



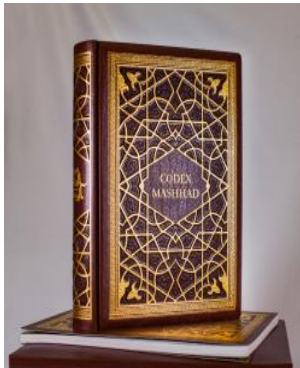
Book Review



Codex Mashhad

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“Codex Mashhad,” also referred to as “*Muṣḥaf-i Mashhad-i Raḍavī*,” is composed in *ḥijāzī* script, a category of early Arabic scripts that originated in the Hejaz region of Arabia. The Quran manuscripts written in *ḥijāzī* script are among the oldest copies of the Quran remaining until today. “Codex Mashhad” consists of two ancient Qur’ānic manuscripts numbered 18 and 4116 held at the Āstān-i Quds Library in Mashhad, Iran. The codex comprises 252 folios containing over 95% of the Qur’ānic text.



Drawing upon multiple scholarly methods, including paleographic scrutiny, orthographic examination, and radiocarbon dating, it has been credibly established that the main body of this codex was scribed in the first Islamic century (7th century AD). Its comprehensive representation of the Qur’ānic corpus thus makes “Codex Mashhad” a landmark primary source for understanding Islam’s foundational scripture.

“Codex Mashhad” was written on parchment measuring 35 by 50 centimeters. It likely remained in Kufa for several decades before being transferred to the region of Khurasan (northeast Iran). Although its textual



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transmission adheres to the official ‘Uthmānic standard of the Qur’ān, this codex notably preserves Ibn Mas‘ūd’s unique order of sūras, representing a rare example of an alternative early organizational structure. In later centuries, the sequence was rearranged to conform to the ‘Uthmānic norm. Manuscript 18 contains the first half of the Qur’ān, from the beginning to the end of *Sūrat al-Kahf*. Manuscript 4116 holds the second half, from the middle of *Sūrat Ṭāhā* to the end.

The vertical layout, line count, and relatively large size distinctly distinguish “Codex Mashhad” from other ancient manuscripts housed in the Āstān-i Quds Library collection. It also contrasts with manuscripts of the *ḥijāzī* or inclined script preserved in overseas libraries and museums. As with most early *ḥijāzī* Qur’ānic manuscripts, the separation of verses in “Codex Mashhad” took place concurrently with the scribal progression. The *basmalah* is consistently treated as a separate verse at the beginning of each sūra, demarcated with a special end-of-verse symbol, visibly present at the introduction of all sūras in both manuscripts 18 and 4116. Similar to other early *ḥijāzī* and Kufic Qur’ānic codices from the first two Islamic centuries, around one line of blank space typically separates each sūra from the next. At a later period, the name and number of verses of each sūra were written in red ink within this space. A rudimentary formatting technique—using a small black circle—is also found in the codex to indicate pause points. This was likely an addition from the third or fourth century AH.

“Codex Mashhad” exhibits nearly all the elements characteristic of the oldest extant Qur’ānic manuscripts worldwide. According to Morteza Karimi-Nia’s research, Manuscripts 18 and 4116 are the only Qur’ānic codices found in Iranian museums and library collections that are entirely transcribed in the inclined *ḥijāzī* script. Like all such manuscripts surviving to date, “Codex Mashhad” contains variants, different regional textual traditions, and orthographic peculiarities. Its spelling and orthography notably diverge from the standardized ‘Uthmānic canon,



strongly suggesting antiquity. Decorative illuminations and ornamental marks at the beginning of sūras remain absent from the original composition, appearing solely in portions transcribed subsequently.

Endowment

Codex Mashhad was endowed to the Shrine of Imām al-Riḍā (a) in the late 5th century. It has been housed within the sanctuary ever since. The person who endowed the codex was ‘Alī ibn Abī l-Qāsim al-Muqrī al-Sarawī, as documented by a deed of endowment found on the first folio (A1a) of MS 18. The deed, signed by al-Muqrī al-Sarawī as owner of the codex at that time, states:



This *muṣḥaf*, which is in handwriting of Amīr al-Mu’minīn ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, peace be upon him, is endowed upon the Shrine of the noble Imam, the blessed martyr, Abu al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, may God’s mercy be upon him, who is buried in Ṭūs. This endowment is made by the owner, ‘Alī b. Abi al-Qāsim al-Muqrī al-Sarawī, seeking closeness to the Almighty God and His satisfaction. May God fulfill his wishes.

While historical sources do not provide unambiguous information regarding the identity of the donor, it is plausible the individual was Abu al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Abi al-Qāsim b. al-Ḥusayn al-Muqrī, a Qur’ān reciter and scholar from Ṭabaristān who likely resided in Khurasan. His name appears in some Sunni Ḥadīth works, indicating he served as one of the teachers of al-Sam‘ānī (d. 562/1161). Moreover, Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sarawī al-Muqrī, whose name also features in al-Ḥākīm’s *Tarīkh Nīshapūr*, presumably belonged to the same family and dwelled in Nīshapūr some 150 years prior to Abu al-Ḥasan.

The original deed of endowment is written in New Kufic (NK) or Eastern Kufic script. Another person named al-Warrāq al-Ṭabarī has recopied the text's wording between the lines using a similar ink but finer handwriting in a smaller *naskhī* or *nasta'liq* script. More likely, al-Warrāq al-Ṭabarī served as both the scribe for the initial Eastern Kufic transcription and the duplicator of its phrases in the old *naskhī* style. A few of its passages are written in Persian using the Ṭabarī dialect, representing some of the earliest handwritten Ṭabarī Persian examples from the late 5th century.

[This is] an ever-lasting endowment to Almighty God in the *mashhad* [= place of martyrdom] of the noble al-Imām 'Alī b. M[ūsā] [...]. 'Alī b. Abī al-Qāsim b. al-Ḥusayn al-Muqri' al-Sara[wī] was the owner of the Codex and made the *waqf* ...



References

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