Early Kufic

2nd-4th/8th-10th century

All the masters of later Arabic calligraphy acknowledge the Prophet’s cousin ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib as the first master of Arabic calligraphy, although there is some doubt as to whether he actually wrote a Qur’an copy in his own hand. The first serious attempts to write Arabic in a hieratic style, however, are associated with the towns of Mecca, Madinah, Basrah and Kufah, each of which gave its name to an early calligraphic style. But there seems to have been a general opinion that Kufic excelled the others, and by the end of the 2nd/8th century it was in use all over the Islamic world as the sole calligraphic script for Qur’ans. The earliest extant copy of the Qur’an included in this exhibition comes from the British Library collection (see no. 10), which is believed to have been copied at Mecca or Madinah in the script called al-mu‘adda in the late 2nd/8th century and it is, exceptionally, in vertical format; the other early copies of the Qur’an which have come down to us are written in Kufic script in black or dark brown ink, and later occasionally in gold, on white vellum, often only a few monumental lines on each page; early Qur’ans on coloured vellum are extremely rare (probably no more than three or four specimens are extant) and we are fortunate to be able to include in this exhibition, from Tunis, two folios from an almost complete Qur’an on blue vellum which is indeed a superb example of its type (see no. 11). The Qur’ans which have come down to us in Kufic script are all oblong in format, probably owing to the influence of the horizontal Quranic inscriptive panels in mosques (see Richard Ettinghausen, in A Survey of Persian Art, vol. III, p. 1942), but even apart from such considerations, this script has a marked characteristic which in a sense calls for the format in question, and that is the long, thick horizontal strokes — sometimes very long — which serve to give it a certain momentum despite its overall static quality. Without the oblong format these strokes would have been disproportionate; and the format was maintained only as long as they continued to be a feature of this script.

Until the beginning of the 3rd/9th century, Kufic Qur’ans received little illumination, but once the initial reluctance of allowing ornamentation to intrude upon the text was overcome, the evolving art of illumination soon provided various ornamental devices which also served certain necessary functions in the arrangement of the Quranic text.

Although in some early Qur’ans verse divisions were not indicated,
in most Kufic and later Qur'āns certain devices which may be called 'verse corners' were provided, and in illuminated manuscripts were used to provide additional ornamentation indicating the end of single verses and separating groups of five and ten verses, and occasionally groups of four verses.

Single verse division markings varied from a simple device such as a thick short stroke, usually in gold and colours (see no. 12), to a very stylized and elaborately designed rosette in gold and colours (see no. 1b); in most cases, however, the division was indicated by a multi-petalled gold rosette with touches of colour. Another device, and one of the earliest marks used to indicate a verse division, is the stylized trefoil made up of small contiguous gold circles, usually only three but sometimes as many as six, resting on each other to form a pyramid (see nos. 3 and 24). The fifth verse divisions were indicated by the final form of an ornamental gold kalām styled to resemble a small palmette (see nos. 3, 6, 9 and 38); alternatively a gold rosette is used, only slightly different in design or colour from other rosettes used for the ordinary verse division (see no. 17). A gold roundel is used to indicate the tenth verse division, and it is usually positioned either in the text or in the margin (see nos. 3, 7 and 17). A few Kufic Qur'āns feature a special rosette marking the last verse of the sūrah; an example of this type of ornament, which can be seen in one of the exhibits, is a gold horizontal stem with stylized leaves (see no. 19). It is interesting to note that many of these same verse division ornaments of the 3rd/9th century were also used in Eastern Kufic Qur'āns of the same period; furthermore in the Islamic West, in particular, their use was continued at least till the 10th/16th century. In the Islamic East, however, both their design and illuminative form began to be modified after the 4th/10th century. If the beginning of a new section of a Kufic Qur'ān was indicated, it was usually done by a relatively more substantial ornament, or even a full-page illumination not unlike those used as frontispieces (see nos. 16 and 18).

The division between sūras was indicated by a sūrah heading which became the most basic element of Qur'ānic illumination. In Kufic Qur'āns, these consisted mainly of decorative rectangular panels with a shayyakh - a palmette projecting horizontally into the margin, and usually composed of stylized foliar and floral arabesque in gold, highlighted with touches or dots in colour (see no. 10). Decorative elements of this type were almost certainly taken from Sassanian art, but many different forms were soon developed and perfected by Qur’ān illuminators. The rectangular panel was progressively reduced in width until it occupied no more than the space of a line of script (see nos. 10 and 11 for comparison), and was later often replaced by a line of ornamental Kufic script (see nos. 1b, 2, 8, 12, 13, 20, 22 and 27); exceptionally, instead of gold the Kufic script is in colour (see no. 15).

The broad and cumbersome early palmettes of the sūrah headings (see no. 10) are no doubt also a direct borrowing from Sassanian art, but these were later modified into more perfect and elegant forms (see nos. 2, 6, 8, 13 and 22); in later centuries they were little used if not altogether discarded (see no. 23). In some cases the sūrah heading is enhanced by elaborate marginal ornaments of geometric and floral design which may even extend to the text zone (see no. 1b).

Most of the 3rd-4th/9th-10th century calligraphic Qur'āns have a double-page frontispiece, and a similar pair at the end. The ornamentation is nearly always the same in design and illuminative elements, generally consisting of an oblong rectangle with a palmette attached to its outer end, the predominant colour usually being gold with highlights in sepia, black or brown (see nos. 16 and 18).

One of the main characteristics of Kufic is that it is angular; it is a script of many right angles, open rectangles and squares, whence the rather inadequate terms, 'square Kufic' and 'rectangular Kufic', which are sometimes applied to it by Western scholars to distinguish it from its more developed forms or the early scripts derived from it. Originally Arabic letters were written without any dots or dia- critics; even today only long vowels and consonants are represented by letters, the remainder, which includes the short vowels, are represented by orthographical signs. Since several Arabic letters have exactly the same character outline, it is difficult to distinguish the form of one letter from that of another without devising a distinguishing mark for each of these letters.

In order to ensure the correct pronunciation and interpretation of the Qur'ān, it became imperative to solve these main problems of early Arabic writing. Attempts for the reform of Arabic writing were made as early as the 1st/7th century and these resulted in decisive changes and modifications which may be grouped into three basic systems. The first was the introduction of a system formulated mainly by Abū l-Aswad ad-Du‘allī (d.69/688), using coloured dots as diacritics representing the short vowels and other orthographical signs such as the hāmuṣ, the shaddāh, the maddāh, the sukūn, the tanūn, etc., with the red dots usually reserved for the vowels. Continued reforms resulted in the establishment of a basic system of 'letter pointing' to distinguish the consonants that were exactly alike in character form. This was achieved by the use of dots or short diagonal strokes above or below the relevant letter and the use of certain vowel signs which were adopted from the Syriac. The establishment of this basic system is attributed to the famous al-Hājīlī ibn Yūsuf ath-Thaqafī (d.96/714). Further reforms resulted in the modification and enlargement of these two basic systems until they were superseded by the system formulated by al-Khalīl ibn Ahmad (d.170/786) which is more or less the conventional system used today. Although the latter system was hardly ever used in early Kufic, it was used at an early date in Eastern Kufic script and there seems to be a general opinion that it excelled the others in the early 5th/11th century.

Specific reference to the type of diacritics or orthographical signs used in individual exhibits is briefly described in the catalogue entries as relevant (see nos. 1b, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15 and 16). In some Qur'āns, the Kufic script is richly supplemented by a complex system of diacritics (see no. 23), whereas in others the Kufic script is devoid of diacritical dots, letter pointing marks or other orthographical signs (see no. 11).
The Qur'an

25
Sura an-Nasir (118), XXIV, 32-45, is a Qur'an copied on vellum in the early Kufic script (al-Ma'āribi script of the late 7th-8th century, probably in Mecca or Madinah). It is believed to be one of the two oldest existing Qur'ans manuscripts. It is written exceptionally in vertical format and is devoid of any decorative marks other than an occasional letter pointing indicated by chapter-stops.

315. 5 x 21.5 (93 x 54 cm); 121 folios.
London, British Library, Or. 1931, ff. 1v-7v.

Sura al-Najm (the Star) and al-Suwar al-Mukarrama (the Messengers), LI- LI, 62-71, from a Qur'an copied on vellum in black Kufic script, probably in the 14th-15th century in Kairouan.

The verses are indicated by red decorative dots and are surrounded by narrow margins containing a single marginal line consisting of a single line of ornamental Kufic script. The margins are decorated with small gold leaves at both sides of the paper. The margins are decorated with small gold leaves at both sides of the paper. The margins are decorated with small gold leaves at both sides of the paper.

23. 5 x 19 (59 x 48 cm); 50 folios.

Sura al-Kafirun (the Unbelievers), viz. 97-102, from a Qur'an copied on vellum in black Kufic script, probably in the late 9th-10th century in Kairouan.

The script is well disciplined and more spaced and elegant than usual. The verses are indicated by red decorative dots, with two dots positioned together to indicate the section.

115. 5 x 21.5 (93 x 54 cm); 121 folios.

Sura al-Qasas (the Story), VIII, 50-69, from a Qur'an copied on vellum in black Kufic script, probably in the 13th century in Kairouan.

The script is well disciplined and more spaced and elegant than usual. The verses are indicated by red decorative dots, with two dots positioned together to indicate the section.

103. 5 x 20 (41 x 24 cm); 50 folios.

Sura al-Ghafir (the Merciful), II, 61-73, from a Qur'an copied on vellum in black Kufic script, probably in the 11th century in Kairouan.

The script is well disciplined and more spaced and elegant than usual. The verses are indicated by red decorative dots, with two dots positioned together to indicate the section.

120. 5 x 21 (59 x 48 cm); 50 folios.

Sura al-Mujaddid (the New Radiator), XLI, 68-76, from a Qur'an copied on vellum in black Kufic script, probably in the 13th century in Kairouan.

The script is well disciplined and more spaced and elegant than usual. The verses are indicated by red decorative dots, with two dots positioned together to indicate the section.

120. 5 x 21 (59 x 48 cm); 50 folios.

Sura al-Da'awah (the Calling), VIII, 50-69, from a Qur'an copied on vellum in black Kufic script, probably in the 9th century in Kairouan.

The script is well disciplined and more spaced and elegant than usual. The verses are indicated by red decorative dots, with two dots positioned together to indicate the section.

115. 5 x 21.5 (93 x 54 cm); 121 folios.

Sura al-An'am (the Progeny) and sura al-Ma'arij (the Pilgrimage), XXII, 112-122, from a Qur'an copied on vellum in black Kufic script, probably in the 14th century in Kairouan.

The script is well disciplined and more spaced and elegant than usual. The verses are indicated by red decorative dots, with two dots positioned together to indicate the section.

115. 5 x 21.5 (93 x 54 cm); 121 folios.

Sura al-Tawbah (the Repentance) and sura al-Baqara (the Cow), II, 1-286, from a Qur'an copied on vellum in black Kufic script, probably in the 9th century in Kairouan.

The script is well disciplined and more spaced and elegant than usual. The verses are indicated by red decorative dots, with two dots positioned together to indicate the section.

115. 5 x 21.5 (93 x 54 cm); 121 folios.

Sura al-Fatihah (the Opening), I, 1-11, from a Qur'an copied on vellum in black Kufic script, probably in the 9th century in Kairouan.

The script is well disciplined and more spaced and elegant than usual. The verses are indicated by red decorative dots, with two dots positioned together to indicate the section.

115. 5 x 21.5 (93 x 54 cm); 121 folios.

Sura al-Fatiha (the Opening), I, 1-11, from a Qur'an copied on vellum in black Kufic script, probably in the 9th century in Kairouan.

The script is well disciplined and more spaced and elegant than usual. The verses are indicated by red decorative dots, with two dots positioned together to indicate the section.

115. 5 x 21.5 (93 x 54 cm); 121 folios.

Sura al-Fatiha (the Opening), I, 1-11, from a Qur'an copied on vellum in black Kufic script, probably in the 9th century in Kairouan.

The script is well disciplined and more spaced and elegant than usual. The verses are indicated by red decorative dots, with two dots positioned together to indicate the section.

115. 5 x 21.5 (93 x 54 cm); 121 folios.

Sura al-Fatiha (the Opening), I, 1-11, from a Qur'an copied on vellum in black Kufic script, probably in the 9th century in Kairouan.

The script is well disciplined and more spaced and elegant than usual. The verses are indicated by red decorative dots, with two dots positioned together to indicate the section.

115. 5 x 21.5 (93 x 54 cm); 121 folios.

Sura al-Fatiha (the Opening), I, 1-11, from a Qur'an copied on vellum in black Kufic script, probably in the 9th century in Kairouan.

The script is well disciplined and more spaced and elegant than usual. The verses are indicated by red decorative dots, with two dots positioned together to indicate the section.

115. 5 x 21.5 (93 x 54 cm); 121 folios.

Sura al-Fatiha (the Opening), I, 1-11, from a Qur'an copied on vellum in black Kufic script, probably in the 9th century in Kairouan.

The script is well disciplined and more spaced and elegant than usual. The verses are indicated by red decorative dots, with two dots positioned together to indicate the section.

115. 5 x 21.5 (93 x 54 cm); 121 folios.
لا، لا تقولوا لنا أن نؤمن بعنهما، فعليكم أن تقولوا ما لكم فيهما من عون، وليكون عوناً لنفسكم وله دخولكم فيه إلى الجنة.
The Qur'an

The Qur'an

The Qur'an

Case 2

Case 2

Case 3

Case 3
The Qur'an

51 Ninth at-Tafs (the Bush) and ninth al-Baq (the Night Journey), XXVI, 121-122, 126-127, XVIII, 4-5, from a Qur'an copy on vellum in black Kufic script in the 6th century, probably in Kairouan.

Black Kufic script indicates the twelves, two positioned together, being used for the nouns, and pink and green for the nouns of the past and present respectively, along with other calligraphic means which indicate a slight development to the system of Abi-l-Mawjud.

The short heading consists of twelve lines of ornamental Kufic script, coloured pure red, yellow and green in the calligraphic style used. It has a distinctive horizontal that such gold robes were used in Qur'an decoration such as at early date. Certain characteristics of this short heading are evident in certain of the earliest North-African Qurans.

On Fig. 14: 12, 16, 18 lines, 2 folios.

Tunis, National Institute of Archaeology and Art.

Case 3

16 Foremation of a Qur'an copy on vellum in gold Kufic script of the 7th or 8th century, probably in Kairouan.

This full-page illumination, which is a splendid specimen of its type, is composed of a rectangular field of gold and turquoise, bordered by a blue vellum frame. The broad gold border, with a gold line, is a sumptuous design and the calligraphic style is used in the other Qurans in the same manner as to form a central shield at the bottom side by side with two half diamonds.

The central diamond is adorned by a four-pointed star of the same broad shield, with the half diamonds consisting half circles. The white outlines highlighting the gold and silver line and intersecting, creating the impression of erasing the various compartmental lines in the outer frame. Each of the four triangles contains a stylized flower and gold leaf on either side. A palmette, pectinately from the rectangular frame into the margin, is composed of gold filigree work highlighted with deep blue and outlined in black.

On Fig. 14: 20, 22, 24 lines, 2 folios.

Tunis, National Library, Beu1978.

Case 2

37 Skins al-Ahrab (the Prophet), XXIV, 50-51, from the same Qur'an.

The exquisitely gold Kufic script is outlined in brown.

The vellum is divided by red horizontal lines, with two dots positioned together for the nouns of the past and present as the horizontal and shadow respectively, according to the system developed by Abi-l-Mawjud. Short diagonal stripes are also used for lettering according to the system of Abi-l-Mawjud.

The ordinary verse division is marked by a gold rule running between a blue circle, the fifth verse being indicated by a gold roundel with a blue circle and red vellum. The red square cover is a marginal red leaf of overlapping gold pearls, outlined by a family drawn square circle marked with red dots, and with an inner circular circle containing a gold inscription on a red ground.

On Fig. 14: 20, 22, 24 lines, 2 folios.

Tunis, National Library, Beu1978.

Case 2

18 Foremation of a Qur'an copy on vellum in Kufic script of the 6th or 7th century, probably in Kairouan.

This full-page illumination, which is a fine specimen of the type, and more likely from the same Qur'an, is composed of a rectangular field of gold and black, bordered by a band of gold, highlighted with black. Drawing a central box divided by broad strips of gold and black into two square areas, each of which is further divided into triangular compartments interrelated by varying forms of the same gold band. These geometric forms are divided horizontally in white. The ground of the central portion is filled with gold geometric and foliate patterns highlighted with black, the side triangles within each being filled with gold, small diamonds, while the left-hand and bottom contain a stylized flower tree within a circle with a leaf on either side, all in gold and highlighted in black. The prominent geometric forms of the illumination are a black and gold vellum tree within a square form, framed by the rectangular band of gold chain.

On Fig. 14: 30 lines, 2 folios.

Tunis, National Institute of Archaeology and Art.

Case 3

19 Skin al-Madikhi (the Placing Women) and skin al-Alab (the Anointer), XVIII, 5-6, probably from the same gold Kufic Qur'an.

The short heading consists of an inscription giving the title of the script and the number of its verses in ornamental gold Kufic script outlined in black, within a rectangular white ground with vertical lines in very fine brown, the script being bordered by a frame of scrolled work in gold and blue.

Protecting the margin is a round design in gold and blue, the ground of which is surrounded by several diamonds, with two gold leaves dropping it to the rectangular frame. The gold leaves surrounding the end of the preceding script is prolonged horizontally into a round holding two ornamental leaves, also in gold, outlined in black.

On Fig. 14: 20, 22, 24 lines, 2 folios.

Tunis, National Institute of Archaeology and Art.

Case 3

20 Skin Fatir (the Cow) and Skin Salih (Sulaym), XXXIV, 34-40, XXXV, 37-44, XXXVI, 6-13, from a Qur'an copy on vellum in black Kufic script in the 6th or 7th century, probably in Kairouan.

The vellum is divided by red horizontal lines according to the system of Abi-l-Mawjud, with exceptionally fine black dots for lettering according to the system later used in Maghribi script. In its normal position in this Qur'an, the left-hand side proceeds that on the right.

The short heading consists of a line of gold Kufic script outlined in brown, giving the title of the script and the number of its verses, attested to a palmette pectinately into the margin. The palmette is composed of gold filigree work, highlighted with blue and brown and outlined in black.

On Fig. 14: 20, 22, 24 lines, 2 folios.

Tunis, National Institute of Archaeology and Art.

Case 3

21 Skin al-Ighf (the Cow), XXII, 227-232, from a Qur'an copy on vellum in brown Kufic script in the 6th or 7th century, probably in Kairouan.

The vellum is divided by red horizontal lines and the bottom by red lines corresponding to the system of Abi-l-Mawjud, with black leaves for lettering according to the system of Abi-l-Mawjud. The verse division is marked by a roundel surrounding a red circle at the centre, surrounded by two thin circles faintly drawn in brown ink. The letters are elaborately small, more angular and symmetrically than usual and more compact, with the head character outline of the lines more distinguished into perfect circles.

On Fig. 14: 20 lines, 2 folios.

Tunis, National Library.

Case 3
Western Kufic

Kufic in its original form is, as we have seen, characterized by its rectangularity. Another noticeable feature is the relative lack of strokes below the line. But in the 4th/5th century, in Tunisia and other adjacent countries, there is a slight but noticeable rounding of angles and also an increase in the depth of sublinear curves. These features are among the heralds of Maghribi script, which was developed from Western Kufic. In some types, nos. 25 and 26 for example, the flourish below the line is triangular rather than curved, but its depth is none the less remarkable. (See also page 19.)
The Qur'an

Western Kufic

34


The stele consists of two parts: the top part with an inscription in Western Kufic script and the bottom part with an inscription in Kufic script. The stele is made of stone and is rectangular in shape. The inscription on the top part is in black ink, while the inscription on the bottom part is in red ink.

35

Stele of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (The Command of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib), XXVIII, 31: XXVIII, 31. From a Qur'an copied on vellum in Western Kufic script with characteristics similar to those of the Qur'an of 'Abd al-Malik (see nos. 23 and 26), probably in the early 9th/10th century in Kairouan.

The stele heading is rectangular and framed by red and black inks. The text is written in Kufic script and is divided into verses. The stele is made of stone and is rectangular in shape.

36

Stele of al-Qurashi (The Offering) and 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Abd Allah (The Offering), XXVIII, 32–33: XXVIII, 32–33. From a Qur'an copied on vellum in Western Kufic script, probably in the 9th/10th century in Kairouan. The stele heading is rectangular and framed by red ink, with the text written in Kufic script and divided into verses.

The stele is made of stone and is rectangular in shape. The inscription consists of a rectangular frame filled with red ink and is divided into verses. The text is written in Kufic script and is divided into verses.

37

Stele of 'Ali ibn 'Abd Allah (The Offering), XXVIII, 34: XXVIII, 34. From a Qur'an copied on vellum in Western Kufic script, probably in the early 9th/10th century in Kairouan.

The stele consists of two parts: the top part with an inscription in Western Kufic script and the bottom part with an inscription in Kufic script. The stele is made of stone and is rectangular in shape. The inscription on the top part is in black ink, while the inscription on the bottom part is in red ink.

38

Stele of Qayrawan (The Offering) and 'Abd al-Malik ibn Abi Talib (The Offering), XXVIII, 35: XXVIII, 35. From a Qur'an copied on vellum in Western Kufic script, probably in the early 9th/10th century in Kairouan.

The stele consists of two parts: the top part with an inscription in Western Kufic script and the bottom part with an inscription in Kufic script. The stele is made of stone and is rectangular in shape. The inscription on the top part is in black ink, while the inscription on the bottom part is in red ink.

The stele is made of stone and is rectangular in shape. The inscription consists of a rectangular frame filled with red ink and is divided into verses. The text is written in Kufic script and is divided into verses.
Eastern Kufic

4th-7th/10th-13th century

One of the marked characteristics of the Eastern derivative from Kufic—what has, in the West, earned the name 'bent Kufic'—is that many of the shorter strokes of the letters are inclined from the vertical or horizontal to the diagonal. This, together with the reduction of the thickness of the letters to that of the average cursive writing, makes it considerably lighter and more delicate than its parent script. Within the framework of these modifications, many different possibilities soon manifested themselves. Some styles are compact; others are loosely knit, with the unjoined letters widely spaced from each other. Some are relatively static, while others tend towards the cursive forms (see no. 42). But all these, together with the many different ornamental varieties, are clearly aspects of one and the same style.

The appearance of this script in the 4th/10th century coincided more or less with the change from the oblong horizontal format of the earlier Qur'an to the vertical format now in general use, and also with the change from vellum to paper. This latter medium was widely used in the Islamic world from the second half of the 2nd/8th century, the art of its manufacture having been learnt by the Arabs in Central Asia from the Chinese. It was not until the 4th/10th century, however, that paper was used for Qur'an manuscripts, the oldest dated example being one in Eastern Kufic script in the Istanbul University Library (A. 6758, dated 362/973). No. 32, shown here for its frontispiece, is an example of Eastern Kufic on vellum.

The system developed by al-Khathth il-tah Ahmad to indicate the various orthographical signs seems to have been more consistently used with Eastern Kufic script, although other systems of diacritics such as coloured dots are known to have been used somewhat less frequently, either by themselves alone or jointly with the system of al-Khathth. Letter pointing in this script was also applied by black dots, and at a fairly early date. (See also page 19 above.)
37

Slab 47 (Fig. 2), XXVII, 3–4, is a Qura’an in Eastern Kufic script copied in the 8th/9th century in Iraq or Persia. The vocalisation is in red dots and the vowel divisions are in the form of small tailed solar astrisks. The slab heading is in gold ornamental Kufic script in an oblong blue compartment between two circles, each containing a bell of Hakmat, gold on black. The gold slanting line of an articulated figure in the left-hand margin marks the passage of five verses.

Gomma, Collection of H. H. Prince Sabahddin, Aps Khan, Ltd.

Case 5

38

Slab 48, (Fig. 3), XXVII, 5–8, is a Qura’an in Eastern Kufic script, copied in the 9th/10th century, probably in Iraq or Persia.

Mansabd, Iran Rice Site Library, 1238.

Case 5

39

Slab 49 (Fig. 4), XXVII, 9–12, is a Qura’an in Eastern Kufic script (of a style known as Qur’ani, copied in the 9th or 10th or 11th century in Iraq or Persia). The vocalisation is in red dots according to the system developed by Abu al-Hasan. Other diacritical marks have been added according to the later system which finally prevailed. There is a Persian commentary in Naskhi script, one of which appears on three pages.


Case 5

40

Slab 50 (Fig. 5), XXVII, 13–16, is a Qura’an in Eastern Kufic script, copied in the 9th/10th century in Persia. The slab heading is in yellow ornamental Eastern Kufic with wawch in blue. The vowel divisions are arrowed, the fifth and ninth verses being indicated respectively by marginal palmettes and roundels in yellow, picked out with blue and red.


Case 5

[withdrawn]

41

Slab 51 (Fig. 6), XXVII, 17–21, is a Qura’an in Eastern Kufic script, copied by ‘Ali ibn Muhammad in Iraq in the 13th century in Persia. The slab heading is in gold ornamental Eastern Kufic with wawch in blue. The verse divisions are arrowed, the fifth and ninth verses being indicated respectively by marginal palmettes and roundels in yellow, picked out with blue and red.


Case 5
Maghribi

5th–12th/11th–18th century

By the beginning of the 6th/12th century, two derivatives from Western Kufic had been fully developed in Spain and North Africa. Both are known as Maghribi, but the smaller and closer-knit of the two is also known as Andalusian, and sometimes even as Kufic. The other derivative is considerably larger, rounder and less compact, being in some of its modes as loose-limbed as art will allow, with only six lines as compared with twenty-seven on pages of approximately the same size (see no. 44 and compare with no. 45). By the 11th/16th century, when the Moors had finally been driven out of Spain, these two hands had converged into one, and it is in the resulting average-sized script that Maghribi Qur’ans have been written ever since. In Maghribi the thickness of the strokes of the letters, which had remained a characteristic of Western Kufic, has disappeared altogether. The letters are often remarkably thin, especially in deep sublinear curved flourishes which sometimes sweep across the taller verticals of the next line. None of the scripts of the Islamic East, not even Thuluth, have such depth of curve below the line. Another characteristic of a different kind is that the letter ǧīf has only one dot above it, unlike the Eastern ǧīf which has two. The single dot of ǧīf is placed below it in the West to avoid confusion between the two letters. The lightness and grace of Maghribi made it possible to use, with excellent effect as a contrasting complement, some of the most massive ornamental lettering to be found in the whole range of the Qur’anic art. Particularly impressive in this respect are the surah headings (see nos. 45 and 50), through which ornamental Western Kufic has continued to be used far longer than its Eastern counterpart.

The Islamic West, generally more conservative than the Islamic East, continued to use vellum, though not to the exclusion of paper, until the 8th/14th century. The oblong format was also used far longer in the West than in the East.

The total effect of Maghribi frontispieces is comparable to that of their Mamluk and Il-Khanid counterparts, but it is produced by a slightly different means. As in Mamluk frontispieces, a section of symmetrically arranged polygons is formed by the prolongation and subsequent diversion of the lines which shape the points of the central star. But the Maghribi artist broadens these lines into strips from the outset, with the result that they become the most striking feature of the illumination, whereas in the Mamluk and Il-Khanid equivalents it is the geometrical figures themselves which attract our notice. (See also pages 50 and 66.)
38

39

Maghribi

40

45

42

Sirat an-Nabi (Women) IV: 177-180, in a Qur'an in Maghribi script on vellum, copied in the 13th or 14th century in Granada or North- ern Spain.

The vellum is good, and other orthographical signs in blue, green and black.

London, British Library, Or. 12750, ff. 40v-47r.

Case 6

44

45

Sirat an-Nabi (the Anti and Sirat al-Quran (the Narrative) XXVII, 27-XXVIII, in part of a Qur'an in maghribi script, copied on vellum in Maghribi script, probably in Granada in the 14th or 15th century.

The vellum is good, with good marks in red and other orthographical signs in blue. This manuscript is similar in every respect to two dated manuscripts copied in Vizcaya in the 6th or 7th century, Cairo, National Library, Or. 153255, and the British Library A 8915a. It is, therefore, probably from the same calligraphic school as these others.

London, British Library, Or. 12750, ff. 40v-47r.

Case 6

40

45

Sirat al-Nabi (It has been expounded) XLI, 20-23, in part of the same Qur'an.

19 x 13cm; 38 folios.

London, British Library, Or. 12750, ff. 46v-57r.

Case 6