7 Fragment of a Qur’ān Section (‘Juz’) 17

Two folios from XXI Al-Hajj (The Pilgrimage), 78 x 32cm. Near East, 258/911.

Kufic on vellum. Vowels are indicated by red dots, diacriticals by short strokes. Bands of interlace at the top and bottom of each page mark the end of the ‘Juz’ 17. At the end of verse 78 is a gold ket’ indicating the last verse of the ‘Juz’.

This manuscript is one of the few Qur’āns with a near contemporary tawaf inscription. Along with its other 29 ‘ajā’īb (sections) it was endowed to the Great Mosque of Damascus in Dhul-Qa’dah 298/July 911, by ʿAbd al-Mu’min b. Ahmad. It is one of the earliest dated 30-part Qur’āns.

Published: Martin, pl. 233; Rice, p. 2.

CRL Ms. 1421, fols. 1v-2r (Arberry No. 16)

8 Fragment of a Qur’ān

Detached half of an opening double-page of illumination. 12 x 28.5cm. Near East, 4th/10th cent.

An eight-pointed star within a circle, containing a medallion in its centre. Intercres filled with arabesque scrolls and fragments in sepia. On either side are oblong panels with diamond pattern containing leaf-shapes. The four areas between circle and outer border have thin floral scrolls over a hatched ground. In the margin is a palmette of golden leaves and scrolls, surrounded by a blue line.

Ettlinghausen suggests this comes from Syria due to its similarity to contemporary dated manuscripts from there.


Published: Martin, pl. 234; Ettlinghausen, Arab Painting, 168.

CRL Ms. 1406 (Arberry No. 5)
9 Fragment of a Qur'ān

Two folios containing II Al-Baqara (The Cow), 61-63; 93-95. 27.5 x 36.7 cm.
Probably North Africa, 4th/10th cent.
Gold Kufic script on blue vellum, fifteen lines to a page. No vocalisation or diacritical points. Each ā is indicated by a silver rosette (now faded). At the end of Ayat 61 is a gold letter al'' indicating a pause in reading.

Apart from another page in the Chester Beatty collection, portions are found in the National Library, Tunis, the National Institute of Art and Archaeology, Tunis, The Fogg Art Museum and Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. For these, see Hayward Catalogue, No. 498, Lings and Safadi, No. 11, Welch, Calligraphy Catalogue, No. 4. Most of the manuscript was in the library of the Mosque of Qarouan by 693/1292-3, see Stubbih, 1971.

CBL Ms. 1400, fols. 1V-2R (Arberry No. 4)

10 Portion of a Qur'ān

Two folios containing XXXVI Yā-Sīr, 72-83, and XXXVII Al-Saffār (Those in Ranks), 1-14. 33 x 47 cm.
Egypt, 4th/10th cent.
Fine example of Mash' script, twenty lines to a page, on vellum. Vowels indicated by red dots, diacriticals by short strokes. No di' markers and no nūn headings. The name of the nūn and verse-count, on right, are later additions.

Ṣūra XXXVII is introduced by exquisitely painted band of illumination which shows considerable Coptic influence in both style and colour. It is part of a group of manuscripts written in Egypt in the 3rd/9th - 4th/10th cents. See Moritz, pls. 1-18.

For other pages from this manuscript, see Moritz, 19-30.
CBL Ms. 1404, fols. 4V-6R (Arberry No. 3A)
11 Portion of a Qur'ān

Two folios containing LXXVIII Al-Nabū (The News), 27-40, and LXXIX Al-Nazīrāt (Those who Tear Out), 1-25, 5.6 x 9cm.
Near East, circa 402/1011
Miniature Kufic script on vellum, thirteen lines to a page, vowels in red. No diacriticals. Sūra heading and verse-count in gold Kufic.
This manuscript contains several inscriptions recording the births of children. The earliest is dated Jamā'īa II 402/December 1011.
Exhibited: Baroda House 1939, Catalogue No. 16.
CBL Ms. 1414, fol. 10v-11r (Arberry No. 13)

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Eastern Kufic Qur'āns

By the 4th/10th century a fine slender form of Kufic had made its appearance and this usually goes by the name of Eastern Kufic. This term, like Kufic, covers a wide variety of different types, most of which are shown here. The system of vocalisation and other orthographic signs were fairly consistent throughout this period, which extends down to the 7th/13th century. Paper replaced vellum for writing Qur'āns and the vertical format was universally accepted throughout the East. Although gold and sepia continued to be the main colours used by illuminators, red, blue and white were increasingly employed.

The introduction of paper meant that large single-volume Qur'āns could be produced more easily. As long as vellum continued to be used exclusively for Qur'āns, it was more convenient for manuscripts to be written in sections, usually of four, seven or thirty parts. The latter was the most popular since if one part (juz) were read each day the whole Qur'ān could be read in a month.

The Chester Beatty collection possesses several Eastern Kufic manuscripts, including some of great historical importance. No. 12 is written on vellum, though paper was becoming widely used by this time – the early 4th/10th century. The manuscript is dated 292/905, making it one of the earliest dated copies of the sacred book of Islam.

No. 13 on the other hand is part of a manuscript divided among the Chester Beatty collection, that of the Ardabil Shrine and the University of Istanbul and is a very early example of a Kufic manuscript on paper. In the portion in Istanbul the date 361/972 is given. As far as we know this is the earliest example of a Qur'ān copied on paper, though paper had been in use for secular documents from the previous century.

No. 15 is a famous manuscript, divided among several collections throughout the world. It is written in a superb script sometimes called 'Qarmatian' though it has no connection with the Qarmathian sect (Qārīmīya). The outstanding characteristic of this Qur'ān is the elaborate arabesque ground on which the text appears to have been written throughout and which is reminiscent of architectural inscriptions rather than Qur'ānic calligraphy. The existence of several fragments has given rise to the belief that manuscripts of this type were fairly common. However, all published fragments belong to the same manuscript.

No. 17 dates from the early 7th/13th century, indicating that Eastern Kufic continued to be used in some places right up to the Mongol conquest. After that it was confined to sūra titles and inscriptions. By this date cursive scripts were well-established throughout the Middle East.

Eastern Kufic script is associated almost exclusively with Iran as no copies in this script can be positively attributed to areas further west. Nevertheless it is quite possible that manuscripts in Eastern Kufic were produced in the Mediterranean area and Egypt has been suggested as the source for some. In the West proper another variant was in use, called Western Kufic, the best example of which is the Qur'ān made at the court of the Zirid ruler Al-Mu'izz b. Badis, see Lings, Qur'ān Art, pl. 16.
12 Section (Juz') 19 of a Qur'an

Two folios containing XXVII Al-Nasr (The Ant), 1-7, 12 x 9.2 cm.
Iran, Sha'ban 292/June 905.

Eastern Kufic script on vellum, eight lines to a page. Diacritics are indicated by dots. Vocalisation is a mixture of that in contemporary Naskh manuscripts and the earlier system of red dots. Ayas are indicated by a gold rossette and each fifth verse by a gold kufi.

Sura heading and verse-count in gold Kufic, the first word being given wings to form a palmette.

This Qur'an is one of the earliest dated Eastern Kufic manuscripts, as it contains the statement in Persian that it was corrected (durust bi-kard) in Sha'ban 292/June 905 by Ahmad b. Abi'l-Qasim al-Khayyari.

CBL Ms. 1417, folio 33v-34r (Arberry No. 260).

13 First Quarter (Rub') of a Qur'an

Opening pages of illumination. 26 x 17.8 cm.
Iran, 361/972.

The main central medallions originally contained details, in white Kufic, of the number of letters, verses, etc., in the Qur'an, on a green and gold ground. This medallion is surrounded by a looped chain joined to a rectangle outside the circle. The area between is covered with a diamond and flower pattern. There is a final outer border of gold interlace with a white treble-dot motif. In the margins of both halves are winged palmettes. The entire design, and the central medallion, are surrounded by a blue line.

Other parts of this Qur'an are in the Ardabil Shrine, and the University Library, Istanbul, where the date 361/972 and the scribe's name -- 'Abd al-Raziq (of Ray) -- are given. See Persian Exhibition 1931, No. 126(D), and the Istanbul University Library, Arabic Ms. Cat. Vol. i, pl. 8.

Published: Lewis, World of Islam, p. 156.

CBL Ms. 1434, folio 1v-2r (Arberry No. 35).
14 Binding

Front cover of No. 13, 26 x 17.8 cm.

Iran, 361/972.

Dark brown leather. The central area is divided into a repeat diamond pattern with circles at the top and bottom of each diamond. Every circle contains the complete text of CXII Al-Fihli in beautifully sculpted miniature Eastern Kufic. There is a narrow blind tooled border. No protective flaps.

CBL Ms. 1434 (Arberry No. 35)

15 Fragment of a Qur’an Section (Juz’ 6)

Two folio containing V Al-Ma‘ida (The Table), 51, 33.5 x 23.8 cm.

Iran, 5th/11th - 6th/12th cents.

Majestic Eastern Kufic, sometimes called ‘Qurashthian’, four lines to a page. Diacriticals are as in Naskh script. Vowels and other signs are in blue, yellow and green (now faded). The script lies on a bed of floral scrolls culminating in large blossoms. The intercal are filled with curling linear scrolls. The text is surrounded by a gold frame with half medallions at the corners.

There are leaves from this Qur’an in Damascus, Cairo, Kerbela, New York and Berlin. For latter, see Schimmel, pl. VIIa. Also Encyc. of Islam (old ed.), ‘Arabia’.

Exhibited: Baroda House 1939, Catalogue No. 18.

Published: SPA, pl. 932A; James, Islamic Art, No. 22, Lings, Quranic Art, No. 17.

CBL Ms. 1436, fols. 9v-16r (Arberry No. 37).
16 Fragment of a Qur’ān

A folio from CXIII Al-Duḥā (Morning Light). 21 x 18 cm.

Fine Eastern Kufic, four lines to a page. Diacriticals are in the form of large gold circles, vowels and other orthographic signs are in red and blue. Ayār are marked by a Kufic letter over an arabesque scroll with a whirling petalled border. Sūrah title and verse-count are indicated by a fine inscription in gold floriated Kufic, surrounded by gold floral scrolls and palmettes on a red-gold ground. There is a gold palmette in the margin, decorated with blue, brown and white. Below this is the word Makkiyya indicating that this sūrah was revealed in Mecca.

Other leaves from this manuscript are in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, see Schimmel, pl. VIIIb, the Aga Khan Collection, Geneva; see Lings and Safadi, No. 37 and Welch, Calligraphy Catalogue, No. 12.

Exhibited: Exposition d’Art Persan, Cairo, 1935, Catalogue (Soc. des Amis de l’Art, Cairo), No. 214.

Published: SPA, pl. 931A.

CRL. Ms. 1607 (Arberry No. 36)

17 Qur’ān Folio

One folio containing XXXIII Al-Ma’minin (The Believers), 44-61. 23.5 x 16 cm. Iran, 7th/13th cent.

Small Eastern Kufic script, seventeen lines to a page. Vowels and orthographic signs in red and green. Ayār are marked by small gold rosettes with red and blue dots. Each fifth verse is indicated by a gold hā’ with half-palmette and each tenth verse by a gold knot with a petal border.

Script and decoration are very close to that in a Qur’ān dated 620/1223 in Meshhed. See Lings, Qur’anic Art, No. 21, Lings and Safadi, No. 32.

This page was mounted in an album of calligraphy. 18th century notes in Persian claim that the hand is that of Ibn Muqīla (d. 329/940).

CRL. Ms. Additional
Early Qur'āns in Cursive Scripts

This period covers the 5th/11th century to the 7th/13th which saw the flowering of the small cursive scripts, Nashī and Rayhān, together with the larger Muhāqqaq and Thuluth for Qur'ānic calligraphy. These centuries were dominated by the great calligraphers of Medieval Islam, Ibn al-Bawwāb (died 413/1022) and Yaqqūt (died 697/1298). Numerous Qur'āns exist purporting to be the work of these men, but few of these can be genuine. Most scholars agree however that the Qur'ān in the Chester Beatty collection (No. 18) is the only authentic example of Ibn al-Bawwāb’s hand that is known to exist. This dates from 991/1001 and is also the earliest example of a Qur’ān copied in Nashī. This manuscript is finely illuminated as its final pages show (No. 19). These pages contain all the elements that were to become part of the classic repertoire of Qur’ān illumination.

No. 20 from the following century is an example of a Muhāqqaq-type script, which was to become the major Qur’ān script under the Mamluks and the Mongol Ilkhanids. This Qur’ān has been known for many years since its publication by Eutinghausen in the Survey of Persian Art. It is one of the earliest examples of the three-fold division of a page, a method which remained consistently popular with Iranian calligraphers down to Safavid times. The larger Muhāqqaq is used in conjunction with Nashī. As the calligrapher refers to himself as the ‘Royal Scribe’, he may well have been the secretary of an Iranian Seljuq or Atabeg ruler.

A smaller, more modest manuscript (No. 21) appears to have been copied in Meshhed and is an interesting example of a mixed Thuluth/Nashī script. Perhaps the finest copy in this section is a large manuscript written in elegant Nashī (No. 23) probably in southern Iran. It is one of the most beautiful examples of Seljuq illumination in existence, though it has received little attention, and includes much decorative material which occurs for the first time. Of particular note are the superb colour schemes and the use of naturalistic foliage and plants. Although the work is not dated it does not contain the name of the illuminator, who is given the same prominence as the calligrapher in a large Kufic inscription on the final page. This emphasises the fact that manuscript illumination had by now become a highly specialised art. Many scribes were also painters. However, there were some craftsmen of exceptional ability who concentrated entirely on manuscript illumination. This Qur’ān was produced shortly before the eruption of the Mongol hordes on Iran and Central Asia and for the next 70 years finely written and illuminated copies of the Qur’ān from Iraq, Iran and Central Asia are few and far between.
19 Closing folios of illuminations from the previous manuscript

Interlocking circles in gold are surrounded by a strapwork frame. In the centre of the circles are confronted brown floral motifs. In the triangular interces are grey lotus blossoms on blue. Other interces are filled with delicately painted patterns. In the margins are floral palmettes in gold, sepia and blue. Unlike contemporary and later work, gold is used only sparingly.

Published: Rice, The Unique Ibn al-Bawwab Koran; Ethinghausen, Arab Painting, p. 171.

CBL Ms. 1431, fols. 284V-285R

20 Qur'an

Two folios from XIX Maryam (Mary), 1-29, 43 x 31 cm.

Three lines of a large Muhajjura-like script are interspersed with eight lines of Nahh. Ayas are marked by the word 'aya in gold Kufic in a blue circle. Each fifth and tenth verse is marked in the margin by the words khamma or 'aswara in gold Kufic on a red-gold ground, with an elaborate petalled border, painted in the case of khamma. The sūra is introduced by the Basmalla in black Kufic edged with gold. The word Allah is lengthened and contains the title and verse-count of the sūra in rough gold Thulth.

At the bottom of the folios are similar oblong panels of decoration, bearing customary Qur'anic verses. At the top of the right-hand page is a red inscription in Persian which is a saying of the Prophet (Jaddik) concerning the reading of this sūra.

The words al-Kutub al-Maliki, 'The Royal Scribe', imply that the calligrapher was the secretary or scribe of a Seljuk ruler.

Exhibited: Baroda House 1939, Catalogue No. 19.
Published: SPA, pl.929.

CBL Ms. 1438, fols. 109V-110R (Arberry No. 43)