

For my parents

QUR'ĀNS
OF THE MAMLŪKS

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OF THE MAMLŪKS

David James

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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Foreword

The status of the Qur'ān is well-known to Muslims: they believe it to be the most authentic divinely-revealed scripture on the face of the Earth. They consider that it has received more care and attention than any other book known to Man. From the time when it was revealed and recorded on palm fronds, parchment, bones and stones, during the era of the Prophet, through that of the Righteous Caliphs, down to our era of advanced printing technology, Qur'ānic script has passed through a variety of stages on its way to perfection. Libraries, mosques and museums contain thousands of examples of the various scripts. There are also numerous fragments from ancient manuscripts in individual collections around the world, handed-down from one generation to the next, not to mention lost copies which have been referred to by various authors. It is impossible to state, with any degree of certainty, which is the oldest written Qur'ān among the surviving material.

Whatever may be said on the question of the script in which the 'Uthmānic recension of the Qur'ān was copied, there is no doubt that the Revealed Text is in conformity with its original which was written without diacritical marks, vowel signs, *sūrah* (chapter) titles or divisions into sections. Subsequently, the Qur'ānic script passed through progressive stages of sophistication and beautification in the various Islamic countries and in different eras, though without affecting the actual essence of the text.

These developments led to the emergence of a special science concerning Qur'ānic script, on which a number of works, like the *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif* of Ibn Abī Dā'ūd, were written. However, most works on the subject are still in manuscript form. Besides these works, others were written on the history of the script, as well as on the scribes and calligraphers who excelled in Qur'ānic script.

In reality, no sooner had the Caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (23-35/644-56)—May God be pleased with him—sent standard codices to the main Islamic centres, than the people hastened to make copies of them. The people of each region carefully copied the Qur'ānic text according to their own local style of Arabic script. Consequently, the "Arabic script" became "Qur'ānic script". In his book *Taṣwīr wa Tajmīl al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah fī'l-Islām*, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Jawwād al-Aṣmā'ī has explained how this evolved progressively, with the spread of the Islamic faith.

After the Muslim conquest of Transoxania in the 1st/7th and 2nd/8th centuries, Muslims learned the skills of paper-making from Chinese craftsmen. With that development, the primary material for wide-scale transcribing became available. Previously, parchment had been the main material.

During this period skilled scribes appeared who became known as *khattāṭūn* (calligraphers). God's words in the Holy Qur'an, "Nūn. By the pen and what Men write", (LXVIII, *al-Qalam*, 1-2) placed writing, especially transcriptions of the Qur'an in a position of great importance and honour among Muslims. Consequently, calligraphers came to occupy a prestigious and distinguished position in the Muslim world which was primarily due to their frequent copying of the Qur'anic text.

When the centre of the Caliphate moved from Kūfa to Damascus the Umayyad State (41-132/661-750) became the focal point for the development of Arabic writing, Qur'anic calligraphy, and the transcription of the Qur'an. Among those who became famous during this period as Qur'anic calligraphers were Khālid ibn Abī'l-Ḥayyāj and Quṭbah al-Muḥarrir. The former produced a copy of the Qur'an for the Caliph al-Walīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik (86-96/705-15). According to the scholar Jūrjīs 'Awwād in his book *Khazā'in al-Kutub al-Qadīmah fi'l-'Irāq*, the Qur'an copied by Khālid for the Caliph 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib was formerly in the library of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn in Iraq where it was described by Ibn al-Nadīm, the famous bookseller and author who died in c.377/988.

In the 2nd/8th century another group of copyists became famous. Foremost among these was Malik ibn Dīnār al-Baṣrī whose biography is given in the *Wafāyāt al-A'yan* of Ibn Khallikān. Others who stood out during this century were al-Dhaḥḥāk ibn 'Ajlān, Abū Ishāq ibn Ḥammād, Ibrāhīm al-Sahajārī and al-Aḥwad al-Muḥarrir, all of whom were noted for the beauty of their writing.

The development of the Arabic script reached a peak towards the end of the 3rd/9th century when Ibn Muqlah (d.328/940), minister of three 'Abbāsīd caliphs, formulated calligraphic laws and rules for every letter of the Arabic alphabet. Ibn Muqlah is considered in many ways to be the founder of the art of calligraphy. Among those who studied under him were Muḥammad ibn al-Simsimānī and Muḥammad ibn Asad, whose pupil was the master calligrapher Ibn al-Bawwāb. Ibn al-Bawwāb (d.413/1022) developed new styles of calligraphy based on the foundations laid down by Ibn Muqlah.

Arabic script continued to evolve to new heights during the 7th/13th centuries at the hands of another master, Yāqūt al-Musta'ṣimī (d.698/1398). However, the calligraphic school of Ibn Muqlah/Ibn al-Bawwāb continued to exert great influence on copyists for many generations after them. For example, calligraphy in 9th/15th-century Egypt continued to follow the model of Ibn al-Bawwāb. However, the influence of Ibn al-Bawwāb was not so great as to prevent the emergence of other schools and scripts in later periods like that of the Mamlūks (648-922/1250-1517).

Something should be said at this point about the artists and craftsmen who dedicated their lives to the service of the Qur'an. After the cultural developments brought about by the spread of Islam there appeared a number of craftsmen concerned with the production of the Holy Book. In addition to calligraphers there were illuminators and gilders *mudhahhibūn* who soon became the most highly regarded class after that of the scribes. The appearance of these craftsmen coincided with certain developments in the evolution of Arabic calligraphy. The inherent flexibility found in Arabic script greatly aided the development of

ornamental types from Kufic to later Iranian categories. The introduction of paper and the production of de luxe types made from cotton and even silk led to further evolution of the art of illumination during the Seljuq and later Mamlūk periods. Much information was given on the subject by Zakī Muḥammad Ḥasan in several of his works such as *al-Funūn al-Islāmiyyah* (Cairo, 1948), and *al-Funūn al-Irāniyyah fi'l-'Aṣr al-Islāmī* (Cairo, 1940). By the Seljuq period, 5-6th/11-12th centuries, Kufic script had evolved in both beauty and intricacy, and *naskh* and other cursive scripts had been invented. By the 9th/15th and 10th/16th centuries the *nasta'liq* script had become established. Many of these developments led to new and impressive stages in the history of Qur'anic transcription.

Qur'anic manuscripts began to be gilded and illuminated with the most intricate designs from the 4th/10th century onwards and from the Seljuq period new methods of embellishment evolved which continued to be practised for many centuries.

In the earliest times Qur'anic embellishment was limited to the beginning of *sūrahs*, marks indicating the end of an *āyah* (verse), and recitational division signs. The first two pages of text containing *Sūrah* I, *al-Fātiḥah* and the first verses of *Sūrah* II, *al-Baqarah*, received the most attention by illuminators. These were sometimes filled almost entirely with intricate designs which glittered brightly as a result of the gold which had been lavished upon them.

Copies of the Qur'an often became extremely expensive to produce as a result of the gold, and often silver, which was used. But there is no doubt that the desire to exalt the Qur'an was the driving force behind the different stages of production: copying, illuminating and gilding. It is also certain that the caliphs, sultans and other rulers who commissioned these manuscripts of outstanding beauty did so for religious reasons—desiring reward and blessings from God. They encouraged calligraphers and illuminators by giving them handsome stipends which led to the emergence of different schools of calligraphy and illumination in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Egypt, as well as in other parts of the Islamic world. This was especially true during the Seljuq and Mamlūk periods.

The Mamlūk era represents a great chapter in the field of Islamic decorative script in general, but it is particularly important for the development of Qur'anic scripts. Decorative Kufic script based on that of the Fāṭimid times (297-567/909-1171) continued in use and there were other decorative types which resembled those used in Iran and even Spain. Circular *naskh* was introduced by the Ayyūbids (564-658/1169-1260) to Egypt and Syria. Later the influence of Yāqūt al-Musta'ṣimī and his pupils made its presence felt.

The present book, which has been produced in consultation with the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, deals with Qur'anic illumination and calligraphy in the Baḥrī Mamlūk period (648-792/1250-1390). However, because the survey is limited to dated examples it begins in the early years of the 8th/14th century with the Qur'an of Baybars al-Jāshnagīr of 704-05/1304-06.

It is our hope that the reader will discover the beauty of some of the most impressive masterpieces of Qur'anic calligraphy and illumination produced in this era. Each work of art is carefully analysed and its artistic qualities are fully described. The names of the

calligraphers and whatever biographical information is available is given, incorporating the schools to which they belong, the names of their teachers as well as the trends that influenced them. The circumstances behind the production of each manuscript are given together with a comparison of material produced in Iraq and Iran in the same period. The contents of the book are based on the study of Qur'ānic manuscripts in Cairo, Istanbul, Iran, London, Dublin and several other places in Europe, America and the Middle East. These have been compiled and explained by Dr David James, Islamic Curator of the Chester Beatty Library and Gallery of Oriental Art, whose broad knowledge of the subject is apparent in this work. To him the Center extends its full gratitude.

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Most of the research in the Near East was undertaken between 1977 and 1979 with visits to Turkey, Egypt and Iran. I visited Istanbul again in 1983, 1984 and 1986, and Cairo in 1987. During some of these visits both Turkey and Iran were undergoing political upheavals: in fact whilst I was on my way to Tehran in 1978, martial law was declared in mid-flight. However, in all the places I visited, I was received with the greatest help and consideration at all levels. I am particularly grateful to the following:

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material included being located in places which are not easily accessible, has not been a simple undertaking. I am, therefore, greatly indebted to the people who have been involved in the production of this book: Yanni Petsopoulos and the Alexandria Press, and Laurence King and the staff of John Calmann and King. Above all, I am grateful for the untiring efforts of the editor, Julian Raby, and the copy editor, Caroline Roberts; without them the book would never have appeared.

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David James
The Chester Beatty Library and Gallery of Oriental Art
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Author's Note

The text and translation of the Qur'ān referred to throughout is the edition of A. Yusuf Ali: *The Holy Qur-ān, Text, Translation and Commentary*, first published in Lahore in 1934.

Throughout the text the place-names of the Holy Cities of *Makkah* and *al-Quds* have been given in the familiar standard English forms Mekka and Jerusalem, respectively.

The English transliteration system employed for Arabic throughout this book is that recommended by the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES).

Arabic script is read from right to left, therefore the terms 'recto' and 'verso' are transposed throughout this text.

Single dates refer to the Gregorian calander. Where two groups of dates appear, as in 703/1303, the first refers to the *Hijrī* date, the second to the Gregorian.

Preface

The Baḥrī Mamlūk period, which lasted from 1256 until 1399, undoubtedly saw the appearance of the finest Mamlūk Qur'āns, including manuscripts which must be considered some of the greatest works of Islamic art produced in any era. Apart from their transcendent beauty as magnificent examples of religious art, these manuscripts also deserve attention because they form one of the earliest and largest groups of Qur'āns from any area to have survived virtually intact. Although large-scale destruction of manuscripts appears to have occurred in the Fāṭimid period and after the collapse of Fāṭimid rule, nothing comparable ever happened again in Egypt, for the country was spared not only the Mongol holocaust that devastated Iraq and Iran, but also the invasion of Tīmūr, which was almost equally disastrous. Although Egypt was to be occupied by foreign powers from the sixteenth century onwards—namely, the Ottomans, the French for a short time and finally the British—these occupations resulted in only the removal of Qur'āns and other manuscripts from the country, not their destruction. Many of these surviving manuscripts bear documentation of one kind or another that can be investigated in the extensive chronicles and biographical dictionaries produced by Mamlūk historians. The Baḥrī period is thus the first period where manuscripts, documentation and historical sources exist in sufficient quantity for an in-depth study of Qur'ān production. Developments in Mamlūk Qur'āns cannot, however, be viewed in isolation, and thus, although the main emphasis of this book is on the Mamlūk examples, considerable attention has also been paid to contemporary products from Iraq, Iran and Anatolia.

The period from 1256 up to and including the reign of the Mamlūk Sultan Sha'bān (1363-76) is our main area of interest, but no Qur'āns have survived from the first fifty years. There are one or two manuscripts which may have been produced in this half-century, but none has complementary documentation which might confirm its date. Confining our attention to dated manuscripts wherever possible, we begin with the Qur'ān made for Baybars al-Jāshnagīr between 1304 and 1306 (Cat. I).

15-16, 18-30, 32, 38

The study of the history of calligraphy in this period depends almost exclusively on the Qur'āns themselves. Except for the biography of Ibn al-Waḥīd, we have no detailed written information on calligraphers, apart from the occasional note that a person, mentioned in a chronicle or biographical dictionary, may have been a scribe or secretary. The Mamlūk authors, whom we would expect to give substantial accounts of calligraphers, have little to say. In his massive compendium for scribes and secretaries, *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā*, al-Qalqashandī gives a history of earlier Mamlūk calligraphers, ending with al-Ziftāwī (1349-1404). The fullest account of calligraphers appears to be that of the eighteenth-century Egyptian author

al-Zabīdī (1732) in his *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq ilā Kuttāb al-Āfāq*.¹ The detailed information he provides, however, is of little direct help because, apart from Ibn al-Ṣā'igh, there are no known examples of the work of these calligraphers.²

In the absence of written sources on the calligraphers, we are forced to rely on their surviving work. Lane-Poole in his *Art of the Saracens of Egypt* gave brief descriptions of some of the most important Qur'āns and discussed in detail the Baybars Qur'ān (Cat.1), raising questions which were never answered and which we take up again here.³ At the end of the nineteenth century many of the surviving Mamlūk Qur'āns in Cairo were studied by Bourgoïn, who produced exceptionally detailed drawings of their illuminations.⁴ Yet no proper survey of Qur'ān illumination was ever undertaken. In the 1930s, an Egyptian student at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Berlin published a doctoral thesis on Islamic manuscript illumination in Egypt.⁵ In this rare work he described more than fifty manuscripts, the majority of which were Mamlūk Qur'āns, together with a brief analysis and a list of all the calligraphers he had been able to identify in original sources. The Millenary Exhibition of 1969 in Cairo included a number of Mamlūk Qur'āns and provided full descriptions of each.⁶ Most of these were from the National Library, but a small number came from the Library of the mosque of al-Azhar.⁷ The year 1976 saw the Qur'ān Exhibition in London, and the Catalogue of Lings and Safadi.⁸ This brought together almost all the major manuscripts of the fourteenth century for the first time, and was undoubtedly the most important event in the study of Mamlūk Qur'āns since the publication of Bourgoïn's drawings. There was also a representative selection of Mamlūk Qur'āns in the Hayward Gallery's *Arts of Islam* Exhibition in the same year.⁹ In 1980 the World of Islam Festival Trust organized an exhibition of the Chester Beatty Qur'āns in facsimile, including all the important Mamlūk manuscripts in that collection.¹⁰ The fullest survey of Mamlūk Qur'āns which has appeared to date is that in Esin Atl's Catalogue to the Mamlūk Exhibition in Washington in 1981.¹¹ Several of the points made, however, need revision in the light of more detailed information which has emerged on the period leading up to and including the reign of Sultan Sha'bān. We hope here to fill the gap in historical scholarship for these seventy-five years.

By contrast, manuscript illustration in fourteenth-century Iran has been intensively studied, for some of the most important of Persian paintings were produced for the *Jāmi' al-Tawārikh* of Rashīd al-Dīn and the Demotte *Shāh-Nāmāh*. Nevertheless, manuscript illumination and calligraphy of the same period have hardly been looked at. As recently as 1976 no comprehensive attempt was made to track down all the constituent parts of several great multi-volume manuscripts made during the reigns of Ghāzān and Öljaytü which were exhibited at The World of Islam Festival in London. We have since been able to reassemble large segments of each manuscript, but undoubtedly portions and fragments remain to be recognized.

Apart from confusion over the identity of manuscripts, there is confusion over calligraphers. Although this was considered a "golden age" of calligraphy, even the exact identity of the six famous pupils of the major calligrapher of the thirteenth century, Yāqūt

al-Musta'šimī, is in doubt. No two historians, ancient or modern, agree on the definitive list. There were obviously many calligraphers who studied under Yāqūt during his long life, but Islamic historians never drew up the canon of the six pupils, the so-called *sittah*. Even their correct names are unknown. Modern Iranian writers like Bayānī¹² and Faḍā'ilī,¹³ whom one would expect to have access to original material unavailable to Western historians, have little, if anything, to add to the information given by Iranian and Turkish historians of earlier centuries. On the odd occasion where we do have a manuscript attributable to a famous calligrapher, such as the 1303-08 Qur'ān by Ibn al-Suhrawardī (Cat.39), the lack of a certificate of commissioning deprives us of valuable information.

46-7, 50-2

The study of manuscript illumination in the fourteenth century has fared somewhat better than that of calligraphy and technical production. In the 1930s Ettinghausen made a preliminary survey based on the manuscripts he could find, but the list was not complete and some of the manuscripts mentioned were not Iranian but Mamlūk. Nevertheless, Ettinghausen did base his remarks on specific dated manuscripts, one of his most important conclusions being that the geometric style of Īl-Khānid manuscripts originated with the Seljuqs and was prominent in contemporary Anatolian and Āzarbāyjāni architectural decoration.¹⁴ In the 1940s Bayānī discussed illumination in the Catalogue to the Qur'ān Exhibition he organized at the Iran-Bastan Museum.¹⁵ Lings and Safadi made interesting comments in their Catalogue to the Qur'ān Exhibition of 1976. In his book on Qur'ānic illumination and calligraphy Lings discussed the theory behind illumination in fourteenth-century Qur'āns. And in 1979 Akimushkin and Ivanov produced a general survey of illumination in Iranian manuscripts from the fifteenth century, which included some information on the fourteenth.¹⁶ Here we are concerned, however, more with recording the technical details of calligraphy and illumination than with interpreting the meaning of pattern and design.

In this book we examine every accessible dated Mamlūk and Iranian Qur'ān from the period 1300-76. This has meant the study of more than seventy copies and many other related manuscripts. Secondly, we identify as correctly as we can Iranian, Iraqi, Egyptian and Syrian Qur'āns, and divide the manuscripts into stylistically coherent groups. Thirdly, on the basis of these groups, we present a history of Qur'ānic calligraphy and illumination in the period. Our concern at all times has been to let the manuscripts "speak" for themselves, for they are our major source of information. Further information is to be obtained from chronicles and biographical dictionaries which are helpful in identifying a number of patrons and tracing the histories of several major manuscripts. On the whole we have not imposed on the study of manuscripts the conventional framework of reigns, though those of Öljaytü (1304-16) and Sha'bān (1363-76) did witness the appearance of some of the finest Qur'āns ever made. The high point in the development of the Mamlūk Qur'ān is reached in the magnificent series of manuscripts produced in Cairo between 1363 and 1376, and we shall endeavour to understand what led up to them and to relate them to those being produced in Syria, Iraq and Iran.