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The Oldest Manuscripts from India and Their Histories.
A Re-assessment of IO Loth 4 in the British Library

ABSTRACT: This essay examines a copy of the Qur'ān from India, now in the India Office Collections at the British Library. The manuscript, registered as IO Loth 4, belongs to the reasonably large group of early Qur'āns that date to the eighth and ninth centuries CE. While some of these manuscripts have charted histories, what is not widely known is that early Qur'āns also made

their way to India. There they have their own special histories, meanings and associations. In attempt to address the long 'after-life' of these manuscripts, this paper will examine a single example that arrived in India in the Mughal period and was eventually presented to the Library of the East India House by Lord Dalhousie in 1853. While not the earliest of the Qur'āns brought to India, it nonetheless dates to the *circa* ninth century CE, making it older than any surviving manuscripts in Sanskrit or Prakrit in India proper.

Historians need no introduction to India's vibrant literary and manuscript culture in antiquity. Among the oldest manuscripts to survive is a bundle of seven different works on medicine and divination known as the Bower manuscript, now kept at the University of Oxford. Written on birch-bark, these texts probably date to the fifth or sixth century (Hoernle 1897; Sander 1987). Slightly later are the palm-leaf manuscripts at Cambridge, collected in Nepal mainly by Daniel Wright and Cecil Bendall. These have now been catalogued online in the *Sanskrit Manuscripts Project*. The oldest is an exceptional outlier, the *Pārameśvaratantra* (MS Add.1049.1), that appears to date to 828 CE if the year 252 given in the text is accepted as the era established by the king Aṃśuvarman (also known as Mānadeva). Otherwise, all the texts in Cambridge belong to the eleventh century and later. The Spitzer manuscript in Berlin (for which Franco 2004, 2005), dates to the early centuries CE and includes a list of the chapters of the *Mahābhārata* (Schlingloff 1969; Brockington 2010). This is not, however, the *Mahābhārata* as expanded and redacted in the Gupta period and available to us (more or less) in the critical edition; it is rather the earlier *Bhārata* text which has not, of course, survived.

A feature of all the manuscripts just mentioned is their provenance outside India. Material has been found in Afghanistan, central Asia, Tibet and even in Japan. While manuscripts were certainly produced in various parts of greater India, or in areas in India's cultural shadow, they survive only because they were produced in places where the climate was conducive to preservation—such as Ladakh and Nepal—or taken from India proper to such places—such as central Asia and beyond. On Indian soil outside the Himālayas, nothing survives before the eleventh century. The oldest copy of the *Mahābhārata* used in the critical edition dates to the mid-sixteenth century (Sukthankar 1933). The oldest quote from that text is found, however, in copper-plate charters of the fifth and early sixth century. The Katni copper-plates (actually found in Uchahara, the ancient Uccakalpa) state: "And it is said in the *Mahābhārata* by Lord Veda Vyāsa (*uktañ ca mahābhārate bhagavatā vedavyāsena*)." There follows an imprecation defending the grant of land registered in the document (Balogh 2019). As noted in an earlier study, the verses that appear in the plates are found only in late Malayam copies of the *Mahābhārata* in the southern recension of the *Āśvamedhika Parvan*; in the critical edition the material is relegated to an appendix (Willis 2009). So, do we have texts from the fifth and sixth centuries? In some ways, yes, in other ways, no. The copper plate charters belong to the genre of legal documents pertaining to land ownership. They were buried in the ground and entirely forgotten until modern times, at which point they passed to museums and Sanskrit scholars. Texts otherwise—literary, scientific and religious works—are much later copies, as the perusal of the introduction to any printed edition will show.

We happily examine the available edition of the *Mahābhārata* thinking we have access to an ancient work and the minds that created it. But we have no such thing or experience. What we are reading is a redacted text that has passed through innumerable hands and copies until, finally, it reached the desks of the modern editors who have pre-pared the *editio princeps*. This edition contains bits and pieces from many periods built around an old core—effectively it is an assemblage built by many individuals over the *longue durée*. This rather spoils

the fun, but critical historicism tends to do that: as Johannes Bronkhorst has pointed out, the historian will, sooner or later, fall out with received orthodoxy (Bronkhorst 2011). So, while people have become accustomed to the idea of Indian texts being ancient, there is a distortion on two sides. Firstly, texts like the *Mahābhārata* may be set in hoary antiquity and recount the interactions of gods and men, but there is no actual evidence of the *Mahābhārata* before the fifth century CE, as the copper-plate evidence just mentioned shows. The manuscripts themselves are a thousand years later, their date telling us just as much about the sixteenth century as the sixth (CE or BCE, depending on your disposition). Against this cultural backdrop, we can turn to the oldest actual manuscripts in India. These are not in any Indic language but are, perhaps ironically, in Arabic and are copies of the Qur'ān. Written in what has come to be called Kufic script, examples are preserved in Raza Library, Rāmpur, and other collections. These manuscripts have not been studied to the extent they deserve, thus the need for the present contribution.

There are five early Qur'ān portions in the India Office collection. Although the catalogue of this material was published more than a century ago (Loth 1877), they have not drawn scholarly attention. François Déroche, a leading authority on the classification of early Qur'āns, did not discuss the India Office manuscripts, in part because he had the collections of the BnF at his disposal and in part because the India Office material contributes little, being but further samples. When we turn, however, from origins to the cultural life of books over the *longue durée*, the India Office manuscripts are pregnant with meaning. Following the growing interest in book ownership and readership (e.g. Hirschler 2012), the present essay maps how a single book was passed from hand to hand over many centuries and how its associations and cultural valence were transformed in the process.

IO Loth 4

As just noted, there are five early Qur'ān manuscripts in the India Office collection. From this group we have selected IO Loth 4 for study in view

of the ownership seals, library notations and attribution to Imām ʿAlī, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muḥammad. The manuscript is numbered 41A, but to avoid confusion with a Persian manuscript with the same number, it is registered in the British Library as IO Loth 4. It is 15.1 cm x 21.0 cm and consists of 20 folios, ten lines per page. With the manuscript visible online for the record (see Bibliography for links), only three images are reproduced here to guide the discussion and analysis. The legacy catalogue (Loth 1877) is being digitised and available online as the *IO Arabic MSS Corpus* to which the reader is referred for further particulars.

Current Binding

The manuscript was placed in a Victorian binding in the mid-nineteenth century and during the binding process the folios seem to have been trimmed. There are four blank fly leaves at the front of the manuscript; folio 5 proper is folio 1 according the numbers stamped on the pages and used in Loth's catalogue. Most of the pages are stamped with numbers, probably applied when the manuscript was taken into the India Office Library. A fine box was made for the manuscript. This carries Loth's numbers in gold, so the box was made after 1877 or the letters were applied to the box shortly after.

The Treaty

The manuscript is complex and we begin with the first item it contains. This is a treaty involving several rulers of Sindh. This is dated 25 Jumādā II, 1252 (= 07 October 1836 CE). The text is written in Persian and registers a settlement reached over claims to properties, tax revenues and hunting rights. The document refers to and validates a prior agreement. The exact particulars are difficult to pinpoint, apart from Shikārpur, a well-known town and presently the capital of Shikarpur District, Sindh province, Pakistan. The agreement was made with Amir Mīr Muḥammad Khān, Mīr Nūr Muḥammad Khān and Mīr Muḥammad

Naṣīr Khān. These rulers belonged to the Talpur dynasty who intersected with British power in the run-up to the annexation of Sindh in 1843. The political developments are best approached through a recent article by Kalwar and Sultana (2019) which gives a review of the relevant literature. The surrounding events at Shikārpur can be found in Goldsmid (1855: 35–40) and Hughes (1876: 34–36). The text of the treaty can be rendered in English as follows:

> May God bless us and protect us,
>
> I bestow my sincere gratitude to God and to the Mīr the Subahdār. Herewith, I will not have any arguments with their Highnesses, the Amir Mīr Muḥammad Khān and Mīr Nūr Muḥammad Khān and Mīr Muḥammad Naṣīr Khān and their sons and brothers over the properties. Herewith, I have no claim, argument or anything to do with both Mīrs and their sons and brothers over Shikārpur and Kot Sabzal and all the related belongings and funds and I will not have any. Prior resolution on the allotments and shares are valid and hunting grounds remain the same as stated in the prior injunction which is based on the original resolution. The rents are also valid according to prior resolution. I will pay one quarter share of the taxes to the local people on the due date. We will be together head-to-head arm-to-arm and from each other we will not keep money [? the word is unclear].
>
> I will pay the share of one quarter of taxes to the local people on the due date whether it is to the deputies, Mīr Khairpur or Mīr ʿAlī Murād, or their agents, or their guests or alms to the poor and to their sons, and to Sayyid Muḥammad Ismāʿīl Shāh and Sayyid Bāqir Shāh and Sayyid Sarāfrāz Shāh and others and daily workers.
>
> This agreement is written on 25 Jumādā II, 1252 (07 October 1836)

Aside from the detailed history of Sindh, which is outside the scope of the present article, the main point to note for the history of the manuscript under consideration is that the Talpur rulers were followers of Shīʿah branch of Islam, which perhaps accounts for the fact that they came to own a Qurʾān with a colophon attributing the writing to Imām ʿAlī (see below). What is of interest in cultural terms is the use of the Qurʾān as a guarantor of the treaty. Oath-taking on the Qurʾān has

a long history in Islamic jurisprudence and is sanctioned by early writers such as Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl Bukhārī. The document under consideration here shows this practice extended to written agreements in addition to spoken oaths. The seal on the treaty awaits further study.

History of The Manuscript from 1839

In 1839, the manuscript became part of the Sindh Prize property. This refers to the properties seized by the British in the First Anglo-Afghan War fought between the British and the Emirate of Afghanistan from 1839 to 1842. In accord with British naval prize legislation, prize money consisted of a monetary reward paid by a belligerent state, normally to the crew of a ship. Captures made by armies, called *Booty of War*, were distinct from naval prize monies and were made for a specific capture, often the storming of a city; awards of this nature did not set a precedent for other military captures in the same war and did not require adjudication by a prize court. Thus, in the case of the Sindh Prize, the Commander in Chief ordered that "all horses, mules and bullocks captured in the fort of Ghuznee" be put up for sale by auction (Hough 1841: 216). On 26 July 1839, Lieutenant General John Keane, one of the commanders of the British force, was nominated a Prize Agent to the army of the Indus, with invitations extended to Shāh Shujāʾ Durrānī to participate in the selection of other agents (Hough 1841: 219). Prize rolls were prepared in triplicate and forwarded to the relevant authorities; the current authors are not aware of the location of any of these rolls.

The sword of the Governor of Ghazni in the hands of the Prize Agents was to be sold by auction for the benefit of the captors, but was claimed as a *right* by John Keane (Hough 1841: 331). The delays caused by this dispute extended to other properties and in 1848 *Allen's Indian Mail* reported that "whole of the arms, Jewellery & c. captured at Haidrabad (Sindh)" had been lying undisposed of in the Bombay General Treasury for upward of three years. *Allen's Indian Mail* also reports that the goods, valued at seven lakhs of rupees and filling about twenty-seven boxes, were sent from Bombay by the steamer *Lady Mary*

Wood to the Pointe de Galle, and from there sent on a second steamer
to Calcutta (*Allen's Indian Mail* 1848: 390).

The sword ultimately passed to Keane, according to records of
the Royal Collection, where the item is preserved. Their documentation
states that the sword was "Delivered up to Sir John Keane when he took
the historic city of Ghazni on 23 July 1839, for which Sir John was made
a peer (peerage now ceased as no male issue). From Mrs Benyon of Ashe,
Windsor, June 1932" (Royal Collections, RCIN 61853). The manuscript
under discussion meanwhile passed to James Andrew Broun-Ramsay,
1st Marquess of Dalhousie (22 April 1812—19 December 1860), gen-
erally known as Lord Dalhousie, who served as Governor-General of
India from 1848 to 1856. He presented the manuscript to the Library of
East India House in 1853 (Loth 1877). East India House was the London
headquarters of the East India Company where a library and museum
were established in 1801 (Desmond 1982). These were dissolved in
1879, the library incorporated into the India Office (Moir 1988). In 1982
the entire collection migrated to the British Library.

The Qurʾān text and colophon

Turning from the modern history to the manuscript's earliest elements,
we come to the Qurʾān text written on vellum. The manuscript under
consideration is remarkable for its colophon that attributes the writing
of the manuscript to ʿAlī b. ʾAbī Ṭālib, the son-in-law of the Prophet
Muḥammad, and the fourth of the so-called rightly guided caliphs (and
the first Imām among the Shīʿah).

On the recto side of the last folio of the fragment on the last line
the text reads *katabahū ʿaliyyu bnu ʿimrāna* "ʿAlī, son of ʿImrān wrote it"
(Fig. 1). Although ʿAlī's father is typically referred to by his *kunyah* ʾAbū
Ṭālib, and his *ism* is typically reported to be ʿAbd Manāf, Shiʿi sourc-
es occasionally report that his *ism* was ʿImrān (al-Maǧlīsī 1983: vol. 35,
138). As an aside, it is worth adding here that the usual reading in western
scholarship has become *katabahu* against the classical Arab grammarians
and indeed also the Arabists Carl Brockelmann and Wolfdietrich Fischer.

     Although the colophon states it was written by the caliph ʿAlī b. ʾAbī Ṭālib it cannot be by him for several reasons. First, the script style of the colophon is quite distinct from the rest of the manuscript. Second, the attribution has been written over a portion of text that has been erased by a later hand, the result being that the last verse of this fragment (Q7:170), is interrupted by the colophon, before the end of the verse.

Text before erasure	Text in the current fragment
1. لحقَ ودرسوا ما فىهِ و	1. لحقَ ودرسوا ما فىهِ و
2. الدارُ الآحرةُ حىرٌ	2. الدارُ الآحرةُ حىرٌ
3. لِلدىَ سەوں أڡکا ىعقلو	3. لِلدىَ سەوں أڡکا ىعقلو
4. والدس ڡسعونَ ىالکسٮ⟨١٦٩⟩نَ	4. والدس ڡسعونَ ىالکسٮ⟨١٦٩⟩نَ
5. وأڡاموا الصلوه إىا لا	5. وأڡاموا الصلوه إىا لا
6. ⟨١٧٠⟩ىصىعُ أحرَ المصلحىَ	6. ⟨١٧٠⟩**كٮٮه على س عمرانَ**

(Note: In line 1, a secondary reading *fīhu* instead of *fīhi* is marked with green ink)

There are, in fact, a number of manuscripts that have colophons that attribute their writing to famous figures in early Islam, all using the same strategy of erasing the last line of the folio and adding a colophon instead. The similarities of the hand suggest that these colophons may have been done by the same person.

     In the fragment named Minutoli 296, held at the Staatsbibliothek, a colophon attributing it to the third Islamic caliph ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān on folio 21v, and verse Q16: 107 (and the first ʾalif of Q16: 108) has been erased, and has been replaced by كتبه عثمان بن عفان "ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān wrote it" (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek 2022). It is now clear that this fragment is part of a larger manuscript, as the connecting fragment is located at the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem under the shelf mark Yah. Ms. Ar. 968, which starts at the second letter of Q16: 108. Different from the Berlin fragment, the Jerusalem fragment lacks the modern paper frame around the parchment and unlike the Berlin fragment does not have an added colophon near the end. This might suggest that

these two fragments were already separated from one another when the colophon was added.

Dr Eléonore Cellard (personal communication) informs us that at least two other fragments, again with colophons attributed to famous Islamic figures added by the same later hand, have been auctioned by Christies. Thus lot 11 in Christie's auction 6028 contains a colophon attributed to one of the sons of the ʿAlī b. ʾAbī Ṭālib: كتبه حسن بن علي "Ḥasan b. ʿAlī wrote it" (Christie's 13 October 1998). Likewise, lot 6 in Christie's auction 6198 carries the same colophon attributed to Ḥasan (Christie's 12 October 1999). In addition to these colophons, four manuscripts in the India Office collection carry similar formulae and mention important figures, among them Safavi and Mughal kings (see list in bibliography). These added colophons must certainly be of considerable age since both IO Loth 4 and Minutoli 296 have been part of European collections since the early nineteenth century and thus these additions must predate that time at the least. If the formulae mentioning the Safavis are thought of as belonging to the period in which these figures were alive, then the addition of the colophon should pre-date the sixteenth century. Karimi-Nia (2017) has, however, cast doubt on the connection with Shāh Ismāʿīl and hints that the colophons are relatively modern. However, the last folio of IO Loth 4, studied in the next section, shows that the manuscript was in the library of Shāh Jahān in India in the mid-1600s. The colophon of Imām ʿAlī was, therefore, already on the manuscript by that time.

In terms of the text itself, IO Loth 4 is written in the D.I style as per the classification of Déroche (Déroche 1983: 41–42; 1992: 43–45). There are several manuscripts in this style with endowment notes dating to 232 AH, 262 AH, 267 AH, 298 AH and one as late as 337 AH (Déroche 1992: 37). Based on these we can say with some certainty that this classical style was at the height of its popularity in the third century AH/ ninth century CE, and as a result we may also estimate that IO Loth 4 is from around this period.

The manuscript contains ten lines per folio, which for this style is unusually high. Manuscripts in the D.I style typically (although not always)

have six or seven lines to the page, and occasionally lower, while examples that exceed seven lines are rare. The only page of the fragment that has fewer than the standard ten lines, is the final page that (before the addition of the colophon) ended at Q7:170, which is the end of Ḥizb 17 (a Ḥizb is a traditional division of 1/60th of the Quranic text). This clearly suggests that the original manuscript, was divided up in multiple volumes, presumably into 60 different volumes for each of the 60 *ḥizb*s.

The 20 folios that make up IO Loth 4 have been reframed in a paper frame, and are strongly out of order, in some cases the recto and verso of the page have been reversed during the reframing. As the frames clearly have a first and last page, the fragment appears to have been put in this chaotic order by the person who placed it in its paper frame. This seems to suggest that this person could not readily read the text anymore, and therefore was unable to place it in its proper order. The original text contains fragments from Sūrat al-ʾAnʿām and Sūrat al-ʾAʿrāf, with several gaps. The original order was as follows: 13v: Q6:57–59; 13r: Q6:59–61; 5v: Q6:70–72; 5r: Q6:72–74; 11r: Q6:80–82; 11v: Q6:82–84; [gap]; 4v: Q6:91–91; 4r: Q6:91–93; 9v: Q6:93–94; 9r: Q6:94–96 [gap]; 2r: Q7:30–32; 2v: Q7:32–34 [gap] 14r: Q7:41–43; 4v: Q7:43–44; [gap]; 1r: pasted over [Note: In its current form the recto of folio 1 does not have text, this has almost certainly been pasted over with paper for the framing]; 1v: Q7:47–49; [gap]; 8v: Q7:57–59; 8r: Q7:59–63; 7v: Q7:63–66; 7r: Q7:66–69; 17r: Q7:69–71; 17v: Q7:71–73; 6r: Q7:73–74; 6v: Q7:74–76; 18r: Q7:76–80; 18v: Q7:80–83; 10r: Q7:83–85; 10v: Q7:85–87; 15v: Q7:87–89; 15r: Q7:89–91; 3r: Q7:91–94; 3v: Q7:94–96; [gap]; 19r: Q7:156–157; 19v: Q7:157–158; 16v: Q7:158–160; 16r: Q7:160–162; 12r: Q7:162–164; 12v: Q7:164–166;[gap] 20r: Q7:169–170.

As is typical for the Kufic D.I style, the manuscript has been vocalised with a system of coloured dots, where the red dots indicate the primary reading, whereas green and yellow dots indicate alternative (often non-canonical) readings of the words in the text. Due to this vocalisation it is possible to examine which specific variant readings occur in these folios. The table below is a list of all the places present in the manuscript where the ten canonical reading traditions

disagree with one another. I have based this on the description of Ibn al-Ǧazarī's (d. 832/1429) *Našr al-Qirāʾāt al-ʿAšr* (Ibn al-Ǧazarī 2018). For every single point of disagreement, the main reading, marked in red, is consistently in agreement with the reading of the canonical Basran reader ʾAbū ʿAmr (d. 154/770). The analysis of the vocalisation system is based on the descriptions of al-Dānī's (d. 444/1053) *al-Muḥkam fī Naqṭ al-Maṣāḥif* (al-Dānī 1997) and Ibn al-Sarrāǧ's (d. 316/928) *Kitāb al-Šakl wa-l-Naqṭ* (Qaddūrī al-Ḥamad 2016: 147–198). For fairly comprehensive discussions of the coloured vocalisation systems in English see Dutton (1999; 2000) and George (2015a; 2015b). The abbreviations for the readers used in the following table are the following: AA = ʾAbū ʿAmr, Y = Yaʿqūb; H = Ḥamzah; K = al-Kisāʾī; X = Ḫalaf; IA = Ibn ʿĀmir, N = Nāfiʿ, AJ = ʾAbū Ǧaʿfar; IK = Ibn Kaṯīr; A = ʿĀṣim. A-h = Ḥafṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim; A-s = Šuʿbah ʿan ʿĀṣim; AJ-iw = Ibn Wardān ʿan ʾAbū Ǧaʿfar; AJ-ij = Ibn Ǧammāz ʿan ʾAbū Ǧaʿfar; IA-h = Hišām ʿan Ibn ʿĀmir; IA-id = Ibn Ḏakwān ʿan Ibn ʿĀmir.

	Main reading (red)	Secondary readings (green)	Ibn al-Ǧazarī
Q6:57 (13v)	*yaqḍi l-ḥaqqa* **AA**, Y, H, K, X, IA	yaquṣṣu l-ḥaqqa N, AJ, IK, A	§3029
Q6:74 (5r)	*ʾāzara* **AA**, IK, H, K, X, IA, N, AJ, A	*ʾāzaru* Y	§3035
Q6:84 (11v)	*daraǧāti man* **AA**, IA, N, AJ, IK	*daraǧātin man* A, H, K, X, Y	§3038
Q6:91 (4v)	*yaǧʿalūna ... yubdūnahā ... yuḫfūna* **AA**, IK	*taǧʿalūna ... tubdūnahā ... yuḫfūna* Y, H, K, X, A, IA, N, AJ	§3041
Q6:94 (9r)	*baynukum* **AA**, Y, H, K, X, A-s, IA	*baynakum* N, AJ, K, A-h	§3043
Q6:95 (9r)	*al-mayti* (twice) **AA**, IA, IK, A-s	*al-mayyiti* N, AJ, H, K, X, A-h, Y	§2745
Q7:32 (2v)	*ḫāliṣatun* **AA**, Y, IK, AJ, IA, H, K, X, A	*ḫāliṣatan* N	§3104

	Main reading (red)	Secondary readings (green)	Ibn al-Ǧazarī
Q7:57 (8v)	*taḏakkarūna* **AA**, Y, IK, N, AJ, IA, A-s	*taḏḏakkarūna* H, K, X, A-h	§3084
Q7:58 (8v)	*yaḫruǧu* **AA**, Y, IK, N, AJ-ij, IA, H, K, X, A	*yuḫriǧu* AJ-iw	§3120
Q7:58 (8v)	*nakidan* **AA**, Y, IK, N, IA, H, K, X, A	*nakadan* (not marked) AJ	§3121
Q7:59 (8r)	*ġayruhū* **AA**, Y, IK, N, IA, H, X, A	*ġayrihī* AJ, K	§3122
Q7:62 (8r)	*ʾubliġukum* **AA**	*ʾuballiġukum* Y, IK, N, AJ, IA, H, K, X, A	§3123
Q7:65 (7v)	*ġayruhū* **AA**, Y, IK, N, IA, H, X, A	*ġayrihī* AJ, K	§3122
Q7:68 (7r)	*ʾubliġukum* **AA**	*ʾuballiġukum* Y, IK, N, AJ, IA, H, K, X, A	§3123
Q7:75	*wa-qāla* **AA**, Y, IK, N, AJ, H, K, X, A	qāla IA	§3125
Q7:81 (18v)	*ʾā.innakum, ʾaʾinnakum, ʾā.innakum* **AA**, Y, IK, IA, H, K, X, A-s	*ʾinnakum* (not marked) N, AJ, A-h	§1408
Q7:157 (19r)	*ʾiṣrahum* **AA**, Y, IK, N, AJ, H, K, X, A	*ʾaṣārahum* IA	§3146
Q7:161 (16r)	*naġfir lakum* **AA**, IK, H, K, X, A	*tuġfar* IA *yuġfar* N, AJ, Y	§2660
Q7:161 (16r)	*ḫaṭāyā-kum* **AA**	*ḫaṭīʾātikum* IK, H, K, X, A *ḫaṭīʾatukum* (not marked) IA *ḫaṭīʾātukum* (not marked) N, AJ, Y	§3148
Q7:164 (12r)	*ma ʿḏiratun* **AA**, Y, IK, N, AJ, IA, H, K, X, A-s	*ma ʿḏiratan* A-h)	§3149

	Main reading (red)	Secondary readings (green)	Ibn al-Ǧazarī
Q7:165 (12r)	*baʾīsin* **AA**, Y, IK, IA-id, H, K, X, A	*bayʾasin* A-s *Bīsin* N. AJ, IA-h	§3150

For Q7:81, a secondary reading is marked in green, but it seems to mark *ʾā.annakum*, as the next verb is an imperfect and not a subjunctive, so this reading seems ungrammatical. For Q7:161, a secondary reading appears to be marked, the text is too damaged to be easily readable. Several non-canonical readings are recorded as secondary readings (marked in green) as well, for example Q6:59 (13r) *ḥabbatun ... raṭbun ... yābisun* attributed to Ibn ʾAbī ʾIsḥāq, rather than the canonical reading *ḥabbatin ... raṭbin ... yābisin* (Ibn Ḫālawayh 2009: 37). A full examination of the non-canonical variants in this manuscript is, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

History of ownership

The final folio of IO Loth 4 bears six seals with some notations that give us an indication of the manuscript's status and ownership journey. Generally speaking, notations or endorsements (known in Persian as یادداشت) may contain information about the manuscript's owners, custodians, buyers, sellers, inheritors and other valuable historical information such as price, value and inspections, whether by kings or librarians.

For the following list of the seals and notations, readers are referred to the accompanying key with the corresponding numbers (Fig. 2). The items are treated in their ostensible chronological order as far as this can be discerned.

Number 1.

مشرفاً بهذا التحریر شریف المبارک اسمعیل الحسینی الموسوی الصفوی
بهادر خان و هی خمس و عشرین دفاتیر

The name of Shāh Ismāʿīl (1487–1524 CE), the founder of the Safavi dynasty, is recorded a two-line notation written diagonally across the folio. The reading is given above. This can be translated tentatively as "Honoured with this honourable writing of Ismāʿīl al-Ḥusaynī al-Mūsāvi al-Ṣafawī Bahadur Khān and it is twenty-five registers." The meaning is no doubt enigmatic. The word *dafātar* generally means a 'notebook,' 'register' or 'copybook' and may refer to the number of folios at the time the notation was written. There are currently 20 in the MS, so some may have been lost in the course of time. The number has been written over subsequently, suggesting a possible recount. The notation appears to accompany the seal in the upper left corner (discussed under Number 2).

Number 2.

هو
الملک
لله
الواحد

The square seal in the upper left corner has a cusped cap. Inside are written four words in Arabic, the reading given above, in actual order. This can be translated: "Dominion belongs to God, the One." This seal and notations accompanying it have been found on other Qurʾāns, see Karimi-Nia (2017) and we follow him here. The seal varies and sometimes does not contain the word *al-wāḥid* and sometimes carries the number 706. There is no trace of a number in the present example. The calligraphic style is Thuluth.

Karimi-Nia (2017) examined a group of Qurʾāns in Kufic script and questioned the authenticity of the colophons and the attestations of Shāh Ismāʿīl found in them. His concluding observations, ten in number, are summarised here for ready reference:

1.) There is a difference between the writing of the Qurʾān proper and the names of the Imāms in colophons;

2.) The name of the Imāms have been added by erasing a line of the Qurʾān and inserting the attribution; in some cases, the name comes in the running text rather than the bottom and in some instances the erasure is only partial; as Karimi-Nia rightly notes, the colophons are asking us to believe that the Imāms writing the Qurʾān would have interrupted their transcription of the verses to insert their own names;

3.) The subsequent notations are often faulty historically, with misspellings of Arabic and incorrect terms; Karimi-Nia detects that the stated lineages of some Kufic pages (such as one sold at auction, discussed above), are faulty with the same appearing in other pages, thus showing an agreement in error;

4.) The dates given for Shāh Ismāʿīl in the notations are sometimes illegible while in other cases the dates fall before his birth or after his death;

5.) The elaborate and flattering titles appearing in the notations that mention Shāh Ismāʿīl, especially if he was present during the recitation of the text, are out of step with surviving works mentioning him and subsequent kings such as Shāh ʿAbbās, all of which are very modest in tone; the statements are thus anachronistic and could not have been written in the time of Shāh Ismāʿīl;

6.) The notations of Shāh Ismāʿīl contain inaccurate and ugly phrases that do not conform to what we know of Shāh Ismāʿīl as a man of letters and calligrapher;

7.) Even accepting the notations as authentic raises the problem that none of the examples examined by Karimi-Nia mention any further king, and were in the possession of unknown persons until fairly recently, the last twenty to eighty years in Karimi-Nia's estimation. (In response to this observation, the current authors note that this criticism has been echoed by other scholars, but the manuscript under consideration in this article and in Berlin, Staatsbibliothek: Minutoli 296, folio 21v, shows the colophons and notations are older than they might seem at first glance or that—perhaps more likely—some of the forgeries are indeed recent, but others are older.)

8.) The seal that reads "Dominion belongs to God, the One" (sometimes without the last word) cannot be attributed reliably to Shāh Ismāʿīl because it does not appear in known documents of his time; moreover, a review of Safavi seals, of which many examples can be found, shows that there are no seals without the name of the king.

9.) Other Kufic Qur'āns were owned by Shāh ʿAbbās and Shāh Ṭahmāsp but none contain inspection notices, while the Qur'āns which Shāh Ismāʿīl allegedly owned and which would have passed to his successors did not attract their attention; moreover other old Qur'āns without Imām colophons, that are part of endowments, have notations of later Safavi and Qajar kings and later scholars also, but none have notations of Shāh Ismāʿīl.

10.) The Qur'ān in the Berlin State Library, with a colophon of ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, has an Ottoman inspection notice of AH 1270/1853–54 CE. Karimi-Nia does not elaborate on this point, his focus being on colophons of the Shīʿah Imāms, and he notes only that the practice extended across the Islamic world. Further observations are deferred to the conclusion.

Number 3.

نصرت فتح ظفر داد مرا
شاه نجف

The notation that appears in the upper right corner is perhaps the earliest on the page, the reading given above. This can be translated as "Nusrat, the king of Najaf, gave me victory." The words "king of Najaf" refer to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, whose tomb is found in the city of Najaf. Interestingly, this notation links to the colophon, discussed above, which states the Qur'ān was written by ʿAlī, suggesting the person who wrote this notation could read the Kufic colophon. The script is in a Naskh style, not easy to date, but it is probably about the same time as the one to immediate left (Number 4) in a closely-related hand.

Number 4.

<div dir="rtl">
دخیلک عباس
یا جدّا فقط
</div>

This notation, positioned above that mentioning Shāh Ismāʿīl, gives the name ʿAbbās and Loth (1887) took this as a reference to Shāh ʿAbbās (r. 1587–1629). The word *dakhīl* is used in the Shīʿah context of prayers of supplication or request (*duʿāʾ*) that are made through a means, that is, entreating a holy or powerful intermediary for assistance from God (*tawaṣṣul*). Thus, the frequent appeals to Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet and his family) through expressions like *dakhīlak yā ʿAlī* and *dakhīlak yā Ūmm al-Banīn.* In the present case, the person writing the notation has invoked ʿAbbās. The word *jaddā* refers to a 'forefather' or 'ancestor'. The word *faqat* in the palaeographical form in which it is written here is found in a large number of Persian documents and indicates 'only', 'no more', to mark the end. Based on this, the notation can be rendered: "O forefather ʿAbbās be gracious. Ended." This may have a double meaning and refer to Shāh ʿAbbās, in view of the mention of Shāh Ismāʿīl on the folio.

Number 5.

<div dir="rtl">
ادرکنی یا شحنه النجف
</div>

Under the notation and seal pertaining to Shāh Ismāʿīl is another Arabic inscription in a relaxed Nastaʿlīq script, possibly from a Safavi king but certainly from a Shīʿah context, the reading given above. The verb is the imperative of *ʾadraka* 'to attain, reach, notice', so *ʾadrik-nī* 'reach me'. Giving this a religious tone, we render this as: "O Commander of Najaf, please come unto me."

Number 6.

<div dir="rtl">
الحکم لله سنه [١١٠٢]
</div>

The square seal below Number 5 has a cusped cap with an inscription, the reading given above. This can be translated: "Judgment belongs to God, year 1102 (?)." The script runs in three lines from the bottom up. The number is unclear. If 22, it may refer to a regnal year, but if the two marks to the left are read as 11, then it could be the date AH 1102/1690–91 CE. This would place the seal in the time of Aurangzeb, during whose time the manuscript under study was in India, see below. In order to hide their identity out of humility before God, people would make use of words from the Qu'rān, Ḥadith, Ahl al-Bayt and so forth (Desai, 1998, 57). As a consequence we cannot venture an identification of the owner from seal Number 6.

Number 7.

السلطان ابن السلطان صاحبقران [٧٩]

The pear-shaped seal with a trefoil top, lobed edge and ornamented with a fine arabesque, is also ambiguous, like the foregoing example. The reading is given above and this can be translated: "The king, son of the king of the Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction, 79." The title given here has been utilised by many rulers beginning with Timur, down through the Ottomans, Safavi, Mughals, Qajars and others (Taylor 1910; Chann 2009; Moin 2012). The title 'Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction' (*ṣāḥib-qirān*) refers to a ruler whose horoscope features the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn which was thought to usher in a time of world-conquest and justice. The late-sixteenth century saw the occurrence of two momentous events: the Grand Conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 1583 and the end of the first Islamic millennium in 1591. That the title *ṣāḥib-qirān* was applied to Akbar at this time is testified by Abū al-Fażl in his preface to the *Razmnāmah* (Willis 2022: 91). Shāh Jahān also referred to himself as the 'second lord of the auspicious conjunction' and the title was picked up by eight subsequent Mughals (Taylor 1910). We do not have adequate information to connect the seal to any particular ruler, but given the wording, Shāh Jahān is a possibility. With the other information on the same folio

pertaining to the Mughals (as we will see below), the connection of this seal with the Qajars is unlikely. In his catalogue, Otto Loth (1877) stated the folio carried a seal of Akbar, his intention perhaps being to reference this seal, but the evidence is not conclusive. We are unable to suggest an explanation for the number 79.

Number 8.

<div dir="rtl">

ز اخلاص کیشان یکی بنده ام

</div>

To the right side of the pear-shaped seal is an endorsement in a similar style of Nastaʿlīq script. The Persian is given above and can be translated: "I am one of his sincere devotees." This may refer to the king alluded to in the pear-shaped seal, but more likely refers to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

Number 9.

<div dir="rtl">

رقم شریف شاه ولایت مآب از وجوه رحمه اینک تحویل خواجه عنبر شد سنه ۱۵

</div>

The Persian notation at the bottom of the page, boldly written in Shikasta script, gives us the first secure date. The transcription is given above. The phrase Shāh Wilayat Mu'ab (roughly 'king of the excellent successors') refers to Imām ʿAlī. The notation can be rendered as follows: "Kindly, the holy amount of Shāh Wilayat Mu'ab has been handed to Khwājah ʿAnbar on the 15th regnal year." Because the book was written by Imām ʿAlī, the "holy amount" paid to the Khwājah was deemed as belonging to him. The 15th regnal year of Shāh Jahān corresponds to 1642–43 CE as testified by coin issues. The likely amount concerned is detailed by the following two items.

Number 10.

<div dir="rtl">

شاه جهانی۲۱

عنایت خان

</div>

The seal of ʿInāyat Khān is circular and written in two lines of Nastaʿlīq script. He was named Muḥammad Ṭāhir and used the pen name Āshnā; he was born in about 1627 and died in AH 1082/1671 CE (Popp 2018; Storey 1927–1939: 1:1, 577). Responsible for an abridged history Shāh Jahān, ʿInāyat Khān was the royal librarian (*Dāroghah-i kitāb khānah*) and his seals are found in a large number of manuscripts. This seal gives us a date, the number 21 referring to the regnal year of Shāh Jahān. This corresponds to 1647–48 as testified by coin issues.

Number 11.

هديه ألف خمسمأية اشرفى

This notation is directly above the seal of ʿInāyat Khān and validated by the latter. The notation records a valuation of 1500 *ashrafī*. The term *hadiyah* can be understood as a gift but it should be noted that it is also utilised in book notations to mean 'price' with reference to auspicious and holy books out of deference because no individual has the authority to put a value on a Qurʾān or other sacred work. The *ashrafī* is a gold coin minted from the mid-fifteenth century and the term was used in later periods, as explain in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. *ašrafī*.

Number 12.

شاه جهان
بندة
فاضلخان٢٣

The circular seal in the lower right corner has three lines of Nastaʿlīq script and is ornamented with clusters of dots. The reading of the Persian is given above. This can be translated as follows: "Fāżl Khān, the servant of Shāh Jahān, 23." Fāżl Khān was a trusted servant of Shāh Jahān, his full name being ʿAlāʾ al-Mulk Tūnī. He came to India in 1633–34 and died in 1663. Entering the service of Shāh Jahān in 1641

he rose to the rank of *Khān-i Saman*. In 1649 he was given the title of Fāżl Khān and he continued in royal service under Aurangzeb (Yazdani 1923–1946: 3: 387–388; Yazdani and Quraishī 1967–1972: 339). A number of portraits of him are known, one being in the Cleveland Museum of Art (Hollis 1946). This seal carries the number 23 which is the regnal year of Shāh Jahān and corresponds to 1649–50.

Number 13.

الله اکبر
بوساطت نواب عالی۷فی شهر ذو الحجه
ز نو باده شد

Between the pear-shaped seal and that of Fāżl Khān is a notation in Persian in Shikasta script. The reading is given above and the text can be translated as: "God is great, on the 7th day of month Dhū al-Ḥijjah by Navāb ʿAlī, entered newly." The position of the notation in relation to the seal described in Number 12 suggest it is in the same year, with the seal of Fāżl Khān added as validation. Dhū al-Ḥijjah 7, 1059 corresponds to 12 December 1649 and notation belongs to that year or the next. The title *navāb* was widely used for high-ranking officials under the Mughals and in this instance probably refers to Fāżl Khān himself and records that the manuscript entered his collection at this date.

Number 14.

عالم گیرباد شاه [۱۱۰۷]
اعتماد خان خانه زاد

The seal on the left side of the folio is in Nastaʿlīq script and dates to the time of Aurangzeb. The reading of the Persian is given above and this can be translated as "Iʿtimād Khān Khānazād of emperor ʿĀlamgīr 1107 (?)." The date is unclear but falls in the reign of Aurangzeb, i.e. AH 1068–1118/1658–1707 CE. The Iʿtimād Khān mentioned here seems to

be the individual known as Iʿtimād ʿAlī Khān who was given his first post in regnal year 37 of Aurangzeb (i.e. 1693 CE, see Rezavi 1985: 126). Khānazād is a term for an individual who whose father was in the service of the king at the time of their birth which circumstance applies to Iʿtimād ʿAlī Khān. He inherited the title Iʿtimād Khān only in 1696–97 (see Rezavi 1985: 127), so our reading of the date may have to be amended. Given Iʿtimād ʿAlī Khān's career was in Gujarat, the presence of his seal indicates the manuscript under study was in Gujarat by the 1690s.

Number 15.

<div dir="rtl">

اخیرک فتح و
نصرت رسید
رمضان۲۰

</div>

The notation accompanying the above seal is in three lines of Shikasta, the transcription of the Persian given above. This can be translated as follows: "Finally assistance and success has arrived, Ramazan 20." The context for this notation is not immediately evident, but it may celebrate one of the promotions that Iʿtimād ʿAlī Khān received from Aurangzeb (Rezavi 1985).

The treatment of the text and the date of the mounts

A notable feature of IO Loth 4 is the way the Kufic pages have been mounted in decorative paper frames in the tradition of album making. The borders vary across the manuscript, but throughout the fragments are used in collage. Folios 1v and 2r are richly decorated with cusped lobes in blue and gold (Fig. 3). The disposition of these borders means the opening two pages faced each other, with the matching designs placed to give maximum visual impact at the opening of the book. As pointed out above, the Qur'ān text proper is out of order. What the current borders show is that this was the order when the borders were applied.

Turning to folio 2v and 2r, we find a simpler type of border. Here the design consists of finely drawn arabesques on a white ground. As in the first folios, the border has been assembled from fragments. From folio 3v the borders change again and consist of rectangular cartouches, reused and gilded over, but some underlying writing has come to show through in some folios. There are three cartouches on most of the ornamented pages, but others only have one (folio 18r for example). Remarkably, the page with the colophon giving the name of Imām ʿAlī did not receive special attention (folio 20r). The cartouche at the bottom has some flipped text showing through the gilding, so it appears backwards; it is recognisable as Qur'ān 9:73.

Folio 7 is of note. It has a smaller paper mount, ruled margins and is not bound into the manuscript. The page belongs to the same Qur'ān and it has been in this position since the mid-nineteenth century. What it shows, in all likelihood, is the appearance of the Qur'ān before the ornamental borders were added. This folio seems to have been missed as the borders were being added and when it was found, it was simply dropped into the manuscript. This folio provides a possible explanation for the count mentioned in notation Number 1, i.e. some pages have been removed since that notation was written.

The borders provide chronological clues to the history of this manuscript. At first glance, the borders appear to belong to the sixteenth century. They are related to better known examples, perhaps the most celebrated being the Chester Beatty Qur'ān (CBL Is 1558), not itself dated but belonging to about 1550 as shown by a similar Qur'ān in Mashhad dated AH 954/1547 CE (Wright 2018: 5). Another manuscript that is telling is the combined copy of the *Kitāb-i Gulistān* and *Kitāb-i Būstān* of Saʿdī in the Walters Art Gallery (W.619). On folio 154v, its date of completion is given as AH 980/1574 CE. However, this style of decoration continued later and is found in Indian manuscripts. The borders of IO Loth 4 may be as early as the second half the sixteenth century, but more likely they are from India and of the seventeenth century. Whatever their date, the borders do not, of course, give us the actual date when they were added. When this was done, the cusped lobes folios 1v and 2r

were outlined in red in a clumsy way (Fig. 3). These red outlines point to an Indian provenance. Khwājah ʿAnbar, named in notation Number 9, may have been the person who guided this process (or perhaps he was simply the person to whom the manuscript came after the work was finished?). A proper assessment of the historical processes involved can only be determined by further study of the manuscripts with early colophons and their ornamental borders.

Comments on the ownership journey and further directions for research

A review of the seals and notations given above in the light of current research shows that while the colophon with the name of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and the inspection notice of Shāh Ismāʿīl cannot be taken at face value, by the mid-seventeenth century both names were in the manuscript. This is demonstrated by the book's accession to Shāh Jahān's library in 1642–43 and the seal of ʿInāyat Khān dated 1647–48. What the library made of it at the time—whether curiosity, forgery or relic—is not known, but the fact that there was no imperial inspection by Shāh Jahān is telling. The seal of Fāżl Khān and the accompanying notion indicate that the manuscript had passed from the royal library to his hands in 1649–50. After Fāżl Khān's death in 1663, the manuscript became the property of Iʿtimād ʿAlī Khān in Gujarat, perhaps as early as 1695–96. From western India, the manuscript travelled to neighbouring Sindh and came to the Talpur dynasty in the nineteenth century. From the Talpurs it passed to the British in 1839.

The name of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib in IO Loth 4 and the subsequent notatons and seals on the final folio have implications for those manuscripts of the Qurʾān that give the names of ʿAlī, ʿUthmān and other historical figures. These colophons have not been studied systematically, a signficant shortcoming in Islamic codicology. Collectively, these manuscripts raise crucial questions about the nature and date of Qurʾānic attributions and, more generally, about how early Qurʾāns were understood, used and circulated as precious residues of Islam's earliest history.

Illustrations

Figure 1. Qurʾān, folio 20r, showing colophon with the name of Imām ʿAlī in the last line. India
Office Collections, British Library, IO Loth 4. Courtesy of the British
Library Board. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6186965

Figure 2. Qurʾān, folio 20v, numbered key to the seals and notations. India Office Collections,
British Library, IO Loth 4. Courtesy of the British Library Board.
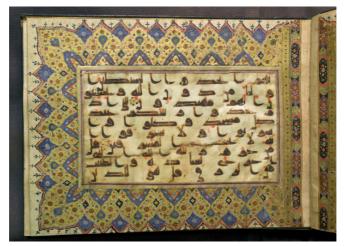https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6810826

Figure 3. Qur'ān, folio 2r, showing text of the *circa* ninth century with borders added in India during the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. India Office Collections, British Library, IO Loth 4. Courtesy of the British Library Board. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5745329

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