61 Qur'an

Two folios containing LXXXVIII Al-Ghāṣiyā (The Overwhelming), 19-26, LXXXIX Al-Fajr (Daybreak), XC Al-Balad (The City). 34.7 x 24.8cm. Iran, 10th/16th cent.

The text is divided into three separate sections. At the top and bottom are lines of large gold Muhāqqiq and in the centre a line of gold Thuluth. Between these lines are others in small Nasḫ, making fifteen in all. Ayāts are marked in gold rosettes. Those in the larger script are more elaborate than those in the Nasḫ.

Sūra titles and verse-counts are in gold Thuluth, unless they occur at the top or bottom of a page, when they are in Muhāqqiq. They are written over beautifully coloured and modelled arabesques on grounds covered with a tiny treble-dot motif.

Each section of the text in Nasḫ is flanked by tiny compositions based on brightly-coloured flower petals, of a type that can be traced back to the 5th/11th century. Each tenth verse is marked by a medallion in the margin bearing the word 'azhara, on a scroll with a gold-petalled border.

The colophon, in the name of the famous 'Abdālīh (al-Tabhāk) al-Harawi, is a later forgery, but the manuscript is nevertheless the work of an outstanding 16th century calligrapher/painter.


CBL Ms. 1499, fol. 213v-214r (Arberry No. 139)

62 Qur'an

Opening folios containing I Al-Fātiha (The Opening Chapter) and II Al-Baqara (The Cow), 1-4, 46.2 x 30.3 cm. Iran, 10th/16th Cent.

The text is in white Rayhān, written over floral fragments on a gold ground within a slightly flattened oval. This is contained in a square the corners of which have shield-shapes and palmettes. The square is flanked by vertical panels, with multiple palmettes going in opposite directions. They lie on a ground of thick stippled gold. Above and below are panels bearing cartouches divided by 'I'-shapes. The central cartouches contain sūra titles and verse-counts in white Rayhān. Around the panels are flower chains within small cartouche-shapes. The final outer order has alternating gold shield-shapes with blue palmettes, and red diamond-shapes with green palmettes. These are joined by gold and black scrolls with multi-coloured blossoms. In the centre of the vertical margin is a triangular projection with decoration similar to that in the central area.

The margin of the page, often left blank, has exquisitely painted flowers and cloud-scrolls.

Published: Lings, Qur'anic Art, No. 90.

CBL Ms. 1545, fol. 14v-20r (Arberry No. 162)
63 Binding

Front cover of No. 62, 46.2 × 30.3cm.
Iran, 10th/11th cent.

Black leather with gilt. The central rectangle bears a design comprising an oval medallion with pendants which repeat in the four corners, almost identical to No. 99. At the top and bottom are narrow panels with lobed cartouches and quatrefoil medallions sunk into them. These bear floral decoration. The final outer border contains similar shapes, but with the larger ones bearing inscriptions in Thuluth. These comprise LVI Al-Waq’a, 77-80 - traditionally found on the binding or opening pages of Qur’ans-and II Al-Isra, 255 - the 'Throne Verse'.

CBL Ms. 1545 (Arberry No. 162)

64 Qur’an

Two folios from LVIII Al-Muṣāfara (The Woman who Pledges), 1-5. 34.7 × 23.3 cm.
Calligrapher: (Mawliyâ) Maqṣûd ‘Alî al-Shari‘î al-Tâbrîzî (of Tabriz), called ‘Mufîlband’, “Twisted belt”(?)
Illuminator: Mawliyâ Bî‘â’î al-Tâbrîzî.
Iran, probably Tabriz, Rabî’ I 961/Feb 1554.

Alternate lines of black and gold Thuluth and Tawqî on a pink ground with floral fragments. Ayas are indicated by gold knots. The naskh heading is in Thuluth in a pointed cartouche culminating in a bright green palmette. This is surrounded by gold scrolls with red and white blossoms. The text is surrounded by a light blue band of strapwork between orange and green lines. The outer border has green and gold palmettes, the green ones being enlarged and filled with gold to form shield shapes. At each corner is a gold palmette filled with orange. In the centre of the vertical margins the border forms a point, with a gold palmette. The remainder of the pages have a criss-cross of floral scrolls. These pages mark the beginning of a section (juz’).

The manuscript was produced under the supervision (bi-tismâ’î) of Amir Hushimi b. Muhammad al-Tâbrîzî, called ‘Mufîlband’. The calligrapher was his nephew and wrote the inscriptions for several buildings erected by him in Tabriz.

Numerous manuscripts copied by Maqṣûd ‘Alî are known. The earliest in Topkapi is dated 927/1521 and the latest, in Cambridge (Christ’s Coll.) is dated 969/1561. For Maqṣûd ‘Alî, see Minorsky p. 79 and Ghulam p. 91.

CBL Ms. 1546, folh. 264v-299r (Arberry No. 155)
65 Qur’an

Prayer to be recited after completing the Qur’an. 43.3 x 29 cm.
Calligrapher: Nizām al-Dīn Maḥmūd.
Iran, 975/1567-8.
The title is in gold Thuluth and the text in alternate lines of gold and white Maḥqqaqīyy. Each line is in a pointed cartouche, written over scrolls, sprays and blossoms. The grounds are painted in traditional gold and blue as well as an unusual light blue, bright red and green. Each cartouche is surrounded by a blue band with white crosses and a plain orange one. The elaborate outer border has alternating palmettes, every other one being double and filled with gold to form a shield shape. The margins contain sketchily painted compositions in blue, based on palmettes.
CBL Ms. 1544, fols. 395v-396r (Arberry No. 154)

66 Qur’an

Two folios containing II Al-Baqara (The Cow) 1-5, 31 x 18.5 cm.
Calligrapher: Dūst Muhammad b. Shaykh Gadā’ī (The Mendicant), pupil of the late Abū Mūsā Muḥammad Nūsair.
Iran, 11th/17th cent.
Two finely illuminated folios. The text in a rectangular panel is in Nūshkī over green scrolls on gold. This is bordered by gold strap-work, flower chains and coloured bands. At each side are panels with multiple palmettes on a pale blue ground. All this work is surrounded by flower chains on black. Above and below are panels containing the sûra title and verse-count in orange Thuluth. At each end of the panel are linked circles with a central rosette and white palmettes on a pale blue ground. The remainder of the panel has full and half palmettes and arabesque scrolls. Gold strapwork surrounds these areas. There is an outer border of alternating palmettes in various colours. This decoration imitates Timurid work of the 15th century. Deliberate imitation of this type is known to have occurred during the reigns of Shāh 'Abbās I (985/1577 - 1038/1629). The calligrapher’s signature comes after a marginal commentary in Naṣṣī, the Muraqqa’-t-Āfṣa of Khāsh (died 910/1499 - 1500).
CBL Ms. 1550, fols. 3V-3R (Arberry No. 174)
67 Qurʾān

Two folios containing I Al-Fāṭihah (The Opening Chapter) and II Al-Baqara (The Cow) 1–4 32.8 × 20 cm.
Calligrapher: Ahmad b. Shams al-Din Muḥammad al-Nayrīzī, (died circa 1152/1739-40)
Iran Safār 1125/March 1713.
Majestic Nāshī on a bed of floral sprays over a gold ground. Āyas are marked by gold rosettes with flowers. Above and below are panels with ṣūr title, verse-count and LVI Al-Waqā'at 77-80 in white Takāʾī. At each side are double palmettes with floral sprays. All panels are surrounded by gold strapwork, and thin palmettes and vine-leaves, in gold, blue and orange on black.
At the top of the page is an extra panel with a multiple palmette composition in red and gold with floral sprays on purple. Beyond this is a triangle with naturalistic flowers. Of the outer margins, two have elaborate shield shapes, palmettes and floral sprays, and one has a flower chain. This is one of the most sumptuous examples of late decoration.
The calligrapher who worked for Sultan Husayn (1105/1694-1135/1722) was famous as a master of Nāshī and was said to have copied very few Qurʾāns. There is also a commentary and a prayer, both finely illuminated and bearing 13th/19th century dates.
For Nayrīzī, see Huart p. 107, Abdal Muḥammad p. 134, Faḍlullāh p. 353.

CBI, Ms. 1561, fols. 3v-4r (Arberry No. 177)

68 Qurʾān

Two folios containing CVIII Al-Maʾṣūm (Neighbourly Needs) 3, to the end of the Qurʾān. 21.2 × 14 cm.
Calligrapher: Ṣubḥ-Allāh b. ʿAshūr.
Iran, 1221/1806-7.
Nāshī script, each line in a narrow panel decorated with gold. Āyas are indicated by coloured rosettes. There is a Persian interlinear translation in small red Nāshī and headings are in gold Riqāʾ within dark blue cartouches flanked by red and blue triangular shapes, covered and surrounded by flowers and scroll fragments. The outer margin has delicate, feathery leaves and blossoms in gold and colours, typical of this period. Much of this is obscured by quotations from the Shiʿa Imāms on the verso. Those on these pages are by Imām Al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAll (d. 61/680).
For another Qurʾān by this calligrapher, in the Gulistan Library, Tehran, see, Bahrami, Iranian Art No. 99.
According to an inscription in this, dated 1231/1815-16, the writer had by that time copied 100 Qurʾāns.

CBI, Ms. 1579, fols. 29r-20r (Arberry No. 181)
Turkish Qur’ans

The Anatolian Seljuks

Under the Anatolian Seljuk rulers (470/1077-700/1300) the city of Konya became the centre of Turkish civilisation. There, some particularly beautiful manuscripts of the Qur’an were copied and illuminated. The majority of these are today in the Mevlana Museum in the same city. However, the Chester Beatty collection possesses a very interesting Qur’an from Seljuk Anatolia. The manuscript, dated 677/1278, and copied in Konya, must be one of the earliest Qur’ans of unquestionable Turkish origin to have survived. Although the illuminators of Turkey followed those of Iran, some compositional schemes (No. 69) as well as the colours used – especially pale green – appear peculiar to Anatolia.

The Ottoman Turks

Ottoman Qur’ans are well represented in the Chester Beatty collection, commencing with some of the earliest 8th/15th century manuscripts. Although No. 70, dated 859/1455, does not mention any Turkish location in its colophon, comparison with manuscripts produced in the time of Mehmet (Muhammad) the Conqueror (855/1451-862/1458) indicate that it probably comes from Istanbul or Bursa. The same is true of the famous Qur’an, reputedly copied for Bayazit II (886/1481-918/1512), No. 71. While the latter follows the format and layout of earlier Qur’ans it show considerable independence in detail and colour.

The classical period of Ottoman calligraphy begins with Shaykh Hamdallah (d. 927/1523) and Ahmad Qarahisari (d. 962/1555). These two masters dominated Ottoman calligraphy for the next three centuries as Sultan ‘Ali Mashhadhi (d. 919/1513) and ‘Imad al-Din al-Hasanvi (d. 1024/1615) did in Iran. One of the finest Ottoman Qur’ans shown here is by the immediate pupil of Qarahisari, Hasan Chelebi, who is best known for his inscriptions in the Suleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul. The manuscript is copied in a superb Rayhans (No. 74) which may be compared favourably with the famous Qur’an copied by his master, and now in Topkapı. Both manuscripts show features of undoubted Iranian inspiration, particularly as far as illumination is concerned. Many Iranian artists came to Istanbul at this time, either voluntarily or else brought back by the Ottomans after the capture of Tabriz in 920/1514. The manuscript is unusual in that it begins with a double page of pure non-representational decoration (No. 73). This contains, among other features, the floral arabesque which was to become one of the most prominent elements of Ottoman manuscript illumination in subsequent centuries, as we see in No. 75 and No. 76.

In the 11th/17th and 12th/18th centuries illuminators concentrated their skills on the opening pages to compositions which were often entirely dominated by gold. During this period Ottoman illumination has a certain monotony. However, as No. 77 shows, this could often be enlivened with charming naturalistic details like the roses and flowers of this composition.

At the end of the 12th/18th century European influence begins to appear. No. 78 shows a successful adaptation of European rococo to Turkish tastes. This was rather unusual since most Qur’an illumination tended to be of a much more traditional character. This is amply demonstrated by No. 79, dated 1264/1848. This manuscript also demonstrates the total unity of the Ottoman Qur’an as a work of art, in which decoration, binding, and even end-papers, were carefully considered by the craftsmen and seen as a total work of art. The end result is the perfect book (No. 79-81).
70 Qur'ān

Two folios containing I Al-Fātiha (The Opening Chapter) and II Al-Baqara (The Cow) 1-4, 29.2 × 19.2 cm. Calligrapher: Muhammad b. Ghaybi. Turkey, Rajab 859/March 1455.

Four lines of small Nashī/Rayhān per page, with a central line of Thulūd/Rayhān outlined in gold, in the centre. The latter lies on a ground of red hatching with floral fragments and black hatchings. Āṣār are marked with gold rosettes. Above and below are rectangular panels with pointed cartouches containing the nūn title and verse count in white Tarqīq over boldly drawn gold arabesques on blue with a white treble-dot motif. The area of the panel beyond the cartouches is painted in an unusual red-brown, with gold floral sprays. There is a final outer border of gold alternating palmettes on a blue ground with a white treble-dot motif.

CBL Ms. 1584, fols. 1V-2R (Arberry No. 188)

71 Fragment of a Qur'ān

Two folios containing XIX Maryam (Mary), 1-5, 35 × 26.2 cm. Turkey, late 10th/11th cent.

These folios mark the beginning of the Second Rukh (Quarter) of the Qur'ān. The text is in fine Mushaf with a Persian interlinear translation in Nashī. The verses are surrounded by floral sprays and blue arabesques on a hatched ground. Above and below are inscription in spidery white Kufic giving the nūn title and verse-count along with LVII Al-Waq'a, 79-80. These lie on superb arabesques with elaborate tendrils and leaves in gold and green. They are in lobed, pointed cartouches. Beyond are green chain borders and flowers and lotuses on a black ground. The backgrounds have a white treble-dot motif. Around all panels are gold strapwork bands with alternate blue stars and gold rosettes. In the margin is a triangular Hasp. Above and below are pointed medallions with a star-polygon motif in white. The margins have elaborate knotted blue spikes.

Martin who first published this stated that it was copied for Sultan Bayazid (886/1481-918/1512). Although this has never been proven, comparison with manuscripts from the time of Muhammad II (855/1451-866/1481) indicates that it dates from this period, see, Turkish Treasures, 1979, No. 1 and Sotheby Catalogue 8.4.75., Lot 202. But see, Schroder, Persian Miniatures, 1941, p. 38. There is another portion in the Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, see Hayward Catalogue No. 578.

Exhibited: New York 1933.7
Published: Martin, pls. 264-7; SPA p. 1962 pl. 940B.

CBL Ms. 1992, fols. 1V-2R (Arberry No. 185)