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PARCHMENT LEAF FROM A KORAN WRITTEN IN HIJAZI

HIJAZ PROVINCE, THE ARABIAN PENINSULA, OR SYRIA; 2ND HALF OF 7TH CENTURY

36.6 × 28.2 CM

This leaf is a fragment from one of the oldest extant copies of the Koran. It is a palimpsest: the original text was scraped off and a new one was written on the parchment. In time, the original text reemerged and now can be read as a shadow under the later one. Both are transcripts of the Koran's *sura* 2, "The Cow."

In Islam, the Koran was revealed direct from God to Muhammad through the archangel Gabriel, and its words were memorized by the Prophet's followers. When the Koran was written down shortly after the Prophet's death, minor variations were found in the different copies. According to tradition, the third caliph, Uthman (644-656), is the one who once and for all decided which text was correct – the one we know today. All variants with even the most insignificant divergences from the authorized text were destroyed, so that there would be no dissent about God's commandments to the believers.

While the lower text is a copy of a pre-Uthman text, the upper one is identical to that in the authorized Koran.

Both texts were written in *Hijazi*, the earliest Arabic script used for Korans and the one that was used in Mecca when the Islamic expansion got under way in earnest.

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