CHAPTER FOUR

The Imperial Qur’āns of Iraq

During the years 1301 to 1316 Il-Khānīd-controlled Baghdad and Mosul saw the appearance of a series of monumental Qur’āns, which in terms of size, format and sheer splendour, mark a new departure in manuscript production, for as far as we can tell, there was nothing like them produced before this time. The Qur’āns are associated with Sultan Ŭljaytū, the builder of what is considered one of the most perfect examples of Iranian architecture and one of the finest funeral edifices of Islam, his tomb at Sulaimiyah (1305-12).

The Qur’āns are also associated with the venerated masters of classical calligraphy, the sittah, the six pupils of Yaqūt al-Musta’simī from whom most later Timūrid, Saʿādī and Ottoman masters traced their descent. Virtually nothing is known about the lives of most of the sittah, and it is paradoxical that so much more is known about a relatively obscure group of calligraphers in Cairo at this time. Even the names of the sittah are uncertain, since historians of calligraphy give contradictory information; where there is agreement, research is often incomplete.

We omit Yaqūt, who died in 1298, just outside the period with which we are concerned. In any case, the problems of identifying genuine Yaqūt Qur’āns are so great as to require a separate study. As far as can be ascertained, his six pupils, none of whose work from before 1300 survives, were:

1. Arghūn ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Kāmilī
2. Naṣrallāh al-Ṭāribī, also known as Nāṣir al-Dīn Mutuṣabbīh
3. Mubārak-Shāh ibn Qubq al-Tāribī, called Zarīn-Qalam, also known as Mubārak-Shāh al-Sulaimān and Mubārak-Shāh ibn ʿAbdallāh
4. Yūsuf al-Maḥdādī al-Khurramīnī
5. Sayyid or Mir ʿHaydar, called Gāndāb-Nawī,
6. ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Suhrawardī, called Shuykh-Za’ilah.

Fig. 46 (Cat. 39). The Anonymous Baghdad Qur’an, fol. 4r, folio 40v. Sūrat III, Al-Baqara, 1405. The calligraphy is by Ibn al-Suhrawardī. His muhaqqiq script is composed so that each line creates its own visual harmony, yet is conceived as part of the page as a whole. It is clear that the distance between the lines of script was carefully calculated, as was the relationship of the five-line format to the overall page. Not a speck of colour animates the script and vocalisation which are entirely in black.
Several Qur’ān survive bearing the names of some of these men, and we examine the more important of them. Yet so great was the prestige of these famous names that facsimiles, not to mention forgeries, were produced in large quantities. Thus we have had to impose a set of rigid criteria to establish the authenticity of the manuscripts examined. To be considered genuine a Qur’ān must, first, bear a date from the period in which the calligrapher is thought to have lived, even though historians are not always exact in the dates they give for the calligraphers. Secondly, it should have contemporary illumination; and thirdly, a certificate of commissioning. Most important of all, it should have the name of at least one other person associated with it, that of the illuminator or corrector, since—Jbn al-Wahhāb excepted—such a person would be unlikely to put his name to a manuscript he knew to be a forgery. These criteria are by no means infallible, but they are among the most satisfactory for establishing the authenticity of a signature.

Baghdad: the Anonymous Qur’ān

Among the acknowledged masterpieces of calligraphy from the first decade of the fourteenth century is a superb thirty-part Qur’ān bearing the name of Ahmad Jbn al-Suhrawardi. This fine manuscript has long been dismembered and dispersed, and today the few surviving sections are found in at least four countries on three different continents (Cat. 39). It bears several colophons by the illuminator stating that the parts were illuminated, and one assumes written, in the city of Baghdad. If the second volume was illuminated in April 1302, then we can safely assume that the calligrapher began his work in the final weeks of 1301, or at the very latest in January 1302, and completed his task in 1306-07, since馥26 bears an inscription to that effect.

The first question is, for whom was this outstanding manuscript produced? Since it bears the signature of Jbn al-Suhrawardi, one of the great masters of the time, it clearly cost a huge amount to produce, and is of a size and format associated only with royal or powerful patrons, such as Qayrawān or the vizir Rashid al-Din. There are three possible patrons: either of the two vizirs of Sultan Ghāzān, Sa’d al-Din Sāvāj or Rashīd al-Din, who were appointed jointly in 1298, or the Sultan himself. The latter seems the most likely choice, because of the four surviving manuscripts comparable to this one, three were commissioned, as we shall see, by Sultan Qayrawān, Ghāzān’s successor, and only one by Rashīd al-Din. The destination of the manuscript may have been Ghāzān’s mausoleum, which was begun in 1297 and completed in 1301. None of the surviving volumes, however, bears either a certificate of commissioning or a waqfyyah, and unless the first or last volume reappears, there will probably be no way of corroborating this suggestion. This manuscript will henceforth be referred to as the Anonymous Baghdad Qur’ān.

The Calligrapher

All historians of calligraphy mention Jbn al-Suhrawardi, but the information they give is meagre. His full name is not known; he is simply called “Jbn al-Suhrawardi”, or in Persian “Shaykh-Zādah”, the son of the Shaykh, the latter being presumably the sūfī author of ‘Awarif al-Ma’ārif, Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Hāṣım ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdallāh, who was born in the small town of Suhraward near Sultanāyeh in 1145 and died in Baghdad in 1234. Jbn al-Suhrawardi was not the “son”, but more likely the grandson, of the great Sūfī. In his colophons he always signs himself Jbn al-Suhrawardi. One on the single page now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art does al-Suhrawardi add the word al-Baṣrī, which members of the Suhrawardi order of Sūfis appended to their names. Born in Baghdad, he came into contact with the calligrapher Yāqūt when he was passing through the town of Shahrizār in the province of Kūrtistan, where Yāqūt was teaching. He is said to have written inscriptions for a number of buildings in Baghdad, including the Masjīd al-Jāmī’, and to have died in 1320-21.

Jbn al-Suhrawardi is credited with the production of thirty-three complete Qur’āns, an understandable low figure if it really took him from 1301 to 1306 to write the Anonymous Baghdad Qur’ān. Of his work little survives. The vizir Rashīd al-Dīn owned twenty Qur’āns by him, which he bequeathed to his own mausoleum, but what became of these is not known. A copy of the Qur’ān signed by him and dated 1318-19 was formerly in Ayā Sofīa, but has now been transferred to the Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi (Cat. 48). The Chester Beatty Library also possesses an interesting copy which may be genuine. It is a complete single-volume copy in ta’dīb and nasīḥ dated 1301-02 (Cat. 37). The colophon...
signature closely resembles those in the Anonymous Baghdad Qur'ān, and the illumination, though slight and partially concealed, looks like Il-Khānid work. The manuscript bears the certificate of a corrector, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Abhari (from Abhar, west of Qazvīn) which, if normal practice was followed, would have been added when the Qur'ān was completed. Ibn al-Suhrawardī's colophons usually follow the text of the Qur'ān, occupy exactly the same position, and are in identical mubāqqāq script. Occasionally, if the colophon is not complete by the time the bottom of the page is reached, it is completed in tiny naṣīḥ at the side or underneath.

This Qur'ān is written in beautiful black mubāqqāq, perhaps verging on šīflī, with all vowels and orthographic signs also in black. No colour is used in the script, which forms a counter-balance to the vivid polychrome of the marginal ornaments. The relationships of the letters to one another and to the size of the page achieve a perfect balance. The harmony of the colours of script and ornament makes this one of the finest Qur'āns ever produced.

**Fig. 49 (Cat. 39). The Anonymous Baghdad Qur'ān, Jec 49, right-hand frontispiece, Baghdad, 1320-8.** This is the work of Muhammad ibn Aybak, responsible for the decoration of two large multi-part Qur'āns (Cat. 39,40), and gives a good idea of how illumination in Baghdad differed from that of Cairo. No examples are known in Mamlūk Qur'āns of rectangular central panels which lack a centrifugal emphasis and inscriptive panels. The geometric design here involves the subtle repetition of hexagons filled with gold arabesque scroll-work. Around the central panel is a border which extends along each of the four sides. This is composed of scroll-work, not palmettes, as in the marginal area. Through this scroll-work, gold on blue, there runs a secondary pattern in dark brown, a colour rarely found further West.
Fig 51 (Cat. 39). The Anonymous Baghdad Qur’an, Juz’ 14, 4th to 5th century AD, folios 25–31, Sūrah VII, Yāsīn (Joseph), verses 5–39.

With the exception of Juz’ 1, all volumes commence in an identical manner. The text, surrounded by white “clouds” is written over a bed of green scrolls on a ground of red hatching with a treble-dot motif. Inscriptions above and below are always in gold kufic. The narrow border on each side consists of palmettes, base outwards.

Left
Fig. 50 (Cat. 39). The Anonymous Baghdad Qur’an, Juz’ 4, folio 211, Sūrah III, Al Imrān (The Family of ‘Imrān), verses 159–160.

The stark black muhattaṣ script of Ibn Sahrawardi always provides a perfect balance to the vibrant colour harmonies of Muhammad ibn Aybak, the illuminator. This page, which is the folio opposite Fig. 46, completes the text of the sūrah. Because the illuminator had a relatively large area of blank space, he used it to create a larger than usual illuminated heading for the next sūrah. The white Kufic sūrah title is kept unusually small but its hyperextended vertical haste and shallow sublinear strokes mirror the rhythm of the muhattaṣ of the main text.

Overleaf
Fig. 52 (Cat. 39). The Anonymous Baghdad Qur’an, Juz’ 13, double frontpiece, folios 15–23.

The patterns employed by Ibn Aybak, the master-illuminator, fall into four groups, of which this frontpiece, together with that of Juz’ 28, form perhaps the most interesting. Although they are technically pieces of “infinite” pattern they are conceived as independent geometric compositions. Intertwines in all cases are filled with single, double or quadruple palmettes, or arabesque scrolls. The medallions in the vertical outer margins are always made up of arabesque scrolls, never palmettes, and are always indented, never round.
Fig. 53 (Cat. 40).  Or lusti’s Baghdæd Qur’an, Juz’ 21, text-page, folio 1er.  Sūrat XXIX, al-Ankabīt (The Spider), Jāhád 69; Sūrat XXX, Rûm (The Roman Empire), Jāhád 1.

A page from a multi-volume Qur’ān, the largest in size of the imperial manuscripts, and the only one bearing an endowment certificate to Or lusti’s mausoleum in Subtanwiyah. The script is a gold muḥaqqaq outlined in black and a black thuluth/muḥaqqaq outlined in gold. The calligraphy is of quite outstanding magnificence. Although none of the surviving colophons give the name of the calligrapher, who employs only a self-effacing formula, it was almost certainly Ahmad ibn al-Subrawardi, who could quite easily have completed his earlier work on Cat. 39 in 1306–7, to complete the first section of this Qur’ān which is dated in the same year by the anonymous calligrapher. The illuminator was again Muhammad ibn Aybak, who signed the seventh volume in 1311, after completing his work on Cat. 39.

Fig. 54 (Cat. 40).  Or lusti’s Baghdæd Qur’an, Juz’ 20, illuminated page of text, folio 2v.  Sūrat XXVII, al-Nanî (The Aantes), Jāhád 56.

The opening page is copied in three lines of superb muḥaqqaq jîlî, over a bed of coloured scrolls on a red hatched ground. Two other types of scroll are employed by Muhammad ibn Aybak for this purpose: one more elaborate, the second much simpler. In general the layout of the opening pages resembles that found in the Anonymous Baghdæd Qur’an (Cat. 39).
The Illuminator

The illuminator of the Anonymous Qur’ān, Muhammad ibn Aybak ibn 'Abdallah, gives his full name on more than one occasion and has signed and dated four of the surviving portions of the Qur’ān. This information helps us to calculate how long it took to produce a manuscript as superb as this. Ibn Aybak records not only when, but where, he completed the manuscript. His fullest colophon occurs in the thirteenth volume: "Illuminated by the weakest of His slaves, Muhammad ibn Aybak ibn 'Abdallah, in the City of Peace, Baghdad, God protect it. He completed it on [Monday] 20 Rabi‘ I 703 [October 1305]." Thus it is evident that between the beginning of the Anonymous Baghdad Qur’ān in 1302 and about the beginning of 1306 the calligrapher completed twenty-five volumes, approximately eight volumes a year. The second volume was illuminated in April 1303 and the tenth was...
completed by February 1305. Thus it took about two years to illuminate eight volumes, twice as long as it took to write them. This figure is confirmed by the thirteenth volume, which bears an inscription by Ibn Aybak certifying that he completed the illumination in November 1305; he illuminated one volume approximately every three months, or four a year. It seems probable, even in the absence of documentary proof, that Ibn Aybak would have had an assistant, perhaps more than one. Certainly, if Baghdad resembled Cairo, this would have been the case; and manuscript illumination must have been much better developed in the old caliphal capital than in Cairo.

All the volumes are illuminated in the same way, in a very wide range of colours, using a high quality pigment which still looks freshly applied. There is an imposing double-frontispiece, followed by illuminated opening and closing pages. Throughout the text, sinâh headings are finely illuminated in a graceful kufi whose vertical strokes reach to the top of the containing panels. Each fifth and tenth verse is splendidly indicated by a decorated medallion in the margin which is quite unlike the standardized ornaments of Mamlûk Qur'âns before the 1370s. Each half of the double frontispiece appears to be conceived as a separate entity, and unlike most later examples, has a border of equal width on all sides. The basic composition of each is the same, whereas the patterns used to make up the central panels can be divided into four groups: those with a central eight-pointed star with surrounding hexagons (Juz' 2 and Juz' 26); those with a central multi-pointed star (Juz' 4 and Juz' 25); those based on a central hexagon within a diamond that touches the four sides of the rectangle (Juz' 13 and Juz' 28); and a straightforward repeat-pattern (Juz' 10). These patterns show great variety and inventiveness. In the frontispiece of Mamlûk Qur'âns, patterns similar to those of Juz' 4 and Juz' 25 are common but the other patterns are rarer, and there appear to be no Mamlûk examples of the type of semi-independent composition (Juz' 13 and Juz' 28) which recurs again in the later work of Ibn Aybak.

The illumination of the frontispiece of Juz' 2, however, differs in four respects. First, the arabesque scrolls have a much more naturalistic appearance; secondly, the accompanying pentagons contain scrollwork sprouting five tendrils, which is a unique feature in this manuscript, although it reappears in the Hamadân Qur'ân of 1313 (Cat. 45). Thirdly, the white kufi inscriptions are less orthodox and somewhat distorted. Finally, Juz' 2 uses a different type of edging to its strapwork borders, with double loops separating the flat links and a green band with a unique repeat motif. Juz' 2 is again the exception in the illumination of its opening pages. The inscriptive panels above and below the text end not in lozenges, as in the other volumes, but in eight-pointed stars, which resemble a tile and bear a circular arabesque scroll with large, fleshy leaves. Identical stars occur on the frontispieces. Interestingly, the final pages have been lavishly illuminated after the fashion of the opening ones. This occurs in none of the other surviving ajzâ', except the loose page in the Metropolitan Museum. In the panels above and below the final words of Juz' 2 an

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**Fig. 57** (Cat. 39). The Anonymous Baghdad Qur'ân, Juz' 4, folio 2r, left-hand frontispiece.

One of the few examples in the Qur'ân of a volume bearing an inscription on its illuminated frontispiece. The identical pattern which forms the geometric trellis of the central panel is found in a manuscript illuminated in Cairo in 1313, Cat. 6, and another, perhaps from Damascus, illuminated in 1314, Fig. 39 (Cat. 8).

**Fig. 58** (Cat. 39). The Anonymous Baghdad Qur'ân, Juz' 2, right-hand frontispiece.

The design of this frontispiece is so similar to that of the second volume of the Haybars Qur'ân (Fig. 16) that it is difficult to believe that the Cairo painters were not aware of it. Although this page was illuminated after that of the Cairo manuscript, technically the latter is further advanced and must certainly have been based in a very similar design.

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**Fig. 59** (Cat. 39). The Anonymous Baghdad Qur'ân, Juz' 2, left-hand illuminated opening page of text, folio 37. Sinâh II, al-Baqarah (The Cow), Ayûb 142.

This volume is more elaborately illuminated than most of the others surviving. The use of six-pointed stars to end the inscriptive panels at the top and bottom appears nowhere else in this Qur'ân, yet they are extensively used in the illuminator’s later work in Fig. 54. The final pages of the volume are signed and dated by the illuminator, Muhammad ibn Aybak, in four finely-worked panels. Perhaps he expended more effort on it because he intended to make the volume a monument to posternity.
elaborate buṣīr inscription over arabesque scrolls reads: "The illumination of this juz' was completed in the month of Ramadān the blessed in the year 702 [1302-03] of the Hijrah by Muhammad ibn Aybak, thanking God, praised be He, praying and saluting." The single detached folio in the Metropolitan has only part of the inscription by Ibn Aybak, and reads: "...Baghdad, may God, praised be He, protect it, in the year 707 hilāliyyah [1307-08]." How are we to understand the differences between the illumination of juz' 2 and of the other volumes? There are two possible explanations. The first is that this is the only volume illuminated in its entirety by Ibn Aybak, and that the remainder were drawn by him but painted largely by assistants under his direction. The other, and more likely, explanation is that Ibn Aybak devoted more time to this volume, and to the lost volume to which the Metropolitan page belonged, because he intended to sign it elaborately at the end, as an example of his virtuosity.

Baghdad: the Qur'an of Öljaytū

Muhammad ibn Aybak worked on at least one other Qur'an (Cat.40) similar to the Anonymous Baghdad Qur'an. Like that manuscript, it is now, alas, dismembered and scattered throughout the libraries of Germany, Denmark and Turkey. But with this work there is no mystery about the person who commissioned it, nor about the place to which it was to be endowed. This Qur'an is rather larger than the previous one, 72 x 50 cm, contrasting with 50 x 35 cm, and is copied in thirty ajzā', with five lines to the page. The two dated colophons name no scribe, and merely state: "Copied by the poor slave, needy for God's mercy, aspiring [7] for His generosity, in the City of Peace, Baghdad, in the year 706 [1306-07], thanking God, praying for the Prophet of God..." The manuscript was commissioned by Ghāzān's successor Öljaytū (1304-16) in 1306, a fact emphasized by the fine, large certificates attached to the front of several volumes, which with slight variations read: "This juz', together with the ones before and after from the Beloved Book, was copied for the glorification of the Islamic Faith with the assistance of the Lord of Majesty and Honour, at the orders of the lord, the great Sultan, shadow of God on earth, bringer of justice and security over the domain of God, bringer of favour and beneficence for the servants of God, supported by the Compassionate One with the light of faith, Öljaytū-Khan Khudábandah, Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dunyā wa'l-Dīn Muhammad, paver of the road of civilization, may God fulfill His bounty towards him, as He has chosen him and entrusted him with His people, which is the best thing He has, and may He make him achieve his ultimate hopes for happiness in the Two Abodes with the help of the chosen Muhammad and his house."

Shortly after Öljaytū ascended the Il-Khanid throne he began to build a mausoleum at the Mongol capital of Sulṭānīyyah, for which this Qur'an was apparently destined. Work on the building commenced in July 1305, about a year before the Qur'an was begun.11 After completion, the manuscript, henceforth referred to as Öljaytū's Baghdad Qur'an, was bequeathed to the mausoleum, as two waqfiyyahs, one in the Leipzig manuscript, the other in Topkapi, indicate: "This juz' along with the remainder of its thirty parts was endowed, hoping for Divine victory, praised be He, on the Day of Judgement when stands before Him, the lord, the greatest Sultan, possessor of the subservience of nations, shadow of God on earth, invigilator of the principles of the Sunnah, object of the support of the Lord of
the worlds, attached to the firm bond of God, Sultan of sultans in the worlds, succour of truth, the world and the faith. Oilayyī-Sultan, Muhammad, may God make ascend the ladder of conquest the one who carries out His works, and make his happiness in the worlds achieve its ultimate inspiration with the help of the Prophet, the chosen one, Muhammad and his righteous house. Let it be placed in the shrine, in the doors of righteousness, which [the Sultan] has founded at Sulaynīyah, as a true, legal, permanent and eternal endowment, on condition that it shall not be pawned nor inherited until God inherits the earth, and those on it, and he is the best of inheritors, 'If anyone changes the bequest after hearing it, the guilt shall fall on those who make the change, for God knows and hears all things.' [Qurʾān, II, 181]

From the information given in the first and seventh volumes, one can calculate that it took between two year and eighteen months to produce these seven parts. This sounds right, because the script is a more elaborate variety than that used by the Anonymous Baghdad Qurʾān. If we assume that the seven volumes were completed in one year, the Qurʾān would have been copied out by about 1316, several years before the consecration of the mausoleum in 1313–14 and the death of the Sultan in 1316. While the Qurʾān was being copied, Oilayyī underwent a number of spiritual conversions. In 1309–10 he adopted the Shiʿite form of Islam and, it is said, decided to transfer the remains of the Imams 'Ali and al-Husayn from Iraq to Sulaynīyah, but towards the end of his life he returned to orthodoxy.12 The bequest of the Qurʾān must have been made after his reconversion, since the waqfīyah makes no mention of Oilayyī's Shiʿism.13

The Calligrapher

The identity of the calligrapher of Oilayyī's Qurʾān is unknown, though his exceptional ability is apparent. The manuscript is copied in a monumental script that has the majesty of muhaqqaq coupled with the freedom and fluidity of thiṣlah. Each folio consists of three lines of gold script outlined (muhaqqaq) in black alternating with two lines of black outlined in gold.14 The vocalization of each line corresponds to the appearance of the script—either black or gold outlined in black. The result is perhaps the most wonderful example of monumental Qurʾānic calligraphy in existence. Ligs is the only scholar to have hazarded an attribution, identifying the calligrapher as Muhammad ibn Aybak.15 This was presumably based on the inscription by Ibn Aybak in Juzʾ 7, where he mentions his work as an illuminator. But this seems unlikely, for the Qurʾān was begun in 1306–07 when Muhammad ibn Aybak was still involved in illuminating the Anonymous Baghdad Qurʾān.

Fig. 62 (Cat. 40). Oilayyī's Baghdad Qurʾān, Juzʾ 21, text-page, folio 55r. Sūrah XXXIII, al-Aṣbaḥ (The Confederates), āyats 20–21.

The rosette in the third line indicates the end of an āyah. The medallion in the margin marks the end of a decade of āyabs and bears the word "twenty", for the twentieth āyah.
The closing page of Juz’ 20, like most final double pages in the various sections of this thirty-part Qur’an, has the sacred text in two large central panels written in muhaqqiq jali. The declamatory phrases above and below are in thuluth, on rich scroll grounds contrasting with that of the central panel which is left blank.

The last inscription by him in that manuscript is dated 1307/08, and the last inscription by Ibn al-Suhrawardi, in Juz’ 26 is dated 1306/07. Thus Ibn Aybak cannot have completed the Anonymous Baghdad Qur’an until 1308/09 at the earliest, and probably not until later. If Öljajyüt’s Baghdad Qur’an was finished in or around 1310/11, it would have been impossible for Ibn Aybak to have completed the first Qur’an, copied out all of the second, and illuminated all of its first seven aqidsa by April 1311. On the other hand, it would have been quite possible for Ibn al-Suhrawardi to have done the calligraphy. If he completed the copying of the Anonymous Baghdad Qur’an by the autumn of 1306, he could have finished the first volume of Öljajyüt’s Baghdad Qur’an by the end of the same year. Since Ibn al-Suhrawardi and Ibn Aybak appear to have been working together, it seems possible that they completed the first Qur’an, originally commissioned for Sultan Gházân, on the instructions of the new ruler Öljajyüt, and then continued to work on the next manuscript for Öljajyüt himself.

The Illuminator

The illuminator’s name, by contrast, is not in doubt, for his signature appears in tiny letters at the end of Juz’ 7: “Illuminated by Muhammad ibn Aybak in the City of Peace in Dhi’l-Hijjah in the year 710 of the Hijrah [April 1311], thanking God, praised be He.” It appears next to a second minute inscription by the calligrapher, and is similar in wording to other inscriptions known to be by him, so that there is no reason to doubt its authenticity.
Ayāt are marked by rosettes which use a system of letters. Marginal ornaments are similar to those in the earlier manuscript, except that the 'aṣharah medallion usually has a border of fine “hairs”, which are quite common in Iranian Qur’āns. Sūrah headings are presented in almost exactly the same manner as in the Anonymous Baghdad Qur’ān, with the exception of the title, which is usually written in tawqī‘.

By his signed examples, the work of Muḥammad ibn Aybak can be traced from 1302 until 1311. If all of the aţa‘ in ʿOlījāyī’s Baghdad Qur’ān are illuminated by him, he would have completed his task in 1315 or 1316. Thus we have some fifteen years’ worth of the painter’s œuvre, more than we have from any other ʿIl-Khwānid artist; indeed, more than from any other fourteenth-century Iraqi or Iranian painter. During this time several changes occur. New elements are introduced, such as the quatrefoils and wiry polychrome scrolls of the opening pages of illumination. There is a movement away from the regular geometric composition based on multi-pointed stars, with their decidedly centrifugal emphasis, to a much freer, almost independent, geometric composition. New details are introduced into the opening pages of text and into the marginal ornaments. Ibn Aybak possessed a wide repertoire of decorative and compositional motifs, together with an exceptionally well-developed colour sense, and he stands out as one of the most brilliant painters of the century.

ʿOlījāyī’s Baghdad Qur’ān was a much more ambitious undertaking than the Anonymous Baghdad Qur’ān. It is larger, almost by half, and there is more illumination. However, by and large it is less successful than the earlier manuscript, which achieves an almost perfect calligraphic and decorative unity. In both Qur’āns we can see clear examples of different hands, but it is obvious that Ibn Aybak, as master illuminator, kept tight control over the production of the manuscripts. This means a well-established painter with an organized workshop. It contrasts with the Baybars Qur’ān (Cat.1), in which there is no stylistic unity between the parts by ʿSandāl and those by Ibn Mubādīr, which suggests that in that instance there were two painters of virtually equal standing collaborating.

Was Ibn Aybak himself a product of Baghdad? We have no means of establishing this, but he probably was. Nothing survives that can be attributed to him before or after 1302-15, and we must assume that his other work has perished or remains to be discovered. If he was well-established in 1302, we may assume that he had been working in Baghdad for at least ten years. It is curious, therefore, that none of the illumination attributed to Baghdad in the last two decades of the thirteenth century gives even the barest hint of his work. Four Qur’āns ascribed to Yaqūt dated 1282, 1286, 1289 and 1294, reveal, if genuine, the type of illumination prevalent in Baghdad at that time. Of these, only the first and last show illumination that could be considered of above average quality, although neither compares in magnificence with the work of Ibn Aybak.

Fig. 64 (Cat. 42) ʿOlījāyī’s Mosul Qur’ān, Juz‘ 15, text-page, folio 6v. A classic example of mawqīf, showing all the silent features of this script.
The Calligrapher

The calligrapher, ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Husayn, was probably well-known in Mosul where the manuscript was copied, though all efforts to find references to him have failed." Apart from this, his name is known about him is that he was, or claimed to be, a lineal descendant of Caliph ‘Ali ibn Abu Taliq. This is made clear by several elaborate colophons in which, like Shadhi ibn Muhammad the Ayyubid, he proudly incorporates his full genealogy. Some give his full name as ‘Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Zayd ibn Muhammad ibn Zayd ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ubaydallah ibn ‘Ali ibn ‘Ubaydallah ibn al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali ibn Abu Taliq. Accordingly, he must have descended in the seventeenth generation from the fourth Caliph. The choice of this calligrapher seems unconnected with Öljayti’s temporary adoption of Shi‘ism, since this did not begin until 1309-10, when the Mosul Qur’an was almost complete.

The colophons, all of which are dated, indicate that the calligrapher was a particularly fast worker. He completed half the manuscript in one year, which means that he must have been able to copy out a single juz’ in less than a month, almost twice as fast as Ibn al-Suhrawardi. Such speed seems surprising, but even stranger is the fact that the manuscript, instead of being completed at the end of 1307, was not finished until 1311-12. The explanation is found in juz’ 15 in the Topkapi Library and juz’ 16 in the Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi. There is a gap of several years between the completion of juz’ 15, probably in June 1306, and resumption of the work in July 1310. How can this gap be explained? Our first thought is that the calligrapher was called away to another commission, but this seems unlikely, for what could have taken precedence over a demand from the “Sultan of Sultans”? Alternatively, could the first fifteen parts have been handed over to the painter? If so, what was to stop the calligrapher from continuing the manuscript to the end? The most reasonable explanation is that the calligrapher was also the illuminator and that he decided to copy out the first fifteen parts and then illuminate them, before continuing with the second fifteen. This would mean that the Qur’an would have been finished in about 1313.

The text of the Qur’an is copied out in thirty parts, each one measuring 57 x 40 cm, with five lines of script per page. It is in magnificent gold muhaqqaq, superbly proportioned, with vowels in black. Black is also used to surround each letter of the text.

The Illumination

The final pages of these volumes are not illuminated, although they often have a little decorated muhaqqaq which contains the colophon. At the beginning of each volume the


association in a certificate of commissioning is rare, and yet there is no reason to believe that the two were in any way responsible for commissioning the work.
characteristic of the work in this manuscript. In the frontispiece of Juz’ 16 almost all the fillers in the interstices link up under the main trellis. The trellis itself is composed of six-pointed star-shapes with straight and semicircular arms, separated by triangles with scalloped sides. This is a splendid example of “infinite pattern”; it has no true centre and works on various levels with an exceptionally large number of optical possibilities. The colour-scheme is simple and unobtrusive.

Perhaps the best known of these frontispieces is the one in Juz’ 25, in the British Library. It has been expertly analyzed by Lings and Safadi, and the only comment we add is that there is an interesting colour-change from one half to the other. On the right-hand page the blue hexagons are outlined in red; on the opposite page the red hexagons are outlined in blue. On each side a little extra touch has been given to the central hexagon so that it stands out slightly. There is an apparent error in the execution. On the right-hand half the border of gold strapwork is three links deep at its widest; on the opposite side it is only two links deep. This change was due to a re-calculation of the geometry, since there was an evident mistake in the initial drawing of the right-hand page which left an awkward area at top and bottom. The artist filled these with motifs that bear no relation to the rest of the pattern.

‘Ali b. Muhammad al-Ḥusaynī was an adequate but by no means outstanding painter. His repertoire was not great, as can be seen by his extensive use of simple gold strapwork, the repetition of compositions and the concentration on repeat block-pattern. Where the painter does attempt to be more adventurous, he gives the impression of lacking confidence and is quite capable of making errors. There can have been little call for sumptuously illuminated manuscripts in Mosul since its hey-day under the short-lived dynasty of Badr al-Dīn Lu’lī. Subsequently Mosul had become a provincial town, and it is quite surprising that a manuscript of the quality of this Qur’ān could still be illuminated there at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

The Relationship between Mamlûk and Il-Khânid Qur’āns
1301-16

The few studies that have dealt with Mamlûk and Il-Khânid Qur’āns from the beginning of the fourteenth century have all referred to the connections between the two. There can be no doubt that Il-Khânid illumination exerted some influence; however, the precise nature of that influence has yet to be set out in detail. It is my belief that the influence of the ʿOṯmānī Il-Khānīdī Qur’ān (Cat. 43), to be discussed in the following chapter, has been greatly exaggerated. The question of Il-Khânid influence itself is not in dispute, providing we take this to mean the influence of the Il-Khânīd centers of manuscript illumination, Baghdad and possibly Mosul. This influence, however, occurred at least two decades before the
appearance of the ʿOlayyiti Qurʾān in Cairo, as a result of the migration of Iraqi-trained craftsmen rather than of the copying in Cairo of ʿIl-Khānīd manuscripts.

In discussing the work of Muḥammad ibn Mubādīr we have noted that both his compositional structures and their details set him apart from his Cairo contemporaries. Most notable are first his use of rectangular blocks of repeat-pattern; secondly the prominence of certain geometric figures such as hexagons and octagons; thirdly the use of borders all the way round each half of a double frontispiece instead of leaving the inner sides blank; and fourthly unusual compositions. These features can, however, be paralleled in work from Iraq:

1. Although repeat block-patterns do not occur in the surviving work of Ibn Aybak, they are found extensively in ʿOlayyiti’s Mosul Qurʾān executed by ʿAlī al-Ḥusaynī. One of his compositions (Jāzʿ 16) is quite close to the frontispieces of Volumes 4 and 6 in the Baybars Qurʾān (Cat. 1) and employs star-shapes of the same type.

2. While hexagons and octagons are not common in ʿOlayyiti’s Baghdadi and Mosul Qurʾāns, they are quite common in other ʿIl-Khānīd work. There are several examples in ʿOlayyiti’s 1313 Hamādatūn Qurʾān (Cat. 45) and in the Qurʾān signed by Ibn al-Suhrawardi in the Chester Beatty Library (Cat. 37), which is dated 1301-02 and which, if genuine, must be from Baghdad.

3. The complete encircling of each half of a double frontispiece by a border is entirely characteristic of the work of Ibn Aybak, occurring in all his known works. On the other hand, there are no examples in Mamlūk Qurʾāns apart from the frontispieces illustrated by Ibn Mubādīr.

4. Among the compositions used by Ibn Mubādīr one in particular stands out. This occurs in Volume 2 and consists of a section of star-and-cross pattern which has been “exploded” and has hexagons inserted into the crosses, and a larger hexagon embedded in the centre of the composition. In the frontispiece of Jāzʿ 26 of the Anonymous Baghdad Qurʾān the central panel is so strikingly similar that it is impossible not to see a connection. While it is true that the underlying star-and-cross pattern was known in Cairo before the production of the Baybars Qurʾān, “exploding” the composition and inserting hexagons was an unusual and novel idea. None of the other manuscripts examined for this study contain it.

In view of the other links with Baghdad and Mosul manuscripts, and since so much in Ibn Mubādīr’s work seems foreign to Cairo, we are inclined to see him as an Iraqi-trained artist who had come to Cairo to work for Baybars, perhaps after a period in Syria.

Fig. 68 (Cat. 42). ʿOlayyiti’s Mosul Qurʾān, Jāzʿ 10, text-page. Sūrat LV, al-Rāmīn (The Compassionate), 78; Sūrat LVI, al-Waqāyah (The Inevitable Event), ṣūrah 1.

The script is a large majestic muhaqqaq in gold, outlined in black, with black vocalization. It is the work of ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī, who was almost certainly the illuminator. There are five lines of script to each page and the ṣūrah is marked by inscribed metal bands. There are no marginal ornaments to indicate the number of verses, and the illumination of the ʿirāq headings, although competently painted, is subdued in comparison with contemporary Baghdadi work.
This Illuminated Opening Page, Folio 1v. Surah XVII, Banı Israil (The Children of Israel), Ayat 1.

Like all other opening pages, the central panel is surrounded by gold strapwork. In the borders are pointed medallions, a favourite motif of the painter.
Fig. 73 (Cat. 73). Text-page, folio 129r. Sūrah XLIX, Al-Ḥajāj (Inner Apartments), ayāt 14–18. Sūrah LI, Qīf, ayāt 1–20, Iraq or Syria, circa 1210–20.

The presentation of the text, in large gold miḥqāq and smaller niḥr, together with some of the illumination details and the colour scheme, indicate that this is an Il-Khāniḥ manuscript. The certificate of commissioning, however, even though damaged, gives the name of a ruler entitled Nāṣir al-Dīn as-Salṭān, which rather suggests Al-Nāṣir Muhammad, the Mamlik ruler of Egypt. The frontispiece is identical to that of a Qurʾān copied in Damascus in 1167 (Reis VII, 3–4).

There are other links between Iraq and the Mamlik Sultanate. In the Chester Beatty Library is a large single-volume Qurʾān (Cat. 73). On each page there are three lines of gold miḥqāq separated by fourteen lines of niḥr. This method of presentation is unknown in Mamlik Qurʾāns, but a comparable type with six lines of niḥr framed above and below by larger sized fiṭḥāh does occur in the 1301–02 Qurʾān attributed to Ibn al-Suhrawardī (Cat. 77). Marginal ornaments are for the most part pink and blue, somewhat reminiscent of Ibn Aybak’s colour schemes, while the large double certificate of commissioning is decorated in exactly the same manner as that of ʿOljaytū’s Mosul Qurʾān. The wording of the certificate is damaged and, although it appears that the monarch who commissioned the work may have been ʿOljajūtī, it does include the phrase: “Nāṣir al-dunya wa-l-din [al-nilātik] al-Nāṣir,” which rather suggests the Mamlik Sultan al-Nāṣir Muhammad. There is a distinctive and rather unusual double frontispiece, the exact equivalent of which is found

Fig. 72 (Cat. 42). ʿOljajūtī’s Mosul Qurʾān, juzʿ 21, certificate of commissioning, folio 9r.

Each of the thirty volumes of the Qurʾān begins with an imposing certificate in the form of a miḥrāb, which declares that the Qurʾān was copied by order of ʿOljajūtī (1304–10). The Il-Khāniḥ monarch’s full genealogy is given back to Chingiz Khan (d. 1227) and his two viziers, ʿAbd al-Dīn and Rashīd al-Dīn, are mentioned. The latter is the famous scholar, statesman and author of the Jamiʿ al-Tawārīkh (World History). The destination of the manuscript is not stated and there are no contemporary endowment certificates. But the most probable destination of the completed manuscript was the Sultan’s mausoleum at Sultaniyah which was under construction at this time, 1306–11.
in a manuscript in the National Library, Cairo, which was bequeathed to Madrasah al-Hanafiyyah in Damascus by its founder Nūr al-Dīn Mahmūd ibn Zangi in 1167. The same calligrapher ‘Alī ibn Ja‘far ibn Asad ibn ‘Alī al-Kātib, copied a manuscript, now in the Keir Collection, which was also endowed by Nūr al-Dīn Mahmūd to the same madrasah in the same year, 1167.23 Cat.73 might, therefore, have been made in Syria for al-Nāşir Muhammad by an Iraqi calligrapher/painter.

The second manuscript (Cat.36) raises a whole host of questions which we cannot answer here. It is one of the "Yāqūt" Qur’ān sold by Sotheby’s in 1977, illuminated throughout with tear-drop arabesque scrolls that never occur in early fourteenth-century manuscripts of unquestionably Iraqi provenance.24 The design of the frontispiece trellis also occurs in a later Egyptian manuscript and, as far as we know, nowhere else. The gold alternating palmette border decorated with tear-drop motifs is identical to those found in the work of Sanā‘al.

We can interpret this information in various ways. The style of decoration that we associate with Sanā‘al may have originated in Baghdad at the end of the thirteenth century, but if it had, some echo of it, however slight, would appear in later Baghdadi work. But there is none, although there are examples of it in Egyptian Coptic manuscripts at the end of the thirteenth century. Cat.36, therefore, may be a Mamlūk facsimile, copied from an original, or presumed original, Yāqūt Qur’ān in Cairo and illuminated in the Mamlūk manner. If so, it is the only one we know of. The third possibility is the one that seems most likely. It was customary for a patron who could afford it to obtain a "Yāqūt" Qur’ān, or similar manuscript by one of the sīrah, and to embellish, redecorate, or, where appropriate, decorate it for the first time. Indeed, Yāqūt produced Qur’āns at the rate tradition claims, the majority must have been unadorned.25 The ex-Sotheby manuscript is probably one of those which came to Cairo in the early years of the fourteenth century, and was decorated by a member of the Sanā‘al workshop. In later times this decoration was embellished by an Ottoman painter who illuminated the margins.

The Baghdad and Mosul Qur’āns that we have examined in this chapter are, without doubt, among the great religious works of art ever produced in the Islamic world. Such manuscripts, however, were not only produced in Mongol-controlled Iraq; Qur’āns, equally magnificent, were made for the Il-Khanid elite in Iran, though, in one important instance at least, quite dramatically different in style and appearance.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Imperial Qur’āns of Iran

The production of large-format, "luxury" Qur’āns was by no means confined to Iraq. From 1300 to 1315 a number of single- and multiple-volume copies of the Qur’ān survive which can be attributed to cities in Iran. They are of two kinds. First, the "royal" Qur’āns: large-format, multiple-volume copies, beautifully written and sumptuously illuminated for the Sultan or members of his immediate circle. Secondly, single- or multiple-volume manuscripts without a patron's name. The quality of these ranges from mediocre to excellent.

In this chapter we deal with the first group. This comprises two Qur’āns, the first copied for ʻOljaytū in Ḥamadān (Cat.43), and the second for the vizīr Rashīd al-Dīn (Cat.46), almost certainly copied in the Rāb‘-i Rashīd at Tabrīz. Both are in the general tradition of the earlier Qur’āns made in Mosul and Baghdad for ʻOljaytū, though the links between them and the latter are closer than those between the Iraqi and Ḥamadān Qur’āns. The Ḥamadān manuscript is undoubtedly the best-known of all ʻIl-Khanid Qur’āns and is the last known to have been commissioned by ʻOljaytū.

The Ḥamadān Qur’ān of ʻOljaytū

The city of Ḥamadān or Ḥamadānī was one of the main centres of the province of Jihāl and lay immediately south of Sultānīyyah. It was a thriving town until the Mongol invasion in the second decade of the thirteenth century. However, by the beginning of the next century it had recovered, and Mustawfi describes it as a city some two leagues across.1 It was here that the famous Rashīd al-Dīn was born.

Although we know little about the production of manuscripts in Ḥamadān, there is a well-known Qur’ān, now in Philadelphia, whose colophon states that it was copied in Ḥamadān in the year 1164.2 The Qur’ān produced there for ʻOljaytū in the first two decades of the fourteenth century is the only one of the "royal" ʻIl-Khanid Qur’āns to have survived intact. Soon after its completion it was sent, or taken, to Cairo, where it became the property of a Mamlūk amir. Thus it survived the chaos and destruction in Iran at the final collapse of the ʻIl-Khanid, and the invasion of Timūr later in the fourteenth century. The