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A PICTORIAL HISTORY  
OF THE QUR'ĀN

The last three chapters take a topical approach. As the West discovered Islamic scholarship in the sixteenth/tenth and seventeenth/eleventh centuries, how did European and Islamic approaches to Qurʾān scholarship compare? How is the worldwide spread of Islam represented in the art of Qurʾāns? How has the Qurʾān been used for personal devotion and spiritual protection through the centuries? The manuscripts presented here illuminate the issues raised by these key questions.

#### A NOTE ON THE COLLECTIONS

The Bodleian Library at Oxford University has been the central repository for research materials for the university for over 400 years. When the library opened to the public in 1602/1010 it had one Arabic manuscript, a Qurʾān, MS.Bodl.Or.322 (featured in the fourth chapter). The library now possesses more than 2,500 individual Arabic manuscripts, 155 of which are Qurʾāns or Qurʾān portions. Many were acquired by purchase or came in as bequests and individual gifts from alumni of Oxford University over the last four centuries—gifts from merchants, diplomats, scholars, clergymen, adventurers and soldiers, gratefully making a small return for the education they had received, and wanting to help uphold Oxford’s reputation as a centre for excellence in Arabic and Middle Eastern studies. Some of the human stories behind the manuscripts are told in the course of this volume. This collection

## A Qur'ānic palimpsest

This is a page from what might be the oldest Qur'ān manuscript in existence, perhaps from the mid- to late 600s. Its script style, called *hijazi*, was the ordinary Arabic script of the time used for business and administrative documents. It has the added interest of being a 'palimpsest'—an erased and rewritten manuscript. The first writing on the parchment was washed off and a second level was rewritten within a generation using the same script but a different portion of Qur'ānic text. The first level, showing light brown, contains the most significant textual variations ever found for the Qur'ān, with words and phrases different to the current version. The second level is very close to what is now considered the normal text, and was possibly written to replace the first level as part of an official editing project that Islamic tradition asserts occurred during the reigns of the early Islamic caliphs.

Inv. no. 86/2003, recto. The David Collection, Copenhagen (photograph: Pernille Klemp).  
Lower text: *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (The Cow), 2:106–217; 7th/1st century; upper text: 2:277–282;  
8th/2nd century.

وَمِمَّنْ يَدْعُونَ بِاللَّهِ  
مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُم مِّنْ  
سَاءِ مَا يَدْعُونَ بِهِ  
أَسْمَاءَ آلِهَتِهِمْ  
الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَلْمِزْهُمْ  
سِيئَةً وَلَا نَفَعَتْ  
لَهُمْ فِي شَرِّ مَا  
كَانُوا يُعْبُدُونَ  
فَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا  
يَكْفُرُونَ بِهِمْ  
مِمَّا يَدْعُونَ  
فَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا  
يَكْفُرُونَ بِهِمْ  
مِمَّا يَدْعُونَ  
فَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا  
يَكْفُرُونَ بِهِمْ  
مِمَّا يَدْعُونَ





لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ

شما ویرداد نواید هر شمارا و نه بود او بگوید

وَأَنْتَ قَائِلٌ

و اکثر نماز و اید داد

مُسْرَقٌ وَأَنْتَ قَائِلٌ

و اکثر سده که کند فراغ شود

لَكَ وَرَبُّكَ عَلِيمٌ

د اینست و شمارا اکر هستی

وَأَنْتَ قَائِلٌ يَا مَعْجُزَاتِ

او خورشید بر همانند از عذاب روزی که کرد کند شمارا اندوی

الْبُيُوتِ تَوَاتُرًا كَرِيمًا

سوی خدای بسر فضاغ برهند

مَا كَسَبَتْ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيمُ

و ایشان بگفتند سماع