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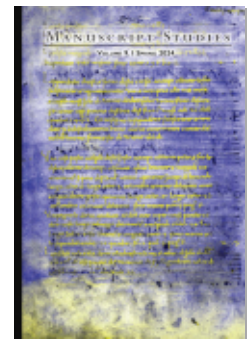
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Copying Islamic Manuscripts in Captivity: The Case of the Qur'an of Muḥammad al-Tāzī / Baldassarre Loyola Mandes (1631–1667)

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IN THE ISLAMIC MANUSCRIPT tradition, copyists usually remain on the margins, to the point that colophons were not considered a strictly necessary element of a book. In premodern bookmaking manuals, there was no mention of the colophon, nor does Arabic seem to have had a specific word for it.¹ In fact, in early modern Islamic manuscripts, though colophons had become a common feature, when they are present they usually have a formulaic and impersonal character, underlined by the use of the third person, stereotyped self-abasement locutions, devotional formulae, and the frequent

The present article stems from a paper presented at the “Perception of the Other and of Islam through Manuscripts of the Qur’ans and Islamic Literatures” workshop held in Naples, Italy, in February 2020, where I discussed a number of case studies, including Muḥammad al-Tāzī / Baldassarre Loyola. I thank all the participants for their insightful observations. In particular, I am grateful to Federico Stella for having generously shared his research and comments. I would also like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers of *Manuscript Studies* for their helpful suggestions.

1 Rosemarie Quiring-Zoche, “The Colophon in Arabic Manuscripts: A Phenomenon without a Name,” *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 4 (2013): 49–81 at 69–73.

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omission of the identity of the copyist, let alone other information: profession, environment, social position, cultural clientage networks, and the like. As François Déroche observes, Islamic “colophons are generally speaking so sparing of details that, unless they provide the name of a specific individual—author, scholar, physician, or other—already recorded in other sources, they are of little help in determining the identity of the person who transcribed the text.”²

This article deals with one of these rather rare cases in which paratextual elements in the manuscript bear unexpected autobiographical information and prove to be valuable historical sources for piecing together the life of a scribe and the social and cultural milieu in which he operated. The manuscript in question is a small Qur’an housed at the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts at the University of Pennsylvania that was copied by a Muslim captive in Malta in 1065 AH/1654 CE.³ What makes this manuscript particularly interesting is the identity of its copyist, Muḥammad al-Tāzī (1631–67), known in Christian Europe as Baldassarre Loyola Mandes, one of the most famous Christian converts of the seventeenth century.⁴ One of the peculiarities that has caused Muḥammad/Baldassarre to be so widely studied by historians in recent years is the great range of sources—both literary and documentary, Islamic and Christian—that pertain to his life. They include his rich correspondence, extensive biographical and autobiographical texts, and even a sacred drama in Spanish, *El gran príncipe de Fez*, by Pedro Calderón de la Barca.⁵ In spite of this large number of sources, however, some aspects of his existence remain elusive.

In this article, I will attempt to show how the Maltese Qur’an and its colophon can offer unexpected evidence of a less well-documented aspect of

2 François Déroche, *Islamic Codicology: An Introduction to the Study of Manuscripts in Arabic Script* (London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2006): 185

3 Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Ms. Codex 1904. I learned about this manuscript thanks to a post by Kelly Tuttle on the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts blog: “A Small, Maltese Qur’an,” accessed February 2023, <https://pennrare.wordpress.com/2019/07/>.

4 In this article, I will use his Islamic name, Muḥammad al-Tāzī, when referring to events pertaining to the first phase of his life and his Christian name, Baldassarre Loyola, for his post-conversion years.

5 Emanuele Colombo, “A Muslim Turned Jesuit: Baldassarre Loyola Mandes (1631–1667),” *Journal of Early Modern History* 17 (2013): 479–504.

Muḥammad/Baldassarre's life—namely, his alleged activity as a copyist of Arabic manuscripts during his years of captivity in Malta. In so doing, I will also examine an underrated yet significant niche in the manuscript production of the early modern Mediterranean, represented by books copied by Muslim prisoners in Christian lands. The use of enslaved Muslims as copyists for Arabic texts in western Europe since the late Middle Ages is a well-known phenomenon. This practice also continued in the early modern era, involving both famous figures, for instance, Leo Africanus, and more obscure scribes who nonetheless acted as “hidden hands,” contributing to the dissemination of knowledge of Arabic and Islam in Europe.⁶ Much less studied are the cases of manuscripts that captives and slaves copied for themselves and for their coreligionists. This peculiar form of manuscript production is attested both through slave accounts and manuscript evidence (i.e., colophons), but it has hitherto remained little studied.

Muḥammad al-Tāzī / Baldassarre Loyola

From his own account, we learn that Muḥammad al-Tāzī was born in Fez in 1631, as the son of the ruler of the city. A pious Muslim, he received an Islamic education, acquiring detailed knowledge of the quranic text. When he was twenty, he embarked on the pilgrimage to Mecca, but the ship on which he was sailing in the Mediterranean was captured by the Knights of St. John, and he was held captive in Malta, where he spent five years awaiting ransom. When he was finally manumitted in 1656, however, he had a vision that led him to convert to Christianity. He decided to remain in the previously

6 For examples from the late Middle Ages, see P. S. van Koningsveld, “Muslim Slaves and Captives in Western Europe during the Late Middle Ages,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 6 (1995): 5–23 at 11. For the early modern age, see Robert Jones, *Learning Arabic in Renaissance Europe (1505–1624)* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 48–66; Nabil Matar, *Mediterranean Captivity through Arab Eyes, 1517–1798* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 456–62. The definitions “hidden hands” and “hidden helpers” were introduced by Ann Blair to define the role of amanuenses in early modern Europe; cf. Blair, “Hidden Hands: Amanuenses and Authorship in Early Modern Europe” (A. S. W. Rosenbach Lectures in Bibliography, University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, 17, 18, and 20 March 2014).

hated island of Malta, where he was baptized by the Jesuits with the name Baldassarre Loyola. He then joined the Society of Jesus and devoted his new life as a Christian convert to eagerly proselytizing an impressive number of enslaved Muslims in the port cities of Naples and Genoa. In 1667, while traveling to India to pursue his missionary service there, he died in Madrid in the odor of sanctity.⁷

During the years of his pastoral activity, Baldassarre had gained considerable fame in Catholic realms by virtue of his great zeal and ardent anti-Islamic spirit. Nonetheless, one element above all others made him a special convert and attracted the attention of contemporaries: his alleged affiliation to a Moroccan royal dynasty. In his autobiography, he stated, “I was born in the city of Fez, and my name was Mahamed Attazi Sherif. My father is named Abd al-Wahid Mtah Muhamed Sherif, and he is the ruler of the kingdom of Fez.”⁸ Thus, in his contemporaries’ eyes, Baldassarre was a Moroccan prince and at the same time, a fervent Jesuit involved in the conversion of enslaved Muslims. However, this point was not exempt from suspicions, and the extreme reticence of Baldassarre himself to talk about his previous life fueled rumors about the truthfulness of his account.⁹ As his biographer and spiritual director Domenico Brunacci observed, “It seemed that with the baptism he had forgotten all his past.”¹⁰ Faced with these doubts, Catholic authorities investigated Baldassarre’s origins by collecting a large number of witnesses to his former identity, and their inquiry satisfactorily confirmed

7 On his life, see Colombo, “A Muslim Turned Jesuit”; Matar, *Mediterranean Captivity*, 162–79. On Baldassarre’s works on Islamic religion, see Federico Stella, “The Mi‘rağ of Muḥammad according to Baldassarre Loyola Mandes S.J. (1631–1667): Sources, Controversy and Christianization of an Islamic Tradition,” *Al-Qantara* 42 (2021): 1–20.

8 Rome, Archivio della Pontificia Università Gregoriana (hereafter APUG) 1060 II, 1v–2r. “Io nacqui nella Città di Fes, e mi chiamava Mahamed altazi; et il mio padre è chiamato Apd alwahid Mtah Muhamed Scerif, che è Ré rignante di tutto quello regno di Fes.” A digital copy of Baldassarre’s autobiography is available on the website of the Gregorian Archives Texts Editing project, https://gate.unigre.it/mediawiki/index.php/Index:BLMM_1060_02.djvu, accessed August 2022.

9 Thyrsus Gonzáles [de Santalla], *Manuductio ad conversionem Mabumetanorum*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Bernardo de Villa-Diego, 1687), 1:105–6.

10 APUG 1060 I, 129r. The English translation is from Colombo, “A Muslim Turned Jesuit,” 489n38.

his claims. His royal lineage has also been generally accepted by twentieth-century scholars who more recently identified him as a member of the Sa'adian dynasty, which ruled Marrakesh at that time.¹¹

In a recent study, Nabil Matar questioned Baldassarre's royal descent on the basis of what emerges from his Arabic autobiography and from the Arabic letters that he exchanged with other Moroccans after his conversion. According to Matar, these documents "challenge completely the information presented in the Christian sources."¹² In particular, in all the correspondence kept up by Baldassarre in his mother tongue, almost no mention of his princely affiliation is detectable.¹³ On the contrary, there were letters from a Moroccan merchant that reported him as an impostor. Moreover, Matar notes that in his writings Baldassarre Loyola displayed a rather poor Arabic, which was hardly compatible with his status of Quranic-educated scholar. All these elements lead him to conclude that "Mandes was not whom he claimed to be" and that "he was not a prince."¹⁴

What is unquestionable is that Baldassarre was extremely reserved in talking about his Islamic past, and even when he was reluctantly pushed to address the question, the discourse he retrospectively elaborated about his persona appears to be studded with fictionalized elements embedded in the

11 Carlos García Goldáraz, "Un príncipe de Fez jesuita: Sceih Muhammad Attasi, en religión P. Balthasar Diego Loyola de Mandes (1631–1667); Estudio sobre su ascendencia regia," *Miscelánea Comillas* 2 (1944): 487–541. More recently, the question has been taken up by Emanuele Colombo, "Baldassarre Loyola de Mandes (1631–1667), prince de Fez et jésuite," in *Les Musulmans dans l'histoire de l'Europe: 1. Une intégration invisible*, ed. B. Vincent and J. Dakhli (Paris: Albin Michel, 2011), 159–93 at 165–66.

12 Matar, *Mediterranean Captivity*, 162–79, quote at 165. Many of the sources used by Matar are also Christian, at least insofar as at that time Baldassarre was a Jesuit writing in Arabic, as he clearly stated.

13 In particular, Baldassarre corresponded with Muḥammad Bi'l-Ġayṭ al-Darāwī, a Moroccan captive who served as an imam in the mosque of the Muslim slaves in the bagnio of Livorno and then converted to Christianity, also collaborating with the Orientalist Barthélemy d'Herbelot. As a matter of fact, however, when still a captive in Livorno, Bi'l-Ġayṭ al-Darāwī was among the Moroccan slaves who, summoned by Jesuit authorities, testified that Baldassarre Loyola actually was the son of the old king of Fez. See Pier Mattia Tommasino, "Bulghait al-Darawi and Barthélemy d'Herbelot: Readers of the Qur'an in Seventeenth-Century Tuscany," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 20 (2018): 94–120 at 106.

14 Matar, *Mediterranean Captivity*, 178.

dynamics of self-representation. What makes the reconstruction even more difficult is the fact that there are numerous pages written in Arabic, Latin, and Italian by Baldassarre Loyola, but, as far as I know, there are no comparable documents ascribable to the pre-conversion Muḥammad al-Tāzī. In this regard, the Maltese Qur'an offers limited but significant evidence regarding the period of captivity that preceded his conversion and might help to reveal his former attitude toward Christianity.

Copying the Qur'an in Captivity

In several autobiographical passages of his writings, Baldassarre reports that while he was a prisoner, he served as a preacher for the enslaved Muslims in the prison of Malta. To perform this duty, he also relentlessly copied a large number of manuscripts for teaching the Qur'an to his coreligionists who had no access to the sacred text. In his autobiography, he writes:

Then I attempted to render some service for the sake of the Muhammadan faith. In Malta, I found some churches [i.e., mosques] and many Muslim slaves. But they had not the appropriate books for their religion, such as the Qur'an, etc. Since I was well schooled in that religion and I had an excellent hand at writing, I believed that copying the Qur'an and other such books to disseminate them among people that cannot [properly] observe the religion due to their disregard would have been a great service to God. So, I started writing and disseminating books. I used to work all day and most of the night. . . .

Each of those churches [i.e., mosques] already had a minister. I did not want to cause one of them to be sent away from his church in order to take his place. However, at that time the minister of the principal church of theirs was manumitted and they elected me to replace him as their minister. Then, I strove even more to serve that faith. During my stay in Malta, I wrote about sixty books, taking into account the ones I copied and the ones I composed by myself

against the faith of Christ, and I sent many of these books to Tripoli and Tunis, where people were amazed for what I managed to do.¹⁵

The same information is also reported with fewer details in his brief Arabic autobiography. In it he explains that, after having been appointed imam of one of the Islamic mosques he found in Malta—the one for the Maliki legal school prevailing in North Africa—he had spent about four years making copies of the Qur'an and other religious books and writing some original works.¹⁶

This account is fully compatible with the material reality of the Grand Prison, or Bagnio, of Malta in the early modern age. In compliance with a reciprocity principle, Maltese authorities granted the enslaved Muslims the possibility of performing prayers and celebrating their religious festivals in dedicated rooms inside the prisons that were used as mosques. To this end, each enslaved community elected an imam, called *papasso* in Maltese documents, who attended to religious affairs and acted as a representative for the believers.¹⁷

15 APUG 1060 II, 16v. “All’hora cercaio di fare qualche cosa in servitio di quella fede di Mahometto, trovai alcune chiese di quella fede in Malta et assai schiavi di quella fede, però non hevevano li libri buoni della loro fede come l’alcorano ec. Io come molto sapevo della loro fede, et havevo buonissima mano nello scrivere, credevo che quello era grandissimo servitio di Dio, di copiare molti libri del alocorano, et altri simili per siminarli in quella parte dove sono molte persone, che non sanno osservare quella fede con la loro incuranza così ho fatto. Cominciavo scrivere e seminare quelli libri. Faticavo il giorno, e la maggior parte della notte. . . . Però erano quelle chiese di loro ogni una haveva il suo sacerdote non volevo caciare nessuno di quelli della sua chiesa per essere io in suo loco, ma in quel tempo riscatò uno di quelli sacerdote della chiesa maggiore che hanno, mi elessero subito per loro sacerdote in loco di quello, all’hora cercavo di servire quella fede maggiore di quello che la servivo in tutto il tempo che stavo in Malta incirca ho scritto sessanta libri tra quelli che ho copiato, et altre che ho fatto novi della mia testa contra la fede di Christo, e mandavo molti libri di quelli a Tripuli, et a Tunesi dove si meravigliavano di quelle cose che facevo.” Also see Colombo, “A Muslim Turned Jesuit,” 487n26.

16 APUG 1060 I, 56–57.

17 Godfrey Wettinger, *Slavery in the Islands of Malta and Gozo: Ca. 1000–1812* (Malta: Publishers Enterprises Group, 2002), 442–50.

In this context, books, and especially religious ones, were an extremely sought-after and valuable good. In the prisons, slaves were allowed to own some belongings, which they kept in their personal box (*cascia*). Among these objects were also Arabic manuscripts that, nonetheless, were usually viewed with suspicion by Maltese authorities. In periods of turmoil, orders were issued that prescribed the requisition of “whichever weapon and written text” (*qualsivoglia armi, et scrittura*) in the slaves’ possession.¹⁸ In spite of these limitations, however, in the bagnios of the Mediterranean seaports, the presence of books was largely tolerated, and, in fact, their circulation among enslaved Muslims is amply documented. For example, from an interrogation conducted on some captives on behalf of the Holy Office by the inquisitor of Pisa, it emerges that at the beginning of the seventeenth century, in the bagnio of Livorno, enslaved Muslims owned many books in their languages. The manuscripts greatly varied in dimension, and some were described as gilded and illuminated. These precious items were an object of trade in the prisons and were often resold to the slaves by the same Christian soldiers who had plundered them from Muslim ships.¹⁹

Similar books then served as models to literate captives for producing further copies and disseminating them among their fellows in the bagnio, exactly as Muḥammad al-Tāzī maintained. This copying activity is repeatedly documented over the centuries. At the end of the sixteenth century, Ma’cūncizāde Muṣṭafā Efendi, a Turkish qadi and poet, wrote a memoir in Ottoman Turkish in which he describes the harshness he suffered during the captivity in the prisons of Malta in an elegant prose profusely interspersed

18 Emanuel Buttigieg, “Corpi e anime in schiavitù: Schiavi musulmani nella Malta dei Cavalieri di San Giovanni (1530–1798),” in *Schiavitù del corpo e schiavitù dell’anima: Chiesa, potere politico e schiavitù tra Atlantico e Mediterraneo (sec. XVI.XVIII)*, ed. E. Colombo (Milan: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 2018), 287–308 at 298.

19 Cesare Santus, *Il “turco” a Livorno: Incontri con l’Islam nella Toscana del Seicento* (Milan: Officina Libraria, 2019), 68–69. “Io ho visto diverse sorte di libri . . . e particolarmente ne ho visto in gran quantità nella sacha alli Turchi, miniati d’oro, grandi e picholi, in foglio, in quarto, in ottavo, ma tutti bassi, et il maggiore non era più alto di duo dita in circa, e dicevano quei Turchi che vi era un libro che valeva cento scudi” (69). On the role of piracy in the acquisition of Islamic manuscripts, see Robert Jones, “Piracy, War, and the Acquisition of Arabic Manuscripts in Renaissance Europe,” *Manuscripts of the Middle East 2* (1987): 96–110.

with verses.²⁰ Muṣṭafā Efendi relates how, while almost totally deprived of any material good, he ventured to make a copy of his own *divān* (collection of poems), whereas a companion of his copied the whole Qur'an in forty days and an Arabic treatise on ethics in one month.²¹

In 1706, Muḥammad ibn 'Abdallāh (or 'Abdalkarīm) al-Ṣa'īdī al-'Adawī, an Egyptian imam who made his living by copying Arabic books, was captured by Christian pirates and imprisoned in Malta. He then converted to Christianity, taking the name Clemente Caraccioli, and moved to Rome, where he became librarian for the Arabic collection at the Vatican Library. In this new office, he copied a large number of Christian Arabic manuscripts.²² As we learn from the autograph dedicatory inscription to the pope that opens one of these manuscripts, during his captivity in Malta he had already employed his remarkable skill as a copyist. It reads, "I have no other ability than writing in Arabic; that is what I did in Malta, where I taught that language to the children [of the other slaves]."²³ One of the manuscripts that he copied in Malta—"may God destroy it," he added in the colophon—is today kept in the Vatican Library. Al-'Adawī/Caraccioli records that, before falling into captivity, he had copied the Qur'an thirty-five times, and the calligraphic quality of the Malta manuscript shows how an accomplished copyist like him could fully display his professional skills even under the

20 The Ottoman text is in Fahir İz, "Macuncuzade Mustafa'nın Malta Anıları: Sergüzeşt-i Esiri-i Malta," *Türk Dili Araştırmaları Yıllığı Belleten* 18 (1970): 69–112. Translations of the work have been published in German, Walter Schmucker, "Die maltesischen Gefangenschaftserinnerungen eines Türkischen Kadi von 1599," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 2 (1970): 191–251; in French, Hayri G. Üzkoray, *Le captif de Malte: Récit autobiographique d'un kadi ottoman* (Toulouse: Anacharsis, 2019); and a partial translation in English, Helga Anetshofer, "Memoirs of an Ottoman Captive in Malta," in *The Ottoman World: A Cultural History Reader, 1450–1700*, ed. Hakan T. Karateke and Helga Anetshofer (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 16–22.

21 İz, "Macuncuzade Mustafa'nın Malta Anıları," 76, 78.

22 Samir Khalil Samir, "Un Imam égyptien copiste au Vatican, Clemente Caraccioli 1670–1721," *Parole de l'Orient* 21 (1996): 111–54. Also see Matar, *Mediterranean Captivity*, 182–84.

23 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (hereafter BAV), MS Vat. ar. 11, 2v. "Et anche non altro esercizio hò, fuorché il scrivere arabo, il che facevo in Malta, dove insegnavo a fanciulli questo istesso."

restraints of a slave prison.²⁴ As the accounts of Muṣṭafā Efendi and al-ʿAdawī show, the practice of copying manuscripts must have been rather common among the learned captives in wait for ransom, and it endured well into the eighteenth century. Still in 1758, just forty years before the abolition of slavery on the island, Sulaymān “the Egyptian,” evidently an untrained scribe, copied a miscellaneous collection of lexicographical, poetic, and astrological materials in Arabic, while confined in the prison of Saint John (Sanjuwan) in Malta.²⁵

In brief, the account of Muḥammad/Baldassarre looks fully plausible and consistent with the life conditions in the bagnios of Malta, where literati captives often succeeded in carving out a space to copy manuscripts. Until now, there was no evidence of his copyist activity other than his own words, which were later taken up by contemporary biographers. In the absence of other evidence, this narrative could be interpreted as one among many of the fictionalized elements in the self-representation of his past. After all, the retrospective abasement of the pre-conversion self, portrayed as an unbelieving sinner, is a rather common feature of Christian conversion rhetoric. In this regard, the Maltese Qurʾān offers validation to that part of Baldassarre’s later account of his activity as a preacher and copyist during his captivity. Moreover, it can provide some information on practical aspects of manuscript production and circulation among captives and slaves.

The Manuscript

The Maltese Qurʾān is a small square manuscript (87 × 86 mm) of 238 folios.²⁶ It has a brown leather cover with flap and blind-tooled decorations (central

24 BAV, MS Vat. ar. 416. The colophon with the quote is on fol. 52v. For the description of the manuscript, see Giorgio Levi Della Vida, *Elenco dei manoscritti arabi islamici della Biblioteca Vaticana: Vaticani, Barberiniani, Borgiani, Rossiani* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1935), 44–46. Also see Samir, “Un Imam égyptien,” 116–17.

25 Edward G. Browne, *A Hand-List of the Muhammadan Manuscripts, Including All Those Written in the Arabic Character Preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 321.

26 Unfortunately, I have not had the opportunity to examine the manuscript. My description is based on the high-resolution digital images of the manuscript in OPenn, <https://openn>.



FIGURE 1. Decorated heading of sura 7 (al-A'raf). Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Ms. Codex 1904, fol. 50r.

mandorla with floral motifs, frames, and cornerpieces). The manuscript is incomplete at the beginning and opens with the second sura (al-Baqara), missing at least one folio with the first sura (al-Fātiḥa). The text is fifteen lines per page and written in *maghribī* script in brown ink, fully vocalized in red. The sura headings are in flaking gold over yellow, with marginal roundels in gold, red, and blue. Three decorative cartouches, different in style, respectively frame the titles of sura 7 (al-A'raf, fol. 50r), sura 19 (Maryam, fol. 111v), and sura 38 (Ṣad, fol. 172v) (figs. 1–3). A fourth similar decoration should have preceded the first sura on the missing leaf. These cartouches mark the beginning of each of the four parts into which the Qur'an text was

library.upenn.edu/Data/0002/html/mscodex1904.htm, accessed February 2023; the entry in the Franklin online catalogue, and the detailed description of the manuscript provided in a post by Kelly Tuttle on the Kislak Center blog, see n3.



FIGURE 2. Decorated heading of sura 19 (*Maryam*). Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Ms. Codex 1904, fol. 111v.

divided according to a distinctive textual tradition attested in North Africa. This way of organizing the Qur'an responded to a mathematical principle and was aimed at dividing the sacred text into four parts whose lengths would be as uniform as possible. These textual sections, almost quantitatively equivalent in the number of letters, coincided with the following groups of suras: 1–6, 7–18, 19–37, and 38–114. This division into four parts had its origin in the Iberian Peninsula in the eleventh century and then spread through North Africa; the Maltese Qur'an copied by Muḥammad al-Tāzī is a later example of this textual tradition.²⁷

27 Juan Pablo Arias Torres, "Sicut Evangelia sunt quatuor, distribuerunt continentiam eius in quatuor libros: On the Division of Iberian Qur'ans and their Translations into Four Parts," in



FIGURE 3. Decorated heading of sura 38 (*Ṣad*). Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Ms. Codex 1904, fol. 172v.

The manuscript ends with a colophon framed in red and yellow with marginal illuminated decorations (fol. 238r; fig. 4). Its text is eleven lines long and is remarkably informative, a feature that is common to the manuscripts of other enslaved copyists. Along with the conventional devotional formulae, the colophon states that the name of the copyist was Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Waḥīd b. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Tazī, a Moroccan from Fez, prisoner in Malta—“may God destroy it,” he adds at every occurrence of the island’s name. The copy was completed on Thursday 16 Muḥarram 1065 (16

The Latin Qur’an, 1143–1500, ed. C. Ferrero Hernández and J. Tolan (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 425–53.



FIGURE 4. Colophon. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Ms. Codex 1904, fol. 238r (detail).

November 1654) at the time of the morning prayer, in the Muslims' mosque on the island.

The Qur'an copy continued to be used by Muslim readers, as evidenced by marginal corrections made in different hands found on its pages. Additionally, two leaves containing prayer instructions written in a modern *naskh* script using pink ink, were pasted on the last page (fol. 238v) and the back inner cover. These additions, which likely date back to the nineteenth or early twentieth century, suggest that the book made its way to Muslim lands, likely North Africa, and remained there until relatively recent times. However, apart from these hints there is no additional substantial information available to reconstruct its later circulation.

The Qur'an eventually arrived at the University of Pennsylvania Libraries as a gift from Gordon A. Block Jr. (1914–73) in 1966. Block was an eclectic book collector from Philadelphia, who gathered a heterogeneous collection

over a number of years.²⁸ He was also a frequent donor to the Penn Libraries, and the Maltese Qur'an was part of one of the donations he made in memory of his mother. This donation included other Islamic manuscripts, such as two collections of prayers of Persian production (Ms. Codex 1905 and 1910), a *rūznāme* (calendar) in Ottoman Turkish (Ms. Roll 1906), and two Qur'ans of Ottoman production (Ms. Codex 1907 and 1909). Although it is reported that most of the books in Block's collection were acquired from Mabel Zahn at Sessler's Bookstore in Philadelphia, very little information is available about his collecting activity, and the way the Maltese Qur'an came into his possession can only be speculated upon.²⁹

Conclusions

The Maltese Qur'an shows how, in some cases, an Islamic manuscript and its colophon can offer an insight into both the life of the person who produced it and the production context itself.

The information provided in the colophon confirms that the actual name of Baldassarre Loyola before the baptism was Muḥammad al-Tāzī, the latter attribution pointing to the origin of his family in the city of Tāza in Morocco: he was the son of 'Abd al-Waḥīd b. 'Abd al-Qādir al-Tāzī and came from Fez.³⁰ It also proves useful to confirm his later autobiographical accounts of the period of captivity in Malta that preceded Baldassarre's conversion. He actually served as imam in one of the mosques in the slave prison and worked as a copyist, even if we cannot be sure that his scribal activity was as prolific as he claimed. Lastly, even within the strict limits of the formulaic structure

28 See for example the catalogue of the auction of his collection held at Sotheby's in 1974 after his death, *The Fine Library Formed by the Late Gordon A. Block, Jr., Jan. 29, 1974* (New York: Sotheby Parke Bernet Inc., 1974).

29 Clarence Wolf, "Collecting, Collectors, You Never Know," *Rare Book Monthly*, April 2021, accessed June 2023, <https://www.rarebookhub.com/articles/2975?id=2975>.

30 See Matar, *Mediterranean Captivity*, 165.

of an Islamic colophon, he expressed, or simply showed off, a firm belief in the Islamic faith.

Moreover, the Qur'an copy offers evidence of a peculiar form of manuscript production that took place among literate captives imprisoned in the bagnios of the Mediterranean seaports. For these recluse scribes, writing manuscripts was an essential part of their daily routine, and even within the constraints of captivity, they succeeded in creating the conditions to produce books that were not only functional for the reading needs of the slave community but could also meet an aesthetic standard. The Maltese Qur'an itself, though not remarkable for its calligraphic quality, appears to be the result of the work of a trained copyist who had access to colored inks, good-quality paper, and all the working tools needed to do a thorough job. The production and use of these books, which were mostly of religious content and predominantly Qur'ans, were a substantial part of the slaves' lives that still deserves to be fully studied. Many of these manuscripts have been lost, but some took on a second life. Some books reached North Africa and continued to be used by Muslim readers, while others remained in Europe, where they were eagerly collected by Orientalist scholars in private and public libraries, thus contributing to the shaping of knowledge regarding the Islamic world in Europe.