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Written, spoken, envisioned: the many facets of the Qur'an in art

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To summarise the many aspects of the Qur'an in art is a herculean task, for the Qur'anic text and artistic expressions of it have permeated the daily life of Muslims over the past millennium and a half around the globe. The material is vast, and one of the striking features of the many chapters in this volume is the extraordinary range of material over time, space and media. My concluding remarks here are designed to complement the opening ones by Oleg Grabar. Like him, I began with the question raised in his article 'Art and Architecture and the Qur'an' in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*: what is there in the Qur'an that shaped, however remotely, or that affected, however immediately, the arts?¹ Like him, I have reversed the emphasis here and focused on the actors, asking: how have Muslims evoked the Qur'an in the arts? Our papers share structural similarities as well. I too have divided my material into three, discussing three ways in which Muslims have evoked the Qur'an in their daily lives: the written, the oral and the visual.

Let us begin with the written, for it is the first documented and best known. For most Muslims, the Qur'an is a book: not just a book, but the Book, the most important one.² We know this from the materials used – the finest parchment or paper, the best quality ink, the lavish use of gold. To see this, we can look at pages from two of the finest codices of the Qur'an ever produced: one on parchment made in the first centuries of Islam, the other on paper dating from five centuries later.³

This page (Fig. 16.1) belongs to a 30-volume Qur'an endowed by Amajur, Abbasid governor of Damascus from AD 870 to 878, to a mosque in the city of Tyre (now in Lebanon) in AH 262/AD 875–76. I chose this manuscript because it is one of the first known in Europe: B. Moritz included a photograph of this page to illustrate his article 'Arabia' in the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, published in 1913. Its parchment support and angular script are typical of the manuscripts made in early Islamic times, but the layout of three lines per page, while aesthetically dramatic, is extremely wasteful of parchment. It required the skins of some three hundred sheep to make the 3,000 bi-folios (each measuring 13×40 cm) that comprise the 30-volume set.

The same lavish, one might even say profligate, use of materials can be



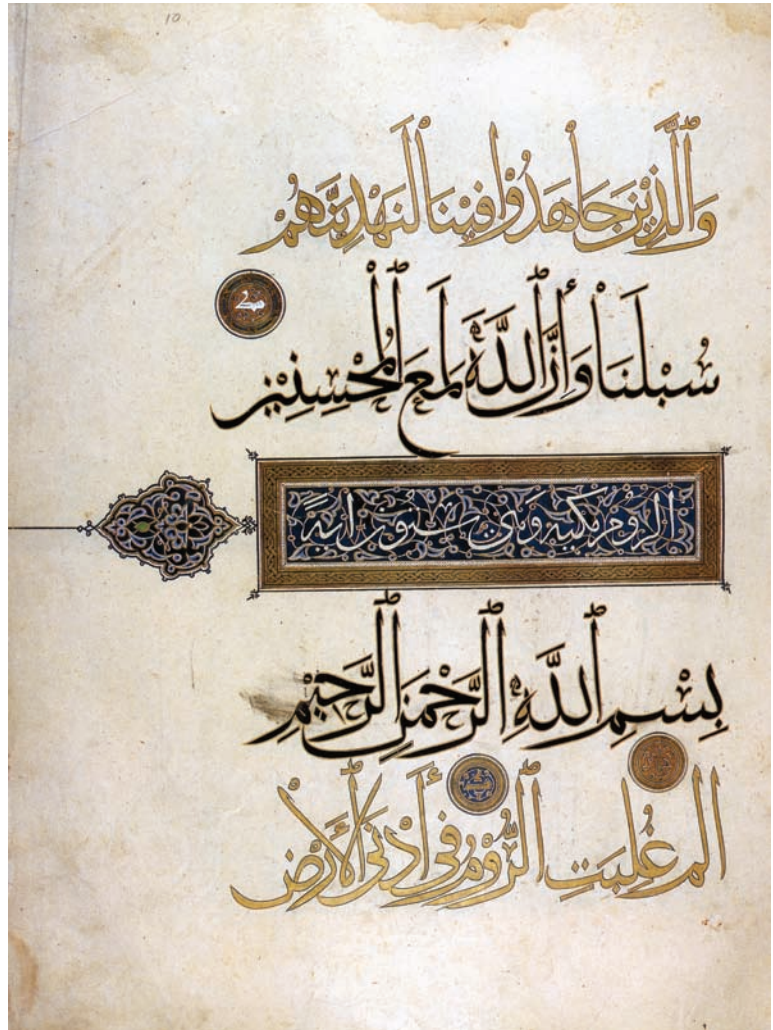
Fig. 16.1
Page with *Sūrat al-Baqara*
(Q. 2:19), 12.7cm × 19.3 cm.
From a 30-volume manu-
script of the Qur'an
endowed by Amajur,
governor of Damascus, to a
mosque in Tyre in AH
262/AD 875-76. Once in
the Khedival Library in
Cairo, after B. Moritz,
'Arabia', *EF*, vol. I, pl. IV/2.

seen in a second manuscript, one bequeathed by the Ilkhanid sultan Uljaytu to his tomb at Sultaniyya (Fig. 16.2). Compared to the earlier parchment manuscript, the paper codex is colossal: each page measures 72×50 cm, nearly fifteen times the area of each parchment folio in the Amajur Qur'an. The full sheet, or bi-folio, measures 100×72 cm, and more than one thousand of these 'baghdadi'-sized sheets of paper – the largest that can be made by a single person lifting the mould from the vat of pulp – were needed for this gigantic manuscript of the Qur'an. The paper was further sized, glazed, and polished so that the pen glided effortlessly across the glassy surface. The calligraphy, attributable to the hand of the early fourteenth-century master Ahmad al-Suhrawardi, is equally polished, and the layout of three lines written in gold ink outlined in black alternating with two lines written in black ink outlined in gold was extremely labour-intensive. So was the decoration, signed by Ahmad al-Suhrawardi's regular partner, the illuminator Muhammad b. Aybak b. 'Abdallah. Colophons, certificates of commissioning, and endowment notices (*waqfiyya*) indicate that it took more than six years (AH 706–713/AD 1306–13) to produce this magnificent book.

The quality of these Ilkhanid copies of the Qur'an is clear when we compare them to other manuscripts of the time. This was the period when the book became a major form of artistic expression in Iran, yet even the finest illustrated manuscripts pale in comparison to the quality of these imperial Qur'ans.⁴ Manuscripts made for the vizier Rashid al-Din are half the size (half-*baghdadi* sheets), but have many more lines per page (typically 35).⁵ The contrast is even greater when such an imperial *baghdadi*-size manuscript of the Qur'an is compared to commercially produced illustrated manuscripts: the typical 'small' *Shāhnāma* manuscripts measure a mere 19×13 cm, or one-sixteenth *baghdadi* size (slightly

Fig. 16.2

Page with the last verse of *Sūrat al-'Ankabūt* (Q. 29) and the opening verses of *Sūrat al-Rūm* (Q. 30), 72 × 50 cm. From a 30-volume manuscript of the Qur'an copied between AH 706-713/AD 1306-13 and endowed by the Ilkhanid sultan Uljaytu to his tomb at Sultaniyya. Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul, TKS, EH234.



smaller than the parchment sheets used in the Amajur Qur'an).⁶ These illustrated manuscripts have been the subject of many publications dating back at least a century, probably because western audiences, accustomed to images, privilege pictures over text, but in their own time, manuscripts of the Qur'an were much more important works of art.⁷

Although we typically think of the Qur'anic text as a codex, this was not the only form that written versions of the text could assume: portions of it were also copied on rolls. These were typically used as amulets, carried in metal cases suspended from the neck. Edward Lane described and illustrated some in his account of life in nineteenth-century Cairo.⁸ Block-printed versions of such amulets, to be identified as *ṭarsh*, were made already in medieval times and provide quotidian examples of written



Fig. 16.3
Block-printed amulet or *tarsh*, Fatimid period, 11th–12th c., 14 × 12.1 cm. Ink on tannish-beige paper. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund 1971, 1971.237.1.

versions of the Qur’anic text. A few fragments excavated at Fustat (Old Cairo) are datable on archaeological grounds to the period AD 950–1050, and more than fifty pieces housed in museums and libraries around the world are assumed to date from that time until the fifteenth century (Fig. 16.3).⁹

These amulets all share certain physical characteristics. All but two are printed on paper.¹⁰ They typically measure less than 8 cm in width; the longest, now in Columbia University Library, is 29 cm long. Like the examples mentioned by Lane in nineteenth-century Cairo, then, these medieval examples are small enough to be rolled and carried in a case.

The text on these medieval amulets was not transcribed but printed from several blocks. The larger headings and decorative motifs, which are often printed in relief, may have been done from wooden blocks, but the small size of the letters – the ones on the so-called *Scheide tarsh* in Princeton University Library, for example, measure a mere quarter of a centimetre – suggests that the text was carved onto metal blocks, perhaps

made of tin embedded in clay or wood, like those used for the block printing of textiles. Most of the texts contain phrases, verses and short chapters from the end of the Qur'anic text along with prayers. They are extremely difficult to read.¹¹ In stark contrast to the Amajur Qur'an, the letters are cramped. There are no dots or vowel marks. Tails of letters do not descend below the line.

The technique of block printing, which allows multiple copies to be produced cheaply, shows that these amulets were made for a quite different audience than the courtly or royal patrons who commissioned large and elaborately decorated multi-volume books. Indeed, various authors have speculated that these scrolls circulated in the so-called 'underworld' of Islam.

In addition to books and rolls, the Qur'anic text was also inscribed on many types of objects made in the Islamic lands, ranging from coins and textiles to woodwork. Many, though not all, of these objects were official commissions. Many are connected with the practice of the faith, but here I would like to turn to another, more quotidian medium: ceramics. Shards or fragments of bowls excavated at the Abbasid capital of Samarra, for example, include the word *fasayakfikahum* ([God] will suffice you against them) from *Sūrat al-Baqara* (Q. 2:137) painted in cobalt on an opaque white glaze.¹² The longest word in the Qur'an, it was adopted as the slogan of the Abbasids. According to the court chronicler Hilal al-Sabi', it was inscribed on the standard that supported their famous black banner. It was also used on other objects made for them, such as a fragmentary *ṭirāz* textile dedicated to Harun al-Rashid.¹³

Architectural inscriptions are both the largest and the most common type of inscription with Qur'anic text. Qur'anic verses appear on all types of buildings erected from earliest times to the present. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, ordered by the caliph 'Abd al-Malik in AH 72/AD 692, is the first example of Islamic architecture and also contains the first dated example of a Qur'anic text written in any medium.¹⁴ The Qur'anic text is part of a long mosaic band that encircles both sides of the octagonal arcade. In addition to selections from the Qur'an, it contains prayers, blessings and the building's foundation text. Both material and technique highlight the importance of the inscription. The words are spelled out in gold glass cubes, the most expensive type of tesserae in an already expensive medium. In order to reflect light and literally 'highlight' the text, the gold cubes are set at a thirty-degree angle to the surface – a painstaking technique that required extra time and hence extra expense.

Qur'anic inscriptions continue to be used on buildings in modern times as, for example, at the mosque built in AD 1983 north of Riyadh at the King Khaled International Airport.¹⁵ The building, designed to house five thousand worshipers, takes much of its inspiration from the Dome of

the Rock. It comprises a central hexagon covered by a huge dome of steel and concrete carried on a compression ring decorated on the interior with tile mosaic. Virtually everything about the building is gigantic, due in part to the copious funding available. The inscription band is said to be the largest of its kind ever produced: it covers an area of 240 square metres (2,600 sq. ft), with letters measuring over four metres high (nearly 15 ft), outdoing the already large ones that had been used in medieval buildings like the madrasa and tomb complex for Sultan Hasan in Cairo.¹⁶

Curiously, the Qur'anic verses on the Dome of the Rock, some of the few that are still extant from the Umayyad period, do not follow the text exactly as we know it today. The variations include juxtapositions of disparate passages, conflation, shift of person, and the occasional addition or omission of brief phrases. Such changes reflect an oral tradition of using the Qur'an and other familiar texts in persuasive messages and orations. They show how Qur'anic vocabulary, phrasing and texts were already part-and-parcel of polished literary language by the end of the first century of Islam.

The Qur'anic inscription on the Dome of the Rock thus reveals the close connection between written and oral presentations of the text, for the Qur'an is not only a written document but also an oral presentation. The message was originally conveyed orally, as depicted in a later painting from a historical manuscript of Rashid al-Din's history of the world showing Muhammad receiving the revelation from Gabriel.¹⁷ The oral tradition of the Qur'an still prevails in modern times. In the 1920s, when Muslim scholars gathered in Cairo to assemble a standard edition of the text with regularised readings and numbering, they did not work from early written copies with traditional orthography. Rather than collating texts from early fragments, they relied on the oral and written traditions of the 'science of readings' (*'ilm al-qirā'āt*).¹⁸ The text produced by these scholars, printed by the Official Printing House at Bulaq in AH 1342/AD 1923–24, and known as the Standard Egyptian edition of the Qur'an, is the one most commonly used in much of the Muslim world today.

Oral traditions are more difficult to document than written ones, and hence historians tend to favour writing (and art historians favour pictures) over oral reports. Anthropologists and other social scientists, however, are now showing that orality played a significant role in many cultures, and we can use indirect evidence from art to show the importance of the oral tradition throughout the history of Islam and the Qur'anic text. Again, let us consider a few representative examples.

We can return to the Amajur Qur'an to see that recitation and memory were already important in early Islamic times (Fig. 16.1). In transcribing the text, the calligrapher(s) manipulated both the shapes of the letters and the spaces between letters and words to enhance the visual and rhetorical aspect of the message. For example, in the centre of the first line on this

page, the calligrapher stretched out the connector between *sīn* and *mīm* in *al-samā'*, with the uprights of *lām* and final *alif* providing counterweights. In the second line he exaggerated the final *tā'* on *ẓulumāt* to balance the initial *zā'*. In this way he arranged the page so that the round bowls of *fā'* and *wāw*, as well as the final *qāf* in the lower line, fell in a diagonal line. Symmetry and balance were clearly desired ends that sometimes took precedence over readability. Words, even *Allāh*, are divided between lines or even pages. The page illustrated here ends with most of the word *yaj'alūn*, but the final *nūn* is written on the verso, perhaps because such a break allowed the reciter time to turn the page.

The anonymous calligrapher of the Amajur Qur'an also suppressed the intratext spaces between words. That is, he made the spaces between words the same size as the spaces between individual letters within words. Compare, for example, the space between the words *barqun* and *yaj'alūn* with the space between the letters *rā'* and final *qāf* in the former word in the middle of the last line. Writers in Late Antiquity had already rejected word separation in favour of the so-called *scriptura continua*. In order to slow down reading and enhance the oral and rhetorical aspects of reading the text, calligraphers writing in both Greek and Latin had deliberately abandoned the intratext spaces. Such unbroken text also provided mnemonic compensation through enhanced short-term aural recall.¹⁹

Calligraphers transcribing the Qur'an in early Islamic times did exactly the same thing, abandoning the visual spaces found in regular written documents, such as a legal document on papyrus dated Shawwal AH 104²⁰ (March-April AD 723) and a contemporary letter on leather found at Mt Mug in Central Asia.²¹ In these regularly written documents the spaces provide immediate visual clues to the beginning and ends of words. When transcribing the Qur'an, calligraphers deliberately collapsed these spaces. The challenge to reading an Arabic text was even greater than in reading one written in Latin or Greek in *scriptura continua*, as vowels are traditionally unwritten in Arabic. To compensate, the calligrapher of the manuscript endowed by Amajur added coloured dots. Such copies of the Qur'an were clearly designed to be 'read' aloud by someone who had already committed the text to memory.

Qur'anic recitation, rather than silent reading, remained important for centuries. We know this from our second example (Fig. 16.4) showing the importance of recitation: the Qur'anic inscriptions used on *miḥrābs* (prayer niches). Many are adorned with a verse that includes the word for ritual prayer (*al-ṣalāt*), not surprisingly because the term occurs sixty-seven times in the Qur'anic text. The text most commonly used on *miḥrābs* is verse seventy-eight from *Sūrat al-'Isrā'* (Q. 17:78), in which the believer is enjoined to perform prayer (*al-ṣalāt*) from the setting of the sun to the darkness of the night as well as the dawn recitation of the Qur'an, for that



Fig. 16.4
Lustre-tiled panel used as a
cenotaph cover in the tomb
of 'Abd al-Samad at Natanz,
Iran, Ilkhanid period, early
14th c., 123.2 × 59.7 cm. The
Metropolitan Museum of
Art, Rogers Fund, 1909,
09.87.

action is particularly attested. This verse is found in many places – for example, on the *mihrāb* of the Kizimkazi Mosque built in AH 500/AD 1106 in Zanzibar²² – but it was particularly popular in Iran. It is found not only on plaster *mihrābs* installed *in situ*, as at the Mosque of Zavara dated AH 551/AD 1156 – 57 and the Mosque of Varamin, founded in AH 722/AD 1322,²³ but also on many lustre-tiled panels, such as the one added to the shrine of ‘Ali b. Rida at Mashhad in AH 612/AD 1215; the magnificent one made for the Maydan Mosque at Kashan in AH 623/AD 1226 and now in the Berlin Museum; and a third in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The largest of these *mihrābs*, the one in Berlin, has the verse inscribed in large blue *thuluth* letters around the outer frame band.²⁴

I have long wondered why this particular verse was chosen over the 66 other uses of the word *al-ṣalāt* in the Qur’anic text, and William Graham’s book on orality provided an answer.²⁵ Verse 17:78 is one of only two indisputable instances in the Qur’anic text – the other being verses from *Sūrat al-Qiyāma* (Q. 75:16–18), which are not suitable to inscribe on a *mihrāb* as they refer to moving the tongue – in which the word *qur’ān* functions as a true verbal noun denoting an activity, not an object. I believe, therefore, that this particular verse was chosen because it conveys the verbal force of Qur’anic recitation. The choice of verse, then, highlights not the architecture, but the believers’ actions that will take place within it, and underscores the force of Qur’anic recitation.

Let us now turn to our third theme of visuality. The Qur’anic text was more than reading and recitation. To drive home the written and oral message, artists manipulated the text to enhance its visual impact. We have seen how the calligrapher (or calligraphers) who penned the Qur’an manuscript donated by Amajur did so with layout and script. So did the Kashani potter, who designed the lustre *mihrāb* in Berlin, emphasising the Qur’anic band containing Q. 17:78 by size, relief and colour. Even designers of tiny *ṭarsh* were concerned with visual impact, enhancing the almost unreadable text with key phrases such as the *shahāda* printed in relief or even with images that illuminated the divine message. The bottom of this fragment (Fig. 16.3) shows two panels printed in reserve flanking an arch with a hanging lamp suspended over two lampstands.²⁶ The panel on the right is damaged, but seems to contain the end of the popular phrase [*al-mul*]k *lillāh* (Dominion belongs to God). The panel on the left continues with two of God’s epithets commonly found in the Qur’an: the One, the Powerful (*al-Wāḥid al-Qaḥḥār*). Although not strictly Qur’anic, the phrase evokes the power and majesty of God. Interlacing bands printed directly above contain *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* (Q. 112:1–4), the pre-eminent statement of God’s unity. The text, then, delivers a similar message to the one on the longer *ṭarsh* in Princeton about God’s power and omnipotence, and the image, often found on

tombstones and in mausoleums, represents the setting of the *miḥrāb*, evoking divine guidance and paradise beyond the grave.²⁷

Designers of lustre tiles manipulated Qur'anic texts and images in a similar fashion. The lustre-tiled panel shown in Fig. 16.4, for example, contains the word *fasayakfīkahum*, the word from Q. 2:137 that had been a slogan of the Abbasids, inscribed on ceramics and other objects made for them. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, artists arranged the word as an arch shape, reproducing it in several media, ranging from stone tombstones to lustre tiles like this one and even coins minted for the Ilkhanid ruler Abu Sa'id from AH 722/AD 1322–23 to AH 727/AD 1326–27.²⁸ The most spectacular are the lustre-tiled panels, which represent a tour-de-force of potting.

This panel probably came from the tomb of the Sufi shaykh 'Abd al-Samad at Natanz in central Iran.²⁹ Measuring 120×60 cm, the set comprises three moulded tiles with inscriptions in blue raised in relief from a background of floral designs reserved in white against a brown ground. A broad band around the edge contains a relief inscription with the well-known Throne Verse (*Sūrat al-Baqara*, Q. 2:255), saying that God neither slumbers nor sleeps and that His throne encompasses all that is on the heavens and the earth. The text continues in the centre between the colonettes with the end of the verse, saying that He, God, the All-High, the All-Knowing, is never fatigued. It continues with most of the next verse (Q. 2:256), saying that truth stands out from error. Written in relief, the text is clear and readable. It contrasts to the arch, which appears to be decorative, but is in fact epigraphic. It spells out the word *fasayakfīkahum*, part of the Qur'anic verse Q. 2:137 whose text continues inside the arch: *Allāh wa huwa al-Samī' al-'Alīm*.

To enhance the image, the designer Hasan b. 'Ali b. Ahmad Babuwayh, whose name is inscribed in the spandrels, added the common motif of a lamp suspended from the arch. The image occurs typically in funerary contexts and may denote God's power over life and death, a message expressed verbally in the accompanying Qur'anic text. Image then reinforces the function of these sets of tiles, which were not, as commonly thought, installed vertically as *miḥrābs* marking the *qibla* (direction of prayer) wall of a tomb or shrine, but rather laid flat on the top of a large boxy cenotaph.³⁰ Qur'anic verse and hanging lamp then deliver the message that God has power beyond the grave.

The funerary implications of the hanging lamp representing God's power over life and death were often conflated with its luminary symbolism as the divine light of God. This too was a powerful image, and artists were able to manipulate it in several ways to reinforce the message of God's omnipotence. Glass mosque lamps provide a final example of how artisans could adapt form and technique to fit the Qur'anic verses

appropriately inscribed on specific types of objects. The lamps, which conveyed light from a wick floating in oil and water contained in a small glass container set inside, are usually inscribed with the so-called Light Verse (*Āyat al-Nūr*, Q. 24:35), whose literal translation reads:

God is the light of the heavens and the earth,
The likeness of His light is as a wick-holder
(Wherein is a light,
The light in a glass
The glass as it were a glittering star).

The verse thus literally describes God's light through the metaphor of the wick floating in a dish of oil inside of a glass mosque lamp.

Artisans in Mamluk times went one step further to make their mosque lamps accord with the meaning of the Qur'anic verse. The typical Mamluk glass lamp (Fig. 16.5) is boldly decorated with inscriptions. The Light

Fig. 16.5
Glass mosque lamp made
for the Mamluk amir Sayf
al-Din Shaykhu, second half
of the 14th c., 33 cm (h).
The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, Edward C. Moore
Collection, Bequest of
Edward C. Moore, 1891,
91.1.1537.



Verse is thickly painted in bright blue around the neck, while a second inscription, painted in reserve against a blue ground around the body, contains the name and titles of the donor. Patrons like the Mamluk amir Sayf al-Din Shaykhu (d. AH 758/AD 1357), named on this lamp, must have ordered dozens, if not hundreds, for his mosque and *khānaqah* complex in Cairo, finished in AH 749–750/AD 1349.³¹ When the lamps were lit, the patron's name and titles would have glowed with divine light, a stunning visual realization of the beautiful Qur'anic metaphor inscribed at the top.

All these examples, then, show how the Qur'anic text permeated the lives of Muslims from earliest times to the present, from the Umayyad Dome of the Rock to the recent mosque at King Khaled airport in Riyadh. The text was read and recited by people across a range of social classes, from the wealthiest patrons like Uljaytu, Ilkhanid sultan of Iran and Iraq, and Amajur, Abbasid governor of Damascus, rulers and courtiers who commissioned and endowed fabulous handwritten copies of the written text, to the more quotidian, if not necessarily underworld, believers who bought block-printed amulets. Selected verses of the sacred text adorned myriad objects, executed in a range of media from official coins, textiles and woodwork to utilitarian ceramics and glass. Artists took the written message and enhanced it so that the Divine Word resonated and reverberated, not only graphically and orally but also visually, in the minds, ears and eyes of Muslims throughout the world.

NOTES

- 1 Oleg Grabar, 'Art and Architecture and the Qur'ān', *EQ*, vol. I, pp. 161–75.
- 2 Some of these ideas about manuscripts of the Qur'an were expressed at greater length in my paper 'Uses and Functions of the Koranic Text', given at the International Conference on Manuscripts of the Qur'an, held at the University of Bologna in September 2002.
- 3 François Déroche, 'The Qur'ān of Amāğūr', *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 5 (1990–1991), pp. 59–66. This page is reproduced in Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair, *Islamic Arts* (London, 1997), Fig. 36. David James, *Qur'āns of the Mamlūks* (London, 1988), no. 40.
- 4 Sheila S. Blair, 'The Development of the Illustrated Book in Iran', *Muqarnas* 10 (1993), pp. 266–74; Linda Komaroff and Stefano Carboni, eds., *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256–1353* (New Haven, 2002).
- 5 Sheila S. Blair, *A Compendium of Chronicles: Rashid al-Din's Illustrated History of the World* (London, 1995); *eadem*, 'Patterns of Patronage and Production in Ilkhanid Iran. The Case of Rashid al-Din' in Julian Raby and Teresa Fitzherbert, eds., *The Court of the Il-Khans 1290–1340* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 39–62.
- 6 Marianna Shreve Simpson, *The Illustration of an Epic: The Earliest Shahnama Manuscripts* (New York and London, 1979).

- 7 Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, 'The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field', *Art Bulletin* 85, 1 (March 2003), pp. 152–84.
- 8 Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London and New York, 1836, repr. 1973), pp. 247, 568. He also mentioned that a scroll with seven suras – Q. 6 (*An'ām/Cattle*), Q. 18 (*Kahf/Cave*), Q. 36 (*Yā Sīn*), Q. 44 (*Dukhān/Smoke*), Q. 55 (*Raḥmān/Most Merciful*), Q. 67 (*Mulk/Dominion*) and Q. 78 (*Nabā'/News*) – was considered an esteemed charm.
- 9 Some were exhibited as part of the splendid show of Fatimid art held in Paris in 1998; see the Institut du Monde Arabe's *Trésors fatimides du Caire, exposition présentée à l'Institut du monde arabe du 28 avril au 30 août 1998* (Paris, 1998), nos. 98–99 with bibliography; Miroslav Krek, 'Arabic Block Printing as the Precursor of Printing in Europe', *The American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE) Newsletter* 129 (Spring 1985), pp. 12–16; Richard W. Bulliet, 'Medieval Arabic *Tarsh*: A Forgotten Chapter in the History of Printing', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107, 3 (1987), pp. 427–38; Karl R. Schaefer, 'The Scheide *Tarsh*', *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 56, 3 (1995), pp. 401–20.
- 10 The two exceptions in the Neues Museum in Berlin and the University of Pennsylvania are on parchment.
- 11 Three scholars, one a native speaker of Arabic, worked on the text of the Scheide *tarsh* at Princeton for some twenty hours and were able to decipher only half of it.
- 12 Friedrich Sarre, *Die Keramik von Samarra* (Berlin, 1925), p. 85, pl. 18/3 and Fig. 179.
- 13 Ernst Kühnel, 'Tirāzstoffe der Abbassiden', *Der Islam* 14 (1925), p. 85, Fig. 2.
- 14 There is a vast bibliography on this building and its inscription. See, most recently, the discussion in Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh, forthcoming), with further references.
- 15 Renata Holod and Hasan-Uddin Khan, *The Contemporary Mosque: Architects, Clients and Designs Since the 1950s* (New York, 1997), pp. 174–9.
- 16 Inscriptions analyzed in Erica C. Dodd and Shereen Khairallah, *The Image of the Word: A Study of Quranic Verses in Islamic Architecture*, vols. I – II (Beirut, 1981), ch. 4.
- 17 David Talbot Rice, *The Illustrations to the 'World History' of Rashid al-Din*, ed. Basil Gray (Edinburgh, 1976), Fig. 32.
- 18 William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (New York, 1993); Efim Rezvan, 'The Qur'an and Its World, vol. VI. Emergence of the Canon: The Struggle for Uniformity', *Manuscripta Orientalia* 4, 2 (June 1998), pp. 13–54.
- 19 Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words, the Origins of Silent Reading, Figurae: Reading Medieval Culture* (Stanford, 1997).
- 20 Nour Collection PPS 185; Geoffrey Khan, *Bills, Letters and Deeds: Arabic Papyri of the Seventh to Eleventh Centuries* (London, 1993), no. 97; also illustrated in Bloom and Blair, *Islamic Arts*, Fig. 35.
- 21 Yuri A. Petrosyan, et al., *Pages of Perfection: Islamic Paintings and Calligraphy from the Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg*, exhibition catalogue, essays by Marie Lukens Swietochowski and Stefano Carboni (Lugano, 1995), no. 7.
- 22 Samuel Flury, 'The Kufic Inscriptions of Kisimkazi Mosque, Zanzibar, 500 AH

- (AD 1107)', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (April 1922), pp. 257–64.
- 23 V. Kratchkovskaïa, 'Notices sur les inscriptions de la Mosquée Djoum'a à Véramine', *Revue des études islamiques* 5 (1931), Fig. 1.
- 24 Richard Ettinghausen, Oleg Grabar and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture 650–1250* (New Haven and London, 2001), Fig. 280.
- 25 Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*, p. 82.
- 26 The piece was illustrated in Jonathan M. Bloom, 'Revolution by the Ream', *Aramco World* 50, 3 (May/June 1999), p. 39.
- 27 On the funerary implications of this image, commonly found on tombstones and in mausoleums, see Nuha N. N. Khoury, 'The *Mihrab* Image: Commemorative Themes in Medieval Islamic Architecture', *Muqarnas* 9 (1992), pp. 11–28.
- 28 George C. Miles, 'Epitaphs from an Isfahan Graveyard', *Ars Islamica* 6, 2 (1939), Style F, pp. 155–6; Sheila S. Blair, 'The Coins of the Later Ilkhanids: A Typological Analysis', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 26, 3 (1983), pp. 295–317.
- 29 Sheila S. Blair, 'A Medieval Persian Builder', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 45 (1986), pp. 389–95.
- 30 At Natanz, for example, the niche in the *qibla* wall of the tomb is three-dimensional and was probably filled with the concave hood now in the Victoria and Albert Museum (AH 71/AD 1885).
- 31 Illustrated in Annemarie Schimmel, 'Islamic Calligraphy', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 50, 1 (Summer 1992), Fig. 33; for the patron and his lamps, see Stefano Carboni, *Glass from Islamic Lands* (New York, 2001), no. 100. I thank Stefano Carboni for these references. David Roberts' celebrated depiction of the Mosque of Sultan Hasan (reproduced in Bloom and Blair, *Islamic Arts*, Fig. 95), shows dozens of these mosque lamps suspended from the *iwāns*, which are themselves decorated with Qur'anic verses.