Monumental Qur’an in naskh script

Iran
About 1200–50

Arabic manuscript on cream paper, 255 folios. Fifteen lines of strong black naskh, vocalization in black, rectation marks in red. Sura headings in thick gold thuluth, outlined and vocalized in black or red. Individual verses marked with gold rossettes pointed in blue and red. Tenth verse divisions marked with marginal medallions, with gold geometric or palmette device on red or coppery gold ground within gold and blue concentric circles. Tenth and fifth verse divisions marked in the margin with red ‘ain and zha respectively. Su’a (prostration) points marked in margins with word ‘sa’da’ in gold thuluth. Illuminated opening page consisting of gold panel filled with interlocking circles and semi-circles filled with gold quatrefoils, foliate scrolls and knotwork stars on blue and coppery-gold ground. Illuminated double-page frontispiece containing Sura 1 (Al-Fatihah) and beginning of Sura 2 (Al-Baqara). Text on ground of pink hatching with interlinear blue-shaded trefoil devices, framed above and below by rectangular panels of interlocking circles and gold knotwork. On final folio (f. 255v) Qur’anic text is followed by illuminated panel containing phrase Sadaqa Allah al-Azm (“God the Almighty has spoken”) in white thuluth contained in a gold ‘cloud’ cartouche on a coppery gold ground. Some staining and damage to edges, some of the tenth verse markers eroded due to verdigris corrosion. In a modern Mamluk-style brown morocco binding with gold interlocking circles on outside covers and flap.

FOLIO 47 x 32 cm

This impressive Qur’an draws on a variety of decorative motifs found in Iranian Qur’ans from the eleventh to thirteenth century and represents the culmination of a tradition of Qur’an production that was to undergo radical changes during the Ilkhani period. Among the most significant of these changes was the rise of muhaqqiq as the script for large-scale Qur’ans. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries naskh was restricted to small-scale copies, though its pre-eminence as the Qur’anic script for copies of all dimensions was once again established in the sixteenth century.

The most striking feature of the present manuscript is the lavish illumination, dominated by a design consisting of large interlocking circles and semi-circles. The design derives from models most frequently associated with eleventh- and twelfth-century Eastern Kufic Qur’ans, but is also encountered on a variety of thirteenth-century manuscripts. Interestingly, either a work-in-progress sketch of the design or the attempt of a later artist to replicate was made at the top of f. 3r.

Also typical of pre-Ilkhani illumination are the dense foliate scrolls on grounds of deep blue and coppery gold, the large rectangular cornerpieces of loose gold strapwork, and the rigidly geometric format of the opening bifolium. The textual arrangement of the opening suras, with Sura 2 (Al-Baqara) beginning immediately after Sura 1 (Al-Fatihah) on f. 2v, was discontinued in the fourteenth century in favour of placing the two suras on facing pages. The use of pink cross-hatching in the text block of the opening bifolium is the only feature of the illumination that remained a staple of fourteenth-century Qur’an production, and its presence here corroborates the hypothesis that this Qur’an represents the very culmination of the pre-Ilkhani tradition.

1 See the discussion of this style of illumination in connection with a Qur’an in naskh in Qur'ans 1999, no. 10, pp. 19–20.
ذات له مدفوعات متعلقة بالخطب في حينها، حيث يتطلب
سورة الإخلاص في بعض الأحيان

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ
قَالَهُوَ اللَّهُ وَلَّيَةُ الْأَصْحَابِ مَعَهُ وَلَدَّهُ لَوْ كَذَّبْتُهُ لَأَتْنِيَ
سورা� الفاتحة أحد عشر آية

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ
قَالَ اعْتَوَّرَتْ نَفْسِي رَبِّ مَا ظَلَّ مِنْ أَأْتِمَّ مِنْ الْأَصْحَابِ وَلَوْ كَذَّبْتُهُ لَأَتْنِيَ
الناس شاركة في العُتُود وَرَجْلُوا احْتَضَنُوا مَنْ أَسْتَرْفَعْ
بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ
قَالَ اعْتَوَّرَتْ نَفْسِي رَبِّ مَا ظَلَّ مِنْ أَأْتِمَّ مِنْ الْأَصْحَابِ وَلَوْ كَذَّبْتُهُ لَأَتْنِيَ
الناس ذُكيُّونٌ في صُنْعِيُّهُم مِنْ النَّاسِ ذُكيُّهم

ملي-modal-93044
الذكرى الكاملة أرسلها الرسول
الذين وصّوا باللغة فقروهم القائلون
وما çerاغهم والذين جيّون ما أنشيء
أنت_escape: ما أمنعك من ذلك وما أصدقون
كله لمن دعوه وهما الفتيان
التي ترتبتها ومساحها ونهرها للرسول
تنᴻوا أيّامكم فنحترمونها على فاتح وعلي
24 **Khabar Mawlana al-Qa‘im**

Perhaps Alamut or Syria
Late 12th century

Arabic manuscript, a book of prayers, on paper with ten folios, each with ten lines of neat naskh script in brown ink on buff paper. The verses are divided by small gold rosettes. There are three headings written in gold thulth script within rectangular panels decorated with scrolling foliate motifs and cloud bands in brown ink. The opening page has a gold panel containing the title written in white thulth script, below which is a panel containing a dated inscription and further documentary information (see below). The corners of the panel are decorated with split palmettes in brown and black ink.

**Folio 17.5 × 13 cm**

This manuscript contains a selection of prayers and hadith. It is one of a small group of three manuscripts, all of them containing Shi‘i prayers and pious tracts. One of the other two is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the second is in a private collection.1

The inscription on the opening page of the present manuscript records that it was read to a nobleman in the city of Ghaznavi in the month of Shawwal in the year 625 AH/March 1226 CE. However, this note is in Persian, and in a different hand and a different ink from the main text, which is in Arabic. It does not necessarily locate the place of production as Ghazna, and since Ghazna and indeed all eastern Iran and Afghanistan was strongly Sunni under the muscular orthodoxy of the Ghurid dynasty and their Seljuk overlords, it is perhaps unlikely that a manuscript of strongly Shi‘i prayers would be produced there.

What, therefore, are the likely origins of this manuscript? A clue is given in the illuminated headings at the beginning of the Metropolitan Museum volume mentioned above, which consist of the title and basmalah written in very fine Eastern Kufic script on a ground of gold scrolling floral motifs. Both the Eastern Kufic script and the scrolling decoration are distinctive, but very close in style to similar heading panels in the well-known illustrated copy of the *Kitab al-Diraq* (Book of Antidotes) of Pseudo-Galen, produced in Mosul in the year 1199 CE, and now in the Bibliothèque nationale.2 Given that the present manuscript and its two sister volumes were produced under the influence of the Mosul school of about 1200, where might they have been produced? The two Shi‘i centres closest to Mosul around the year 1200 were the Isma‘ili at Alamut in north-western Iran and the Nizari Isma‘ili in the mountains of Syria. This was an interesting period in Isma‘ili history. In 1164 the Imam of Alamut, Hassan II ‘Ala Dhikrihi’t-Salam, introduced the doctrine of qiya‘ma,3 and after this proclamation he hinted that he was the Qa‘im al-Qiya‘ma. His son and successor Muhammad II (r. 1166-1210) placed the doctrine of Qiya‘ma at the centre of his imamate and represented himself as the figure of the Imam al-Qa‘im.4 Is it possible that the prayers in cat. 24 were associated with either Hassan II or Muhammad II? The title of cat. 24 - *Khabar Mawlana al-Qa‘im* - does not appear in the listings of known Isma‘ili texts, but the date of the manuscript (about 1200) fits very well into the chronology of the doctrine of qiya‘ma and the figure of the Qa‘im al-Qiya‘ma at Alamut. It should be noted that the doctrine of qiya‘ma was also declared by the Nizari Isma‘ili in Syria. Could this prayer book have been the product of one of these Isma‘ili centres, echoing the artistic style of northern Iraq, but adapted to a much more petite and portable format? The portability of these prayer books would have suited the lifestyle of the Isma‘ili, being, as many were, peripatetic and often secretive in their proselytizing activity. Perhaps there was a scriptorium in either Alamut or Syria producing Shi‘i texts specially for itinerant Isma‘ili emissaries and agents, to be carried with them on their travels and missions.

But what was the manuscript doing in Ghazna in 1206? A possible explanation is to be found in the context of Isma‘ili activity in Afghanistan and the Punjab at this period. During the late twelfth and early thirteenth century the Ghurid armies under Ghiyath al-Din Mu‘ammad (r. 1163-1203) had sacked the two Isma‘ili strongholds at Multan and Qohistan, and in the early thirteenth century there was Isma‘ili propagandizing and missionary activity in the mountainous regions between Ghazna and Lahore and down to the plains of north-west India around Multan. It is probable that this activity was organized by Isma‘ili emissaries of the Imam of Alamut.5 Furthermore, the Sunni Ghurid Sultan Mu‘izz al-Din was assassinated near the Indus on his way back from the Punjab in the year 1205, allegedly by an Isma‘ili assassin – just a few months before the opening inscription in this manuscript was written.6

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1 The Metropolitan Museum manuscript is *Munajat Mawlana of Ali b. Abu Talib*; see Sotheby’s, London, *Oriental Manuscripts and*
Minatures, 26 April 1995, lot 54; the manuscript in a private collection is Duwar Quause Mawalna al-A'imma, see Sotheby's, London, Arts of the Islamic World, 7 May 2001, lot 27.

2 Ms. Arabe 2564; see Ennghansen 1952, pp. 84-85; Paris 2001, pp. 112-13, 116-17, 130.

3 The term qiyama refers to resurrection on the Day of Judgement.

4 Deliary (1990, p. 565) describes qiyama and Qa'im al-Qiyama as follows: "The Nizaris of the Almaru period interpreted the qiyama spiritually as the manifestation of the unrolled truth in the spiritual reality of the current Imam, who was also called Qa'im al-Qiyama".

5 See Els, art. 'Ismi'lliya', sub-section 'Nizaris'.

6 See Els, art. 'Ghurids', sub-section 'Ghurids as an imperial power'.
Illuminated folios from a large Ilkhani Ilkhanid Qur’an

Western Iran or Iraq
About 1275-1315
Sura 84 (Al-Indiqah), v. 10–Sura 86 (Al-Thiqq), v. 17; Sura 89 (Al-Falaq), v. 14–Sura 90 (Al-Balad), v. 9

Three folios from an Arabic manuscript on paper with nine lines of muraqqa’ script per page written in black ink. The discritics are marked in the same black ink. Single verse divisions are marked with gold rosettes. Fifth verse divisions are marked with large illuminated teardrop devices in the margins. Tenth verse divisions are marked in the margins with large illuminated medallions. The sura headings are written in gold rubtub and nasyhan script within elaborately illuminated rectangular panels.

folio 48 × 35 cm

These large and grand folios are interesting survivals of what must have been an extremely fine and lavish manuscript of the Qur’an, made possibly for a high-ranking courtier of the Ilkhani dynasty at the end of the thirteenth or early in the fourteenth century. The illumination of the sura headings and the fifth and tenth verse markers, which is notable for its glowing colours and unusual motifs, relates closely to Ilkhani illumination on court manuscripts of the period.

The earliest comparable manuscript is a copy of al-Jurjani’s medical encyclopaedia, the Kitab-i Zakhira-yi Khwanzmshahi, dated 671 AH/1273 CE, in which the title page contains a large teardrop-shaped motif extremely similar in design to the fifth verse markers on the present fragment (see fig. 10).1 The choice of a teardrop shape for the fifth verse markers of a Qur’an manuscript is not in itself unusual—the shape had been used for centuries to imitate Arabic letter ḫa, which has the numerical value 5 in the abjad system—but here the individual motifs are strikingly similar, particularly the lobed lotus-petal border.

The illuminated motifs of the sura heading panels of the present fragment are related to those of the sura heading palmettes on a copy of the Qur’an dated 702 AH/1303 CE written by the scribe al-Husayn bin Muhammad al-Husayni.2

One of the sura heading panels on the present fragment has a knotted trellis pattern of a type which has a distinctive chain-link design. The closest comparisons can be found on the illumination of a manuscript in the Bibliothèque nationale—a monumental copy of Rashid al-Din’s Kitab Jam‘ al-Tasawwuf al-Rashidi (Collected Writings of Rashid al-Din), dated 707-10 AH/1307-10 CE and illuminated by Muhammad Ibn al-‘Affi al-Kashi, and in the shamsas of both the Edinburgh and the London volumes of an illustrated Jam‘ al-Tavarikh (World History) of Rashid al-Din, dated 714 AH/1314-15 CE.3

Further comparisons to the illumination in the present fragment can be found on two royal Ilkhani Qur’ans made for Sultan Obeytu Khan between 1306 and 1313, one at Mosul and one at Baghdad.4

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1 Sotheby’s, 14 October 1999, lot 21.
2 Sotheby’s, 15 October 1999, lot 20.
3 Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, Ms. or. accler. 15.244, see New York 2002, p. 65, fig. 54.
4 Edinburgh University Library, Ms. Arab 20; for this specific motif see f. 1496v, illustrated in Talbot Rice 1976, p. 184; and Khalili Collection, London, Ms. 727; see Blair 1995, colour illustration f. 259a.
5 The Mosul Qur’an, originally bound in thirty volumes, is now dispersed between the Topkapı Sarayi Library, Istanbul, Ms. EH 232; Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, Istanbul, Ms. TIEM 539-41; Balyaçılı Library, Anamya, Ms. K1055; Şehzade Library Hali Selin Aya, Ms. K2a; Shah Ni mandah Library, Kirkman; British Library, London, Or. 4945; Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ms. 1613; see James 1988, no. 42, p. 108, fig. 72.
6 The Baghdad Qur’an, originally bound in thirty volumes, is now dispersed between the Topkapı Sarayi Library, Ms. EH 234a, 243; Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, Istanbul, Ms. TIEM 2359; Royal Library, Copenhagen, inv. no. N7; Karl Marx University Library, Leipzig, inv. no. XXXVII KL; Dresden Library, Ms. 444. See James 1988, no. 40, p. 87, fig. 54.
سورة النمل (16) الأنصراني

الملاذات النورج لالله الوعد مسأله

مشجوب فلا إحلاج الخدود النذور

الوقود أذخروا لهم عهد ورزعواهم

والسرقة شجاعة وقارئواهم لأن يمعنوا

المثل المهدى لدلكمله النورإني أثب

فلم بصبب مسجثن بهدأ أرلاذك في المسبع
Bifolium from a Qur’an in *muhagqaq* script

Central Asia
About 1330-50
Sura 5 (Al-Ma’ida), vv. 27-29

Bifolium from Arabic manuscript on buff paper in three lines of large black *muhagqaq* script. Persian interlinear translation in small black *naskh* script. Single verses marked in the text with gold rosettes pointed in red with a green centre. Outer margins filled with inscriptions from *hadith* in archaic red and white Kufic script on a ground of gold foliate scrolls and blue or green quatrefoil devices. Large medallions of gold, blue, red and black interlace in the top and bottom outer corners of the page.

**FOLIO**: 28.8 x 18.5 cm

The Qur’an from which this bifolium originates has been attributed to locations as distant as Anatolia and India. The most recent research, however, has pointed to Central Asia, of which the situation on the Eastern border of the Islamic world would account for the survival of certain archaic features. These include the retention of the three-line format and the unusually narrow outside *muhagqaq* script, which is reminiscent of Iranian Qur’ans of the pre-Illahid period.

In this respect, the present Qur’an bears comparison to the Chinese Qur’ans of the Ming period that remained similarly isolated from developments in Qur’an production in Iran. The striking marginal illumination found on this bifolium was certainly added at a later date, as other leaves from the same manuscript bear examples of what was clearly, by contrast, the original illumination. The present bifolium and the other folios containing marginal inscriptions from prophetic *hadith* in archaizing red and white Kufic all come from the sixth juz’ of the Qur’an. As this juz’ was in an Iranian collection in the nineteenth century, it has been suggested that it was at this point that the illumination was added. The illumination is not at all typical of Qajar work, however, and it is possible that it was added at an earlier date.

The present bifolium is a flamboyant example of this manuscript’s unusual script. The calligrapher’s pleasure in playing with the form of the letters is seen in particular effect in the extension of the letter *ya* into the right margin and the gathering on top of one another of the curved bases of the letters of the final words in the lines on the left-hand page.

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2. Quaritch 1999, no. 11, p. 22.
3. ibid., and James 1992a, p. 208.
5. See eg. James 1988, no. 60, p. 171, fig. 120.
Illuminated Qur'an section in muhaqqaq script with extensive contemporary marginal commentary

Illumination attributable to Muhammad b. Mubadir
Mamluk, probably Cairo
About 1258-1310 CE

Arabic manuscript, thirty folios, seven lines per page written in bold muhaqqaq script in brown ink on finely burnished cream paper.
Illegibility written in gold throughout. Verse divisions marked within text area with illuminated roundels, fifth verse divisions marked with cone-shaped illuminated devices in gold and red in margin, tenth verse divisions marked with large illuminated roundels in gold and red in margin. Sura headings written in blue dhulh script on elaborately illuminated rectangular panels with stylized palmettes extending into margins. Further illuminated devices in margins marking juz' and hitha divisions and saha loci. Extensive marginal commentary consisting of taflis, qira'at and ta'awun written in same script in red, brown and blue ink arranged horizontally, diagonally and vertically with visible impressed guide rules. Ff. 28v and 29r with additional marginal illuminated panels surrounding text of Sura 114 (al-Nas) and closing prayer, f. 26r with illuminated border bands and a large square illuminated panel beneath the closing prayer, ff. 29v and 30v with textual description of marginal commentary surrounded by an illuminated band with roundels extending into the margin. Ff. 30r with a full-page illuminated panel with a rounded and cusped arms extending into the outer margin. Modern green morocco binding in Mamluk style.
FOLIO 47 x 33 CM

This is the final volume (juz' 30) of an exceptional Mamluk Qur'an. Being the final section of the Qur'an, it contains the shortest suras and therefore the highest number of decorated headings of any section. These, in addition to the fully illuminated finespaces, demonstrate just how rich and artistically luxurious the manuscript as a whole must have been. Furthermore they afford us a considerable amount of stylistic evidence for the origin and date of production of this Qur'an. Careful analysis reveals the Qur'an to be a masterpiece of geometric planning and execution and a highly important work of early Mamluk art. The overall quality and invention of the illumination points to the work of a master artist, and several factors point more specifically to the work of Muhammad b. Mubadir, one of the leading illuminators in Mamluk Cairo at the turn of the thirteenth to the fourteenth century.

An unusual and significant feature is the presence of an extensive contemporary commentary in the margins, which was undoubtedly included as part of the original scheme. It presents three different types of Qur'anic exegesis, relating to the meaning, reading and grammar of the Qur'an, and its presence was considered important enough within the general design of the manuscript to have been laid out with the same careful geometric and proportional principles underlying the whole production. The result is simultaneously complex and simple, powerful and refined, and deserves to be ranked alongside the greatest examples of early Mamluk manuscript production.

The presence of this commentary raises the question of the intended function of this copy of the Qur'an. On the whole copies of the Qur'an with commentaries written in them were used for teaching and were not particularly glamorous or expensive productions. Grand copies of the Qur'an such as this one, on the other hand, were very rarely provided with commentaries at the time of their production, although some had commentaries added in later decades or centuries. Here the commentary clearly preceded the illumination. Could the Qur'an have been commissioned by a powerful scholar for his own use, or perhaps for a renowned scholar by his wealthy patron, or even by a prince or sultan for a madrasa or other teaching establishment?

The manuscript displays significant and unusual qualities in every aspect of its design and illumination. Each of the three main parts of the design is meticulously planned with a sense of proportion and spatial harmony; the main text area is in strict proportion to the overall dimensions of the page; the marginal commentary is arranged in spatial relation to the main text area and to the overall dimensions of the page as well as according to its own internal geometric system; and the illumination is a tour de force, striking the eye with its interplay of geometry and vegetal motifs, balance of abstract and organic features, and sheer quality and richness of execution.

The various indications of the most likely date and place of origin for the Qur'an can be summed up as follows: