



The European Qur'ān

18 September 2024 to 24 August 2025
Weltmuseum Wien

What role does the Holy Scripture of Islam, the Qur'ān, play in the history of European thought? How has it been read and understood in Europe since it was first translated in the Middle Ages?

A special exhibition the Weltmuseum Wien developed in collaboration with the European Research Council (ERC) Synergy Grant Project *The European Qur'ān. Islamic Scripture in European Culture and Religion 1150–1850 (EuQu)* explores these questions.

This exhibition examines the perceptions and uses of the holy text of Islam in Europe's religious and intellectual landscape from the Middle Ages to the present, and illustrates the diverse ways in which the Qur'ān has been experienced, read, and interpreted in Europe. With historical artefacts, contemporary works of art, media installations and facsimiles of manuscripts and books, the exhibition documents the significant role played by the Qur'ān in the lives of Europeans. The special exhibition hopes to stimulate reflection on the many ways in which the Qur'ān can be read in modern European societies.

More than a book

The Qur'ān holds a central significance for Muslims and is embedded in a culture of recitation and verbal transmission. Verses of the Qur'ān are recited during prayers and celebrations, and are present in the lives of Muslims in the form of written and printed words as well as in art and architecture, be it as carvings or mosaics

The first part of the exhibition presents the sensual aspect of the Muslim experience of the Qur'ān through an audio installation by Scottish reciter Madinah Javed and animated calligraphy.



A source of religious practice, the Qur'ān functions as a theological, moral, ethical, and legal guide for Muslims. For interpreting and understanding the Qur'ān, Muslims developed a rich tradition of commentary (*tafsīr*) and produced translations into numerous languages. Today, the Qur'ān remains at the core of life for Muslims. From scripture to audio record and digital copies: the Qur'ān has been adapted for visual, auditory, material, as well as online experiences, marking its way into the digital era.

Medieval encounters

A media installation highlights early translations of the Qur'ān in Europe, which were produced by Christians in the Middle Ages. They were used to learn Arabic and for polemical, but sometimes also for laudatory arguments. In the ninth century, a partial Greek translation of the Qur'ān circulated in the Byzantine Empire. As Muslim rule on the Iberian Peninsula fragmented, numerous scientific texts were translated from Arabic into Latin. Two Latin translations of the Qur'ān were produced in this context, with the aim of confronting Islam.

The Qur'ān in early modern Europe

Between 1500 and 1800, the invention of printing, the Protestant Reformation, and the rise of the Ottoman Empire all changed how Muslim and non-Muslim Europeans approached the Qur'ān.

The second section of the exhibition illustrates that the Qur'ān was interpreted differently in Europe at different times, by different groups and readers. Christian theologians used it in order to approach the Hebrew texts of the Bible via Arabic as a spoken Semitic language. Romantic poets were inspired by the Qur'ān, and Enlightenment thinkers regarded it as the document of a rational religion.

From Romanticism to Colonialism: The Qur'ān in the nineteenth century

In the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, the Qur'ān left a deep imprint on Europe, then a rapidly changing continent. New translations laid the foundation for innovative theoretical and aesthetic interpretations of the Qur'ān. While authors of the Enlightenment understood the Qur'ān as a text that emphasized reason and natural religion, Romantic writers such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) regarded it as a source of poetical inspiration.

The Egyptian graphic designer and media artist Marwan Shahin explores this relationship in a series of portraits one of which shows Goethe reading the Qur'ān.

The European colonial conquest and control of territories with Muslim majorities in Africa and Asia led to new prejudices against Muslims and the Qur'ān. While other colonial powers discriminated against Muslims as subjects, the Austro-Hungarian Empire took an exceptional step. After the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Habsburg Empire granted equal rights to Muslims in the *Islamgesetz* (Islam Law) of 1912. During the First World War, both sides



mobilized Muslims from Europe and European colonies. The warring nations saw the instrumentalization of Islam and the Qur'ān as strategic tools to achieve their political and military goals.

Contemporary voices

The final section of the exhibition explores the question of how European Muslims deal with the Qur'ān in contemporary society. Today's interactions with Islamic scripture are increasingly shaped by both active community involvement and scholarly research, and can enhance intercultural understanding and social cohesion. Many Muslim voices advocate for new approaches to the Qur'ān, offering innovative readings that address contemporary challenges and contribute to ongoing dialogues in Europe.



The exhibition is curated by Naima Afif (ERC *EuQu*, University of Copenhagen), Jan Loop (ERC *EuQu*, University of Copenhagen), and Tobias Mörike (Weltmuseum Wien).

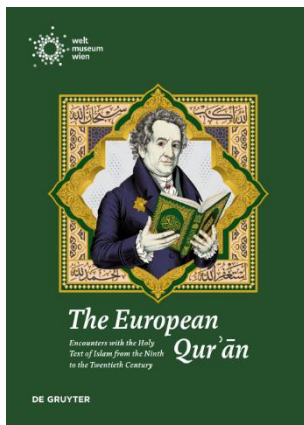
The research project

EuQu is a six-year research project (2019–2025) studying the ways in which the Qurʾān is embedded in the intellectual, religious and cultural history of Medieval and early-modern Europe. It examines how the text has been translated, interpreted, adapted, and used by Christians, European Jews, freethinkers, atheists, and European Muslims in order to understand how the Qurʾān has influenced both culture and religion in Europe.

For more information go to: <https://euqu.eu/>

Publication

The publication accompanying the special exhibition *The European Qurʾān* comprises essays by Naima Afif, Jan Loop, John Talon, Mercedes García-Arenal, Katarzyna K. Starczewska, Paul Babinski, Asaph Ben-Tov, Roberto Tottoli, Emmanuelle Stefanidis, Omar T. Nasr. They explore the central themes of the research project, providing insights into the history of the Qurʾān in Europe.



The European Qurʾān

Published by Naima Afif and Jan Loop
136 pages
English
€ 25,-

Programme

Wednesday, 18 September, 4 pm

Deep Dive: Becoming a (Female) Qur'ān Reciter

Exhibition talk (in English) with Madinah Javed and Tobias Mörike



The exhibition *The European Qur'ān* explores with the long history of the Qur'ān in Europe. The Qur'ān is not only written or printed words but is also encountered by believers as recitation, which could be described as "chanted words": the *tajweed*.

In a tour through the exhibition, Scottish solicitor and Qur'ān reciter Madinah Javed will be talking to Tobias Mörike, curator at the Weltmuseum Wien, about her path to Qur'ān recitation, the history of Qur'ān recitation by women, and her commitment to the global #FemaleReciters movement, which she created to raise awareness of women's voices.

In the exhibition, Madinah Javed can be heard reciting from Surah 53 of the Qur'ān, *The Star*.

Duration: 60 minutes

Participation: € 9 (valid museum ticket required)

Tickets: online or at the ticket office, while stocks last

Meeting point: Hall of Columns

Check our homepage for more details on our **programme of lectures and events:**

https://bit.ly/WMW_Koran

Press photos

Go to the press section on our website to download free press releases and photos if you want to write about special exhibitions and projects at the Weltmuseum Wien:

<https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/press>

Marwan Shahin
God is Perfect
(Portrait of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)

2024

Draft for 3D printed UV inks on aluminium with gold chrome finish mounted on PVC Sintra

© Marwan Shahin



Marwan Shahin
One Thousand Years
(Portrait of Christina von Schweden)

2024

Draft for 3 printed UV inks on aluminium with gold chrome finish mounted on PVC Sintra

© Marwan Shahin



Madinah Javed
Photo © Emily Maciness



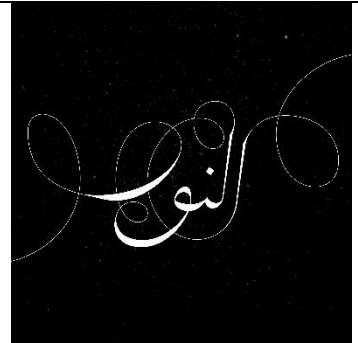
Ruh Al-Alam

Surat Ibrahim 1, Holy Qur'ān

2024

Animated calligraphy

© Ruh Al-Alam



Mosque lamp

Egypt

c. 1360 AD

Enamelled glass

Weltmuseum Wien

© KHM-Museumsverband



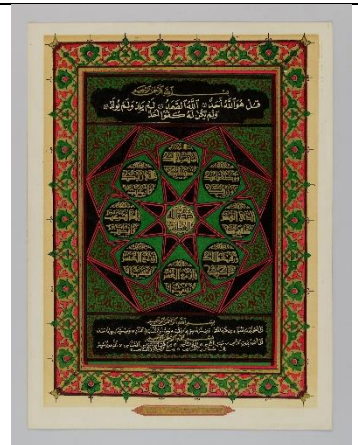
Print with Qur'ānic verses

Egypt

c. 1970

Replica by the Weltmuseum Wien

© KHM-Museumsverband



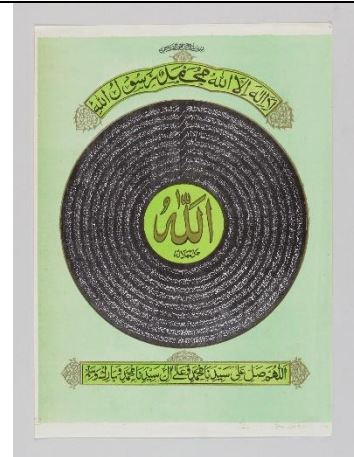
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Egypt

c. 1970

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Le Coran

Excerpt from a comic by **Ernesto Anderle** and
Julien Moca highlighting the history of the

Qur'ān in Europe

2025

© Éditions Petit à Petit



**Opening times, tickets, entrance fees**

www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/information

Additional information regarding your visit

Guided tours, bookings and reservations for events

+43 1 534 30 – 5150

kulturvermittlung@weltmuseumwien.at

Information, questions and suggestions

+43 1 534 30 – 5052

info@weltmuseumwien.at

Exhibition programme and events

All events are listed online in the [event calendar](#) of the Weltmuseum Wien.

Social Media

Follow the Weltmuseum Wien on Facebook and Instagram.

#WeltmuseumWien #TheEuropeanQuran

Journalist accreditation

Journalists visiting the KHM-Museumsverband for professional purposes are entitled to free admission to its exhibitions and locations. You need to register at presse@weltmuseumwien.at at least two working days in advance.

Please identify your medium, specify the date of your visit and attach a scan of your valid press pass. Thank you!

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