

Fall 2023 Arts of Asia Lecture Series
Views from the Other Side
Sponsored by the Society for Asian Art

Made in China: Ritual Objects for China's Muslims

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Key terms

Hui. An ethnoreligious group of Chinese-speaking Muslims, many of whom trace their ancestry to Arab, Persian, Mongol, and Central Asian immigrants to China over the centuries.

Sini (“Chinese”). A calligraphic style of writing Arabic that is distinctive to China, especially in Qur’an manuscripts.

Qur’an. Islam’s core religious text, revealed to the prophet Muhammad (570–632 CE) in the cities of Mecca and Medina over a period of 22 years (610–632 CE).

Ayat. A Qura’nic verse (pl. *ayaat*). There are a total of 6,200 verses in the Qur’an organized into 114 chapters (*sura*). Verses are separated from each other with plain or ornamented circular verse markers.

Sura. Chapter in the Qur’an. There are 114 chapters (*sura*) with varying number of verses in each; the shortest *sura* has 3 verses (*ayaat*) and the longest has 286 verses. All *suras* have a name and, except one, they begin with the phrase *basmala* (alt. *bismillah*), “In the name of Allah, the most merciful and beneficent.”

The start of a new chapter is marked by a (typically ornamented) chapter heading which includes the name of the *sura*, the city where it was revealed (Mecca or Medina), and the number of its verses.

The chapters are organized in order of descending length, that is, the longest *sura* is at the beginning of the Qur’an and the shortest *sura* is at the end. This recension and organization of the Qur’an dates from the period of the third caliph Usman (r. 644-656), and this standard structure continues in use across the Muslim world today.

Juz. Section of the Qur’an. In addition to chapters, the Qur’an is divided into 30 equal sections (*juz*) to facilitate its recitation and completion in one lunar month, especially the month of Ramadan.

Mushaf (pronounced *muus-haf*). A written copy of the Qur’an. Typically, Qur’an manuscripts are bound as a single volume, in 30 parts (*juz*), and in variations thereof, such as 2-volume or 5-volume sets. Some *suras* (chapters) are also bound independently.

Talk outline

Part I. Contextualizing a Ming period Qur'an manuscript in the Asian Art Museum collection (2020.1)

BREAK

Part II. Contextualizing three Qing period Arabic-inscribed *cloisonné* vessels in the Denver Art Museum collection (1988.336A-B, 1987.248, 1989.22)

Suggested Readings

Bartholomew, Therese Tse. "Auspicious Messages on Cloisonné Vessels" in Béatrice Quette, ed. *Cloisonné: Chinese Enamels from the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties*, 2011, pp. 105–129.

Ben-Dor Benite, Zvi. *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China*, 2005

Brown, Tristan G. "A Mountain of Saints and Sages: Muslims in the Landscape of Popular Religion in Late Imperial China" in *T'oung Pao*, 105, 2019, pp. 437-492.

Fraser, Marcus. "Beyond the Takmalakan: The Origins and Stylistic Developments of Qur'an Manuscripts in China" in Melanie Gibson, ed. *Fruit of Knowledge, Wheel of Learning: Essays in Honor of Robert Hillenbrand*, 2022.

Gladney, Dru C. "Muslim Tombs and Ethnic Folklore: Charters for Hui Identity" in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 46, no. 3, August 1987, pp. 495–532.

Norris, H.T. "The Muṣḥaf in Beijing's (Bikīn's) Oldest Mosque" in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2001), pp. 123-124, 127-134.

Steinhardt, Nancy Shatzman. *China's Early Mosques*, 2015.