34 Fragment of a Qur’ān

Two folios containing CXIII Al-Falaq (The Dawn) and CXIV Al-Nār (Mankind) 74 × 49cm.
Egypt, circa 803/1400

Large Muhanniq script on pinkish paper. Several letters have additional diacritic points and that of dhāl is placed next to rather than over the letter. Ayās are marked by large gold rosettes. The script is on an elaborate pink hatched ground with green dots, blue Chinese cloud-scrolls and floral compositions. Above and below are panels with sura headings and verse-counts and Qur’ānic inscriptions (VII Al-A'ām 115). These are in gold Kufic in an interlinked geometric and floral composition. The panels are surrounded first by gold strapwork broken by squares, then by flower-chains. All panels are surrounded by a gold chain. There is a final outer border of alternating palmettes on a blue ground. In the margin are elaborate medallions with multi-coloured petals which can be traced back to early 14th century Iran.

Apart from these other folios in the Chester Beatty Library the remainder of this manuscript is in the John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

Published: Prisse d'Avennes, L'Art Arabes, 1877; Lings, Quranic Art, No. 61; James, ‘Arabic Ms. 42’, BRJL, 1977.

CBL Ms. 1628 (Arberry No. 94)

35 Portion of a Qur’ān

Two folios containing XV Al-Hijr (The Rocky Tract), 65-82. 35 x 26cm.
Cairo, circa 814/1411

Magnificent Rayḥān script in large and medium size, the larger being at the top and bottom of each page and the smaller in five intervening lines. Ayās are marked by gold rosettes, and the word āyu in a medallion in the larger script.

The marginal medallions indicating the fifth and tenth verses are beautifully painted in pink, green, red, blue and gold. Khums and 'ashara are in Kufic on black or red with a gold, red or blue border surrounded by multi-coloured petals, coming to a point for khamsa. The treble-dot motif is extensively used. More of this manuscript exists in Topkapı Library, Istanbul. Further page, see Bamborough, Treasures of Islam, 1976, p. 36.

In Dir al-Kutub, Cairo, is a Qur’ān copied by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-Sūgh in 814/1411-12 and illuminated by this painter; see Moritz, pls. 71-74.

CBL Ms. 1494, fol. 41V-43R (Arberry No. 66)
36 Qur'an

Two folios containing XIII Al-Ra'd (Thunder), 43, and XIV Ibrāhīm (Abraham), 1-29. 35 x 18 cm.
Cairo, al-Shawāl 813 (February 1411).

Naskh script. Ayas are indicated by gold rosettes. Sā'īgh titles are in brown Zaynī. The word ḥāf in the margin indicates the beginning of the Fourteenth Section of the Qur'an. At the top of the page is an inscription stating that the manuscript was made a waqf (endowment) at some stage. This bold Naskh hand became popular in 9th/15th cent. Egypt for Qur'an

There are several Qur'āns by Ibn al-Sā'īgh in various other collections, see Moritz, 71-4, Lings and Safadi, No. 88, Lings, Quranic Art, No. 49.

The manuscript was commissioned for the library of Fārīs al-Sā'īq al-Khāzīndār, an official of Sultan Al-Nāṣir Farāj (801/1398 - 812/1412).

CBL Ms. 1503, fols. 124v-125r (Arberry No. 99)

37 Qur'an

Opening folios containing I Al-Fātīha (The Opening Chapter) and II Al-Baqara (The Cow), 1-5. 35.8 x 28 cm.
Cairo, Sha'bān 832 (May 1429).

An unusual arrangement. Each page, in contrast to the standard practice, is illuminated differently. Al-Fātīha (right) is in a blank panel surrounded by a geometric frame, the interoves which are fitted with linked palmettes forming crosses, and lotuses with floral sprays in gold and blue on red-gold. The outer border has gold palmettes with white centres on blue. Al-Baqara is written over scroll fragments on a red cross-hatched ground. There is a surrounding flower chain, which can be traced back to Ilkhānid work of the previous century. Above and below are white Kufic inscriptions giving the title and verse-count. These are in lobed cartouches which repeat on either side, where they contain gold palmettes. All panels are surrounded by a band of gold strapwork broken by red and blue squares. In the centre margin is a hasp with a multi-coloured palette and above and below are medallions.

This was written for the son of Sultan Al-Ashraf Barqūq (825/1422 - 842/1438), Jamal al-Dīn Yūsuf, who ruled for a few months in 1438 as al-`Azīz. In 1429 Yūsuf was only 6 years old, so this Qur'an which contains numerous didactic features must have been ordered for his instruction.

CBL Ms. 1496, fols. 4v-5r (Arberry No. 100)
38 Qur'ān

Opening illuminated folios of I Al-Fātiha (The Opening Chapter) and II Al-Baqara (The Cow), 1-4. 58.8 x 42.5cm. Caligrapher: Muhammad Abu'l-Faḍl al-Anṣārī. Cairo, Ramadan 847/January 1444.

Elegant gold Muḥāqqaq script, interspersed with white arabesque scroll fragments on a red hatched ground. Around this central panel is a flower-chain border. Above and below are oval cartouches with the nine titles and verse-counts, in white Kufic over gold arabesques on blue. At each end is a star-polygon in a circle. All panels are surrounded by a band of gold strapwork broken by red and blue squares. The outer border is made up of alternating shield and palmette motifs, gold and brown on blue. In the outer margin are double palmettes in medallions above and below a husl containing gold floral sprays on red. A fine example of 9th/15th century Mamluk illumination, though it cannot be compared to the best work of the previous century. The quality of the pigment and the execution are inferior.

This manuscript was endowed by Zayn al-Din (Yāḥyā) Umrār al-ʿAlīya (i.e. Major Domo) of Sultan Al-Zahir Jaqmaq (842/1438 - 857/1453) to his mosque at the Bāb al-Khurwa, Cairo, in 848/1444.

Exhibited: Baroda House 1939, Catalogue No. 27.

GBL Ms. 1507, fol. IV-2R (Arberry No. 101)

39 Binding

Rear cover and flap of No. 38. 58.8 x 42.5cm. Cairo, 847/1444.

Dark brown leather. There is a large central medallion in an almond shape. This is covered with gold tooled knots and overlain with a fret of linked diamonds, also in gold. Above and below are finials which culminate in a knot. To the four corners are quarter-circles decorated in a similar manner. The main rectangular panel is surrounded by a border of quatrefoils with gold tooled rope-work on either side. On the flap is a large motif with three arms, each in a 'jui' shape and covered with arabesque decoration. The central medallion on the front cover is also decorated in this manner.

The British Library possesses another example of the work of this binder (Or. 13286).

GBL Ms. 1507 (Arberry No. 101)
40 Qur'ān
Two folios containing XXXII Sâdâ (Adoration), 11-30, and XXXIII Al-Âhsâb (The Confederates), 1-4. 35.7 x 27cm.
Calligrapher: Jânim b. 'Abdallah al-Sayfî (min) Jâmi Bîy al-Dawwâdî al-Kabir.
Câiro, circa 865/1461 - 872/1467.
Naskh script. Each ayâ is marked by a gold rosette. Sâhu title and verse-count are in gold Tânsî in a panel, on a ground of sepiâ hachtings with a treble-dot and a blue motif.
In the margin are medallions marking the quarter and half of the section (ju'â). These have a brightly coloured stuff-petalled or scalloped edge. Both these and the nūr heading seem to be copied from 8th/14th century Iranian work. The word sâdu (prostration) is written in gold in a blue diamond.
The calligrapher, Jânim, was governor of Damascus under Sultan Al-Ashraf Qîyâl Bîy (873/1469 - 901/1495), and died there in 888/1485. This manuscript was copied for Sultan Al-Zâhir Khushqâlam (865/1461 - 872/1467).
CBL Ms. 1483, fols. 176V-177R (Arberry No. 162)

41 Qur'ān
Illuminated folios from I Al-Fātîha (The Opening Chapter) and II Al-Baqara (The Cow), 1-4. 47.5 x 33.5cm.
Probably Tripoli, Ramadân 896/July 1491.
Fine gold Naskh interspaced with arabesque-scroll fragments on a red cross-hatched ground. On either side are narrow blue panels with linked white palmettes. Above and below are oblong panels with oval cartouches. These have white Thulth inscriptions giving the nūr titles and verse-counts. They lie on fragmentary gold floral sprays over blue. At each end the oval cartouche repeats and bears a distorted palmette. Around the panels are bands of plain gold strapwork. The usual palmette border is here found only along the top of the composition, a familiar method in the 9th/15th century. In the margin are floral sprays in medallions and a large haq in gold, green, red and blue.
An interesting example of late Mamlûk provincial illumination. The calligraphy is of a high standard but the illumination is rather crude.
The calligrapher moved to Istanbul where in 910/1504-5 he copied a Qur'ān, now in Topkapî Library.
The manuscript bears a sâqâ'îya (endowment certificate) in the name of Jûnîl Bîy, governor of Tripoli, and dated 903/1497-8.
CBL Ms. 1486, fols. IV-2R (Arberry No. 105)
Ilkhānīd Qurʾāns from Iraq and Iran

Despite the disaster of the Mongol invasions of the Near East in the 7th/13th century the effect on the production of finely written and illuminated copies of the Qurʾān was only momentary. Paradoxically the Mongol rulers of Iran and Iraq became the patrons of some of the most beautiful copies of the Holy Scripture of Islam following their adoption of the faith of their subjects. This was particularly true of Qalījūyū (703/ 304-716/1316) who commissioned several thirty-part manuscripts which must be reckoned among the most outstanding works of religious art created in any era of human history.

The earliest Qurʾān that we can associate with the Mongol rulers, who are known as the Ilkhānīd, was begun in 702/1302-3 and was probably ordered by Qalījūyū’s predecessor, Ghāzān, although none of the surviving portions bear any ruler’s name. The calligrapher of the Qurʾān was the famous Ahmad al-Suhrawardi (see No. 42) and the master illuminator was Muḥammad b. Aybak. No. 43 is a frontispiece from this Qurʾān, illuminated by Muḥammad b. Aybak, who was one of the best craftsmen of the century. His workshop was in Baghdad.

In both Mamlūk Egypt and Ilkhānīd Iran it was common at this time for illuminators to sign their work, and, on occasion to mention where it was done. During the early years of this century Qurʾān illumination reached unparalleled heights in Iran and Iraq. Curiously, as is the case in Egypt, almost nothing survives from the two decades prior to 700/1300. The numerous, so called ‘Yaqūt’ Qurʾāns from that period, in so far as it is possible to confirm their dates on the basis of illumination, give no hint of the superb artistry that was to blossom forth in Baghdad at the beginning of the 8th/14th century.

Another well-known Qurʾān commissioned by Qalījūyū was written in Mosul and is now divided among various collections in Europe and the Near East. The Chester Beatty has several pages (No. 44) from the text of the manuscript. This was copied in majestic gold Muḥaqqiq by ‘Alī al-Jusaynī, a linear descendant of the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik, who is otherwise unknown to us. That so fine a calligrapher should be unmentioned by historians is surprising though understandable in an age which saw more outstanding practitioners of the art than any other.

It seems unlikely that all the manuscripts in existence claiming to be in the hands of the pupils of Qalījūyū can be genuine. However, there is an interesting group of Qurʾāns, in Istanbul for the most part, which bear the name of Arghūn al-Kāmilī, the master of Rayhān, dating from the 730s and 740s, all illuminated by Muḥammad b. Sayf al-Dīn al-Naqqash. There are strong reasons for believing that these, at least, are genuine, and that this was a partnership similar to that of Suhrawardi and Ibn Aybak. A substantial portion of a manuscript by Arghūn and Muḥammad Sayf al-Dīn exists in the Chester Beatty collection and is displayed here (No. 45).

Ilkhānīd manuscripts have survived from many different areas of Iraq and Iran. These often have little in common. The famous Hamadān Qurʾān of 713/1313 commissioned by Qalījūyū bears no resemblance to others commissioned for the same ruler further west and the same is true of many of the minor Qurʾāns. No. 48, for example, copied in Marāgha in 730/1331, has more Far Eastern elements than any other manuscript. This influence, which is very apparent in contemporary miniature painting, came about as a result of the close links between the Mongol courts of Iran and China.

42 Qurʾān

Two folios from XXVI Al-Shuʿarāʾ (The Poets), 62-92. 27.2 x 19cm.


Six lines of Nāzīḥ with a line of fine Thulūḍ above and below. One line has been corrected. Āyas are indicated by gold rosettes. Each tenth verse is indicated in the margin by a gold medalion bearing the word anānāh in Kufic. Every fifth verse is marked by a blossom in the shape of the letter kh.

The manuscript was corrected by Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Aʿzīz al-Aḥbarī (Aḥbarī is a town west of Qazwīn).

If this is the work of al-Suhrawardi, it must have been written in Baghdad, since in this year (1301-2) he commenced Qurʾān No. 43 in that city. Although the signatures on these two manuscripts are identical, the earlier copy does not have the absolute perfection and precision of the later one.

CBL. Ms. 1667, folios 29IV-5R (Arberry No. 135)
43 Fragment of a Qur'an Section (Fus')

Opening folio of illumination. 50 x 35cm.
Illuminator: Muhammad b. Aybak b. 'Abdulläh.

The centre is a star-polygon whose arms have been distorted to form squares, one on top of the other. The central polygon contains an arabesque scroll on a black ground, contrived to fit the shape exactly. The main interseps have single or double red or gold palmettes on a blue ground. There is a double outer band of gold strapwork with a 'chain' motif on either side. The outer border consists not of palmettes but of a gold arabesque scroll on blue, through which runs a secondary pattern in chocolate-brown.

This page comes from an outstandingly beautiful thirty-part Qur'an written by Ahmad b. al-Suhrawardi. Muhammad b. Aybak was the master illuminator. This manuscript was probably commissioned by the Ilkhanid ruler Ghazan (694-1295 - 703/1304). Apart from two folios in the Chester Beatty Library collection there are two sections (ajam) in Topkapi and four in the Iran-Itzbn Museum, Teheran.

For the latter, see Bahrami, Iranian Art, No. 56 (Fig. 36); Hayward Catalogue, No. 526; Lings and Safadi, No. 97; Lings, Quranic Art, No. 48; Safadi, Islamic Calligraphy, 63.

For the other Chester Beatty folio, see Arberry, pl. 40.

Published: James, Celtic and Islamic Art, 1979.

CBL. Ms. 1614 [Arberry No. 92]

44 Fragment of a Qur'an Section (Fus') 6

A folio from V Al-Ma'ida (The Table), 5-6. 44.6 x 30cm.
Mosul, 706/1306-7 – 711/1311.

Superb gold Misbaqaq, five lines to a page, copied by a lineal descendant of the Caliph 'Ali (died 40/661).

The manuscript, in thirty sections, was commissioned by the Ilkhanid ruler Olyagü (703/1304 - 716/1316). Ayat are indicated by a medallion divided into sections and containing the word 'ayat in the centre. Apart from another folio in the Chester Beatty Library, three sections (ajam) are in the Turkish Islamic Museum, one in each of the following collections: Topkapi Library, the Iran-Itzbn Museum, Amasya Public Library, the Süleymaniye Library and the British Library. For the latter, see Browne, Literary History of Persia, 1920, vol. 3, pl. V, Rogers 1976, No. 78 and Lings, Quranic Art, Nos. 52-3. For the sections in the Turkish Islamic Museum, see SPA, pl. 936A.

CBL. Ms. 1615 [Arberry No. 91]
45 Fragment of a Qur’ān

Two folios containing XLIII Al-Zaḥrā' (The Ornaments), 86-89, XLIV Al-Duḥākhān (Smoke), 1-10, 48-49, and XLV Al-Ṭābūna (Bowing the Knee), 1-5. 37.4 x 27.3cm.

Iraq, circa 730/1330 - 745/1345.

Two folios of fine Rayḥān script, thirteen lines to a page. Ayat are indicated by gold rosettes. Each fifth and tenth verse is marked by a medallion in the margin. The medallion indicating each fifth verse is pointed at the top. Sūra headings are painted in different ways, with the titles written in various types of script. Marginal palmettes are usually in the form of blossoms in dark and light blue.

This Qur’ān is part of a group of manuscripts attributed to Arghina al-Kāmilī, the pupil of Yaqūt and master of the Rayḥān script. The most important of these are in the Turkish Islamic Museum, and Bayezit Library, Istanbul. These manuscripts like the Chester Beatty pages are illuminated by Muḥammad b. Sayf al-Dīn al-Naqāsh (the Artist).

CBL Ms. 1498, fol. 17v-18r (Arberry No. 192)

46 Fragment of a Qur’ān (‘Iṣrā’i’l) 5

One folio containing IV Al-Nisā‘i (Women) 176, and V Al-Ma‘ṣūma (The Table) 1. 27 x 29.2cm.

Iran, circa 737/1337.

Large Thuluth script. The word Allāh is written in gold. Accompanying the text are two interlinear translations. The top line is in Persian, the lower one in Eastern Turkic. Ayat are indicated by a gold rosette.

The sūra heading of Al-Ma‘ṣūma is in silver Thuluth in a circle lobed on each side. Beyond are gold and silver circles with gold and blue knots on red gold. The areas between the circles are filled with gold and blue palmettes. Attached to the sūra heading is a large medallion with a petalled rim in bright green, red and blue. Blue throughout is of distinct shade, almost turquoise.

Most of this manuscript is in the John Rylands University Library, Manchester, apart from a number of folios in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and another one in the Chester Beatty Library.

The Turkic translation displays features of the Karakhanid literary language of the 6th/12th century; some scholars would say even earlier. However, linguistic innovations introduced by the copyist, plus the styles of calligraphy and especially - illumination, indicate that this particular copy dates from the late 7th/13th or the 8th/14th century.

In the Meshed Shrine Library is an almost identical two-volume Qur’ān complete with an interlinear Turkic translation. The latter, dated 737/1337, is copied by Muḥammad b. Shaykh Yūsuf al-Ṣinā‘ī/Abārī, who may well be the same calligrapher/illuminator of this manuscript. See Lings and Safadi, No. 107.

Both of the above are related to a Qur’ān in the Turkish Islamic Museum copied in Shiraz in 734/1333-4, but containing an interlinear Karakhanid Turkic translation composed in the 6th/12th century.

Published: Eckmann, Two Fragments, 1969.

CBL Ms. 1606 (Arberry No. 54)