The text is on boards of white with irregularly curving edges, surrounded with gold. The initial headings are in gold Kufic script over gold calligraphy on gold ground edged with blue, gold, red and green.

30 x 20 cm; 12 lines; 4 folios.

London, British Library, Or. 12412, f. 50–60.

Case 37

592

Siwat al-Firikhi: al-Baybars (The Lion), 1–11, 4, in a Qur'ân copied in Naṣrī script in the 13th/14th century in Fars.

The illumination surrounding the text consists mainly of panels of gold and silver gilded with polychrome glass inlays. The initial headings are in gold on an ultramarine ground.

There is an intermediate Persian translation in red Naskh Tag.

20 x 26 cm; 13 lines; 4 folios

St. Andrews University Library, BP 127, f. 17–19.

Case 37

593

Siwat al-Ashkari: The Spider, and al-Safar al-Bayan (The Byblist), 1–XX, 1–XXX, 8, from a Qur'ân in Naṣrī script copied and illuminated by the Persian poet and artist Wajj Shīrāzī towards the beginning of the 15th/16th century, probably in Shiraz.

30 x 20 cm; 12 lines; 24 folios


Case 37
Qur‘ān bindings

An important aspect of the Islamic art of the book is the decoration of bindings. Islamic binders laboured devotedly and with great skill to enrich leather covers, particularly Qur‘ān bindings, with various geometric, foliar and floral designs, and achieved a very high standard in the techniques of both ‘blind tooling’ and gilding.

The technique of bookbinding in leather, with blind-tooled or embossed or impressed ornamentation, was derived from the Coptic culture of pre-Islamic Egypt. Early examples date from the 4th or 5th century A.D., and by the early centuries of the Islamic era the craft of tooled leather binding had reached an extraordinarily high level. Muslim binders, building on this foundation, carried it to yet greater heights of skill and beauty, culminating in the masterpieces of bookbinding under the Mamluk dynasty in Egypt (see nos. 159–60).

Tooled leather bookbinding was also practiced in the Islamic regions of North Africa (see nos. 153–6 from Tunisia) and, so far as our present state of knowledge goes, it was in Morocco that the practice of gold-tooling originated: no. 158, which was made about 1256 in Marrakesh, is the earliest known example of gold-tooling on leather. In this process, designs were impressed on the leather by means of heated tools on gold leaf. This process, together with the related one of enriching with gold paint the blind-tooled or stamped designs on leather covers, spread from Morocco to Moorish Spain and to Naples, and thence to Venice, where a colony of Muslim bookbinders introduced the methods and designs of Islamic binding to the European book world. Their influence was far-reaching. Islamic techniques of tooling, together with patterns of geometric, foliar and foliate design, and particularly the use of arabesque, have left a lasting imprint upon the art of European bookbinding.

153
Lower cover of a blind-tooled Qur‘ān box-binding in reddish-brown leather. From Kairouan, 3rd/4th century. The central panel contains two parallel lines of ribbon interlocking, cross-hatched incised letters, and three vertical lines occupying the inner margin. The panel is flanked by a border containing a continuous floral pattern incised in blind. The outer edges are bordered by blind cross-bands and pomegranate by small roundels. Three holes pierced at one end of the binding were intended to take leather strap hinges, parts of which remain.
15.8 x 23.90cm.
Tunis, National Institute of Archaeology and Art.
Case 24

154
Lower cover of an oblong Qur‘ān box-binding in tooled leather, originally reddish-brown, now blackened round the edges. From Kairouan, 3rd/4th century. The central panel, surrounded by a triple frame, contains an elaborate design of broad interlocking bands, the spaces between them filled in with solid dots. Outside the triple frame is a wide border containing a running design of hatched caligraphy in relief, enclosing a row of cartouches.
8 x 17.50cm.
Tunis, National Institute of Archaeology and Art.
Case 24

155
Lower cover of an oblong Qur‘ān box-binding in tooled leather, originally reddish-brown, now blackened round the edges. From Kairouan, 3rd/4th century. The central panel, surrounded by a triple frame, contains an elaborate design of broad interlocking bands, the spaces between them filled in with solid dots. Outside the triple frame is a wide border containing a running design of hatched caligraphy in relief, enclosing a row of cartouches.
8 x 17.50cm.
Tunis, National Institute of Archaeology and Art.
Case 24

156
Lower cover of an oblong Qur‘ān box-binding of black leather of course grain. From Kairouan, 3rd/4th century. The central panel is occupied by four parallel rows of six circular lenses in relief, each decorated with a design in the form of a medallion. A wide frame, containing a cord beneath the leather, surrounds the central panel and is itself surrounded by a wide border of continuous hatched caligraphy design.
13.0 x 20.10cm.
Tunis, National Institute of Archaeology and Art.
Case 24

157
Original 6th/7th century blind-tooled binding of brown goatskin, laid down as a later binding. The outer frame is decorated ornamented by small decorative tools, and it encloses a plain panel of natural leather, ornamented with a similar central ornament, similarly tooled.
The binding contains a part of a rare Zaire Qur‘ān copied in Naskh script by ‘Ali bin Is‘ra‘il ibn Is‘ra‘il, probably in Syria. It was made in 184–190 by Abū Ali al-Ghafs ibn Muhammad ibn Zakari‘, the scribe, and is probably the brother of the zaidi ruler Nayar id-Din (see no. 155).
18.5 x 13.50cm.
London, The Irf Collection.
Case 24

158
Original 7th/8th century gold- and blind-tooled binding of brown goatskin, laid down as a later binding. The geometric panel consists of broad broad stripwork in geometric patterns covering the panel, with closely compressed interlace of small cross-striped rosettes, filled in with dots and scroll work. There is a matching flap. This binding is of tremendous importance in the history of bookbinding as the earliest known example of gold-tooling on leather.
The manuscript is one of the two-volume Qur‘ān, copied about 844/1248 at Marrakesh in Morocco by the Abūlwhād Abū ‘Abd Allāh ‘Alī ibn ‘Alī ibn Muhammad al-‘Ala‘ in the name of ‘Alī ibn ‘Umar al-‘Ala‘ in the name of al-Ma’mūn. It is the earliest known example of gold-tooling on leather.
10.6 x 7.51cm.
London, British Library, Or. 1399.
Case 24

159
Brown goatskin binding over paste board, with gold and blind tooling. An outer and an inner border, with elaborately tooled corners, contains a large central ornamental panel in blind and gold with gold filigree at top and bottom. Blind stripwork is ruled over the entire cover, with a large central panel containing a medallion with geometric design incised in blind and blind.
Case 24
180 Brown goat skin binding over paste board, inscribed with a design which closely resembles that of another volume from the same Qur'an (see no. 183). The central panel is blocked in blind tooled and gold, with compartments enclosing two large, oval frames at top and bottom. Inside the central panel a geometric design of interlocking gold lines overlaid with a second, smaller, repeating rectangle containing text and gold dots. The flap has a border and frame to match those of the cover, and a circular aperture with gold- tooled design based on a six-pointed star, surrounded by ropework interlace in blind, punctuated with gold dots.

Part of a Qur'an copied, illuminated and bound for the Amir Ahmad al-Husayn (d. 887/1484). A fine example of Egyptian binding of the Mamluk period, late 14th/early 15th century.

315 x 225mm.
London, British Library, Or. 8577.
Case 24

184 Decorated Qur'an binding of dark brown morocco over paste board, with a brocatel surrounding frame consisting of a chain of each gold panel separated by a blue panel, stamped with vellum. The interior large central panel is blocked in gold with a continuous floral band. The central medallions, panels and corners are outlined in gilt. The outer cover consists of a single, large panel surrounded by a border of smaller panels, some with small, red and green medallions, others with light brown leather, framed by a sequence of wide border panels filled with royal blue and turquoise paper, each of which contains a design of gold medallions in one paper flange. The central panel consists of a continuous sequence of smaller, panel-like panels coloured in red, orange and turquoise, with a similar gold paper flange inlay. This design is repeated on the flap. Persia, 1183/1770 century.

475 x 280mm.
London, British Library, Or. 8129.
Case 24

186 Decorated Qur'an binding of brown goatskin, decorated on front and back covers with an identical design in blind tooled with gold dots. With a frame filled in with small decorative tools, the central panel is dominated by a bold design of brocaded interlacing medallions against a deep background of small ropework tools. Six compartments are closed by the ropework contain a pattern of white dots, originally tooled or painted in gold. Lines larger border dots contain their golding. There is a matching flap.

From a Qur'an of the Mamluk period, copied in Muhajariq script with alternate lines of gold and red with gold and red trim in the late 14th/early 15th century and a second red and blue panel on the flap of a similar period. It is a fine example of Egyptian binding of the Mamluk period. (See no. 180).

265 x 185mm.
Case 24

188 Decorated Qur'an binding of brown goatskin over limp boards made of layers of this decorated paper. Blind tooled decoration consisting of a hatched frame, closely intertwined with small ropework tools, and similar compartments in the same style. The frame encloses a plain panel, also tooled in the same manner, with a yellow and red backing fill.

Two pieces of vellum with floral patterns are attached to the flap and an illuminated page of the Qur'an is attached to the flap.

From a Qur'an of the Mamluk period, copied in large Muhajariq script, with ornate illumination in gold and red in the 13th/14th century in Egypt (see no. 77-8).

265 x 185mm.
Case 24

189 Dark brown goat skin binding over paste board, with flaps of the Purpolo decorated on each gold border panel enclosing a large central panel blocked in gold with a floral medallion pattern. This panel contains a central medallion decorated with floral designs and sprays. The flaps are of light brown leather cut away in a series of border panels and a large central panel, all of which are filled in with cut paper flanges of gold arabesque over backgrounds of blue, turquoise, orange and black paper. There is a matching flap.

The binding encloses a copy of the Qur'an, contemporary with the binding, in fine Muhajariq script with illuminated margins. Persia, 13th/14th century.

36 x 225mm.
London, British Library, Or. 12379.
Case 24
Glossary of Arabic words

bismal-ah, the expression 'Bi-sm il-Lahi 'ar-Rahman 'ar-Rahim', in the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, which appears at the head of every surah of the Qur'an with the exception of Surah IX, at-Tawbah.

f, a letter of the Arabic alphabet.

h, a letter of the Arabic alphabet.

hamzah, a letter of the Arabic alphabet representing the glottal stop. Hamzat al-naf (the joining hamzah) is an initial hamzah which loses the quality of a glottal stop, except in pause, and the word is thus assimilated with the previous word. Hamzat al-qaf (the cutting hamzah) keeps the quality of the glottal stop at all times.

hijra, the flight of the Prophet from Mecca to Madinah in A.D. 622; this is taken as year one of the Islamic Era.

kh, a thirtieth part of the Qur'an. The Qur'an is so divided to enable the reader to complete the reading in a month.

khaf, the plural of haf, a person who has committed the Qur'an to memory.

khalq, a residence for Sufis.

maddah, an orthographical sign in Arabic, denoting a long 'a' vowel after a glottal stop.

madrasah, a college for traditional Muslim education, usually attached to, or part of, a mosque.

q, a letter of the Arabic alphabet.

qaddah, an orthographical sign in Arabic, denoting the doubling of the letter over which it is placed.

shamsah, a solar rounded used in Qur'an manuscripts as a verse division.

shuuyrah, a palmette in Qur'an manuscript illumination, usually projecting horizontally into the margin.

sukun, an orthographical sign in Arabic, denoting that the letter over which it is placed is voiceless.

surah, a chapter of the Qur'an.

ta' mim, an orthographical sign in Arabic, used only on the final letter of a noun, adjective, or participle, which denotes that the word is indefinite.

naf, a religious endowment.

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