28 Binding of a Qur'an
Iran, 1282/1865-6
Ms. 1537; 33.2 x 21.5 cm

Lacquer over a papier-maché base, attached by a red leather spine. In the centre is a large multi-branched oval motif decorated with flower chains. The origins of such a motif go back to 16th century Safavid times. This lies on a honey-coloured ground of arabesque scrolls. In the middle of the oval is a black quatrefoil with gold floral decoration, which also repeats in a surrounding border. On either side are red bands with gold floral decoration. There is a final outer border of gold flowers on black. The doublures are of traditional red, with a fine gold floral medallion and surrounding borders. The whole is an excellent example of Qajar bookbinding. The manuscript, a copy of the Qur'an, is 16th century Safavid, undated. In 1271/1854-5 it became the property of Hushang Mirza, a grandson of Fath‘Ali Shah (1797-1834), who added hadiths throughout in 1272/1855-6. In 1282/1865 it was rebound by a new owner, Mirza ‘Ali-Naqi — ‘Galen of Ingenuity and Aristotle of Knowledge’ — for whom this binding was made.

Published: Van Regemorter, 1961, pl. 52. James, 1980, no. 102.

29 Picnic scene
Painter: Muhammad Murad Samarqandi
Bukhara, Central Asia, 1616
Ms. 297, fol. 134 r; 32.2 x 21.8 cm

This painting, which appears to be the left half of a double-page composition, is found in a copy of the Bustan of Sa‘di. The manuscript was copied about 1570 probably by Mir Salih al-Katib, although it bears a colophon in the name of Muhammad Qasim al-Harawi and the date 930/1523. The latter is suspect (see C.B.L. Persian Cat., III, p. 66). The manuscript contains one original miniature and 10 added about 1025/1616 when the book became the possession of Hidayat b. Mu‘in al-Din b. Khwaja ‘Abdal-Rahim b. Khwaja Sa‘d, in Bukhara. Two of the paintings are by Muhammad Murad Samarqandi. The first (fol. 159r) shows an Indian temple; the second a picnic. If the painting was intended for this manuscript it must have been part of a frontispiece or finispiece, the other half of which has disappeared. The drawing, colour and distortion of the figures are most unusual in Islamic painting where such idiosyncratic treatment is rare. A large banquet is in progress. The master-chef deftly skims a carcass hanging from a tree while a gnarled servant pours water from a skin into a cauldron on a roaring fire. The smell of cooking has attracted a snake and magpies which perch on a branch. A beggar-woman with her children is being driven away by a harassed servant who aims a blow with a ladle in her direction. This mixture of caricature and pathos is almost unique. The vividly-animated border is also the work of the painter, whose name occurs on a blue pot in the foreground. Other examples of the artist’s work are found in a Shah Nama in Tashkent (Ashrafii, pp. 94-103), a painting formerly in the Veer collection (Veerr, pl. LXXXIV) and probably a drawing in the Fogg Art Museum (Welch, 1973, no. 59; Simpson, 1980, p. 98).
The Ottoman Turks

The Ottomans were the strongest of the Turkish tribes inhabiting Anatolia in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. In 1358 they managed to cross the Hellespont and extend their power into the Balkans. By 1453 they had captured all the territory surrounding Constantinople, last stronghold of the Byzantine emperor. In that year the city was captured and the empire which in former times had controlled all of the eastern Mediterranean was extinguished. Greatest of all the Ottoman sultans was Sulayman the Magnificent (1520-66). At his hands the Ottoman Empire reached its greatest extent, finally encompassing the Balkans, Anatolia, Egypt, Syria and large parts of North Africa. Many different nationalities were incorporated into the new empire and from among these many artists and craftsmen came to work at the Ottoman capital of Constantinople (now Istanbul). In addition — either voluntarily, or forcibly after the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514 — a number of Iranian artists worked in the royal library where manuscripts were produced. Persian painting exercised a major formative influence on Ottoman art, so much so that the two were often confused. Ottoman painting, however, is much bolder and simpler and its themes were often contemporary events, unlike Iran where myth, fable and romance were the most frequent subjects.

Ottoman calligraphers were undoubtedly the greatest practitioners of that noble art. In Nasḵh, Thulṭh and Rayḥan they were without equal and even in Naṣrīq they were able to produce work equal to that done in Iran. Most Ottoman Qur’ans were written in Nasḵh, though there are fine examples in the other traditional scripts, especially Rayḥan. The late 15th and the 16th centuries were the great periods of Ottoman calligraphy, though each century, including the present one, has produced its outstanding masters.

30 Six folios from a complete Qur’ān

Calligrapher: Al-Hasan bin Juban (Chopan) bin ʿAbdallah al-Qunawi;
Illuminator: Mukhlis bin ʿAbdallah Konya, Anatolia, 667/1270
Ms. 1466; fols. 1v-2r, 90v-175r, 330v-331r; 10.5 x 8 cm

Anatolian Seljuk Qur’ans are rare outside Turkey, and most of the surviving examples are today in the Mevlana Museum, Konya. This appears to be one of the earliest Qur’ans giving an Anatolian location. Full, though rapidly executed, illumination occurs at the beginning and end of the manuscript. Anatolian illumination is based on that of Iran, but with its own distinctive compositions and colour combinations. In the earlier work of this illuminator he makes great use of the composition which appears in a simplified form on folios. 1v-2r: a vertical central rectangle with surrounding circles and wide outer borders filled with arabesque scrolls. He was the illuminator of a magnificent copy of the Mathnawi (Mesnevi) of Rumi, in the Mevlana Museum, Konya (Ms. 51), dated 667/1268-9. In this latter manuscript he uses the kunya al-Hindi (of India), though whether he was truly of Indian origin is not possible to tell. His colleague Al-Hasan al-Qunawi, however, was obviously a native of Konya as his name implies. In the very full colophon he tells that the manuscript was copied in the madrasa of Saʿd al-Din Kubak, in Konya, i.e. Saʿd al-Din Köpek, a prominent minister of Sultan Kaykhusraw (1237-46), put to death by the latter. This madrasa no longer exists. The Qur’ān was copied for Sayf al-Mila wa’l-Dunya wa’l-Din Sunqur bin ʿAbdallah.

Published: James, 1980, no. 69.
31 Double frontispiece: (a) King Solomon; (b) Bilqis, Queen of Sheba
Sulayman-Nama (Book of Solomon)
by Firdawsi of Bursa
Turkey, c. 1500
Ms. 406, fols. 1v-2r; 25 x 19 cm

Firdawsi's enormous compilation consists of 20 weighty chapters in prose and verse giving details of the Solomon legend. A large literature based on Jewish and Christian sources already existed for this best-known figure among the ancients, whose piety, wisdom and deep spiritual knowledge are acknowledged on several occasions by the Qur'an. This copy of the Sulayman-Nama was made for the library of Bayazid II (1481-1512) and should have been elaborately illustrated, judging by the complex shapes of the 42 spaces left for miniatures in the text of the first 4 chapters. Unfortunately, only the double frontispiece was completed. This is one of the earliest examples of Ottoman painting, produced in a strange mixture of Eastern and Western styles. Much of the enigmatic subject matter has yet to be fully explained. Sulayman, who is, of course, the biblical Solomon, sits in the Bab al-Salam, the Gate of Salutation, main entrance to the Topkapi Palace. Around him are angels and the birds of the air including his faithful hoopoe who brought him news of the Queen of Sheba (Qur'an XXVII, 22-3). Underneath are the orders of mankind, jinn and demon-dom over which Solomon has authority. Opposite is the Queen of Sheba with more angels and her maidens. Under her are rows of monsters and, at the bottom, the famous stables of Solomon. The layout of these pages may well be inspired by a Western Christian representation of Christ the King accompanied by the Four Evangelists, with the Blessed Virgin (here transformed into the Queen of Sheba), 12 apostles, and orders of mankind in rows underneath. An almost exact Western parallel exists for this painting in a drawing in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. (Ms. Lat. 11751). Earlier Islamic parallels also exist.

Exhibited: British Museum, 1977, 29. Published: C.B.L. Turkish Cat., Frontispiece; Grube, 1966, 70; Aslanapa, 1971, XXVII.
These two folios containing Sura XIX (Maryam, Mary), 1-5, mark the beginning of the second Rubʿ (quarter) of the Qurʾan. The text is a fine Muḥaqqaq/Rayhan with a Persian interlinear translation in Naṣkh. Above and below the text are panels of spidery white Kufic giving the sura title and verse-count and LVII (Al-Waqʿa, The Terror), 79-80. According to Martin (1912i, p. 102), who first published the pages from this manuscript which are now in the Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, the Qurʾan — at that time in Aya Sofia — was written for Sultan Bayazid II (1481-1512). This claim has never been verified (Martin did not state where the information came from — presumably an inscription), but the manuscript is usually accepted as 15th century Ottoman. Ettinghausen (Survey, p. 1962) points out a number of 14th century survivals in the illumination, though Schroeder (1942, p. 38) was adamant upon a late 14th century date for the manuscript. Although the layout of the pages is somewhat unusual for the 15th century, i.e. geometric marginal medallions, central hasp and lack of a palmette border, such features are not unknown at this time. Mamluk Qurʾans of the 15th century, for example, are very similar. It is not impossible that the manuscript is Timurid (Lings, 1976, no. 89) but the vivid colour schemes throughout the 6 pages plus the points that the manuscript has in common with a Qurʾan made for Mehmed the Conqueror (Sotheby, 8. 4. 1975, Lot 202) would seem to support an Ottoman origin.

Exhibited: New York, 1933. Published: S.P.A., pl. 940b; Arberry, no. 185, pl. 10; Lings, 89; James, 1980, no. 71.
33 (a) The last journey of Sultan Sulayman; (b) Sultan Selim meets his father's cortège in Belgrade

The History of Sultan Sulayman by Lugmani-i Shuri
Scribe: Qasim al-Husayni al-Qazwini
Istanbul, Turkey, 987/1579
Ms. 413; fols. 413v-414r, 116v-117r, 39.5 x 25 cm

During the reign of Sultan Sulayman (‘The Magnificent’), 1520-66, the Ottoman Empire reached its largest extent. Sulayman was undoubtedly the ablest and greatest of all the Ottoman sultans. This manuscript, referred to as the ‘Supplement’ (Pers. tārīmī) to the History of Sulayman, deals with the events from 1559 to 1566 culminating in the final campaign in Hungary. The text is written in Persian verse in mutaqarrīb metre after the style of Ferdowski’s Shāh-Nāma, which was the inspiration of these Ottoman ‘sultan-as-hero’ histories. Six of the manuscript’s 25 paintings are double-page.

(a) After the death of Sulayman at the siege of Szegedvár, the Grand Vizier Sokullu Mehmed Pasha wished to inform his heir-apparent Selim before making the news public. Therefore, the body was carried back in triumphal procession, as if Sulayman were still alive. In this dramatic rendition of that occasion the army escorts the portable throne of the sultan down to Belgrade. Above the carriage are musicians playing a victory march. Immediately below is the figure of the grand vizier, painted somewhat larger to show his importance. This is Ottoman painting at its best: simple yet majestic, bold yet realistic.

(b) After Selim heard of this father’s death, which was brought to him in eastern Anatolia by a special courier, he returned at once to Istanbul where he received public allegiance. He then proceeded rapidly to Belgrade, without pausing along the way, to meet the army returning with Sulayman’s body. Outside the city Sokullu Mehmed Pasha gave the order for the Qur’an to be recited next to the carriage with the body and thus, several weeks after the event, the soldiers knew for the first time of the death of their sultan. Here we see Sultan Selim weeping by the carriage which stands parked under an awning. In front of him figures in the dark clothes of mourning raise their hands as they pray for the departed monarch. On the opposite page is the Ottoman camp and, bottom right, the city of Belgrade represented by a cluster of European-style buildings. Uniting the two halves of the composition are the dark waters of the Danube. The painters of this and the other scenes are not mentioned but all the hallmarks of the outstanding artist Uthman (Osman) are present. He is known to have worked on several manuscripts of this type. The manuscript was made for Murad III (1574-95), grandson of Sulayman. The beautiful contemporary binding is in brown leather with sunken centre medallions and corner-pieces bearing black floral and cloud-scrolls on gold. The doublures are finely painted with gold floral scrolls on black with sunken centre medallions and corner-pieces (not shown — see Van Regemorter, pls. 46-7).

Published: Schtoikine, 1966, 33, pls. XXXV-H; Atasoy & Cagman, 1974, pl. 12; James, 1974, no. 30.

Published: C.B.L. Turkish Cat., pl. 11.
34 (a) Two episodes in the life of Ibrahim (Abraham); (b) Nuh (Noah) in the ark

Zubdat al-Tawarikh (The Cream of Histories) by Luqman-i 'Ashuri
Istanbul, Turkey, c. 1583-90
Ms. 414, fols. 61v, 66v; 39.5 x 25 cm

The Cream of Histories is a grand compendium of history and legend with intermissions, from creation down to the time of Sultan Murad III (1574-95). This manuscript was evidently copied for Muhammad Agha, head of the black eunuchs in Topkapi. Several of its 45 illustrations are arranged two on a page.

(a) Shows two events in the life of the prophet Ibrahim (the biblical Abraham). In the upper painting he is subjected to an ordeal by fire for his faith (Qur'an XXI, 68-9) by King Nimrud, ruler of Assyria. The prophet sits impassively in the centre of a raging fire. Miraculously flowers have sprung up all around him. The villainous Nimrud stares down from the palace window. His features have been disfigured by some outraged reader. Below we see the intended sacrifice by the prophet of his son (Isma'il i.e. Ishmael, according to Muslim tradition, not Yaqub, the biblical Jacob). In the background is the traditional rain caught in the thicket. Lines on the page trace the genealogy of Ibrahim and Isma'il, culminating here in the sons of the latter shown in the form of circles at the bottom of the page.

(b) The Qur'anic account of the prophet Nuh does not differ significantly from that of the biblical Noah. Here we see him after the deluge on board the ark (Ar. A'l-Fulk) with his righteous sons clinging to the rigging. The vessel is not described in detail in the Qur'an, but later tradition gives it a body in the shape of a bird and a prow and stern in the shapes of a cock's head and tail. Below deck the animals are in pairs — except for the ass, who came aboard with Satan clinging to his tail. The black sea which conveys so well the atmosphere of terror is probably an accident of time: originally the water would have been painted with silver, which has oxidised over the centuries. The original of this work was prepared for Sultan Murad III by a team of artists and craftsmen working in the royal palace of Topkapi (Turk. Islamic Museum, Ms. 1973). Although the illustrations of the Chester Beatty manuscript are similar, the artists were somewhat inferior in their skill. A later copy dated 1583 is now in Topkapi (Ms. H. 1321). The manuscript has a fine contemporary binding in brown leather painted with flower designs. In the centre and corners are sunken panels with black carnations and spiky leaves on a gold ground. The doublures are covered in yellow paper. (Not shown.)

Published: C. B. Turkish Cat., pl. 15; Sichtou-kine, 1966, 43.

Published: C. B. Turkish Cat., pl. 14.
A story equally popular in both the Qur'an and the Bible was that of Yusuf (Joseph), the slave who became grand vizier of Pharaoh's Egypt. Although the essentials of both accounts are the same, differences do exist. The Qur'an gives a much fuller account of Yusuf's temptation by Zulaykha, the name tradition has ascribed to the wife of the Egyptian officer. This relationship inspired several of the poets of Iran and Turkey to produce romances based on it. One of these was attributed to the great Firdawsi. The most popular Persian version, however, was that of Jami (1414-92). The lack of any Turkish version inspired the poet Hamdi to write this one. In doing so he relied heavily on earlier works, particularly that of Jami. In parts his poem is almost a verbatim translation of the Persian romance. The 4 charming little scenes shown here give the main outlines of the story:
(a) Yusuf is rescued from the well by Malik, the leader of the caravan.
(b) Malik sells Yusuf to Zulaykha for a box of priceless gems.
(c) Pharaoh sends for Yusuf, who has been imprisoned by Zulaykha, and asks him to interpret his dream. As a result he becomes Pharaoh's minister.
(d) Zulaykha, as a blind old woman, stops Yusuf on the road. By his prayers she regains her youth, sight, and beauty.

For a manuscript very similar in style see Binney (1979, no. 17).

Published: Stchoukine, 1971, 7-6

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The author composed his monumental Life of the Prophet in 1388, probably for the Turkish-speaking Mamluk ruler of Egypt, Barquq (1382-98). This double-page scene comes from vol. 4 of a superb 6-vol. copy made for the Ottoman Royal Library in Istanbul and now dispersed. Each vol. (no. 5 is missing) has approximately 100 paintings, an extremely large number given the usual rarity of representations of the Prophet. These pictures have a great intensity of religious feeling, although they serve no devotional purpose. This manuscript must be the one referred to in documents preserved in Topkapı Palace which mention a Siyar-i Nabi copied in 6 vols. for Murad III (1574-95) under the direction of the master-painter Lutfi 'Abdallah. The scene shows the Prophet encamped with his men at the well of Badr on 15 March 624, awaiting the arrival of the 1,000-strong Meccan war-party that intended to destroy him and his little band of 300 men. He sits behind the well in a shelter (built of palm branches). As the sun rose his enemies advanced down the hill and the Prophet cried out: 'O God, Here are Quraysh in their pride and vanity fighting against Thee and calling Thine Apostle a liar. O God, Grant the help which Thou hast promised me. Destroy them this morning.' These words appear in red under his picture. Opposite in 16th century Ottoman armour come the Meccans with their leader 'Uthman and his two sons Al-Walid and Shayba in the foreground. All were killed in single combat with three Muslim champions.

Published: Stchoukine, 1966, 59.
37 Dancing Mevlevi dervishes  
Nafahat al-Uns (Breaths of Fellowship) of Jami (1414-92) 
Istanbul or Konya, 1003/1595 
Ms. 474; fol. 248v; 30.6 x 19 cm

Jami wrote his voluminous Nafahat al-Uns in 1478. It contains 582 biographies of Sufi saints and is considered his chief prose work. This scene comes from the biography of the best-known of all the Sufis, Jalal al-Din Rumi (Mevlana Jalal al-Din, d. 1273). It illustrates a short saying of the master: 'a bird may fly high in the air; he will never reach Heaven but he will escape the net. A dervish may never reach perfection but he will always be removed from the crowd, aloof from the troubles of this world, and free of care.' The artist has taken this brief reference as the starting point for his illustration which shows Mevlevi dervishes dancing in the sama'khana (hall) where their dance ritual is performed in the tekke (Arabic, takiyya: dervish monastery). The instruments favoured by the Mevlevi order were the tambourine and reed flute which can be seen in the hands of the musicians on the left as the dervishes move around in a broken circle. The subject was very popular with Turkish and Iranian artists though, more often than not, rendered in a very symbolic manner. The manuscript is illustrated in a style which is more naturalistic and less formal than that of the great court manuscripts at the end of the 16th century. Other manuscripts illustrated in this style are known to have been produced in Konya and Baghdad as well as Istanbul. It is believed that they originated in the Mevlevi tekkes. This work may have been produced for the inhabitant of one such institution in Istanbul, or a provincial city (see Cagman, 1979). 

Published: C.B.L. Turkish Cat., No. 474, pl. 41; Stichoukine, 1966, 70; Atasoy & Cagman, pp. 58-63.

38 The Silsila-Nama (Genealogies) of Yusuf b. Hasan b. 'Abdul-Hadi  
Scribe: Abu Talib Isfahani  
Baghdad, c. 1006/1598 
Ms. 423, fol. 21 r, 26 x 16.4 cm

This manuscript is in two parts: the first untitled, the second bearing the name Zubdat al-Tawarikh (Cream of Histories). The whole seems to be identifiable with the Silsila-Nama, a collection of genealogies, three other illustrated versions of which are known to exist. The purpose of the work was to show the legitimate descent of the Ottoman sultans from the illustrious prophets and monarchs of the past. This page depicts the prophets Da'ud (David), Sulayman (Solomon), Iskandar (Alexander), Zakariya and his son Yahya (Zachariah and John the Baptist) and 'Isa (Jesus). All of these were regarded as precursors of Islam and venerated by Muslims, even though their attempts to establish Islam were unsuccessful, or only partially successful. 'Isa, who is particularly highly regarded, appears as a youthful, beardless figure quite different to Christian portraits of Christ. This was only one representation, however; several others are known, some of which were based on Western or local Christian depictions of Christ. The first part of this work is in Arabic and signed by the copyist who refers to himself as 'sakin-i Baghdad' ('residing in Baghdad'). It is assumed that the second half which is Turkish was also produced in Baghdad. Several contemporary copies of this work are known to have been copied there (see Sims, 1979, note 30, and Atasoy and Cagman, p. 61). However, it should be pointed out that the two parts were on different sizes of paper before being bound together and remaranged and that only the second part bears a dedication to Muhammad III (1595-1603). The attribution of the second part with the illustrations to Baghdad should thus be treated with some caution.

Published: Atasoy & Cagman, op. cit.
39 Café scene
Istanbul, Turkey, late 16th century
Ms. 439; fol. 9r; 41.5 x 27.2 cm

This painting comes from an album (Turk. muraqq'a) of 12 pages, put together probably in the 17th century. At the top and bottom are fine Persian verses in Nasta'liq script, selected purely for the quality of the calligraphy and not for any connection with the intervening scene. Although it may represent the interior of a private house, it seems much more likely to be a Turkish café. The patrons are seated around the room, drinking coffee from small handleless cups, fanning themselves with flag-shaped fans and passing the time by reading, talking and playing the kind of games that one can still find in most Middle-Eastern cafés today. In the centre of the room a dancing-boy performs to the accompaniment of an orchestra. Unlike contemporary Iranian painting, that of Ottoman Turkey shows a strong interest in everyday subject matter. There is even a touch of humour: the old man asleep in the bottom left-hand corner, clearly a portrait, could well be someone known to the members of the workshop. Painting and calligraphy are set into a piece of marbled paper (Turk. ebru), a technique perfected by Ottoman craftsmen.

Published: C. B. Turkish Cat., pl. 32.

40 Hilya-i Nabi (Description of the Prophet)
Calligrapher: 'Uthman b. 'Ali, called 'Hafiz al-Qur'an', i.e. the one who knows the Qur'an by heart (1642-98)
Istanbul, Turkey, 1103/1691
Ms. Additional; 47 x 34 cm

Large beautifully-written descriptions of the Prophet Muhammad were very popular in Turkey from the 17th century onwards. The format of the description was always the same, though decoration could be more varied than here. The description given is usually that according to 'Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 661), of which this is the slightly abbreviated version. However, there existed other descriptions which were occasionally written in this manner. The Hilya-i Nabi is said to have been invented by Hafiz 'Uthman (Osman), though he may have been simply the first Ottoman calligrapher to treat it in this way. He was one of the greatest Ottoman masters of all time. His father was the muezzin of the Haseki Sultan Mosque in Istanbul. He gained his certificate at the age of 18 after being the pupil of dervish 'Ali Mustafa al-Ayyubi (d. 1668). He then studied under Nafasizade Sayyid Isma'il to learn the calligraphic principles of Shaykh Hamdallah. Among his pupils were Sultans Mustafa II (1695-1703) and Ahmad III (1703-30). The Basmallah on the top line is in Thuluth, and is quoted from Qur'an XXVII, 30; the only occurrence of the Basmallah in the Qur'anic text. The description in the centre and in the rectangle beneath is in Naskh. Around, in Thuluth, are the names of the first four caliphs and below, also in large Thuluth, is Qur'an XXI, 107. Part of the decoration, particularly the surrounding gold floral border on green, appears to date from after the 17th century.
41 Tughra of Sultan Mustafa II
(1695-1703)
Istanbul, Turkey, 17th-18th century
Ms. Additional; 43 x 28 cm

The tughra or calligraphic emblem of each Ottoman sultan served as both heraldic symbol and official signature. Although the names of the sultans differed, the format was always the same. Starting at the bottom right it reads Mustafa Khan bin Ahmad al-Muzaffar da’i'man ('Mustafa Khan son of Ahmad, always triumphant'). Bayazid II (1481-1512) appears to have been the first Ottoman sultan to use the tughra in this form. It continued in use until the abolition of the office in the 20th century. This emblem is a particularly decorative one and the dome-like medallion surmounting the three vertical strokes is especially distinctive. It comes from the top of an official document prepared in the Ottoman chancellery. The beginning of the document, written in feathery gold Divani script, can be seen underneath. By convention each line rose towards the left. Mustafa's short reign began with great promise. In 1697 he advanced into the Balkans to challenge the Hapsburgs, only to be disastrously defeated by Prince Eugen of Savoy at the Battle of Zenata. Discouraged, Mustafa never took the field again and was deposed in 1703.

42 Twelve Ottoman sultans
Mittah al-jah al-jami' (Key to the Compendium of Divination) by Sayyid bin Sharif Burhan
Scribe: Hajji ‘Uthman Al-Busnawi, pupil of Ibrahim al-Rudasi
Istanbul, Turkey, c. 1757-73
Ms. 444; fols. 346v-347r; 18.9 x 11.5 cm

Works on divination and magic were very popular throughout the medieval Islamic world. The Mittah was initially composed in Arabic by Al-Bistami (d. 1458) though in fact he seems only to have been the arranger, or adapter, of an earlier work by Ibn Talha (d. 1254). (For the Arabic original, see C.B.L., Ms. 4212.) This Turkish translation and commentary was made by an official of the Imperial Palace in 1598. Like the Arabic versions, the Turkish ones are illustrated with pictures depicting the events of the text, most of which deal with the signs of the 'last day'. However, the patron of the manuscript, Sultan Mustafa III (1757-73), must have been troubled with religious scruples, as the artist has apparently been ordered to leave out most of the figures. The result is a series of bizarre, empty, lunar-like landscapes. On occasions when figures were unavoidable, as in this array of sultans from Mehmet the Conqueror (1451-81) to Ibrahim I (1640-8), their heads are replaced with roses, which are, however, quite in keeping with the apocalyptic nature of the text. The date of the manuscript has been altered to 1747, ten years before Mustafa ascended the throne.
43 Calligraphic composition by Muhammad As'ad Yasari Efendi (d. 1798)
Istanbul, Turkey, 2nd half of the 18th century
Ms. Additional; 51 x 32 cm

Muhammad As'ad Yasari was one of the finest exponents of Nasta'liq calligraphy in Ottoman Turkey. He was known as Yasari (The Left-handed) because paralysis of his right side compelled him to use his left hand. This is one of his best-known compositions in Nasta'liq script. It is a ruba'i by Sultan Ahmad III (1703-30):

My Lord, I can no longer bear to be apart from you.
This heart has turned to ice in love; there's no affection left.

So many tears did Fate decree that I, poor wretch, must shed
That even Jacob's turn to weep for Joseph never came.

Calligraphers sometimes used the same composition more than once; an exact copy of this exists in the Ekrem Hakkı Collection, Istanbul. The script is set into a beautiful ground of floral arabesque scrolls surrounded by a border of blue and gold palmettes. Yasari was appointed a teacher of calligraphy in the Imperial Palace by Mustafa III (1757-73), where he remained until his death in 1798 — except for his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1791. Public examples of his work are found in the mosques of Ayyub and Aya Sofia, Istanbul. The Chester Beatty Library also possesses a fine little manual of Nasta'liq by Yasari which belonged to his son Mustafa 'izzat (see Huart, 291; Son Hattatlar, 535-40).

44 Binding of a Qur'an
Turkey, 1218/1803-4
Ms. 1580; 17.8 x 12 cm

During the 18th and 19th centuries painted decoration replaced decoration produced by stamping and engraving leather on Iranian bindings. Although in Ottoman Turkey painting also became important, this continued to be subordinate to the traditional methods. In this magnificent example the central panel is carefully painted but only after the design has been first produced by a metal plate. This leaves the impression of the floral arabesque scrolls with carnations, spiky leaves and cloud-scrolls. Over this is a separate piece of leather in the shape of 2 rectangles joined by 12 oval medallions. Between the medallions is more raised decoration in the form of cloud-scrolls over arabesques. The entire surface is brushed with gold before the decoration is picked out in dark brown. The doublures have a typically Ottoman central medallion with pendants, surrounded by 4 triangular cornerpieces. These are covered with fine scrolls in gold and etched to give a textured finish. Inter-spaced are gold dots which have been punched. Originally designs of this type were made by the use of metal stamps on the cover. The binding is on a Qur'an copied by Al-Sayyid Hafiz Muhammad Salih Efendi, called 'Chamshir Hafiz'. Salih Efendi was a native of Istanbul, where this manuscript was produced. He is said to have died in 1820 while in the act of copying out a Qur'an (Son Hattatlar, p., 356).

Published: Van Regemorter, 1961, pl. 48; James, 1980, no. 110.
The Mughals of India

The Mughal Empire in India was established in 1525 by Babur, a Turkish-speaking descendant of Timur, when, after an eventful career which had begun in Central Asia, he was able to defeat the Sultan of Delhi. His son Humayun (d. 1556) continued the conquest of northern India but in 1540, after a severe defeat by the king of Bihar, he was compelled to flee to Iran. After a period of exile lasting 15 years Humayun was eventually able to return to India and reconquer his empire. His son Akbar (1556-1605) was one of the ablest rulers of India and by modern standards one of the most enlightened monarchs of the 16th century. Akbar’s attitude to religion was, to say the least, unorthodox. Neither his son Jahangir (1605-27) nor his grandson Shah Jahan (1628-58) could be called devout Muslims. It was not until the reign of Aurangzeb (1659-1707) that an ‘orthodox’ Muslim ruler came to the throne. Nevertheless, the years from 1556 to 1658 were very fruitful for the development of the visual arts, as both Akbar and Jahangir were enormously interested in painting and the many uses to which it could be put.

Mughal painting was based on the art of neighbouring Iran, many of whose artists emigrated to India to work for the Mughals from the time of Humayun onwards. Native Indian painters worked side by side with the Iranians and it was from the fusion of their two separate traditions that the Mughal style came into existence. Mughal artists were also instructed to copy European paintings and engravings and these eventually had an influence on their work.

Although there were some excellent Indian calligraphers, the Mughals showed a decided partiality for the work of Iranians, especially Mir ‘Ali Harawi, whose work was collected and probably copied in the 16th and 17th centuries. Examples of his calligraphy were bound together with paintings into large portfolios or albums during the reigns of both Jahangir and Shah Jahan.