CHAPTER 5

Arabic calligraphy in West Africa

Sheila S Blair

The history of Arabic calligraphy in West Africa is a story that is beginning to unfold. Scholars are just uncovering the extraordinary richness of local libraries in Timbuktu which preserve large caches of hitherto unknown manuscripts, some made there in the last few centuries. Most of these discoveries are so recent that they have been described only briefly on the internet.[1]

These written documents cover a variety of subjects, as shown by a recent exhibition of manuscripts from the Mamma Haidara Memorial Library held at the Library of Congress in Washington DC in 2005.[2] Some, such as an astronomical text dated 1733, contain scientific texts, often embellished with diagrams to aid in understanding. Others, such as a chronicle of the Songhay Empire dated 1809, are historical. Most of these texts are in prose, but a few contain poetry, such as one with the laws of commerce written in verse to aid memorisation. Still other manuscripts deal with religious affairs, including a Sufi treatise dated 1858.

But of all manuscripts produced in the region, the finest in terms of both quality of materials and carefulness of execution are copies of the Qur'an. At least two dozen are known, of which a generous handful have been published with colour illustrations (see Figure 5.1).[3]

Like the others, these Qur'an manuscripts show a range of writing styles, but in general they are all well executed, with colour enhancing both text and illumination. Each manuscript is written in a controlled, practised and uniform hand closest to the 'ideal' script, which could be executed with varying levels of competence and performance.[4]

Figure 5.1 (opposite): The opening page of text from a typical manuscript of the Qur'an made in West Africa.

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Characteristics of West African Arabic script

Using these published manuscripts, especially copies of the Qur'an, our first task then is to outline the salient characteristics of the 'ideal' Arabic script used in West Africa. This script is often dubbed 'Sudani', a name coined in 1886 by Octave Houdas in a seminal article on Maghribi script, the style used in the Maghrib, or Islamic West.[5] He distinguished four subtypes of Maghribi, all sharing certain characteristics. Some relate to the alphabet. Arabic speakers (or, more precisely, writers) in the Maghrib use a different (and older) system of alphanumerics, in which the positions of *sin* and *sad* are reversed from the positions they hold in the (newer) eastern system. Other differences are orthographic. In the Maghrib, for example, *fa* and *qaf* are pointed differently than they are in the East, with a single dot below *fa* and above *qaf*. Final *fa*, *qaf*, *nun*, *ya* and *ta marbuta* are often dotless or unpointed.

Still other differences relate to the ways that calligraphers pen their strokes. The strokes used in the Maghrib have softer, more curved edges than the tauter, sharper-edged strokes used in the round hands known as the Six Pens that have been popular in the eastern Islamic lands since medieval times. Such a difference in *ductus* is probably due to the difference in pens: although calligraphers everywhere in the Islamic lands traditionally use a reed pen, calligraphers in the Maghrib slice the reed into flat slats whose tips are trimmed with a blunt or rounded end that gives a round outline. They control thicks and thins through the amount of ink on the pen and the speed with which they move it.[6] By contrast, calligraphers in the East use a pen cut from the full circumference of the reed and trimmed, since the time of Ibn Muqla (886–940) and the introduction of round scripts, with an oblique cut.[7]

Differences in materials and technique seem to have engendered differences in aspect. Maghribi script is posed on a flat baseline, with diacritical marks added in complementary horizontal strokes. In the East, by contrast, single words are often written on a slope, as are the small strokes indicating short vowels. Maghribi calligraphers typically draw only one or two letters at a time, and thus within words there are often tiny spaces or overlapping strokes. In contrast, flowing strokes and ligatures between unauthorised letters such as *alif* to *lam* are characteristic of the Six Pens used in the East, notably *thuluth*.

In addition, the shapes of individual letters in Maghribi script show more variation, as a single letter can assume four or five different shapes on the same page. The shapes also differ from those typical of the round scripts. In Maghribi script the vertical strokes for *alif*, *lam* and *ta/za* are often curved, not rigidly straight, and have a large dot or serif that faces left. The connected final *alif* descends below the baseline. The bodies of *sad* and *ta/za* are elliptical rather than triangular, as is typical of round scripts, and smooth, lacking the final notch typical of eastern scripts. In addition, Maghribi calligraphers typically exaggerate the ends of the letters, especially *sin*, *sad*, *lam*, *mim* and *nun*.

These features characterise all four subtypes of Maghribi script, but Houdas distinguished the subtype Sudani by its heaviness. Its letters are thicker and blacker. They also show greater variation between thick and thin, with thinner vertical strokes set next to thicker horizontal and diagonal ones, achieved by using the pen along its vertical chisel edge. Houdas distinguished this heavy Sudani script from three other subtypes that he designated as Qayrawani (from Qayrawan, the city now in Tunisia), a smooth, even script that resembled the round scripts used in the East; Andalusi (from Andalusia), a small, compact and jerky script; and Fasi (from Fez in southern Morocco), a large, round and elegant script. Houdas's choice of names was in many ways unfortunate, for these styles of script, while different, are not distinct to the geographical locations to which he assigned them, and two styles were sometimes combined in the same manuscript, as in a copy of a work on traditions, *Shihab al-akhbar* (The Meteor of News), transcribed in 1172–73.[8] Such intermingling of styles in any one centre of production is not surprising given the movement of both people and manuscripts throughout this region.[9] Scholars such as Ibn Rushd or Ibn Khaldun moved about Andalusia and North Africa, not always by choice. They often took manuscripts with them. Thus, the copy of *Shihab al-akhbar* produced in Valencia was read 16 years later at the Great Mosque of Cordova and is now preserved in Rabat, Morocco.

Houdas's choice of Sudani for the fourth subtype of Maghribi script was also confusing. It seems to have been predicated on the use of the term 'Sudani' as in Bilad al-Sudan (literally, the land of the black people), traditionally used to designate the broad swath of Saharo–Sahelian land across middle Africa from the Atlantic to the Red Sea, a region that today is often divided into east and west.[10] This chapter concentrates on the Arabic script used in the western half of this broad belt, and one of my goals is to set out methods to distinguish manuscripts of the Qur'an and other texts made there from manuscripts made in the eastern Bilad al-Sudan. Such regional traditions may be established on the basis of not only script, but also format and decoration as well as, in the case of the Qur'an, the specific reading of the text. I shall work from the few dated and localised manuscripts outwards to the larger group of similar but undated examples in order to delineate characteristics of the 'ideal' script and typical codex from West Africa and to establish a chronological and geographical framework about when and where this script was popular. Finally, I shall conclude with more general considerations about the cultural significance of writing in West Africa. Along the way, I shall also suggest the kinds of information that still need to be gathered to test these preliminary hypotheses.

Characteristics of Qur'anic manuscripts

Let us begin with the finest and best published manuscripts that can be assigned to West Africa, copies of the Qur'an. The image in Figure 5.2, dated 8 Rabi' I 1250 (15 July 1834), for example, was penned by a scribe named Sayrallah for Malam al-Qadi ibn al-Husayn of Borno.[11] Many of the same features, with some variations, can be seen in a

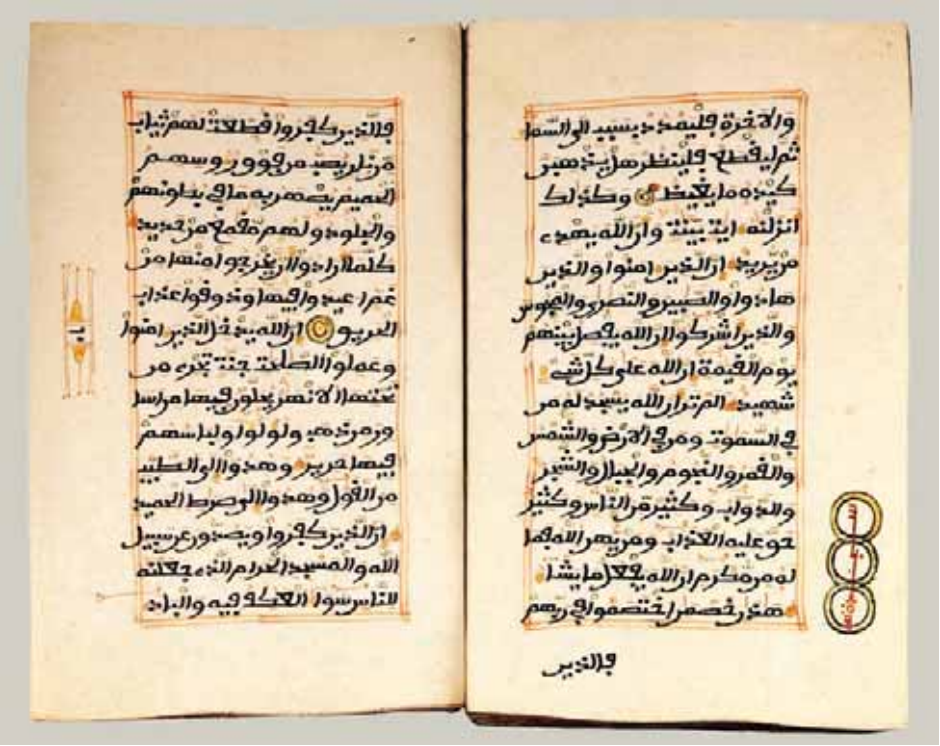


Figure 5.2 Loose-leaf manuscript of the Qur'an copied by Sayrallah for Malam al-Qadi ibn al-Husayn of Borno and completed on 8 Rabi' I 1250 (15 July 1834).

handful of similar manuscripts, most of them undated, including copies in the Nour and Ghassan Shaker collections (numbers 6 and 73, respectively). All are loose-leaf manuscripts held in a tooled leather wallet that is not attached to the text block, but rather wrapped around it, with the flap folded on the outside (see Figure 5.3). The flap is often pointed or ogival and can be held in place by a cowrie shell and leather thong wrapped around the binding. The wallet, in turn, is held in a leather satchel, said to preserve the manuscript from impurity and protect it from the evil eye, but also used to enhance portability.[12] Made of goatskin, the satchel usually has a shoulder strap and a flap secured by plaited leather thongs.[13]

The text in a typical Qur'an manuscript made in West Africa (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2) is copied on some 400 to 500 separate sheets of hand-trimmed paper, each measuring approximately 23 by 17 centimetres. The written area varies, but an average surface measures on the order of 15 by 10 centimetres. Each page typically contains 15 lines of writing, although the number can vary anywhere from 14 to 20, even within the same manuscript. The text, identified in at least two cases as the reading transmitted by Warsh from Nafi',[14] is penned in brownish-black ink, with vowels, *sukun* and *shadda* marked in red and *hamzat al-qat'* marked with a yellow dot. Green is used sparingly for *hamzat al-wasl*, as on opening pages of the Qur'an manuscript seen by Nadia Abbott.[15] Chapter titles are typically written in red, with markings in brownish-black (see Figure 5.1).

Certain letter forms are distinctive. The letters themselves are squat, and the written height within the line is almost uniform, such that *fa'*/*qaf* is almost as tall as *alif* or *lam*,

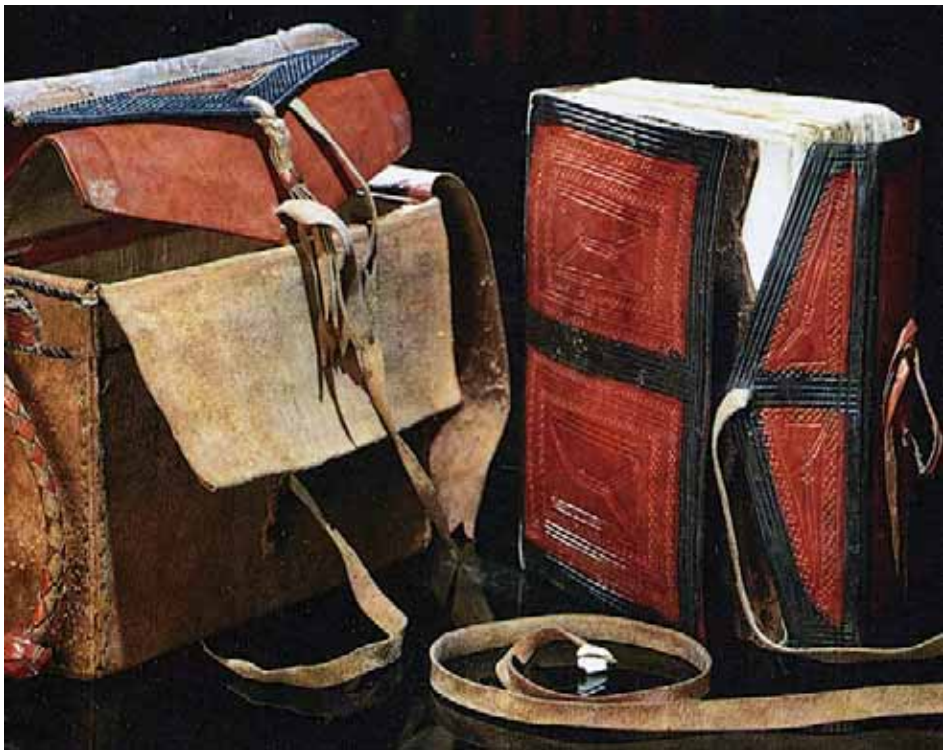


Figure 5.3 Typical binding and satchel from the copy of the Qur'an in Leeds University. In West Africa, many loose-leaf manuscripts are held in a tooled leather wallet that is not attached to the text block, but rather wrapped around it, with the flap folded on the outside. The flap is often pointed or ogival and can be held in place by a cowrie shell and leather thong wrapped around the binding. The wallet, in turn, is held in a leather satchel, said to preserve the manuscript from impurity and protect it from the evil eye, but also used to enhance portability. Made of goatskin, the satchel usually has a shoulder strap and a flap secured by plaited leather thongs.

the same height as the initial *ba* in the *basmala* that begins all but one chapter in the Qur'an. '*Ayn* is large. *Sad* is a smooth, toothless lozenge that is sometimes quite large, as in the Nour manuscript Qur'an (no. 7). It can also be elongated to fill out the line, as in the Leeds Qur'an (see Figure 5.1). Medial *ha* is written flat on the line like a bow on a package. Unwritten *alif* is added as a thin red slash.

These Qur'an manuscripts from West Africa are typically decorated with illumination of simple geometrical shapes painted in the same earth colours used to copy the text: brown, red, yellow, and occasionally green. Examination of the manuscript in Leeds suggests that the yellow is probably orpiment (Arabic *zarnih asfar*), an arsenic sulphide used elsewhere in the Maghrib and mentioned by Ibn Badis.[16] Further testing on the red would be useful as different substances were used in various regions to produce red: vermillion (*zanghafr*) was typical in the East, whereas cochineal was common in the Maghrib, not only for manuscript illumination but also for dying skins.[17] Individual verses in these West African manuscripts of the Qur'an are typically divided by pyramids of three yellow circles outlined in red. Groups of five and ten verses are indicated by various types of filled circles. Similar marginal ornaments indicate the division of the text (see Figure 5.2) into sixtieths (*hizb*), further subdivided into eight parts, indicated with rectangular panels containing the letters *ba* (one-fourth), *nun* (for *nisf*, one-half) and *tha* (for *thumn*, one-eighth). Divisions of the text into the seven parts known as *khatam al-ahzab* are sometimes indicated by circles inscribed with the word 'seven' (*al-sab'*). Places of prostration are marked with similar designs containing the

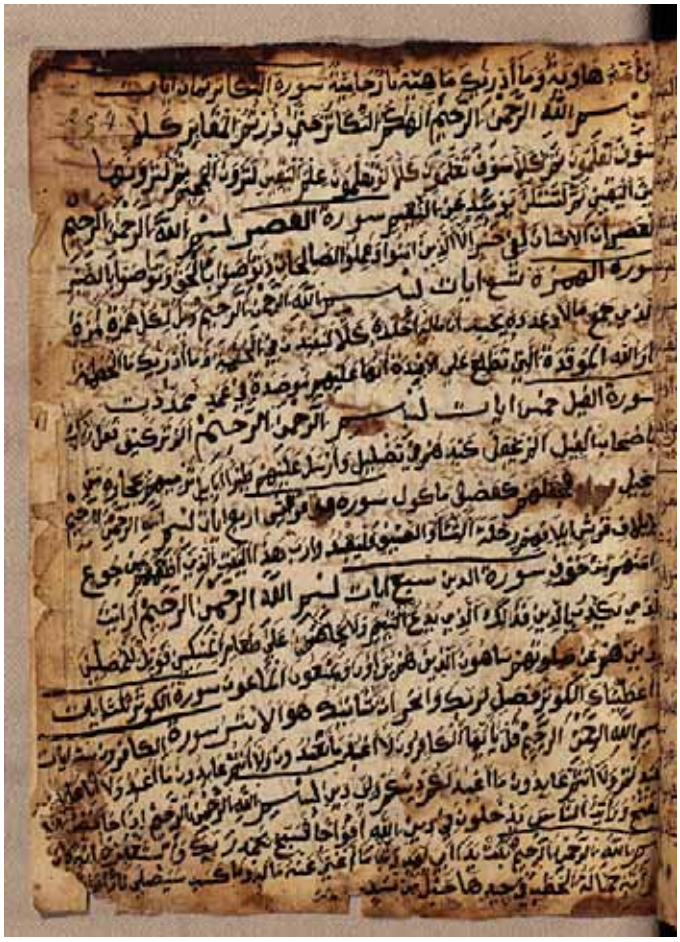
word *sajda*. In the manuscript examined by Abbott, for example, 10 of 11 prostrations accepted by the Maliki school are thus marked.[18]

Several manuscripts also contain marginal notes in the same red script as the headings. Some supply supplementary information about the numbers of verses, words and letters in each chapter. Other notes give alternate readings and instructions on recitation techniques, a topical subject in a region with a strong oral tradition. In the manuscript examined by Abbott, the marginal notes consist of a word or phrase that is to be repeated as many as 11 times, with the added instruction that this word or phrase should be repeated in recitation each time that it occurs in the Qur'an.[19] According to Abbott, this type of recitation is said to be characteristic of Sufi sects in North Africa.

Most of these small-format, loose-leaf Qur'an manuscripts can be attributed to the eighteenth or nineteenth century. At least one is dated: the copy made for the *qadi* of Borno in 1834 (see Figure 5.2).[20] In most cases we can date the manuscripts by the materials: they are copied on paper watermarked with the distinctive *tre lune*, paper that was manufactured by the firm of Andrea Galvini since the seventeenth century.[21] Some manuscripts may even date from the seventeenth century. A composite codex in the Bibliothèque Nationale containing fragments from different manuscripts (see Figure 5.4) includes a final folio dated Ramadan 1100 (June 1689).[22] The oldest Qur'an manuscript that can be attributed to the area is one examined by ADH Bivar at Maiduguri in Nigeria (see Figure 5.5).[23] It has interlinear glosses in a form of Kanembu, a dialect of Kanuri still spoken by parts of the Borno population around Lake Chad. The margins are filled with several commentaries, including a lengthy one by al-Qurtubi, whose colophon says that it was completed on 1 Jumada II 1080 (Sunday 27 October 1669). Bivar concluded that this bilingual Qur'an manuscript and three similar ones that he had seen in northern Nigeria were produced in Birni N'gazargamu, the former capital of the Borno Empire destroyed by the local Fulanis in 1808.

In format, the bilingual manuscript differs from the typical West African examples perhaps made in later centuries. It is larger (32 x 23 cm). Each page is therefore twice the area of the smaller manuscripts and has eight widely spaced lines of text written in a hand that shares many features with the Maghribi style. Letters are posed on a flat baseline and share the classic Maghribi pointing and shape, with swooping – though shorter – tails, horizontal diacritical marks, unusual pointing for *fa'* and *qaf*, and typical letter shapes such as *alif* often with a club foot, flat *sad*, *kaf* with a diagonal bar, and *dal* like pursed lips. Verses are marked with a pyramid of three balls. Like the smaller examples, the decoration is added with simple geometric shapes in earth colours, used on folio 1b to fill the bottom of the page, space that would have been occupied by the eighth line of text on regular text pages.

Colophons suggest further that the scribal tradition existed in West Africa at least from the turn of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century. The colophon to the bilingual Qur'an



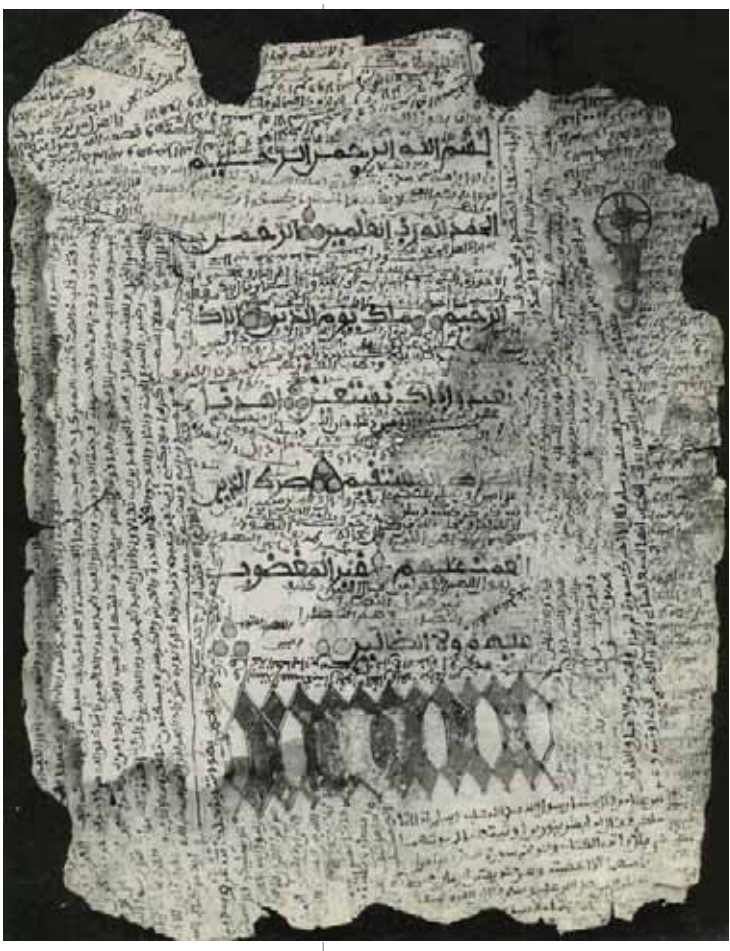


Figure 5.4 (left) Composite codex containing fragments from different texts including a final folio dated Ramadan 1100 (June 1689).

Figure 5.5 (right) Manuscript of the Qur'an with interlinear glosses in Kanembu and marginal commentary by al-Qurtubi. Several manuscripts also contain marginal notes in the same red script as the headings. Some supply supplementary information about the numbers of verses, words and letters. Other notes give alternate readings and instructions on recitation techniques.

with Kanembu gives the genealogy of the calligrapher, whose family had lived in Borno as early as the last quarter of the fifteenth century.

Sites of production

Localising the place of production of these manuscripts is difficult, for few contain a colophon and those that do are somewhat confusing. Some of the Qur'an manuscripts can be connected with Borno and the region around Lake Chad where the bilingual manuscripts with Kanembu would have been used. The Qur'an manuscript dated 1834 (see Figure 5.2) was made for the *qadi* of Borno, but the colophon reports that the scribe was in Tunis near Bab Suwayqah, which can be identified as a gate in the north wall in the medina there. The colophon adds that the scribe wrote it in the village (*balad*) of *w-z-k*, repeating the name of the settlement, the village of *w-z-q*, with a different spelling. Tim Stanley has suggested that the scribe might have moved to Tunis or was en route from his home in West Africa to Tunis.[24]

Two signatures in the manuscript examined by Abbott state that it was written in the city of Qariyan or Qariya. Abbott found that al-Bakri mentioned Qariya as a small hill-city with many springs near Tunis. Marginal notes give the name of the calligrapher as Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Mika'il ibn Fatima, whose name once includes the unexplained letters *ta-sin* after the second Muhammad and twice contains a non-Arabic phrase describing him as a craftsman who paints or draws (*yasawara*). Abbott concluded that the manuscript was a copy of an older one penned by the above-mentioned Muhammad, whose signature was then copied by someone in the southern Bilad al-Sudan, whence the manuscript made its way to Lagos, where it was purchased in 1935.

The distinctive script used in these West African manuscripts clearly derives from Maghribi, but scholars have debated which other subtype was the immediate source. Bivar designated the West African script *'ifriqi*, meaning from Ifriqiya, the Arabic name for the region comprising modern-day Tunisia and western Algeria.[25] As evidence, he cited the statement by the great North African historian Ibn Khaldun, writing *c*.1375, who reported that Muslim calligraphers fleeing from Andalusia introduced a more delicate and flowing hand which had replaced the styles used earlier in North Africa, notably at Qayrawan and Mahdiyya.[26] The old scripts, Ibn Khaldun continued, were preserved only in a few towns in the Jarid, a word literally meaning palms and a term designating the region of south-western Tunisia in the Sahara. Bivar argued that the old style of script was also preserved south of the Sahara in the Sahel, brought there by the Almoravids during their conquests of the Upper Niger region. He distinguished this heavy angular *'ifriqi* script from a thinner and more flexible hand that he, like Houdas, called Andalusi.

Though ingenious, Bivar's arguments are ultimately unsatisfactory for a variety of reasons, ranging from historical to palaeographic.[27] The Almoravids, who introduced Maliki Islam and many other features to the Sahel, never controlled Ifriqiya, the presumed home of the *'ifriqi* script, although they might have imported manuscripts from there.[28] Furthermore, the style that developed in tenth-century Tunisia was different, more closely related to developments in the East.[29] A legal text copied in 1015, almost certainly in Qayrawan, shows many characteristics of eastern scripts, such as *sad* with a bump and medial *ha* shaped like a figure 8 that descends below the baseline.[30]

The script used in the Qur'an manuscripts from West Africa, by contrast, shares many, many characteristics with the western Maghribi style used in Morocco and Andalusia.[31] *Sad* is written without a final tooth, as in the Maghribi style, and medial *ha* also follows the Maghribi rather than the eastern style. To see this, we can compare typical pages from Qur'an manuscripts made in West Africa (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2) and Morocco, specifically a copy transcribed in 975 (1568) for the Sharifan sultan of Morocco, Mawlay 'Abdallah ibn Muhammad (see Figure 5.6).[32] Both scripts are distinguished by swooping tails and flat diacritical marks, *alif* with a club foot, *dal* like pursed lips, *kaf* with a diagonal bar. Both have a medial *ha* that sits on the baseline like a bow and a very large

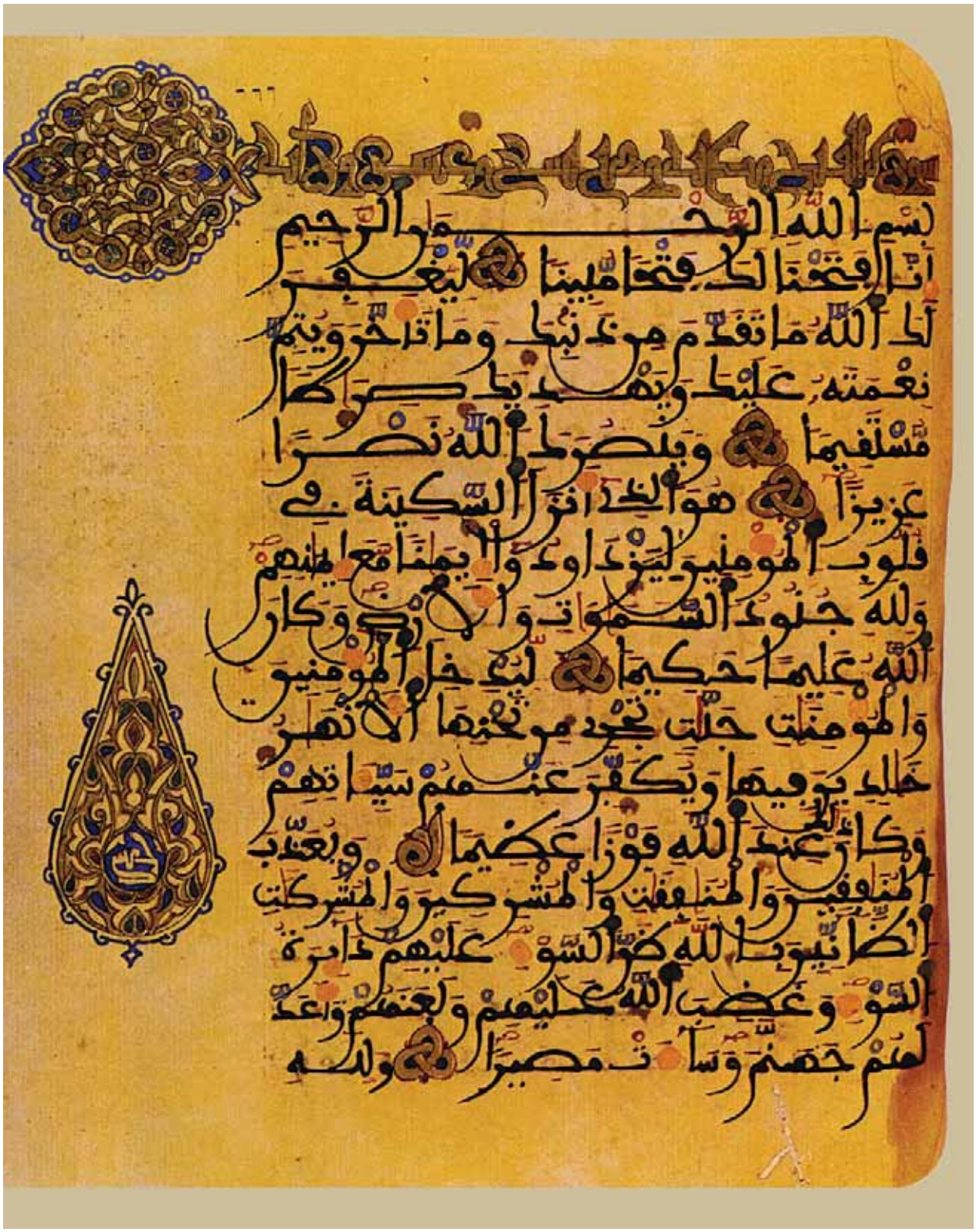


Figure 5. 6 Manuscript of the Qur'an copied in 975 (1568) for the Sharifan sultan of Morocco, Mawlay 'Abdallah ibn Muhammad.

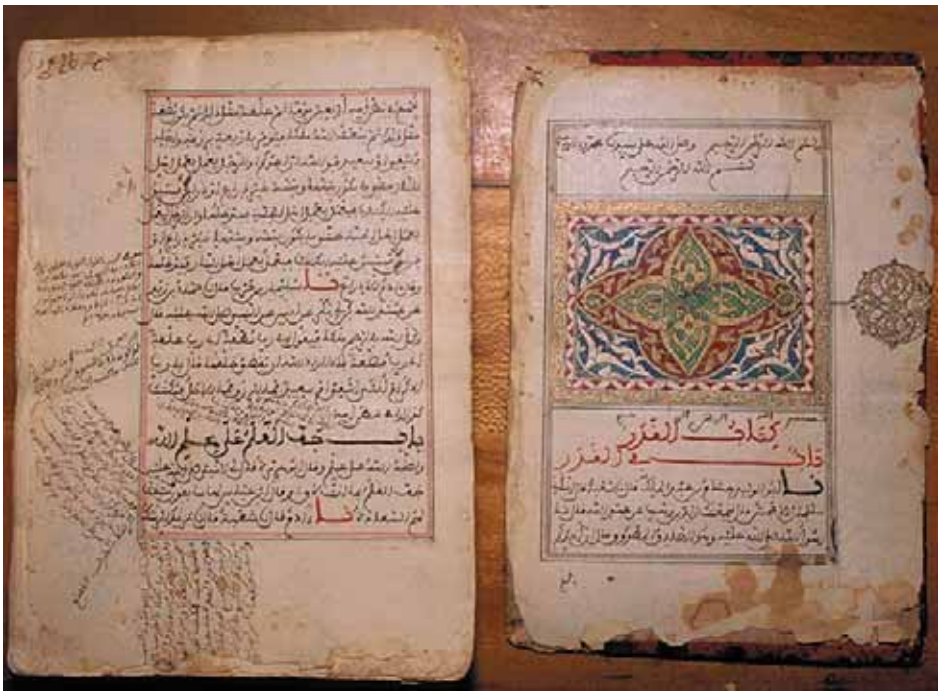


Figure 5.7 Copy of Bukhari's *Sahih* dated 1419.

initial *ba* in the *basmala*. Neither of these features is found in a Qur'an manuscript endowed by the Hafsid ruler Abu 'l-Faris to the Qasba Mosque of Tunis in Ramadan 807 (March 1405).[33]

Features of layout used in West African manuscripts of the Qur'an also continue those used further north in Morocco and Andalusia. The commentary in the bilingual Qur'an (see Figure 5.5) circles around the text, the epistolary tradition used in Andalusia as shown by a rare cache of 162 letters written by various Muslim rulers of Spain and North Africa to the kings of Aragon–Catalonia.[34] The text on one dated 10 Sha'ban 745 (17 September 1344) that was written by Yusuf I, Nasrid ruler of Granada, to Peter IV (the Ceremonious) of Aragon, for example, begins in the horizontal lines but then continues in a circle to fill the page, the same kind of circular format as in the Kanembu bilingual Qur'an manuscript. Similarly, religious manuscripts from West Africa, such as a book of litanies and prayers with the names of Muhammad and litanies to be recited on Saturday,[35] use the small square format that remained common in the western Maghrib long after it had been abandoned in the west. Such a format is used, among many other examples, for a well-known Qur'an manuscript made at Cordova in 1143,[36] and it continued to be used until the nineteenth century, as shown by copies of the *Dala'il al-khayrat* in the Berlin Museum and the Shaker collection.[37]

The decoration of West African manuscripts of the Qur'an also shows features of the style used in the western Maghrib. The pyramid of three balls, for example, is part of a long tradition there, found also in the Cordovan Qur'an of 1143. The illumination in West African Qur'an and other manuscripts also relates to traditions further north. The

decoration of the larger panels resembles textile patterns seen on Berber rugs from Morocco. We can compare, for example, a page from the Leeds Qur'an manuscript with the last verse of Chapter 6 (folio 81b) to a Zemmoura flatweave from the Middle Atlas.[38] Such patterns of diagonals, zigzags and strapwork arranged in rectangular panels are standard on *bogolanfini*, the discharge-dyed mud cloths made in Mali, traditionally by sewing together narrow strips.[39]

Western Maghribi script had long been the model in the area. The earliest examples of Arabic calligraphy to survive from western Africa comprise a group of tombstones found near Gao.[40] At least four seem to have been carved at Almería in Andalusia and shipped to West Africa where they provided the models for local copies. Moroccan manuscripts were also imported to West Africa. The oldest codices in the Kati collection, for example, were made in Morocco, to judge from the style of a copy of al-Bukhari's *Sahih* (Authentic) transcribed in 1419 (see Figure 5.7).[41] Similarly, a copy of Iyad ibn Musa's *al-Shifa bi-ta'rif huquq al-mustafa* (Healing by the Recognition of the Rights of the Chosen One) in the collection of Malam Nagwamatse of Sokoto was probably transcribed at Fez in the sixteenth or seventeenth century.[42]

The development of Arabic calligraphy in West Africa

We can therefore pose the following outline for the development of Arabic calligraphy in West Africa. Arabic manuscripts were clearly read and appreciated there since the conversion of rulers to Islam. The Moroccan globetrotter Ibn Battuta, who visited the area in 1353, mentioned that the people of Walata regularly studied religious law and memorised the Qur'an.[43] He also tells us that for the feast held in his honour in the Malian capital, Qur'an cases were brought and the whole Qur'an was read.[44] The construction of mosques throughout the region may well have been accompanied by the endowment of Qur'an manuscripts for public reading.

For practical reasons, notably the lack of paper, it is likely that in these earlier centuries the manuscripts were imported, probably from Morocco. Ibn Battuta noted that the kings of Mali sent members of the *'ulama* to Fez and exchanged embassies with the Marinid ruler Abu al-Hasan. These embassies may well have brought back books, long popular as official gifts. Illustrations show us, for example, that Safavid embassies often presented books to their rivals, the Ottomans.[45] Scholars also brought manuscripts from North to West Africa. A note in one manuscript in the Fondo Ka'ti Library states that it was purchased in the Saharan oasis of Tuwat in 1467 while the purchaser was en route from Toledo to West Africa.[46] Pilgrims too probably brought home copies of the Qur'an and bestowed them on family and friends.[47]

With the increasing prevalence of a written – rather than an oral – tradition and the increased availability of materials, West Africans began to produce their own manuscripts. Production may have begun as early as the sixteenth century, and increased gradually

in the seventeenth century due to an increase in both demand for written works, notably new chronicles, and the availability of European watermarked paper from Pordenone and elsewhere in the Veneto. Arabic manuscripts became common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries such that we can talk of a distinctive West African style of script. This scenario bears comparison with what occurred at another borderland in the Islamic lands: India. The sultans of Delhi established Islam as the state religion in the opening years of the thirteenth century, but a distinctive style of script, known as *bihari*, dates only to the very end of the fourteenth century and became widespread in the fifteenth and sixteenth.[48]

Looking at the manuscripts themselves shows us that production in West Africa was very much a local affair. The materials were expensive. The imported paper was often cut from larger sheets, with various kinds combined in the same manuscript. The Leeds Qur'an (see Figure 5.1), for example, uses three different types of paper.[49] The one examined by Abbott is copied mainly on paper watermarked with the Arabic phrase *ya nasib*, the name Beniamino Arbib written in Roman characters, and the figure of a horseman, but the manuscript also has two folios of heavier paper watermarked with the *tre lune*. The expense of the paper is clear from layout as well. Scribes such as the one who copied the Kanembu Qur'an were anxious to use every surface available. Pens too were expensive. Brockett's close examination of the copy in Leeds shows that the nib became increasingly blunt over the pages, showing that the scribe wanted to preserve the nib for as long as possible. The inks and pigments for text and illumination are also local, and there is no use of gold, a hallmark of fancier manuscripts produced elsewhere in the Maghrib. Such an absence is somewhat ironic, given that gold was a major export of the region.

Various features of format and decoration also indicate that production in West Africa was more a matter of home production than a formal school with set rules. The pages are not ruled, and the number of lines varies within a single manuscript. Marginal notes are added in various directions and places. There is no indication of a division of labour between scribe and illuminator, and indeed the note in the Qur'an manuscript examined by Abbott suggests that both were the same. In contrast, these became specialised tasks in Iran and the East from the twelfth century and in the Maghrib shortly thereafter, as shown by both signatures and pigment analysis.[50] The illumination of these West African manuscripts also comprises simple designs, often drawn from the textile repertory, patterns that could be worked out directly on the surface. In contrast, the elaborate floral arabesques typical of eastern manuscripts require cartoons or templates that were part of the workshop practice.[51] In the East, canons of calligraphy were passed from master to pupil by instruction in organised schools, written manuals, and albums with specimens of specific scripts. The codification of a tradition there makes it difficult if not impossible to identify individual hands.[52] In West Africa, by contrast, learning – even Arabic script – was often oral and visual (rather than written and kinetic), often

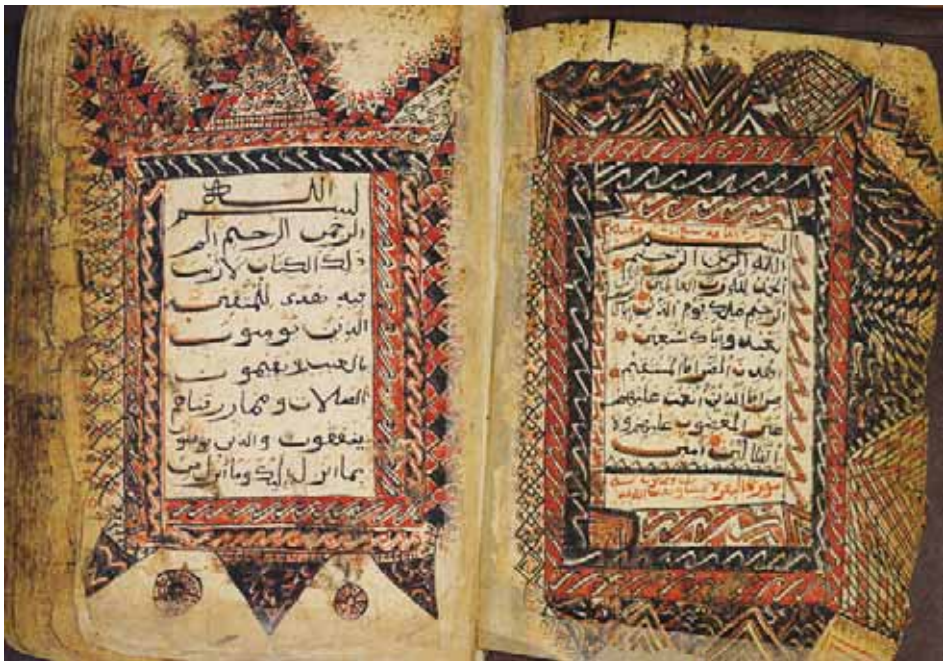


Figure 5.8 Manuscript of the Qur'an copied by al-Hajj Ahmad Muhammad ibn Ahmad Musa in the eastern Bilad al-Sudan in 1879.

taught through the use of writing boards.[53] Hence, it is no surprise that there is greater deviation from any 'ideal' West African script and more variety of individual hands.

Despite the variety of hands used to copy Qur'an manuscripts in West Africa, we may be able to distinguish them from manuscripts copied further east in what is now the Republic of the Sudan, as in a copy in Leeds dated 1881 (ms. 619) and one in the Shaker collection dated 17 Ramadan 1296 (August 1879) (see Figure 5.8).[54] One major difference is the reading: the Leeds manuscript contains that of the Basran Abu 'Amr, a reading that was widespread only in the eastern Bilad al-Sudan.[55] This text can be distinguished from that of Nafi' via Warsh, a reading that is popular in Libya and West Africa.[56] Identifying the reading in an individual manuscript is therefore essential information in publishing a Qur'an manuscript, particularly one from these later centuries.

The script in these two Qur'an manuscripts from the eastern Bilad al-Sudan is also different. It derives from the regular round script known as *naskh*. It shares certain letter shapes with eastern styles, notably medial *ha* written as a figure 8 rather than a flat bow. The script slants distinctly to the left, a feature also found in a Qur'an manuscript dated Shawwal 1162 (September–October 1749) and once in Zanzibar.[57] Like the example in the Shaker collection (see Figure 5.8), the one associated with Zanzibar is larger (33 x 22 cm). It also shares features with manuscripts in the distinctive *bihari* script used in India, such as an upper and lower line in larger script and illuminated pages in the beginning, middle and end.

In short, the script used in manuscripts from West Africa forms a distinct subgroup of the Maghribi script used in North Africa. Copyists in West Africa used a more formal variety

of the 'ideal' script for manuscripts of the Qur'an, but the same style can be seen in other manuscripts with historical and scientific texts. It is often written more hurriedly, with a decided slant to the right, but has the same letter shapes and position on the line. Though less polished than the scripts perfected in the East and somewhat rough around the edges, the Arabic script typical of West Africa is energetic and lively, a testament to the vigorous tradition of Islam that has flourished there in the last centuries. West African scripts deserve more detailed study, especially given the existence of numerous substyles of calligraphy.

NOTES

1 See, for example, the article on the Kati Library at http://www.saharanstudies.org/projects/kati/ or one by the University of Oslo on the libraries of Timbuktu at http://www.sum.uio.no/timbuktu/index.html.

2 For the exhibition 'Ancient manuscripts from the libraries in Timbuktu', see http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/mali/.

3 There are, for example, two Qur'an manuscripts from West Africa in the Nour collection, London – see Bayani et al. (1999: numbers 6, 7). Tim Stanley's essay there, 'The Qur'anic script of Western Sudan: Maghribi or Ifriqi', note 1, gives a list of other similar manuscripts. The best published manuscript is the copy in Leeds' illustrated in Figure 5.1, for which see Brockett (1987). One of the earliest to be published was examined by Nadia Abbott (1949) in Chicago in the 1940s. The Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, one of the largest repositories of Qur'an manuscripts outside the Islamic lands, owns five: see Arberry (1967: numbers 131 and 239–242), but illustrations of only one double page (ms. 1594) and one binding (ms. 1599) have been published; James (1980: numbers 94, 115). The Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris has 10, but no illustrations have been published – see Déroche (1985: numbers 334–343). Colour reproductions of others include manuscripts in the Ghassan Shaker collection (Safwat 2000: number 73) and one in the Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg (number C-1689; Petrosyan et al. [1995: number 67]).

4 By script, I follow the definition given by Michael Gullick in the introduction to his article on script in Volume 28 of Turner (1996: 303) – 'system or style of writing. Scripts are identifiable and their particular features enumerated, as a consistent graphic representation of notations or letters of the alphabet.' A script is therefore a hypothetical model; it can be distinguished from a hand, what a particular individual writes. Gullick used the example of italic: Michelangelo and Queen Elizabeth I both wrote italic letters, but they had very different hands. On the terms 'competence' and 'performance', developed by Noam Chomsky for linguistics, as applied to Arabic writing on papyri from the early period, see Khan (1993: 19).

5 Houdas (1886). For an appraisal of his work, see Déroche (1994).

6 My thanks to Muhammad Zakariya who supplied this lucid description of the pens used in the Maghrib today. On this, as on many other aspects of contemporary Arabic calligraphy, he remains a master of traditional styles.

7 For examples of the pen, see Déroche (2000: 114–115 and figure 34); Guesdon & Vernay-Nouri (2001: number 6), also reproduced in Blair (2006).

8 Rabat, Bibliothèque Royale 1810; illustrated in Dodds (1992: number 77). The text is transcribed in the larger, looser Fasi and the marginal notes in the smaller Andalusi.

9 On this point, see Blair (2006: chapter 6).

10 See for example Gibb et al. (1960), in which the article 'Sudan, Bilad al-' is subdivided into eastern and western.

11 Quaritch Catalogue (1995: number 21). The manuscript was formerly in the Newberry Library, Chicago (Or. Ms. 235), which acquired it from the collection of Henry Probasco; his bookplate is dated 1 December 1890.

12 See also Déroche (2000: 309 and figures 86, 87).

13 James (1980: number 115); Safwat (2000: number 73).

14 This is the case with the manuscript in Leeds (see Figure 5.1); Brockett (1987: 45); and the one in St Petersburg (Petrosyan et al. 1995: number 67).

15 Abbott (1949: 63).

16 Brockett (1987: note 23).

17 Déroche (2000: 155–156).

18 Abbott (1949: 64).

19 Abbott (1949: 64).

20 Quaritch Catalogue (1995: number 21).

21 Walz (1988). See also Jonathan Bloom's chapter in this volume.

22 Déroche (1985: number 334). Smaller than the typical West African example (20 x 15 cm) and copied on 'oriental' paper, it is probably from the eastern Bilad al-Sudan.

23 Bivar (1960). As in south-east Asia, the cataloguing of collections in this region will undoubtedly bring to light more early manuscripts. In 1987, CC Stewart at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaigne initiated a project known as the Arabic Manuscript Management System (AMMS) to provide an online catalogue of manuscripts in the West African Sahel. AMMS version 2 database included 19 000 records from 6 collections in Boutilimit, Mauritania, Niger, Paris, Timbuktu, and Evanston, Illinois. The newer third version, described at http://test.atlas.uiuc.edu/amms/ammsinfo.html#acks, will allow for easier addition of new material, internet access to these collection entries, and an opportunity to finally reunite an impressive quantity and range of Arabic writing representative of a broad sweep of West Africa in, mainly, pre-colonial times. On the Mauritanian collections, see also Werner (2003).

24 Quaritch Catalogue (1995: number 115). See also Stanley's essay in Bayani et al. (1999: 32).

25 Bivar (1968); Brockett (1987) accepted Bivar's argument.

26 Ibn Khaldun (1967: 2:286).

27 See the criticisms by Stanley in Bayani et al. (1999: 33–34).

28 On the Almoravids and this area, see the entries for 'Murabittun' and 'Maritanniya' in Gibb et al. (1960).

29 For the origins of Maghribi script and the difference between that used in Tunisia and those used further west, see Déroche (1999).

30 Reproduced in Bayani et al. (1999: 32).

31 Bivar's identification of this script as *'ifriqi* on the basis of Ibn Khaldun's use of the name poses the same problem that scholars have encountered in trying to identify early Arabic scripts on the basis of references in Ibn al-Nadim's *Fihrist*: without dated and identified examples, it is difficult, if not impossible, to match names mentioned in texts with extant examples.

32 London, BL 1405; Lings & Safadi (1976: number 50); Lings (1976: 108–110); Safadi (1978: figures 79, 80); Blair (2006: figures 12, 13).

33 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. 389–92; Déroche (1985: numbers 305–308).

34 Alarcón y Santón & García de Linares (1940); Valls i Subirà (1978).

35 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. arabe 6869; Guesdon & Vernay-Nouri (2001: number 39).

36 Istanbul University Library ms. A6755; Dodds (1992: number 75).

37 Kröger (1991); Safwat (2000: number 71). The text, a collection of prayers for Muhammad composed by the Moroccan Sufi al-Jazuli, was popular from the Maghrib to south-east Asia. See Blair (2006: chapter 12).

38 Many examples of these flatweaves are illustrated in Fiske et al. (1980); Pickering et al. (1994).

39 See Turner (1996), Mali (3) Textiles.

40 Sauvaget (1949).

41 FK 36, Hofheinz (2003). The manuscript is illustrated on the projects page of the Saharan Studies Association: http://www.saharanstudies.org/projects/.

42 Bivar (1968: plate III).

43 Ibn Battuta (1993: 4:951).

44 Ibn Battuta (1993: 4:957).

45 See, for example, the double-page illustration showing the presentation of gifts, notably books, by the Safavid ambassador Shahquli to Selim II in 1567, from a copy of Loqman's *Shahnama-yi selim khan* done in 1581; Istanbul, Topkapi Palace Library ms. A3595, fol. 53b–54a; reproduced in Blair & Bloom (1994: figure 308).

46 The Fondo Ka'ti Library, available at http://www.saharanstudies.org/projects/kati/.

47 See, for example, a small standard Ottoman copy of the Qur'an that was presented to 'Abd al-Kader by his father when he had returned from the pilgrimage in 1827; Paris, BN ms. 7252; Guesdon & Vernay-Nouri (2001: number 1); Déroche (2004: figure 3).

48 Blair (2006: chapter 9).

49 Brockett (1987: 48).

50 Spectrographic analysis showed, for example, that a Qur'an codex copied in the Maghrib in the thirteenth or fourteenth century (BN, ms. 6935; Déroche [1985: number 302]) had diacritical marks done in blue made from azurite, but marginal decoration in blue from the more expensive lapis (Déroche 2000: 152–153).

51 On the use of paper cartoons and the different types of designs, see Bloom (2001).

52 This is the case, for example, with the various Mubarakshahs who worked in the early fourteenth century. From calligraphic style alone, it has been impossible to tell how many separate individuals used this name.

53 See, for example, the writing board illustrated in Porter and Barakat (2004: number 104) or the various examples in the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution (2001-16-1 and 2001-16-1), available through their website http://www.nmafa.si.edu/.

54 The Leeds manuscript was acquired in the Sudan just after the death of the Mahdiyya (see Brockett 1987). The Shaker manuscript contains several notes by people with the *nisba* Hilwani ('of Hilwan'), referring to the town on the Egypto–Sudanese border (see Safwat 2000: number 72).

55 Identified in Cook (2000: 74–75 and figure 12).

56 For the various readings, see Dammen McAuliffe (2001), Readings of the Qur'an; Brockett (1988).

57 Nour collection QUR706; Bayani et al. (1999: number 5).

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