

The Blue Koran Revisited*

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Abstract

The “Blue Koran” is one of the most distinctive copies of the text, copied in 15 lines of an angular gold script on leaves of blue parchment. Leaves from the manuscript have been known to scholars since the early years of the 20th century, but it first came to wide scholarly attention in the 1970s, following the publication of several leaves in such international exhibitions as the Arts of Islam at the Hayward Gallery in London. It was attributed either to ninth-century Iran or Tunisia, where the bulk of the manuscript was said to remain. The present author published several articles on the manuscript, reconstructing it as a set of seven volumes and attributing it on the basis of its *abjad* numbering system as well as historical evidence to tenth-century Tunisia under Fatimid patronage. In the following decades other scholars have challenged this attribution, suggesting that the manuscript could have been produced in Umayyad Spain, Kalbid Sicily, or even Abbasid Iraq. Considering the additional pages from this manuscript that have come to light in the past decades as well as the significant advances made in the study of Koranic paleography and codicology, it is time to reexamine what is known about the manuscript and see which attribution makes the most sense.

Keywords

Koran (Qurʾan) – manuscripts – calligraphy – Kufic – gold – indigo – Tunisia – Fatimids

The so-called “Blue Koran” is one of the rare Islamic manuscripts that is immediately recognizable to all viewers, even those without any knowledge of Arabic

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or Islamic art. Indeed, no other manuscript of the Koran—or Islamic manuscript in general—has been the subject of a novel, in this case *The Blue Manuscript* by the Tunisian writer, artist and curator, Sabiha Khemir.¹ The deep blue parchment pages are crossed by fifteen lines of stately golden script delicately outlined in black, interrupted only by a few silver circles, now tarnished, to indicate the ends of verses. I became interested in the Blue Koran over thirty years ago and presented a talk on it at the first Codicology and Paleography conference organized by François Déroche in Istanbul in 1986.² When the fifth conference was announced, I thought it would be appropriate to revisit the manuscript in the light of the great advances that had been made in studying Islamic manuscripts over the past decades, and this paper is the result of that review as well as some additional work on the physical aspects of the manuscript.

The Blue Koran has been known to the scholarly community for just over a century, ever since the Swedish diplomat and dealer, Frederik R. Martin, announced that he had acquired several leaves of this extraordinary manuscript in Constantinople. He said that the manuscript had come from Mashhad in Persia, and that it had been commissioned for the tomb of the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid by his son al-Ma'mun in the early ninth century of the Common Era. He explained the distinctive color of the manuscript pages by stating that “blue was the color of mourning in Islam”.³ In the late 1920s, T.W. Arnold and Adolf Grohmann not only accepted Martin’s attribution but also embellished it.⁴ Martin eventually sold his leaves, and they were quietly acquired by various European and American museums and collectors, including the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, which acquired its leaf in 1933 [Fig. 1], the Seattle Art Museum, the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, Sir Alfred Chester Beatty, and Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan.⁵

1 Sabiha al-Khemir, *The Blue Manuscript*. London (Verso), 2009.

2 Jonathan M. Bloom, “The Blue Koran: An Early Fatimid Kufic Manuscript from the Maghrib”, in: François Déroche (ed.), *Les Manuscrits du Moyen-Orient: Essais de Codicologie et Paléographie*. Istanbul/Paris (Institut français d’études anatoliennes d’Istanbul/Bibliothèque nationale), 1989, pp. 95–99.

3 Fredrik R. Martin, *The Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey from the 8th to the 18th Century*. London (Holland Press), 1971, p. 106, 141, n. 83.

4 Thomas W. Arnold and Adolf Grohmann, *The Islamic Book: A Contribution to Its Art and History from the VII–XVIII Century*. Paris (Pegasus Press), 1929, p. 20.

5 Harvard University Art Museums 1967.23, the page had been on loan for ten years from a private collector in Cleveland, Ohio, from whom it was eventually purchased; Seattle Art Museum 69.37 acquired in 1969; Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Illuminated: A Handlist of Korans in the Chester Beatty Library*. Dublin (Hodges, Figgis & Co.), 1967, No. 4.



FIGURE 1 *Leaf from the Blue Koran. 239 × 351 mm. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 33.686*
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

In 1976 leaves from the manuscript were exhibited at the great Festival of Islam held in London. A double page from the National Library in Tunis was attributed to “Mesopotamia (Baghdad?), Abbasid period, 9th century”.⁶ In a concurrent exhibition across town at the British Library devoted to manuscripts of the Koran, another leaf from this “almost complete manuscript” had been borrowed from the National Institute of Archaeology and Art in Tunis; this leaf was attributed to the early tenth century in Kairouan, the capital city of North Africa in the medieval period.⁷ This attribution was supported by the Tunisian scholar Ibrahim Shabbouh, who had published a late thirteenth-century Arabic catalogue of the mosque library of Kairouan stating that a very similar manuscript had been in the library at this time.⁸ The catalogue men-

6 *The Arts of Islam*. [London] (The Arts Council of Great Britain), 1976, No. 498. Exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery.

7 Martin Lings and Yasin Safadi, *The Qurʾān*. London (World of Islam Publishing Co. for the British Library), 1976, No. 11.

8 Ibrāhīm Shabbūh, “Sijill qadīm li-maktaba jāmiʿ al-qayrawān [An old register of the library

tioned a manuscript written in five lines of gold and silver on a “dark” ground; it was bound in seven volumes and contained in an aloes wood case. Shabbouh and other scholars imagined that the “five” was a mistake for “fifteen”. Following Tunisian independence and the dissolution of the religious endowments many leaves from the Blue Koran had been moved from the library of the Great Mosque of Kairouan to the Bibliothèque Nationale de Tunisie and the Institut National d’Archéologie, both in Tunis.⁹

Scholars continued to study this manuscript in the following years. In 1980 David James republished the pages from the Chester Beatty Library, connecting them for the first time with the Tunisian ones that had been exhibited in London, and in 1982 Anthony Welch and Stuart Cary Welch published a page in the collection of Sadruddin Aga Khan in Geneva. Following the opinion of Martin Lings and Yasin Safadi, who had organized the British Library exhibition, Welch and Welch claimed improbably that the pages of this manuscript, “unlike almost all others, were turned from left to right, the left-hand page preceding the right”.¹⁰

About that time I had the chance to closely examine the leaves at Harvard and at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. I tried to collect information about all the leaves known from the manuscript, including some that were appearing on the London art market in the wake of the Festival of Islam exhibition. I was able to determine that all the known pages came from a single manuscript of some 600 leaves, measuring approximately 30 × 40 cm, and that many of the leaves in Western collections came from the first seventh of the text, suggesting to me that the manuscript had been divided into seven parts and that the first volume had become separated from the others at a relatively early date. Although the Harvard leaf was stamped with a Persian customs stamp dated 1902, I concluded that the manuscript was not Persian but North African in origin, particularly because the page in the Chester Beatty Library, which contains text from Chapter 2, verses 57–61, is marked with the Arabic letter *ṣād* to indicate the end of verse 60. In the *abjad* system used in most of the Arab world, sixty is indicated by the letter *shīn*; the variant *ṣād* was used in the western Islamic lands, however, indicating that the manuscript might have

of the Great Mosque of Kairouan]”, *Revue de l’institut des manuscrits arabes* 2, no. 2 (1956), p. 345.

9 Alain George, “Calligraphy, Colour and Light in the Blue Qur’an”, *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 11 (2009), p. 79.

10 Anthony Welch and Stuart C. Welch, *Arts of the Islamic Book: The Collection of Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan*. Ithaca/NY/London (Cornell University Press), 1982, pp. 20–22. Exhibition catalogue.

been produced in that region. Early astrolabes confirm that difference had emerged by the early tenth century: the one made by Ahmad b. Khalaf for the Abbasid caliph al-Muktafi (reigned 908–932) uses the eastern form *shīn* whereas the one made at Sarragosa in 1079 uses the older and western form of *šād*.¹¹ Furthermore, I suggested on historical grounds that the manuscript had been made in the mid tenth century during the time when the Fatimids ruled North Africa.¹²

In 1992 when François Déroche published the pages from this manuscript in the Nour Collection, he identified the script as one of the variants of his D group and suggested that such manuscripts would have been produced in the ninth century, when the Aghlabid dynasty ruled North Africa for their Abbasid overlords.¹³ On historical grounds, however, I had argued that the Aghlabids were unlikely to have been patrons of this particularly magnificent manuscript and suggested instead that the gold and blue color scheme had been inspired by Byzantine manuscripts, which were often copied on colored parchment. We know that the Byzantines and Fatimids had extensive diplomatic relations in which precious gifts were exchanged, and I hypothesized that the receipt of a Byzantine imperial manuscript in the middle of the tenth century might have inspired Fatimid calligraphers to produce the Blue Koran.

At the time I first studied the Blue Koran, I knew only of Byzantine imperial manuscripts, some notable examples of which had been written in silver and gold ink on parchment colored purple (actually more a reddish pink) apparently with murex, a rare dye made from mollusks that was reserved for imperial use. I suggested that the blue was meant to replace the unavailable Byzantine purple, but later the Byzantinist Robert Nelson wrote of other Byzantine and even Latin manuscripts copied with metallic inks on blue and green parchments, such as the ninth-century Codex Aureus Anthemi in Albania or the Lectionary in Naples.¹⁴ Nelson suggested that the choice of blue might

11 Dominique and Janine Sourdel, *La civilisation de l'islam classique*. Paris (Arthaud), 1968, p. 630 and ill. 203 and 205; Jerrilynn D. Dodds (ed.), *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain*. New York (Metropolitan Museum of Art), 1992, p. 376.

12 Jonathan M. Bloom, "Al-Ma'mun's Blue Koran?", *Revue des Études Islamiques* 54 (1986), pp. 61–65; id., "The Blue Koran"; id., "The Early Fatimid Blue Koran Manuscript", *Graeco-Arabica* 4 (1991), pp. 171–178.

13 According to George, "Calligraphy, Colour and Light", p. 84, based on François Déroche, *Les Manuscrits du coran, aux origines de la calligraphie coranique*. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale, Département Des Manuscrits, Catalogue Des Manuscrits Arabes) 1983, no. 145, the D.IV script group can be dated on the basis of an endowment document of 329/940.

14 Robert S. Nelson, "Letters and Language/Ornament and Identity in Byzantium and Islam",

reflect a color hierarchy in Byzantine manuscript production, where purple was reserved for the emperor and blue and green for lesser levels of society. At the time I had barely considered the connotations of blue in Arabic and Islam, but as Classical Arabic, like Persian, has no specific word for “blue”, I wondered how contemporaries would have viewed the particular color of the manuscript.¹⁵ Does the absence of a word for a particular color mean that contemporaries would not have seen it as distinct from neighboring hues?

In 1995 the London bookseller Bernard Quaritch offered for sale some additional leaves from the Blue Koran, and the author of the catalogue, Tim Stanley, while noting the North African attribution, proposed that the manuscript had been produced in tenth-century Spain, then ruled by the Umayyads.¹⁶ Stanley compared the gold-and-blue color scheme of the manuscript to the mosaic inscriptions surrounding the mihrab and dome at the Great Mosque of Cordoba and noted that Arabic sources also record the receipt in Spain of a “sky-colored” letter from the Byzantine emperor, where the Greek text was written in gold and the Arabic translation in silver. Stanley also returned to the question of the Kairouan library catalogue that first mentioned the manuscript and sorted out some of its details. He was able to correlate the silver chapter-headings mentioned in the catalogue with the tarnished and virtually invisible inscription on the margin of one of the leaves in Tunis as well as on one of the Quaritch leaves.

Ten years later, in 2006, Marcus Fraser and Will Kwiatkowski published an additional leaf from the manuscript being offered for sale by the London dealer Sam Fogg.¹⁷ Noting the various attributions of the manuscript to North Africa and Spain, they proposed yet a fourth attribution, namely to Sicily, ca. 850–950, when it was ruled by the Aghlabid and Kalbid dynasties. They suggested that the Blue Koran was directly inspired by the Rossano Gospels, a Byzantine purple manuscript that had been produced in Syria or Palestine in

in: Irene A. Bierman (ed.), *The Experience of Islamic Art on the Margins of Islam*. Reading (Ithaca), 2005, pp. 61–88.

15 *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*, eds. H.A.R. Gibb and others. Leiden (Brill), 1960, s. v. “Lawn”.

16 *The Qur’an and Calligraphy: A Selection of Fine Manuscript Material*, Bernard Quaritch Catalogue 1213. London (Bernard Quaritch), 1995.

17 Marcus Fraser and Will Kwiatkowski, *Ink and Gold: Islamic Calligraphy*. London (Sam Fogg), 2006. (Exhibition catalogue Berlin, Museum für islamische Kunst). In the same year, Emily Neumeier, then a student at Boston College, published an article summarizing the debate, “The Blue Koran: Debating an Early Koranic Manuscript”, *Elements: Boston College Undergraduate Research Journal* 1 (2006), pp. 11–19.

the middle of the sixth century but that was preserved for hundreds of years at Rossano, a town in the province of Calabria on the instep of Italy that had been captured and held by the Aghlabids and Kalbids. Sicily, they argued, stood at the mid-point of the Mediterranean world and would have been a perfect place to produce such a manuscript. While this attribution is intriguing, their evidence is not even circumstantial. The only known manuscript of the Koran attributed to Sicily in this period, part of which is in the Khalili collection in London, is nothing like the Blue Koran, whether in script, format, or size.¹⁸

Just a few months later, Sophie Makariou, curator of Islamic art at the Louvre, published a bifolio from the Aga Khan Collection and suggested that the manuscript's blue and gold color scheme could be compared to mosaic inscriptions in Umayyad Syria and therefore resonated with an "Umayyad ideology". Although noting the Ifriqiyan attribution, she concluded that manuscript could be localized to the Umayyad or Abbasid east (i.e. in the eighth century) or even in Spain where the Umayyads had established a caliphate in exile in the tenth century.¹⁹

Most recently Alain George of the University of Edinburgh has joined Makariou in challenging the North African consensus in a long article in which he argues that the manuscript was produced at Baghdad in the early Abbasid period; he also attempts to explain the origin and meaning of its unique color scheme in practical, temporal and spiritual terms.²⁰ While acknowledging Déroche's classification of the script as D.IV, he decided that the Blue Koran represents a transitory stage, "still anchored in the aesthetic of B. II, C. II and related styles, while also prefiguring the rest of the D group".²¹ He concluded that the script of the Blue Koran is "thus in all probability a product of the period between the mid-second and early third century AH, i.e. the second half of the eighth to first half of the ninth century AD".²² A page from the manuscript that has a full page of gold illumination covering gold calligraphy (but no silver markers) shows, he believes, that the manuscript was the product of not one but two stages; in his view the calligraphy dates from the first campaign and all the silver ornament—verse markers, marginal indications of ten verses, and

18 QUR 261 and 368. See François Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition: Qur'ans of the 8th to the 10th Centuries AD* [The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art]. London (The Nour Foundation/Azimuth Editions/Oxford University Press), 1992.

19 Sophie Makariou, *Chefs-d'oeuvre islamiques de l'Aga Khan Museum*. Paris (Musée du Louvre Editions), 2007, No. 34.

20 George, "Calligraphy, Colour and Light, *passim*."

21 Ibid, p. 81.

22 Ibid. p. 89.

chapter titles, were added later, probably in the late third/ninth or fourth/tenth century when he believes that the manuscript was reformatted from one to seven volumes and the gold illumination added.²³ George also demonstrated that the so-called Maghribi system of *abjad* notation could not serve as a reliable indicator of origin, as it was used throughout all the Islamic lands before the evolution of a distinctive Eastern variant.²⁴ Although he, like other scholars, compared the Blue Koran to Byzantine purple manuscripts, he like Makariou saw a stronger relationship not only to Umayyad mosaic inscriptions, as on the Dome of the Rock, but also to a series of now-lost gold on blue inscriptions from the Abbasid period.²⁵ He concluded his article with a discussion of the color scheme of the manuscript and how it resonates with a sense of “light over darkness”, an opposition “profoundly rooted in the Qur’an itself”.²⁶ The manuscript, he suggested, was probably made for an Abbasid patron of the highest rank in Baghdad or another prominent center. It drew on Umayyad color schemes, themselves based on Byzantine precedents, with connotations not only of royalty but also of divine light.²⁷

Although I admire George’s erudition, I remain skeptical not only of the Abbasid attribution, but also of the symbolic interpretation. It seems to me that almost every author, from F.R. Martin to Fraser and Kwiatkowski, has had a particular interest in championing one attribution over another, whether—in the case of Martin—to disguise the true source of his pages or—in the case of the auction houses and rare book dealers—to increase the value of the product they are offering for sale by suggesting a new and unique provenance. Indeed, I first encountered the Blue Koran when I was writing my dissertation on the art of the Fatimids, so it is no wonder that I saw this manuscript through the filter of my own research. Nevertheless, the Blue Koran has long been closely associated with Tunisia and in recent decades the manuscript has become for Tunisians, along with the minaret of Kairouan’s mosque of Sidi ‘Uqba, *the*

23 George follows Stanley in suggesting that the absence of the silver marks under the illuminated page indicates that these marks had to have been added [significantly] later (p. 90 and n. 69). There can be no question that the silver marks were added after the gold writing, but the question remains whether this was part of the same campaign, as I believe. If the continuation of the text on the page later covered with illumination was simply a mistake, then it would have been corrected when the gold was done and before there was any need to add the silver.

24 George, “Calligraphy, Colour and Light”, pp. 92–93.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 96–97.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 105.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

symbol of Tunisian Islamic art. Leaves from the Blue Koran are displayed in several provincial museums, testifying to the extraordinary importance of this manuscript for Tunisian cultural identity. This manuscript is not only presently in Tunisia but Tunisians believe it was also made there. For Alain George, who had just finished writing a book on the rise of Koranic calligraphy, the Blue Koran belongs to the Abbasid manuscript tradition he examined in great detail.²⁸ For Ladan Akbarnia and Francesca Leoni, two young scholars who organized a 2010 exhibition in Houston, Texas, on the mystical arts of Islam, the gilded words of the page and the manuscript as a whole represent “rays of light for those who read and recite [God’s] revelations”.²⁹ In that sense, the Blue Koran manuscript has become a mirror in which we project reflections of ourselves and our own interests, an image already considered by the novelist Sabiha Al Khemir. In any event, a lot of money rides on scholarly opinions, for as the manuscript becomes increasingly known to the world at large it becomes increasingly valuable. Whereas in 1933 the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, paid \$85.00 (equivalent today to about \$1400/£950) for its page, a single page offered at auction in London on 5 October 2010 that was estimated to sell for £200–300,000 actually fetched £529,250 (\$835,000)!³⁰

It seems to me that four aspects of the manuscript require further elucidation: its provenance, its materials, its script, and its meaning. In the remainder of this essay, I will take these aspects in order, summarizing what we know and don’t know about the manuscript and applying the logical principle known as Ockham’s Razor, namely that *entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity, or the simplest explanation is more likely the correct one*. In other words, when competing hypotheses are equal in other respects, we must select the one that introduces the fewest assumptions and postulates the fewest entities while still sufficiently answering the question.

Provenance

Although the modern history of the Blue Koran manuscript begins in Istanbul, where F.R. Martin said that he acquired some leaves, the Persian customs stamp on the Harvard University leaf is evidence only that one particular leaf

28 Alain George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*. London/Berkeley (Saqi), 2010.

29 Ladan Akbarnia and Francesca Leoni, *Light of the Sufis: The Mystical Arts of Islam*. Houston (Museum of Fine Arts), 2010.

30 <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2015/arts-islamic-world-l15220/lot.62.html> last accessed 14 May 2015.

passed across the Iranian border in the early twentieth century. Otherwise nothing connects this manuscript to the eastern Islamic lands, and the bulk of the manuscript has been associated with Tunisia where a significant number of leaves remain. George states that 67 leaves are preserved at the Raqqada Museum and four in the Bardo Museum in Tunis, but no full count has ever been published.³¹ There is also no evidence to associate the manuscript with Spain or Sicily. All told, about 50 leaves (less than one-tenth of the original manuscript) are publicly known today, but only six leaves, presumably those that had passed through Martin's hands in Istanbul, had been published before the 1976 London exhibitions (see Appendix A and B). The bulk of the leaves known today appeared quite mysteriously on the art market. Approximately two-thirds of the known pages, including the oldest-known leaves, come from the first seventh of the text, but there is no way of knowing how many leaves had ever been in Istanbul. My sense is that only a few leaves were ever in Istanbul and that the bulk of the manuscript remained in Tunisia well into the mid-twentieth century. Therefore, many of the leaves that have appeared on the market in the last few decades may have a questionable provenance.

It is significant, however, that no leaves from this manuscript are known to remain in Istanbul collections, and there is no other evidence, apart from F.R. Martin's report, that it was ever there. Had this remarkable manuscript spent centuries in Istanbul or Damascus, it seems never to have inspired a later calligrapher to emulate its color scheme in the way it appears to have inspired a Hafsid calligrapher to produce a five-volume manuscript of the Koran written in silver and gold on dark paper in the early fifteenth century.³² Perhaps even closer is the small folio in Kuwait (illustrated by George) from an undated manuscript of the Koran written in gold Maghribi script on blue paper, which was clearly inspired by the Blue Koran.³³ It is safe to imagine therefore that most of the manuscript spent most of its life in the Maghrib. That said, it is perfectly possible that some pages from the Blue Koran, presumably from the first part of the manuscript, were removed from Kairouan, possibly after the Ottomans conquered Tunisia in the sixteenth century, and taken to Istanbul. It was perhaps at this time that the "fine sixteenth-century tooled Morocco binding from Persia, obviously ... for a section of the same Qur'ān" was made.³⁴

31 George, "Calligraphy, Colour and Light", p. 110.

32 Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam, 1250–1800*. London/New Haven (Yale University Press), 1994, p. 116.

33 George, "Calligraphy, Colour and Light", fig. 2. Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, LNS 323 MS.

34 Christie's (London), *Khurasan*, 9 November 1977, lot 66.

The long presence of the manuscript in Tunisia is certainly not evidence that it was made there, for we know that manuscripts were carried across the medieval Muslim world. If we accept, however, that the Blue Koran is the same manuscript that was mentioned in the medieval catalogue of the Kairouan library, it was either brought from elsewhere or produced there before ca. 1300. Under what circumstances might a manuscript of some six hundred parchment leaves have been brought from its place of production to Kairouan? Assuming for the sake of argument that the manuscript was made in Abbasid Iraq, the only time at which it could have been brought to Ifriqiya was in the ninth century, when the Aghlabids ruled the region for their Abbasid overlords. It is certainly within the realm of possibility that a manuscript produced in Abbasid Iraq was transported to Aghlabid Ifriqiya, for this is the period when both luster tiles and teakwood panels were transported from Iraq to Kairouan to be used in its Great Mosque.³⁵ But if this manuscript were the very special commission Alain George imagines it to have been, imbued with very particular meanings specifically appropriate to its time and place of production, one then wonders why it would have been sent off to distant and provincial Ifriqiya so quickly after it was made. Unlike the luster tiles and the teakwood panels, about which local sources have long said that they were imported from Iraq, there are no local legends about the Blue Koran stating that it has Abbasid origins. Nevertheless, continuing with the assumption that it was an Abbasid manuscript, it seems highly unlikely that it would have been brought to Kairouan in the tenth century, when the Fatimids gained control of the region, or in the eleventh, when it had been handed to the Fatimids' Zirid and Hammadid governors. By the middle of the eleventh century the Hammadids had returned to the Abbasid fold, but by that time any relationship between Baghdad and the Maghrib must have been more symbolic than practical, as the region devolved into political instability following the Hilalian invasions. Meanwhile, by the middle of the eleventh century, the Seljuqs had taken Baghdad and probably had better things to do than send old Koran manuscripts to Kairouan. Thus, in the absence of any other evidence that the manuscript was transported from elsewhere, a North African origin seems simplest, but its date of production remains to be established.

35 For the luster tiles, see O. Bobin, et al., "Where Did the Lustre Tiles of the Sidi Oqba Mosque (AD 836–863) in Kairouan Come From?", *Archaeometry* 45, no. 4 (2003), pp. 569–577; for the teakwood panels of the minbar, see K.A.C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, vol. 11. Oxford (Clarendon Press), 1940, pp. 317–319.

Materials

Several physical aspects of the manuscript deserve further attention. It is universally acknowledged that the manuscript was copied on unusually large sheets of parchment colored deep blue. The lines of text are ruled, and the letters written in gold. Each page of this manuscript measures roughly 30×40 cm, so bifolios must have measured more than 30×80 cm. This implies that only two bifolios could have been cut from a single parchment, so production of parchment for the entire manuscript would have required more than 300 skins. Some of the parchment leaves also bear the remains of deep creases, as if they had been folded in half or quarters. Are these creases significant? Can they help us group together some leaves? Some bifolios photographed in a dealer's collection in London in the 1980s were untrimmed with relatively rough edges. [Fig. 2] Although George noted that some of the published leaves are as large as 31×41 cm, his research focused on the proportionality of the manuscript page.³⁶ Yet much of the impact of this particular manuscript derives from the unusually large size of its pages, something that publications tend to diminish as different manuscripts are rarely reproduced to the same scale.³⁷ The sheets of parchment on which the Blue Koran was copied were twice or even four times larger than many other Koran manuscripts of Déroche's D group.³⁸ Another manuscript of exactly this unusual size is the "Nurse's Koran" commissioned by Fatima, the wet nurse of the Zirid prince al-Mu'izz b. Badis, presumably at Kairouan and completed in January 1020, although the pages are oriented vertically rather than horizontally, as in the Blue Koran, and the script is quite different.³⁹ Is the similarity of size more than mere coincidence? Does it indi-

36 George, "Calligraphy, Colour and Light", p. 113, n. 15.

37 Indeed, even the matting and framing of a leaf can have a dramatic impact on one's impression of the manuscript, as visitors to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 2012 exhibition, *Byzantium and Islam*, noticed when comparing the Blue Koran leaf borrowed from the Brooklyn Museum with the one borrowed from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. In both the exhibition and its catalogue, the Los Angeles leaf was displayed with broad margins on three sides, while the Brooklyn leaf was cropped by the mat to leave narrow margins on all four sides. See Helen C. Evans with Brandie Ratliff (eds.), *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition 7th–9th Century*. New York (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), 2012, cat. no. 192A and B, pp. 275–276.

38 Déroche, *Abbasid Tradition*, pp. 67–115. A rough survey of these examples shows that most pages measure roughly 150×200 mm or 200×300 mm. One exception is cat. no. 16 (KFQ63), a leaf in c. III script dated to the second half of the ninth century or early tenth, which measures 280×395 mm.

39 David Collection, Copenhagen 25/2003, each leaf measuring 442×295 mm.



FIGURE 2 *Untrimmed bifolio of the Blue Koran (Q 42:21–23) photographed in London in the 1980s*

PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

cate that both manuscripts were made at Kairouan? Much more work needs to be done not only on the proportional module of these manuscripts but also on the size of the sheet.

The most distinctive feature of the manuscript is, of course, its deep blue color. While a few other leaves of colored parchment manuscripts are known, none achieves the depth and vibrancy of the Blue Koran. Most scholars, including George, have assumed that the parchment was dyed with indigo, and indeed, I had originally assumed that it was true. When I repeated that claim, Cheryl Porter, an experienced book conservator who has worked with Islamic manuscripts in many collections, told me that it is well-nigh impossible to dye parchment, as re-wetting the stretched and dried skins would cause them to cockle and lose their finish.⁴⁰ Other experiments dyeing parchment with indigo have produced very splotchy results, quite unlike the even color of the

40 For the various ways in which sheep parchment might be colored with indigo, see Cheryl Porter, "The Physical Make-up of the Blue Quran," in Glair Anderson, Corisande Fenwick and Mariam Rosser-Owen, eds, *The Aghlabids and their Neighbours*. Leiden (Brill), in press.



FIGURE 3 *Two samples of parchment one colored with indigo, the other dyed*
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

Blue Koran. George, in consultation with a conservator at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, claims that microscopic examination reveals the presence of dye, but this claim remains to be confirmed. A few years ago, Joan Wright, a paper conservator at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and I were able to experiment with parchment and indigo. It was impossible to get a deep blue by dipping parchment sample in an indigo bath or by painting the parchment with an indigo solution, and both treatments changed the parchment's texture. However, an appropriately deep blue was relatively easy to achieve by rubbing the parchment with a stick of indigo dye. [Fig. 3] One can imagine that pages intended for the Blue Koran were rubbed on either side with indigo paste, which had been made by fermenting the indigo leaves in water, adding lime to precipitate the indigo and then drying the sediment until it could be molded into balls or flat cakes suitable for use.⁴¹ In short, it seems more appropriate to say that the manuscript was “colored” rather than “dyed” blue with indigo, since dyeing implies the use of a liquid bath.

As George has noted, the Blue Koran is—unlike all other Kufic manuscripts—ruled with light drypoint incisions (visible in figs. 2 and 5). While several very early manuscripts of the Koran were ruled, ruling was not usual for later parchment manuscripts of the Koran, although paper manuscripts, which became increasingly common in the tenth century, were often ruled. George justified the presence of ruling by explaining that the unique blue “dye of the parchment would have prevented work by transparency.”⁴² Sheila Blair, on the other hand, explained the presence of ruling as a sign of the manuscript's rel-

41 The process is described by Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo*. London (British Museum Press), 1998, p. 109.

42 George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, p. 175, n. 6; George, “Calligraphy, Colour and Light”, p. 119, n. 88.

actively late date.⁴³ Lack of transparency seems a poor explanation for ruling, since few undyed parchment leaves are so translucent, let alone transparent, that underlying rulings could be seen through them. Paper, on the other hand, is often translucent enough to allow rulings to be seen through the sheet. Other dyed parchment leaves, such as those dyed deep orange, are not ruled.⁴⁴ In sum, the presence of ruling in the Blue Koran remains to be explained and seems to point to a later rather than earlier date.

The other unusual feature of this manuscript's materials is the writing in gold, or chrysography, which, according to George, is based on the use of gold powder as an ink pigment.⁴⁵ As he notes, several recipes for gold ink are recorded in the manual on calligraphy writing by the Zirid ruler of North Africa al-Mu'izz ibn Badis (d. 1062), although to my knowledge Ibn Badis's instructions have not been tested to see if they actually work.⁴⁶ For example, he writes that one should "pulverize" a sheet of gold with wine vinegar on a rubbing stone or pour gold and black *tūr* filings into a glass pot to steep for twenty days,⁴⁷ but the first approach would produce gold granules rather than the fine powder necessary for ink, and the second might not do anything at all. According to later European sources such as Cennino Cennini, gold pigment is produced by gently grinding gold leaf with a finger in gum arabic or honey and then washing the excess medium away to leave "shell" gold, so called because it was normally collected in a shell. In any event, shell gold does not handle like paint or ink and does not provide opaque coverage with one application, so it is difficult to imagine our calligrapher copying the manuscript with it as if he were using ordinary brown or black ink.

Binocular microscopic examination of the leaf in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, with Joan Wright (and independent confirmation by Cheryl Porter and Kristine Rose who looked again at the Chester Beatty Library leaves) indicates that the Blue Koran was written in an entirely different way, namely by writing on the colored parchment using a pen charged with a transparent adhesive (i.e. glair, made from egg white, or gum arabic), and then applying the gold leaf, which would stick only where the adhesive had been applied. After the

43 Sheila S. Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*. Edinburgh (Edinburgh University Press), 2006, p. 45 and 127.

44 Déroche, *Abbasid Tradition*, p. 58.

45 George, "Calligraphy, Colour and Light", p. 75.

46 Martin Levey, "Medieval Arabic Bookmaking and Its Relation to Early Chemistry and Pharmacology", *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 40 (1962), p. 32.

47 Ibid.



FIGURE 4 *Detail of fig. 1 showing black outlining on top of gold leaf*
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

excess had been brushed away (and perhaps saved and collected for reuse), the remaining gold leaf would then have been burnished to make it shine. Leaf gold would have given a much better effect using much less gold than shell gold, had it been available, because the burnished leaf would give an impression of solid gold difficult to achieve with gold ink.

George and others have noted that each letter or letter group in the Blue Koran was outlined in a dark brown ink, which sometimes appears red when it lies on top of the gold. [Fig. 4] Outlining is typical of almost all Arabic writing in gold, whether for headings and chapter titles or for the text itself. Gold leaf inscriptions on roughly contemporary *ikat* textiles from the Yemen are also outlined in black.⁴⁸ It would seem that the process of writing in gold—whether using leaf or later shell gold—left unattractive feathery edges that the calligrapher needed to “neaten” with outlines. In later manuscripts, the

48 Déroche, *Abbasid Tradition*, e.g. nos. 44 and 41. A Yemeni textile is illustrated in Balfour-Paul, *Indigo*, pp. 28–29.

process of outlining the letters was known by many terms, including *tazmīk*, *takhīl*, *tahrīr* and *zammaka*.⁴⁹

While the outlines were done by the calligrapher or his assistant, George believes that the silver verse markers and chapter headings were part of a later refurbishment of the manuscript. This idea adds a needless complication to the manuscript's history. George believed that the full-page illumination covering a page of text (which was sold by Quaritch) indicated that the manuscript had been reformatted, but even Tim Stanley, who first published the page, suggested that it was simply a calligrapher's mistake: "it was acceptable merely to cover up the text on the verso, rather than recopy the whole leaf".⁵⁰

Further evidence for the reformatting, George believes, are the silver leaf headings and markers in this manuscript, which went long unnoticed because they had tarnished to black, virtually invisible against the dark blue ground. Silver tarnishes only in the presence of hydrogen sulfide, a naturally occurring gas whose presence in the atmosphere has increased greatly since the dawn of the industrial age, so there is no particular reason to believe that the silver leaf could not have been visible for many years after the manuscript was made. The idea that silver was not part of the original scheme does not make sense. Despite official disapproval, silver is known to have been used for manuscripts since Umayyad times.⁵¹ It must have been used in the Blue Koran with some specific purpose in mind. As the headings and divisions (here marked in silver) are not part of the revealed text of the Koran, calligraphers distinguish them from the revealed text in some way. In other manuscripts, chapter headings are invariably written in a color or script distinct from that used in the main text, so that the headings are in gold when the text is in ink, etc. Ibn al-Bawwab used two colors of gold for the illumination of the manuscript he copied at Baghdad in 1001, but the calligrapher of the Blue Koran did not use the "Baghdad" solution.⁵² Ink would not have been effective on the dark blue ground, but silver

49 On the use of the word *zammaka* see Sheila S. Blair, "Space, Place and Style: Craftmen's Signatures in Medieval Islamic Art", in: Antony Eastmond (ed.), *Viewing Inscriptions in the Late Antique and Early Medieval World*. Cambridge (Cambridge University Press), 2015, p. 260 and Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, "Hidden Treasures: Qur'an Manuscripts in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston", in: *Nameh Baharestan* (forthcoming). For the other terms, see Adam Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers*. Leiden (Brill), 2009, p. 172.

50 *The Qur'an and Calligraphy*, p. 11.

51 Gacek, *Vademecum*, p. 216.

52 D.S. Rice, *The Unique Ibn al-Bawwāb Manuscript in the Chester Beatty Library*. Dublin (Chester Beatty Library), 1955.

would have been lovely; its evanescent quality might have been particularly appreciated as it would have been distinguished from God's immutable word but equally luxurious.

Script

In the last few decades scholars have done much to categorize and identify the various scripts used to copy the Koran on parchment, but the problems of dating early Koran manuscripts are well known and have often been discussed.⁵³ In brief, no early parchment manuscript bears a date, and scholars have been forced to use various other kinds of evidence, such as endowment records and dated inscriptions on buildings and coins, to establish dates for manuscripts and then dates for particular scripts.⁵⁴ The method is fraught with difficulties, as scholars have no way of knowing how many centers of production the extant manuscripts represent and whether all places of production followed the same lines of development at the same time, let alone whether monumental epigraphy and manuscript calligraphy followed the same patterns. While many scholars have accepted and adopted François Déroche's broad classification of scripts, establishing the genetic and chronological relationships between the individual scripts remains a work in progress. For example, the differences between the ideal form of a particular script and its actual realization by an individual hand remains unclear, as does any sense of how widespread a particular script might have been or how long it might have remained in use.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, scholars accept that the script of the Blue Koran is that identified by Déroche as D.IV, although identifying the script has been easier than dating or localizing it. In addition to the use of ruling, a little-noticed feature of the Blue Koran is the occasional use of gold diacritical marks to differentiate letters of similar shape. While this feature is known from early Islamic times, does the

53 Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, chapter 4.

54 George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, e. g. pp. 60–74.

55 As George writes, "The most important conclusion, from our perspective, is that D.IV had a period of overlap with B.II and C.Ia. The evidence discussed so far thus shows that (i) Styles C.Ia, B.Ib, and B.II were in existence by the Umayyad period; (ii) C.Ia, B.II and D.IV were being written contemporaneously at one point in time; (iii) Experiments of the type that gave rise to styles F.I and D.IV were being undertaken in the second half of the second/eighth century; (iv) D.I, the classical form of D, was being written in 262/876; (v) D.III and E.I were being written in the late third/early tenth century." George, "Calligraphy, Colour and Light", p. 89.

presence of these marks help to date or localize the script? Why are some letters and words pointed? Are they particularly problematic phrases with several possible readings?

Alain George's research on Koranic calligraphy has proposed a unitary development with apparently little or no regional variation; he places the production of the Blue Koran manuscript at Baghdad in the second half of the eighth or first half of the ninth century. By the end of the ninth century, he has argued, New Style scripts were beginning to replace the older Kufic styles of writing in Iran. Nevertheless, the manuscript of the Koran endowed in 876 by Amajur to a mosque in Syria was written "in or shortly before" that year in style D.I, so clearly there must have been some regional variation. We know that Kairouan was a center of book production even if we don't know what books were produced there. If the Blue Koran was made at Kairouan instead of Baghdad, would George's early date still stand? Should we imagine a time-lag—a decade, several decades, or even a century—between metropolitan and provincial production? How quickly and easily did calligraphers carry artistic ideas from one region of the Islamic lands to another? While a ninth-century date for the Blue Koran, as Déroche himself originally proposed,⁵⁶ is certainly possible, historical circumstances still favor a tenth-century date, for we know of no other acts of Aghlabid patronage, apart from the Mosque of Kairouan itself, to equal the Blue Koran in ambition or quality. In any event, scripts are not soups, and we can't say that they're basically one flavor spiced with a soupçon of this and a dash of that. A script is a record of a performance that reflects not only the place and time in which it was done but also the skill of the performer who did it and the audience for whom it was intended.

Meaning

As so much remains to be known about this well-known manuscript, it seems quite premature to attempt to elucidate its meaning. We have seen that many authors are eager to read into this manuscript whatever they like, whether death and mourning, imperial power, emulation of the Byzantines, mystical light, and so on. The color combination of gold and deep blue has a long history in art, perhaps inspired by the "gold" flecks (which are actually pyrites) normally found in the deep blue lapis lazuli mined in Afghanistan and used as

56 Déroche, *Abbasid Tradition*, pp. 92–93.

early as the Sumerian period for cylinder seals. Tutankhamun's gold was inlaid with blue stones and faience, and gold and lapis lazuli beads were often combined in ancient Greek jewelry. Gold designs on a deep blue ground are found in Byzantine mosaics; gold writing on a blue background has a long history in Roman, Byzantine, and medieval art, whether on monumental inscriptions or on manuscripts;⁵⁷ and George has documented several instances in the arts of the first Islamic centuries from Iraq to Spain.⁵⁸ So the combination cannot be seen as particularly unusual. Indeed, several examples of indigo-dyed linen tiraz with gold Kufic inscriptions are known from the early Fatimid period in Egypt.⁵⁹

What is unusual, however, and often overlooked, is the extraordinary blueness of a Koran manuscript, considering that blue is mentioned only once in the Koran (20 [*Ta Ha*]: 102) and that in a negative way, referring to the *zurq* or [evil] blue/blear-eyed [blind] people. White and black, red, yellow and green are all repeatedly mentioned in the Koran, but blue is notably absent.⁶⁰ This does not mean that when the Koran was revealed neither the sky nor the sea were blue, but rather that the particular color we call "blue" was seen either as "green" or "dark" (i.e. black). For example, if the reference in the medieval Kairouan library catalogue does refer to this manuscript, it uses the word "dark" (*akḥal*) rather than "blue" (*azraq*). While green and turquoise blue have largely positive connotations in Islamic civilization, [dark] blue (i.e. the blue of the Blue Koran) had some negative connotations, particularly in the early centuries of Islam. The blue and gold color combination may have been appropriate for expressions of royal power, but it does seem odd to commission a manuscript of the Koran in the one color not mentioned in the text. And, as George notes, even writing the Koran in gold had its detractors.⁶¹ Thus, while a manuscript of the Koran written in gold may be unusual, one written in gold on blue is extraor-

57 Lawrence Nees, "Blue Behind Gold: The Inscription of the Dome of the Rock and Its Relatives", in: Jonathan M. Bloom and Sheila S. Blair (eds.), *Diverse Are Their Hues: Color in Islamic Art and Culture*. London (Yale University Press), 2011.

58 George, "Calligraphy, Colour and Light", pp. 98–104.

59 Jonathan M. Bloom, *Arts of the City Victorious: Islamic Art and Architecture in Fatimid North Africa and Egypt*. London (Yale University Press), 2007, p. 92, fig. 57. At the meetings in Madrid, Miriam Ali de Unzaga showed several other examples of Fatimid gold and blue tiraz.

60 Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair, "Introduction: Color in Islamic Art and Culture", in: Jonathan M. Bloom and Sheila S. Blair (eds.), *Diverse Are Their Hues: Color in Islamic Art and Culture*. London (Yale University Press), 2011, p. 17.

61 George, "Calligraphy, Colour and Light", p. 104.

dinarily so. We have no idea what the commissioner and calligrapher called the color of this manuscript—was it “dark” or was it “blue”. What associations would they have brought to bear on it?

I may have been quite misguided when I initially proposed that the Blue Koran was inspired by a Byzantine imperial manuscript, for I did not then realize that Byzantine purple was always more a reddish pink than a deep color midway between blue and red as contemporary American English usage would have it. But I think we are all misguided when we allow our imaginations free rein to project on this extraordinarily beautiful work of art whatever strikes our fancy. The Blue Koran was an extremely expensive work of art that took a great deal of time and effort to make. It was undoubtedly made somewhere, sometime long ago with a particular purpose in mind. As its extraordinary beauty remains as compelling today as when it was made over a thousand years ago, it remains our duty to continue to attempt to unravel its secrets with as much sophistication and subtlety as we can muster.

Appendix A. List of Pages by Date of Appearance

1. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, purchased Avery fund, 33.686
2. Dublin, Chester Beatty Library (before 1967), 1405
3. Cambridge, MA, Harvard Art Museums, 1967.23
4. Seattle Art Museum, 69.37
5. Tunis, Ms. Rutbi 197 (London, 1976, no. 498)
6. Tunis, National Institute of Art and Archaeology: Lings & Safadi (1976) 11, Paris 1982, no. 350
7. Sotheby's 13 April 1976 lot 237
8. Geneva, Sadruddin Aga Khan, Welch & Welch 1982 pp. 20–22
9. Geneva, Private Collection Geneva 1984, no. 1
10. Sotheby's 16 April 1984 lot 147
11. Sotheby's 15 October 1984 lot 220
12. Geneva, Private Collection, Geneva 1985, no. 3
13. Sotheby's Geneva 25 June 1985 lot 11
14. Christie's 25 November 1985 lot 83
15. LACMA 86.196
16. Christie's 16 June 1986, lot 56
17. Sotheby's 22 May 1986 lot 243
18. Sotheby's 20 November 1986 lot 279 (Khalili KFQ 53)
19. Riyadh, Rifaat Shaykh al-Ard (Geneva 1988, no. 4)
20. London, Private Collection (Bloom 1989, p. 99)

21. Christie's 10 October 1989, lot 303
22. Christie's 19 October 1993, lot 35
23. Sotheby's 22 October 1993, lot 32
24. Brooklyn Museum, 1995.51a–b
25. Quaritch 1996 no. 14
26. Sotheby's 23 April 1997, lot 41
27. Sotheby's 15 October 1997, lot 41
28. Sotheby's 29 April 1998 lot 4
29. Sotheby's 15 October 1998 lot 7
30. Sotheby's 15 October 1998, lot 8
31. Sotheby's 12 October 2000, lot 5
32. Paris, Institute du Monde Arabe 2001
33. MMA, New York, 2004.88
34. Copenhagen, David Collection, 77.2004
35. Sam Fogg 2006
36. Sotheby's 24 October 2007 lot 7
37. Roxburgh 2007, fig. 8
38. Doha, Arab Museum for Modern Art, inv. no. 234 (Sokolly cat. 6)
39. Sotheby's London, 4 October 2010, lot 7
40. Christie's London, 26 April 2012, sspale 6537 lot 39

Appendix B. List of Pages Known by Verses (Based on George [2009] with Additions)

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 1. 2:26–30 | Christies 25 November 1985 lot 83 |
| 2. 2:34–41 | Doha, Museum of Islamic Art |
| 3. 2:60–63 | Dublin, Chester Beatty Library |
| 4. 2:69–74 | Dublin, Chester Beatty Library |
| 5. 2:74–81 | Sotheby's 24 October 2007 lot 7 |
| 6. 2:93–96 | Dublin, Chester Beatty Library |
| 7. 2:109–113 | Seattle Art Museum 69.37 |
| 8. 2:120–127 | Nour Foundation KFQ53 1a–b |
| 9. 2:148–150 | Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan |
| 10. 2:178–181 | Sotheby's 15 October 1997, lot 41 |
| 11. 2:183–187 | Sotheby's 23 April 1997, lot 41 |
| 12. 2:187–194 | Copenhagen, David Collection |
| 13. 2:190–194 | Falk Geneva 1985 no. 3 |
| 14. 2:196–202 | Geneva 1988 cat 4 (Rifat Shaykh al-Ard) |
| 15. 2:196–202 | Geneva 1988 cat 4 (Rifat Shaykh al-Ard) |

16. 2:218–221 Christie's 10 October 1989, lot 303
 17. 2:229–231 Cambridge MA, Harvard Art Museums
 18. 2:237–241 Roxburgh 2007, fig. 8
 19. 2:261–267 Sam Fogg 2006
 20. 2:267–273 Sotheby's London, 4 October 2010, lot 7
 21. 3:7–9 Sotheby's 29 April 1998 lot 4
 22. 3:28–31 Christie's 19 October 1993, lot 35
 23. 3:31–36 Sotheby's 15 October 1998, lot 8
 24. 3:47–3:55 Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
 25. 3:55–64 Nour Foundation KFAQ53 2a–b
 26. 3:79–81 Christie's 16 June 1986, lot 56
 27. 3:91–96 Sotheby's 15 October 1984, lot 220
 28. 3:127–133 Sotheby's 22 May 1986, lot 243
 29. 3:170–174 Sotheby's 22 October 1993, lot 32
 30. 3:185–188 Sotheby's (Geneva), 25 June 1985 lot 11
 31. 3:188–192 Sotheby's 12 October 2000, lot 5
 32. 4:8–12 Paris, Institut du Monde Arabe AC 84–09
 33. 4:12–17 Christie's London, 26 April 2012, sale 6537 lot 39
 34. 4:19–23 Sotheby's 15 October 1998 lot 7
 35. 4:23–25 LACMA 86.196
 36. 4:37–51 Sarikhani Collection (bifolio published outside)
 37. 4:52–59 Brooklyn Museum 1995.51a–b
 38. 4:59–62 Quaritch 1996 no. 14 (end of 1st 7th of the text)
 39. 13:3–10 Quaritch 1996 no. 12
 40. 13:23–31 Quaritch 1996 no. 12
 41. 18:1–14 Quaritch 1996 no. 13
 42. 18:82–90 Kuwait, Tareq Rajab Museum
 43. 25:55–60 Aga Khan Museum
 44. 26:52–64 Aga Khan Museum
 45. 29:51–56 Bahrein, Beit al-Qur'an
 46. 30:28–32 New York, MMA 2004.88
 47. 30:24–32 Sam Fogg cat 27, no. 8
 48. 31:33–34 Raqqada, Musée des Arts Islamiques, Rutbi 196
 49. 67 leaves Raqqada (67 leaves ex-Tunis IAA)
 50. 2:10–16 Sotheby's 13 April 1976 lot 237 (ex-Bashir Mohamed, London)
 51. 42:16–23 Tabbaa 2001 fig. 17 (formerly Bashir Mohamed, London)
 52. ?? Tunis, Musée du Bardo
 53. ?? Tunis, Musée du Bardo
 54. ?? Tunis, Musée du Bardo
 55. ?? Tunis, Musée du Bardo