Islamic Art
from the Collection of
Edwin Binney 3rd
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Acknowledgments

One of the finest attributes of a collector is his willingness to part with his possessions for a prolonged time in order to share with the public the inspiration and enjoyment gained from works of art well chosen and assembled. The Smithsonian Traveling Exhibition Service takes special pleasure in presenting such an exhibition from the private collection of Edwin Binney, 3rd. Mr. Binney has not only lent a selection of miniatures and complementing objects of highest quality—forming a comprehensive survey of the Islamic "art of the book" from the early 14th through the 19th centuries—but he has also enthusiastically supported all aspects of the exhibition by generously underwriting part of the catalogue costs and by contributing the introductions which serve as informative guides to the various sections of the catalogue.

To Dr. Richard Ettinghausen, Head Curator, Freer Gallery of Art, go our special thanks for the many hours he freely gave of his time, both while selecting the items and while determining the scope of the exhibition together with Mr. Binney. Besides contributing the foreword to the catalogue, Dr. Ettinghausen also wrote the introduction to the chapter on Turkish miniatures and gave valuable scholarly advice during all stages of production of the catalogue.

The beauty and technical perfection of the photographs, supplied by Mr. Raymond Schwartz, Photographer of the Freer Gallery, greatly enhances the appearance of the catalogue. Our thanks also go to the staff of the Smithsonian Press, in particular to Mr. Thomas C. Witherspoon for editing the catalogue, and to Mrs. Richard Pasquantino and Miss Barboura Flues of the Traveling Exhibition Service for their untiring efforts in coordinating the exhibition preparations.

DOROTHY T. VAN ARSDALE  
Chief  
Traveling Exhibition Service
Persian and Indian miniature paintings of excellent quality were frequently available in New York in the years preceding the second World War. Indeed, so much excellent material drifted westward through the channels of trade that some of the most important museums and collectors in Europe found outstanding paintings in New York art galleries. All this has changed. Near Eastern miniatures have become rarer and rarer so that now the finding of an outstanding painting is a special event, and even second-rate pieces turn up only at long intervals. In the former art centers of Europe, too, particularly Paris and London, only an occasional big sale provides museums and collectors with opportunities to enlarge their collections.

In view of this situation it is a small miracle that Mr. Edwin Binney, 3rd, has been able since 1943 to build up a piece by piece a very wide-ranging collection of Near Eastern art, a collection containing not only pieces of the various schools of Iran and Muslim India but even rarer examples from Arab countries such as Iraq or Egypt or Turkey, a country hardly ever represented in the collections of the West. Many of his acquisitions are intrinsically beautiful while others appeal more for their historical significance, thus satisfying both the person who looks for aesthetic enjoyment and the scholar who is intellectually stimulated by problems of identification.

A significant aspect of Mr. Binney’s collection is that it contains examples from some of the most famous manuscripts that have become fragmentary or have, in the course of recent decades, been broken up so that their pages are now dispersed in a great many collections. The aficionados of Persian miniatures thus find a miniature from the Arabic version of the Dioscorides De Materia Medica written in Baghdad in 1324, the royal Shah Nameh of the first half of the 15th century (often referred to as the De-mote Shah Nameh), a page from the pre-Mughal Amir Khojro Dhlawi of the second half of the 15th century, a page of the Hanea Nameh written for the Emperor Akbar of India, and parts of many other equally distinguished manuscripts. Other examples come from famous old collections beginning with that of the Mughal emperors of India.
Mr. Binney has not, however, been satisfied with paintings alone; he has fully realized they represent but one aspect of the art of the book. His collection therefore includes many specimens which demonstrate different aspects of that refined art. There are bookbindings of various character, finely calligraphed pages, and splendid illuminations, both "carpet pages" and marginal decorations. And from the later periods when the artist also painted pictures not connected with a book, there are a number of self-contained miniatures and drawings made for the albums of connoisseurs. Even this range of collecting has not satisfied Mr. Binney because he realizes that the art of the book has close ties in one way or another with the various media of the decorative arts. So he has rounded out his collection with objects that demonstrate the beauty of calligraphy, of animal and figural design, or of pure ornamental decoration.

Whatever these pieces are, they were selected with the greatest care and obvious love and understanding. Their quality, the charm of their designs, and the finesse of their execution will undoubtedly be felt by everybody who has a chance to see this fine collection whether he be novice or initiated scholar.

RICHARD ETTINGHAUSEN
Head Curator, Near Eastern Art
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The phrase "Islamic Arts of the Book" embraces the products of many artists—binders who worked in leather or lacquer, scribes who wrote the texts, illuminators who painted and gilded the title pages or margins, and the miniature painters themselves. To create a completely successful manuscript, each of these artists had to contribute his best work. The study of the finished product of this joint effort, "the Islamic book," whether a religious or literary text or an album for a connoisseur, is a rewarding aesthetic experience. The term miniature applies only to the size, not to the scope or value of the work. Increased in size, the complicated patterns of the bindings or illuminations may appear in huge rugs or tile revetments. And the fine miniature painting loses none of its artistic value when magnified hundreds of times and projected onto a screen.

The validity of the Islamic decorative pattern is attested in all European languages by the legacy of its name—arabesque.
Islamic bindings of the early periods were of tooled or stamped leather. Lacquer bindings were apparently used first in the 16th century and became very popular later, although use of leather was never completely superseded.

In Egypt and Syria, geometric ornament was used in bindings as early as the 8th century, the designs owing much to earlier Coptic work. By the 13th or 14th century patterns became complicated (cat. 1) but were still based on a simple geometric plan. In Persia bindings from the 13th century commonly featured cut-leather decoration in central medallions. These medallions were used in 16th-century books on the don- blures (inner linings of bindings), with increasingly complicated corner decoration surrounding them, the whole often enhanced by colored paper filigree. Outside of the 16th-century bindings were commonly stamped in panels and lavishly gilded (cat. 2). Islamic motifs from these bindings reached Europe through Venice in the 15th and 16th centuries and the patterns were adapted by Western bookbinders, as was the use of morocco leather and gold tooling. The later lacquer bindings in Persia (cat. 3) were painted with watercolors on a base of papier-maché and gesso, showing landscapes, hunting scenes, or bouquets of flowers. In the Qajar period (late 18th century until the 1920’s) decorated lacquer was also used for mirror covers, pen cases, and other small objects.

1. Binding from a Koran
   Mamluk, probably Cairo, 13th-14th c. 1055 x
   855 in. (with flap).
   Few early bindings are extant where the protective
   flap has not been altered or was not removed during
   restorations in the 19th and 20th centuries.

2. Binding from an Unidentified Manuscript
   Safavid, 16th c. 13½ x 9½ in. (with flap).
   Large sunk gilded panels surrounded by gilded
   bands of nastaliq script. Rosettes and corner decora-
   tions painted in four colors and gold on the natural
   morocco doublelayout.

3. Lacquer Binding from an Unidentified Manuscript
   Isfahan style, ca. 1700. 9½ x 15½ in. Coll. Claude
   Asse, Paris.
   This is a good example of an unpretentious lacquer
   binding made before the Qajar period when lacquer
   almost completely replaced leather. Decorated with
   animals, both real and mythical, in a landscape with
   trees and rocks, this binding now covers an early
   17th-century anthology of poetry in Arabic and
   Turkish.

For similar bindings see Dimand, Handbook, figs.
48, 49, 74, pp. 81-84.
Calligraphy and Illuminations

For the Muslim, primacy among the "artists of the book" went to the scribe or calligrapher, since it was he who copied the word of Muhammad as set down in the Koran. Prejudice excluded pictures of human and animal forms from the Holy Book of Islam, but elaborate decorations in the form of arabesques, rosettes, and other motifs were used. Pages of calligraphy from the oldest remaining Korans antedate the picture illustrations of literary works by four hundred years.

Early Korans were written exclusively in the Islamic script known as kufic, after the town of Kufa in Mesopotamia (cats. 4-6). Ninth- and 10th-century examples show thick, rather rounded letters with short verticals and pronounced horizontals. In later examples the letters become more angular, and verticals are emphasized. Eventually more cursive scripts came to be used in Korans—first thuluth (cats. 7 and 8) and later naskhi. In the 13th century, the most elegant cursive script of Persia, supposedly invented by the celebrated calligrapher Mir Ali of Tabriz, appears—nastaliq.

The names of the great scribes were listed and remembered, as were those of the miniaturists. Of prime importance among the former were Sultan Ali al-Mashadi (cat. 11) and his son Sultan Muhammad Nur (cat. 39). While literary texts used the newer nastaliq, Korans were more frequently written in the more conservative naskhi (cat. 14).

Illuminators as well as scribes worked on the preparation of manuscripts. The double-page frontispieces of most works (cats. 9 and 11) presented the titles of the texts with specimens of the calligrapher's handwriting. Other works had frontispieces in the shape of a rondel or medallion (cat. 13). To enhance further the aesthetic value of a manuscript, other text pages were frequently completely illuminated (cat. 14).

From the late 15th or early 16th century dates the use of découpe work (cat. 10) and stenciling. Both kinds of decoration are used in Turkish books as well as in Persian. A unique Turkish development, however, one never seen in Iran, is the firman or edict, prefaced by an elaborate formal rendition of the sultan's name, called the tughr (cat. 15).
Page from an Unidentified Koran
Kufic script on paper. Persian, 19th-20th c. 6 x 9 3/4 in.
This Koran page shows the neat elegance of the horizontal kufic calligraphy which was used for the writing in the early Islamic Korans. The name is derived from the town of Kufa on the Euphrates River. It is rare to see a page of this early, paper, a Chinese invention of about the 3rd century A.D., not used in the Islamic East until the 8th cent.
It did not completely replace the more costly parchment until considerably later (see cat. 5).

Three Pages from a Small Koran
Kufic script on vellum. Probably from Egypt, 10th c. Each page 4 1/2 x 6 1/2 in.
Again the kufic script. Letters with sumptuously accented horizontals and short verticals.

Page from a Koran
Kufic script on paper. Seljuk period, 11th c. 8 3/4 x 5 3/4 in.
Between the 10th and 11th centuries, kufic script changed, stressing the vertical rather than horizontal parts of the letters. The gold background of most ambigases serves as perfect foil for the calligraphy.
Other leaves from this Koran are in the Metropolit.

Page from a Koran
Text in thuluth script with chapter heading in kufic script. Mamluk period, from Egypt, dated 718 AH (1317), 17 1/2 x 11 in.
The gilded roses along the side of the page became increasingly elaborate in later Korans. The colophon of this Koran reads: "Finished this Holy Book on Friday, 27th of Shaban, in the year 718 by the humble copyist Ahmad, son of Abdallah, son of al-Mansur Masoud, al-Abbasiani."

Page from a Koran
Thuluth script on paper. Probably from Egypt, 17th or early 18th c. 14 3/4 x 10 5/8 in.
Decoration in later Korans became increasingly complicated. Here, the red, gold, and black symbols have little or nothing to do with the word of the Muslim Holy Book, but form a pleasing aesthetic image. The small calligraphy within the text and in the borders consists of later comments and additions to the original text.

Illuminated Frontispiece
Nasrani on paper. Persian, Turkman style, ca. 1490. Two shams, each measuring 9 1/2 x 11 in.
Majestic double-page headings like the above for a dispersed manuscript of the Kitab al-Dalil must have been prepared for the majority of texts, giving the title of the work and a sample of the script's calligraphy.

Panel of Nasrani Calligraphy by Mir Ali Shir Navai
Nasrani on paper. Probably Herat, late 14th c. 4 1/2 x 11 3/4 in. (text panel only)
This page of calligraphy in Qaghati Turkish is mounted on an album leaf. Decoupage work--cutting out from one paper and pasting onto another--was not a common practice in Persia, but was more often found in later Turkish manuscripts. The fame of Mir Ali Shir Navai (ca. A.D. 1416-1482), personal friend and vaizat of the last Timurid Shams of Herat, merited such treatment.

Other leaves from this manuscript are in the Freer Gallery, Washington, D.C.

Page from a Manuscript of the Gulistan of Sa'di
The calligraphy for the Gulistan (Rose Garden) is by Sultan Ali ad-Mudallil of Mubbad who died in 1519. The decorated border depicts animals fighting in a landscape.
Leaves from this very famous manuscript are in museums in Boston, New York, and Leipzig, Germany. For reproductions of other leaves see: Cook, c. 1938, 905, no. 17; ibid.; Glück-Diez, p. 511; Köhler, p. 28; pl. 44; Köhler, Köhlererz., pp. 33-53, fig. 21; Martin II, pls. 72-73; Survey V, pl. 94 A; Schaefer, pls. 68, 72.

Illuminated Frontispiece
Shiraz, ca. 1560. Two leaves, each measuring 11 1/2 x 8 3/4 in.
From a dispersed manuscript of the Shah Nameh of Firdausi. For a miniature from the same manuscript see also cat. 41.