85 Portion of a Qur'an

Two folios containing LXII Al-Mulk (Dominion), 1 - 2, 25.2 × 15.5 cm.
Calligrapher: Malika Jahân.
Oudh, India, 12th/18th century.
A rare example of Nasta’lîq script used for copying the Qur’an. The script is surrounded by gold line and covered with gold dots. Each line of script is in a panel separated by gold bars. Ayas are marked by red circles. The Sura title and verse-count are in red Nasta’lîq. There is an outer border of green feather-shapes with gold sprays and flowers, also blue-petalled rosettes with gold flower heads. These are linked by floral scrolls on a gold ground. This border has a bright red line on either side.

The calligrapher, a woman, was evidently a princess of Oudh.
CBL. Ms. 1563, fols. 61V-62R (Arberry No. 236)

86 Portion of a Qur'an

Opening folios of XXXVI Yâ-Sîn, 1 - 8, 11.3 × 6.8 cm.
Calligrapher: Ahmad-Shaykh b. Muhammed-Shaykh.
Kashmir, India, Sha’bân 1291/September 1874.
Ghâbîr script in oval medallions. Aya indicated by gold rosettes. Above and below are triangular appendages with sura title, verse-counts and LXI Al-Mu‘âja’â, 79. The main text is in a long narrow panel with a leaf-chain border. At the top is an elaborate knot-palmette in gold decorated with flowers and blossoms in black. In the vertical margins are husp shapes. The corners are filled with decoration to make a rectangle.
The manuscript was made in the workshop of Badr al-Din for Kustâbul (Constable) Shâhîb, evidently an English resident of Kashmir.
CBL. Ms. 1592, fols. 1V-2R (Arberry No. 237)
87 Qur’an Section (Tuz) 15.

Two folios from XVIII Al-Kahf (The Cave), 74, 25.8 × 17.5 cm.
China 12th/13th cent.

Sih script, five lines to a page. This is the form of Nashi used by Chinese Muslims which is influenced by the Chinese written characters.

CRL, Ms. 1588, fols. 25v-26r (Arberry No. 244)

Qur’ans from Islamic Spain, North and West Africa

The earliest undated North African Qur’ans of which we are aware is one in Tunis copied around 410/1020 at the court of the Zirid ruler, Al-Mu’izz b. Badis, see 1.ings and Safadi, No. 25. The earliest Qur’an from Islamic Spain (Al-Andalus) is probably one in the University Library, Uppsala, dated 483/1090. We know almost nothing about manuscripts produced in those areas prior to the dates mentioned. However, several manuscripts in what is termed Western Kufic, do survive from the formative period of the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries.

In Islamic Spain it is well known that the Umayyad rulers sought artistic and architectural inspiration in their distant Syrian homeland. If this was true also of Qur’ans - and there is no reason to think it was not - then early Qur’ans from Spain, and probably North Africa, would be expected to differ little from those produced at the other end of the Mediterranean. As far as we can judge from the surviving evidence this appears to be the case.

It is not known when Qur’ans were first copied in the Maghribi script, though secular manuscripts in fully developed Maghribi hands survive from at least the 3rd/9th century. There are several types of script which all went under this name. The most important are as follows. The large bold type with deep swinging curves below the line, which is thought of as being typically Maghribi (No. 92). Secondly, there is a smaller, more complex type called Andalusi (No. 88). Thirdly there is a rather primitive type used in West Africa called in Sudani (No. 93). An important script not shown here was Fajri.

Maghribi scripts were usually black or brown, but vowels were often brightly coloured, with the two harnam being written as coloured dots. There are some examples of Qur’ans being copied in gold. This may be due to influence from the East where gold Qur’ans were much more common.

From the 6th/12th and 7th/13th centuries we have a large group of small and medium-sized manuscripts, most of which are finely illuminated. Several of these give their place of origin, which show them to be the great cities of Spain, shortly before they were reconquered. Others came from Ceuta and Marakesh in North Africa. Most probably the two examples of this type on display here (No. 88 and 89) originated in Spain. They are written on vellum and are of square format. Prominent among their decorative repertoire are panels and bands of heavy gold strapwork. Compositions are often enlivened with bright colours. This bright colouring seems to have been a feature of North Africa and Spain from earliest times, see No. 6. The combination of a square and a circle was often used by Maghribi illuminators as well as elaborate plaits and knots. Perhaps the outstanding characteristic of illumination from this part of the Islamic World was its conservatism. Not only did vellum continue in use in the West for centuries after it had ceased to be used for Qur’ans in the East, but the Kufic script was almost always employed to write sina titles, long after this had ceased to be the case further East.

With the fall of Granada at the end of the 9th/15th century Qur’ans production in Spain came to a halt. Many copies of the sacred text made after that date had to be done in secret. However, Muslim craftsmen did work for the Castilian conquerors in various capacities, one of which was manuscript illumination and there are a number of Spanish manuscripts from the 7th/13th century onwards illuminated in this so-called Mudjar style. No. 93 which is quite unlike any other Qur’an was probably illuminated in North Africa by someone who had seen Mudjar manuscripts, probably a refugee from Spain.
88 Qur'ān

Two folios of vellum containing XIX Maryam (Mary), 1-55, 9.2 × 8.7 cm.
Probably Muslim Spain, 7th/13th cent.
Minute Andalusian Maghribi twenty-four lines to the page. Vocalisation is red, yellow and blue. Ayas are marked by three gold circles. Each fifth verse is indicated by a small gold ḥaʾ in floriated Kufic and each tenth verse by a gold circle. Rosettes in the margin also mark the passage of verses. The nāw in the top right also marks the beginning of the Third Quarter Ruh of the Qur'ān. It is an elaborate panel of gold and white interlace with a tiny gold Kufic inscription and a palmette in the margin.
CBL Ms. 1444, fols. 63v-64r (Arberry No. 122)

89 Qur'ān

Opening folios of illumination on vellum, 9.3 × 9.5 cm.
Probably Islamic Spain, circa 596-7/1200.
Each folio bears a square panel of interlocking rectangles with alternate horizontal and vertical axis. These are filled with gold floral decoration. Double bands of white strapwork surround each rectangle. At the tops and bottoms are thin white chains on black. There is a wide outer border of gold strapwork around all sides of the central panel. In the outer margin is a gold foliate palmette. All elements are within a blue line.
Similar decoration occurs in a Maghribi Qur'ān in Topkapı Library dated 598/1201-2.
CBL Ms. 1443, fols. 1v-2r (Arberry No. 121)
90 Two folios
containing (right) VI Al-A‘rām (Cattle), 164 - 165, VII Al-A‘rāq (The Heavens), 1 - 27.
Minute Andalusian Maghribi script, twenty-nine lines to the page, with no āyuw indicating and only occasional
vocalisation. Each tenth verse is shown by a gold circle in the margin. The šuru title and verse-count is in ornamental
Kufic with a gold floral palmette in the margin. The right-hand page is finely illuminated and marks the end of the
First Quarter Rukš of the Qur‘ān. The text occurs within a square within a circle. The corners of the square are blue
with white palmettes. Above and below are thin pink chains on a red ground. The central square is surrounded by a
wide band of gold strapwork with a foliate palmette in the right-hand margin. All elements are inside a blue line.
Published: James, Aramaic World, 1972
CBL Ms. 1443, fols. 27v-28r

91 Fragment of a Qur‘ān
Two folios of vellum containing IV Al-Ŷiṣa‘ (Women), 46 - 50, 27 × 22 cm.
Probably Muslim Spain, 7th - 8th/13th - 14th cents.
Fine large gold Maghribi, nine lines to the page. Āyuw indicated by the word āyu in white Kufic in a blue circle
surrounded by a gold segmented border. Vocalisation in red and blue with āyuw indicated in green and yellow.
Each fifth verse is indicated a gold ḥamasa in a blue circle with a long red point containing a gold foliate segment. Gold
Qur‘āns are common in the East especially from 1300 onwards. In the West they are rare. Other portions of this fine
manuscript occur in the Keir Collection, see Keir Catalogue 1976, No. VII 7; the Aga Khan Collection, see Aga Khan
Catalogue 1972, Vol 2, Callig. 3; Metropolitan Museum, see Dimand, fig 39; Bibliothèque Nationale, and Dār
al-Kutub, Cairo.
Published: James, Islamic Art 1972, No. 29 Lings, Qur‘ānic Art, No. 95.
CBL Ms. 1424, fols. 7v-8r (Arberry No. 119)
92 Qur'an

Two folios containing III Al'I'mrân (The Family of 'Imrân) 144 - 146, 25 × 20.8 cm.
Morocco, late 10th/16th cent.
Maghribi script, seven lines to the page. Vowels marked in red, blue, green and yellow. Āyāt are marked by a gold knot. Each fifth verse is indicated by a flouriated kā' and by a pointed medallion in the margin bearing the word khamsa in white Kufic on a blue ground in a gold, segmented circle surmounted by a white palmette. Script and decoration are very close to that in a Qur'an in the British Library written for the Shāhid Sultan of Morocco in 975/1568. See Lings, Qur'anic Art, Nos. 108 - 10
Published: James, Asamco World, 1972.
CBL Ms. 1568, fols. 21v-22r (Arberry No. 130)

93 First Quarter Rub' of a Qur'an

Two folios containing III Al'I'mrân (The Family of 'Imrân) 42 - 57, 24 × 18.8 cm.
North Africa 10th - 11th/16th - 17th cents.
Maghribi script, fifteen lines to the page. The word Allāh and other sacred references are written in gold. Āyāt are marked by a gold circle. Each fifth verse is marked by a gold kā'. Both pages are flanked by long-stemmed gold plants outlined in red and green. In the centre of the outer margin is another multi-branched plant in similar colours. This decoration is unique in Qur'an illumination. Comparable decoration is found in Spanish Mudjar manuscripts and these were probably the source of inspiration for this.
Exhibited: Baroda House 1939, Catalogue No. 29.
Published: Kühnel, Islamische Kleinkunst, 1925.
CBL Ms. 1522, fols. 25v-26r (Arberry No. 128)
94 Final Quarter (Rub' ) of a Qur'an

Two folios containing CXI Al-Maf (Victory), to the end of the Qur'an, 22 x 17.5 cm.
North Africa mid-13th/19th cent.

Maghrbi script, fourteen lines to the page. Vocalisation in red, blue and green. Āār are not marked. Sūra titles are in gold Maghrbi. In the margins are gold palmettes with blue, green and pink interiors surrounded by a black circle. The text has a surrounding blue and gold line. At the end of the text is a panel of decoration containing an invocation in gold script on green within a cross-shape. This is within an orange circle bearing palmettes in gold. Around this is coloured floral decoration of Turkish origin. In the left hand margin is an elaborate palmette. The manuscript is written on French machine-made paper.

CBL. Ms. 1594, fol. 118v-189r. (Arberry No. 151)

95 Qur'an

Two folios containing I Al-Fāṭihah (The Opening Chapter) and II Al-Baqara (The Cow), 1–11.
West Africa 13th/19th cent.

Sūdāni script, fifteen lines to the page. Vowels marked in red. Each āya is indicated by three yellow circles and each tenth verse is marked by a large yellow circle within a black line. After Al-Fāṭihah is a rectangular panel divided into four sections and decorated with red and yellow stripes going diagonally up or down. In the margin are five circles decorated in yellow red and black. Qur'āns of this type were based on those of North Africa, but with local decorative features of their own, particularly in the area of colouring.

CBL. Ms. 1599, fol. IV-2R. (Arberry No. 241)
From earliest times the bookbindings of the Islamic World have been a source of wonder and admiration. The Chester Beatty Library is the location of one of the richest collections of Islamic Bindings, so much so, that in arranging this exhibition it has been difficult to know what to leave out. Only authentic Qur'an bindings have been included. 'Secular' bindings re-used for Qur'ans - regardless of their merit have been omitted. Preference has also been given to manuscripts that have original or near contemporary bindings.

In several cases it has been thought appropriate to show binding and manuscript side by side, where both are closely related. These have already been described.

There are two major traditions in Islamic binding; the Egyptian and the Iranian. These traditions merge in the bindings of Ottoman Turkey.

The earliest binding on display here comes from 8th/9th century Iran (No. 14), and shows a simple repeat pattern covering the entire surface and bearing stamped inscriptions. This differs somewhat from another 4th century binding which appears to be more or less contemporary with its manuscript (No. 96), whose design is more closely related to later Islamic tradition. It consists of a central medallion in blind tooled knot-work on a plain rectangular ground with simple border. Exactly the same design occurs on a rare Ikhbānīd binding (No. 97) several centuries later. Another Ikhbānīd example includes geometric elements, which we associate more with Mamlūk Egypt. At this time, the 8th/9th century, Egyptian and Iranian binding traditions are closely related (Nos. 33, 49).

By the next century, under the Timurids, binding technique and design are quite different. The example of Timurid work shown here (No. 98) illustrates the beginnings of the classic Islamic binding. Large stamps are used instead of tooing, sunk into the leather to leave a finely sculpted impression. The corner pieces are similarly produced. Qur'anic verses and Prophetic Hadiths were also made in this manner, to be applied to the border or along the protective flap (No. 63).

By Safavid times entire bindings were embossed with decoration which was brushed over with gilt, completely or in part to give an effect of great sumptuousness and luxury (No. 99). Complex patterns were cut from leather and paper and stuck down on to the surface, usually on the inner doublures where they would be better protected.

Decoration on Iranian Qur'an bindings at this time normally takes the form of arabesques, cloud-scrolls, medallions, and inscriptions. On occasion, however, flower compositions were employed (No. 101). In the 13th/14th century, as lacquer superceded leather, flower compositions were increasingly used (No. 103), though more 'abstract' decorations remained popular (No. 102).

In Egypt the binder's techniques were confined to engraving and punching the leather. Stamping with medallions and corner pieces is rare before the Ottoman conquest. The great era of binding in Egypt was the Mamlūk period of the 8th/9th and 9th/10th centuries and all the bindings displayed here come from that epoch. The typical Mamlūk design consists of a central circular medallion with tapering finals above and below which repeat, or have some closely related decoration, in the four corners of the cover. The Mamlūk binders covered surfaces with blind tooing in the form of knots and interlace. This rarely occurs in Iranian work after the Ikhbānīds. Similarly, geometric compositions continue to be the mainstay of Mamlūk work for entire compositions or for details (No. 105). Geometric compositions play little or no part in late Islamic work. One area where the two traditions do coincide, however, is in cut leather and filigree work. The Mamlūks tended to use this on the outer covers as well as on the doublures, with striking effects, as Nos. 104 and 106 illustrate.

Under the Ottomans both Iranian and Egyptian binding traditions exist side by side for a time, and are almost indistinguishable from the products of their countries of inspiration. By the 10th/11th and 11th/12th centuries Ottoman craftsmen had developed an individual style in which the two traditions are fused. Sunken medallions feature prominently, as do stamps for corner pieces and borders, but the technique of engraving the leather of the cover and doublure is also regularly employed (No. 110). Decoration is in high relief in the stamped portions and this is often emphasised by painting the individual elements. Arabesque and palette designs are combined with motifs of purely Ottoman derivation such as carnations and long saw-edged leaves.

In the 13th/14th century book covers were often painted. This was sometimes done by the manuscript illuminator, rather than the binder. When binding, case and manuscript are all illuminated by the same person (Nos. 79-81), the result is a level of unity and cohesion practically unknown in earlier times.
97 Binding.

Front cover of a portion of the Qur'an, 38.5 x 31.5 cm.
Iran, 7th/13th - 8th/14th centuries.

Light brown leather. In the centre of a plain rectangle is surrounded by a wide border with decoration identical to that in the circle. On one side of this border is a blank line, on the other a band of tiny circles with points.

CBL. Ms. 1487 (Arberry No. 67)

98 Binding.

Rear cover and flap of No. 56, 38.4 x 30 cm.
Iran, 9th/15th cent.

Brown leather. A central oval medallion with pendants and triangular corner pieces decorate an otherwise plain cover. Corner pieces and the central medallion are sunk into the leather and decorated with delicately sculpted palmettes in two confronted sets. There is a gold border around these motifs and the pendants are also in gold. Around the main area of the cover are four concentric borders; a gold line, a gold tooled rope-work band, a blind tooled one and another gold line. For an almost identical binding, see Hayward Catalogue No. 549.

CBL. Ms. 1501 (Arberry No. 147)