. 35-6, and Lings and Safadi, No. 3.

CBL Ms. 1616, fol. 12V-13R (Arberry No. 19)
3 Fragment of a Qur'ān Section (Juz'') 21

Two folios containing XXXI Lāqāmūn, 34; niṣra heading of XXXII Tafsīl (Revelation), and XXXIII Al-Āhnāf (The Confederates), 30. 21.8 x 32.3 cm.

Near East, 3rd/9th cent.

Kufic on vellum, five lines to a page. Vowels are indicated by red dots and diacriticals by short strokes. ʿAyān are indicated by a gold rosette with dots. A large medallion with the word ʿalāmah (thirty) in Kufic script shows where the juz’ ends.

The beautiful niṣra heading gives the title and verse-count of XXXII. Underneath is the Basmallah with which Sūra XXXIII commences. More of this manuscript exists in Oxford, Bodleian, and Berlin. For latter, see Sultz, pl. 95.

Published: Dimand, Islamic Miniatures, pl. 2; James, Islamic Art, No. 18.

CBL Ms. 1407, fol. 2V-3R (Arberry No. 6)

4 Final folios from the previous manuscript

21.8 x 32.3 cm.

Near East, 3rd/9th cent.

Final folios of illumination. Central rectangle is filled with undulating bands which weave in and out of one another. Around this are six small oblong panels with sepia arabesques, and between them, six squares. Squares and panels are surrounded by golden cord which is knotted on each side of the shapes. Each knot is joined to the next by a band of interlace. In the outer margin are winged palmettes in gold.

Published: Martin, pl. 233; James, Celtic and Islamic Art, 1979.
For the opening folios, see Sultz, pl. 93 and James, Islamic Art, No. 77.

CBL Ms. 1407, folio. 3V-4R (Arberry No. 6)
5 Fragment of a Qur’an

Folio from XVIII Al-Kahf (The Cave). 1. 18.5 × 26 cm.
Near East, probably Iran, 3rd/9th-4th/10th cexxs.
Kufic script on vellum, six lines to a page. Vowels are indicated by red dots, diacritical marks by short strokes. Āyūr are marked by a gold rosette.
Śūra heading is in gold Kufic with a tiny well-drawn palm tree in the margin, with flowers on either side. This is a characteristic of the manuscript. More pages exist in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Pars Museum, Shiraz, and the Iran-Bastan Museum, Tehran. For the latter, see Hayward Catalogue No. 499 and Lings, Qur’anic Art, No. 5.

CBL Ms. 1422 (Arberry No. 17)

6 Fragment of a Qur’an Section (Fat‘) 30

Illumination and final word of XCII Al-Layl (Night) and XCIII Dāhī (Morning Light). 1 - 11. 12.8 × 20.2 cm.
North Africa or Muslim Spain, 3rd/9th - 4th/10th cent.
Kufic on vellum, ten lines to a page. Unusual system of vocalisation. See Lings and Safadi, No. 23, for an identical example. Āyūr are indicated by gold knots with red centres. Each fifth verse is marked by a gold letter ǧī’ and each tenth by a rosette with the word ʿarka. Śūra heading and verse-count in gold Kufic with vividly coloured palmette in gold, blue, black, red and green. In the centre is a miniature cypress tree with sets of coloured leaves and scrolls on either side.

On right is a rectangular panel divided into two squares. In each is a cross with central medallion. A circular band hooks through the arms of the cross. Beyond this band and within central medallion is a ground of minute coloured mosaic. The squares are separated by a narrow panel with a diamond pattern. There is another border of coloured squares with diagonal crosses. In the margin is the remains of a palmette. The opposite of this page has disappeared.

More of this manuscript is found in the Turkish Islamic Museum, Istanbul.
Published: Martin, pls. 235-236.

CBL Ms. 1411, fols. IV-2R (Arberry No. 10)