CHAPTER EIGHT

Qur’āns of Sultan Sha‘bān
1363-76

This chapter concentrates on the greatest era of Mamlūk Qur’ān production, the reign of Sultan Sha‘bān (1363-76). A large number of Qur’āns has survived from this time, four of which can be directly associated with the Sultan, and two with his mother. The manuscripts fall into two groups. In the first, there are three clearly related manuscripts (Cat. 28-30), with opening pages of illumination based on star polygons, and they are probably the work of the same team of artists. To this group called here the Star Polygon Group, we add Cat. 21, which was copied some ten years earlier. The second group, however, is more interesting, for they are illuminated, for the most part, in an entirely different style, and are by a known painter, Ibrāhīm al-Āmīdī (Cat. 31-33, 34-35).

The waqffiyahs give evidence that the Qur’āns were attached to two institutions, the Ashrafiyah Madrasah and the Umm al-Sultan Madrasah, also called the madrasah or Mosque of Sultan Sha‘bān, a title that has led to some confusion. According to the Khūṭaṭ of Maqrīzī, the Umm al-Sultan Madrasah was founded in 1369-70 by Khwānd Barakah near Bāb al-Zawāygh in the Khūṭaṭ al-Talbānāh on a site previously occupied by a cemetery. The building was equipped with a fountain and ablution pool, and was used by both the Ḥanāfī and Shāfī’ī madrasah. All later authorities repeat Maqrīzī’s assertion that the madrasah was founded by Khwānd Barakah, the Sultan’s mother. However, an inscription carved on an octagonal panel inside the madrasah indicates that, although the madrasah was supported by various waqffs established by Khwānd Barakah, it was built at the expense of her son, the young Sultan Sha‘bān, as a gift for her. Thanks be to God. The erection of this blessed madrasah was ordered by our Lord, the Sultan, al-Malik al-Ashraf, God make him victorious, for his mother, may God accept them both. Whosoever lays hands on this madrasah or its endowments will be reprimanded by the Prophet, Peace and Praises be upon him, at the Day of Judgement. ‘If anyone changes the bequest after hearing it, the guilt shall be on those who make the change, for God knows and hears all things.’ (Qur’ān, II, 181). Some of the Qur’āns mentioned above were no doubt commissioned by Sha‘bān and his mother, while others must have been bought, to bequeathed to the library of the madrasah. In 1368 two Qur’āns are known to have entered the madrasah. One (Cat. 22) had been completed twelve years earlier, while the other (Cat. 28) was almost certainly commissioned for the Umm al-Sultan Madrasah itself. In 1369-70 two more (Cat. 29 & 31), were endowed to the madrasah. One may wonder how these manuscripts could have been bequeathed to an institution which was not founded until 1369-70. Maqrīzī must, therefore, have meant that the madrasah was opened in the year 1369-70, but was far enough advanced structurally for the first endowment to take place in 1368. There is actually an inscription on the door of the building which states that it was completed in 1368-69. According to the Khūṭaṭ of ‘All Pāṭhā, the Ashrafiyah Madrasah was founded by Sultan Sha‘bān in 1368-69, but was demolished during the reign of al-Nāṣir Faraj (1399-1412). In 1407-8 it was ransacked by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Usṭādār, when most of its Qur’āns were taken to Jamāl al-Dīn’s new madrasah in the Bāb al-ʿId. Eventually, the Mārisīn of al-Mu‘ayyad (1412-21) was built on the site. During the raid by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Usṭādār, the Qur’āns taken were said to include copies by Yāqūt and Ibn al-Bawāh. Maqrīzī describes them in some detail saying that they were sold “for a song” by Sha‘bān’s son ‘Ali.”
The Star Polygon Group — Sultan Hasan’s Qur’an

For reasons that will become apparent the survey of this group begins with a manuscript that, strictly speaking, does not belong to it — Sultan Hasan’s Qur’an, Cat.24. This is the earliest Qur’an known to have been bequeathed to the royal madrasahs. It consists of 413 pages of black muhaqqaq. The opening and closing folios are written in gold, which is a characteristic of most of the manuscripts of the Star Polygon Group but otherwise rare among Mamlūk Qur’ans. To our knowledge, it occurs only in the Qur’an dated 1310 in the Keir Collection (Cat.12). On the final folio of Cat.24, in a curious trapezoidal frame, the colophon reads: “This Glorious Qur’an (Jami’) was written with the help of God and his care by Ya‘qūb ibn Khalīl ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Jāfari in 757 [1356].” It bears no contemporary waqfīyyah, but in view of its magnificence it must have been destined for an important mosque or madrasah established in or near the year in which the text was completed. In 1356 both the madrasah of the Emir Širghimish and the famous Mosque of Sultan Hasan were founded. This Qur’an was most probably commissioned by Sultan Hasan for his mosque. However, he died before the mosque was completed, and Sha‘bān, his successor, either inherited or purchased the manuscript for Khwānd Barakah’s foundation.

Typologically the decoration of the manuscript, particularly that of the opening pages, comes exactly mid-way between the Iran-Bastan Museum Qur’an of 1339 (Cat.20) and the manuscripts of the Star Polygon Group proper. The Iran-Bastan manuscript contains the first extant example of a classic Mamlūk frontispiece, which achieved its most perfect expression in the Argūnī Shah Qur’an (Cat.30). Other such frontispieces must have been produced between 1339 and 1356, but none has been published.

The opening pages are divided into three main areas: a large central panel, square in shape, containing a twelve-armed star-polygon barely separated from four others repeated in the corners of the square. Above and below are rectangular cartouches bearing in white thuluth, al-Waṣṭī (LVIII, 22-45), outlined in gold, over gold arabesques on blue. Around are bands of decoration culminating in a border of alternating palmettes and lotuses. The central square is exactly the same design as that in the frontispiece of Cat.28, which dates from about a decade later. The design is used by the artist of the Il-Khānid Qur’an commissioned from Hamadān c.1313 by Sultan Ōljāyti (Cat.45), where it occurs in the frontispiece of Juz’ 13. This could prove the influence of that manuscript on Cairene artists, but here it does not. The Qur’an in the Türk ve Islam Eserleri Müzesi illuminated by Aydūghī ibn ‘Abdallāh (Cat.6) uses precisely this design for the frontispiece of its text. As this was painted in Cairo c.1313, ten years or more before the Hamadān Qur’an arrived in Cairo, it clearly cannot be used as evidence for Il-Khānid influence, if Mamlūk painters knew and employed the design so much earlier.

The centre-piece of the central twelve-armed star-polygon in the central square is rather unusual, in that it is not a net- or fret-type, as preferred by later painters, but a vegetal one—a wreath with leaves projecting into the points of the polygon. This is rare, and it is never used by the Sandal artists, who always prefer a palmette or arabesque, and is quite unknown in Iranian or Iraqi work, though it does occur in Cat.8, dated 1314. The fret-type or linked palmettes are found in Qur’ans of the Sha‘bān period.

Within the body of the text the sūrah headings consist of simple panels with the title and verse-count in fine large white thuluth, with a medallion bearing a lotus at one end. The baṣmalah and the first line of text are written in gold outlined in black, which is a novel feature, and found elsewhere. Each page is surrounded by a blue and gold border which encompasses the entire text. This is quite common in Il-Khānid, but rare among Mamlūk manuscripts.

A final point of interest in Cat.24 is that on the opening pages of text, the sūrah al-Fāṭīhah and al-Baqarah are written over red lotus flowers on a red hatched ground. This use of lotuses for the background of the opening verses does not appear in Mamlūk Qur’ans before this date. It does, however, occur in the Il-Khānid Qur’an copied by Mubārak–Shāh ibn ‘Abdallāh, which was in Cairo at this time, having been bequeathed to the Mosque of Širghimish in 1356 (Cat.72).

The Waqfīyyah

The waqfīyyah, which is not contemporary, but twelve years younger than the manuscript, is elegantly and legibly written on the first page. It has been produced with considerable care, and resembles more a certificate of commissioning than a waqfīyyah. It seems to have been the work of a professional calligrapher rather than of a religious dignitary charged with drawing up the document. It reads: “This is an endowment of our Lord, the high estate, the noble, the high, the lordly, the Sultan, the insām, the learned, the holy warrior, the mursālī, lord of the marches, the fortified, the chief, the possessor, the royal, the most noble, the victorious, Nāṣir al-dīn wa-l-dīn Sultan of Islam and the Muslims, destroyer of the unbelievers and the polytheists, shelter of the oppressed from the oppressors,
conqueror of the deviants and atheists, Abūl-Muẓaffar Sha'bān, may God prolong his kingdom and sultanate and bestow on his subjects all his justice and bounty and grant him victory every day and give him dominion over the earth on land and sea, son of our Lord, the noble abode, al-Jamālī, Husayn, son of our Lord the Sultan, the happy, the martyr (ṣahīḥ), the monarch, al-Nāṣir Muhammad, son of our Lord the Sultan, the happy, the martyr, the monarch al-Maṣṣūr Qālī, may God grant them His mercy, this Holy Qurʾān, as a legal endowment, that Muslims may benefit from it, by reading it and in all other legal ways. It is decreed that it be kept in the madrasah on the outskirts of Cairo, in the Khaṭt al-Tabbānāh, and should not be removed from the aforementioned place, except in return for a pledge equal to its value. The endower will be responsible for it all the days of his life and after his death it will be the responsibility of whoever administers the endowment. 3 Dhī ʿAl-Ḥijjah 1369 [Monday 13 June 1369].” Thus, the manuscript was left by the Sultan, not to his own foundation but to that of his mother. Although she is not mentioned in the inscription, the madrasah in the Khaṭt al-Tabbānāh must be hers.

The text is interesting in that, unlike many other waqfyyāhs, it permits the Qurʾān to be removed from its place on payment of a bond. Normally Qurʾāns could not be removed—this is plainly stated by earlier Mamlūk waqfyyāhs. In some madrasahs and khānqāhs rules were strict, debarring the careless from consulting the volumes, and recording the names of all readers, although it was possible for books to be removed from the library on payment of a sum double their value, and indeed, in some khānqāhs dervishes were permitted to take books to their cells for consultation without payment.11 To permit this manuscript’s removal from the madrasah was rather unusual. On the other hand, its value would have been considerable, for a fine Qurʾān at the beginning of the century would have been worth about 1,600 dinars, and so this stipulation of a bond may have been only a different way of ensuring that the Qurʾān was not removed.

**Star Polygon Qurʾāns**

The Waqfyyāhs

Associated with Sultan Ḥasan’s Qurʾān (Cat.24) are three others (Cat.28-30). The earliest of this group is probably Cat.28, bequeathed to the Umm al-Sultan Madrasah at the same time as Cat.24. It was presented not by Shaʿbān but by his mother, as can be seen from the waqfyyāh: “The high abode, the protected, the veiled, Khwānd Barakah, mother of the noble estate, the greatest, the Sultan, al-Malik al-Ashraf Abūl-Muẓaffar Shaʿbān, God make his kingdom eternal, and protect her person, has presented this Noble Book as a true legal endowment that all Muslims may benefit by reading it and other legal uses. She has declared that the place of this shall be the madrasah, which is known as her foundation and building on the outskirts of Cairo in the Khaṭt al-Tabbānāh. She has declared that it should not be removed from this place except on payment of a sum equal to its value. She will be responsible for it all the days of her life, and after her death the responsibility will devolve on whomever she appoints to administer the endowment. 3 Dhī ʿAl-Ḥijjah 1369 [13 June 1369].” This Qurʾān is not dated, so it is not known what period separates the completion of the work and the act of endowment. But the chances are that this Qurʾān and Cat.29 and 30 were made sometime between Shaʿbān’s accession and the date of the endowment.

Of the other two manuscripts, one (Cat.29) bears a waqfyyāh dated about a year later, and the other has a partly obliterated inscription mentioning Arghūn Shāh al-Ashraf (Cat.30). It is probable that, despite the fact that all three Qurʾāns were commissioned by different patrons, they come from the same source, although it is not possible to tell the order in which these manuscripts were produced.12 These three manuscripts mark the high-point of a tradition in Qurʾān production that goes back to the 1330s, and probably earlier, although the first extant example of the style is the Iran-Bāstān Museum Qurʾān of 1339 (Cat.20).

Arghūn Shāh al-Ashraf’s manuscript (Cat.30) is perhaps the best known of all the Qurʾāns of the Shaʿbān period. A Mamlūk amir, Arghūn’s name occurs in a rather odd, half-obliterated inscription at the front of the manuscript: “…Arghūn Shāh al-Malik al-Ashraf, may God make him victorious and grant him his hopes and desires in the worlds
(has bequeathed) all of this Holy Qur'ān for all Muslims, that they might benefit from it in reading, copying and other ways. Although the inscription mentions no institution, this is undoubtedly waqfiyyah, since the word waqfa can be clearly seen at the beginning of the inscription, even though a determined effort has been made to erase it. Unless the name of the institution is contained in the erased lines, which is unlikely, we must assume that the inscription is unfinished.

Arghūn Shāh was a relatively common name, but the addition of “al-Ashraf” indicates that he was a Mamlūk of a Sultan bearing the throne name al-Ashraf, which can relate only to Kūjuk (1341–42) or Sha’bān. Both Ibn Taghribirdi in Manhal al-Sīfī, and al-Ṣafādī in his huge Waqā’ fi-Waḥīfiyyah give the biography of an Arghūn Shāh al-Ashraf, an amir of Sultan Sha’bān who died in 1376. According to Taghribirdi,23 Arghūn Shāh ibn Al-Kāshī al-Ashraf, the Amir Sayf al-Dīn, was one of the commanders of a thousand in Egypt, at the time of his master’s reign, al-Ashraf Sha’bān ibn Husayn. He was an intimate of his lord, to the extent that he undertook the Hāj with al-Ashraf in the year 778 [1376] when what will be related in his biographical entry occurred, and he returned to Cairo. Arghūn came back with him and the other amirs who returned to Cairo. Then al-Ashraf concealed himself and hid from his amirs, and Arghūn did likewise until he was caught and put to death in the year 788 [1376] at Qubbat al-Naṣr outside Cairo. 24

There can be little doubt that it was this Arghūn Shāh for whom the Qur’ān was written. The only mystery is the identity of the institution for which it was intended, since there are no records of this amir building a mosque or madrasah to which it might have been bequeathed.

The Calligraphy

It is surprising to find no calligrapher’s signature considering the exceptionally high quality of script and illumination in these manuscripts. All manuscripts use a large black muhāqaq, eleven lines to the page, with the text surrounded by a blue and gold border. The script of the sûrah al-Fatihah and al-Baqarah is in gold outlined in black. The same script is used for the final two sûrah in Cat. 29 and 30, though not in Cat. 28, where it is in black. The script of Cat. 29 and 30 are virtually identical, being almost classic muhāqaq. In Cat. 28, however, the height of the alif is somewhat less than that on the opening pages of the other two manuscripts. In the main body of the text dots are used under certain letters, such as sīn, though this practice, a common one in Mamlūk manuscripts, is not followed in Cat. 29 and 30. The differences between the scripts are sufficient to exclude the possibility of one man having produced all three manuscripts, and it is probable, therefore, that two calligraphers were concerned.

The custom of beginning a Qur’ān with gold script outlined in black (tashkīl) is one that, from the 1360s we associate with Mamlūk Qur’āns. But there are only two known earlier examples: the Cairo manuscript of 1366 (Cat. 24), and Cat. 12 dated 1330. Furthermore, the large muhāqaq jāli script used for the body of the text in these manuscripts and in Cat. 24 is quite rare before the 1350s, as we saw in Chapter Six. Pages are outlined in the main text by a blue and gold line, a common enough practice among Il-Khanid and later Iranian manuscripts but rare in Mamlūk ones.

The Illumination

The sûrah headings are rectangular in all cases, with the rectangles divided into compartments which are always interlocking and consist of regular or irregular geometric shapes. They bear the titles and verse-counts usually in white thulūth, but very occasionally in kufic. At the end of each heading is a circular medallion attached by thin blue lines to the outer margin and decorated with lotuses and chinoiserie. Khamsah is in gold kufic over gold scrolls in a red circle, surrounded by a gold border with red and gold dots. At the top is a pine-cone point slightly reminiscent of those in the Şandal manuscripts. The whole is surrounded by a blue line with stunted “fingers” that occur first in the Iran-Bastan manuscript of 1330 (Cat. 20). ‘Asharah is a gold rosette in a gold border with a chinoiserie exterior and is a type not noted elsewhere.

The frontispieces are perhaps the finest Mamlūk work in the traditional manner. Each consists of a square geometric trellis with surrounding chinoiserie border, inscriptions in cartouches above and below and a palmette/lotus border. In each case the trellis originates in a central star-polygon, twelve-armed in Cat. 28, sixteen-armed in Cat. 30 and 29. As we have seen, the design of the first is identical to that of Sultan Hājan’s Qur’ān (Cat. 24), and this can be traced back in Mamlūk Qur’āns to 1313, and is therefore not evidence of the influence of the Ūljaytū Qur’ān, though it exists there too. The sixteen-armed polygons result in trellises which are not in fact the same; however, both are “closed” in the sense that the pattern, unlike that of the 1313 Qur’ān, does not expand beyond the confines of the frame because no part is repeated in the four corners. In this the patterns resemble the design on the opening illuminated pages of the Iran-Bastan manuscript of 1330, where the corners are “sealed” by lotuses. 135 There is no exact model in earlier Iranian or Iraqi work for the trellis design of Cat. 29 and 30. The sixteen-armed polygon is itself rare, occurring only in the Musul Qur’ān of ‘Ali ibn Muḥammad al-Ḫusayn al-Ālāwī, completed between 1307 and 1311 for Ūljaytū (Cat. 42), and there in a composition quite different from these. The only parallel polygon is in a twelve-armed one in the Ḥamādān Qur’ān in Ajzā’ 6, 8, 13, and 28 (Cat. 45), where the patterns are closed rather than expanding. In short, there is not much evidence in these manuscripts for the influence of the design on the central trellis from the Ūljaytū Qur’ān of 1313–14.

The fillers of Cat. 28 consist of large oval palmettes in the polygon arms, whirling šamsah in the octagons, and ordinary palmettes in the four half-hexagons. They are similar to those of Cat. 24, but this earlier manuscript has lotus flowers in the areas between the hexagons, whereas Cat. 28 has palmettes; however, apart from this the decoration is comparable. The main difference between the two lies in the use of colour.

All the centre-pieces are different. Those of Cat. 28 and 29 are made up of linked
are shown in Chinese art, from which the Mamluk examples ultimately derive. The ordinary peony, *Paeonia albiflora*, which has frilled petals and narrow straight leaves; and the Moutan or Tree Peony, *Paeonia suffruticosa*, which bears leaves, three to a stem, which are larger, and jagged. It is the latter, the “King of Flowers”, which appears in Mamluk art; and although the flowers are stylized the leaves bear more resemblance to those of the second type. The only other plant, something resembling the *zagitata*, an aquatic three-pronged plant, is found in Cat. 28. This is always depicted in Chinese art in association with the lotus. This type of decoration occurs in Mamluk decoration for the first time in the *kursi* of al-Nāṣir Muhammad, dated 1328, and the earliest example in Qur’āns appears in the Iran-Bastan manuscript of 1339 (Cat. 20). In all three manuscripts of the Star Polygon Group, *chinoiserie* motifs occupy the penultimate outer border, as well as the central panel of Cat. 28 and 30. Three types of lotus flower occur in the manuscripts, and either the swollen seed pod is used or the open blossom. These are painted white, blue and white, green or green and white. They are the first examples of lotus blossoms coloured in this manner on a large scale. The Iran-Bastan Qur’ān (Cat. 20) employs only one lotus at the corner of each half of the frontispiece, together with three types of rosette which might be open lotus blossoms shown from above, but should rather be seen as stylized peony flowers.

Inscription panels at the top and bottom of each page resemble those of the *sirah* headings, though with the exception of those in Cat. 30 they are not nearly so complex. They consist of two- or three-lobed cartouches on a single multi-lobed cartouche. All of the types occur among the *sirah* headings. They bear an unusual and distinctive form of *kufic*. There are few Mamluk forms which are as Baroque and idiosyncratic as these examples, though all of the *kufic* scripts in the manuscripts examined have their individual features, particularly since it was one of the areas where artists felt free to introduce their personal styles. Nothing as elaborate as this appears in later Bāḥrī Mamluk work, and that of Ibrāhīm al-Qādiri appears quite “classic” by comparison.

The *kufic* inscriptions in all three Qur’āns are the same: al-Sha’bān. (XXVI, 192–7). This is a fairly popular *sirah* with illuminators, but by no means common in the fourteenth century. It is interesting to recall that Sandal and his associates, the first identifiable group of Mamluk illuminators, used verses on the opening illuminated pages of Cat. 1 which were not those commonly chosen, and that, as several manuscripts demonstrate, they often preferred *Fusūlat* (XLI, 41–2). This may suggest that particular āyat had a special meaning in certain groups or studios, but whether as “ trademarks” or for more complex reasons we cannot say.

One of the Star Polygon Group (Cat. 29) has an additional bank of inscriptions in place of the central *chinoiserie* border. It is contained in eight oval cartouches alternating with large peonies. The cartouches contain *Fāṭīr*, XXXV, 29–80, on the right-hand page and 31–32 on the left. The verses go in an anti-clockwise direction, beginning at the bottom left, but do not continue all the way round, since the lines at the bottom would have to have been written upside down, and for aesthetic, and probably religious reasons, this was not done. This was probably something of an innovation, since the number of Mamluk and
Fig. 130 (Cat. 30). Opening illuminated text-page, folio 3r. The text is a fine gold muqattat. The scribe did not sign the manuscript, but was probably the same person as the scribe of Fig. 133 (Cat. 29).

Iranian or Iraqi Qur'ans which introduce such lengthy quotations as Ayat al-Kursi is extremely small. There is an instance of the use of Ayat al-Kursi on the frontispiece of a Qur'an supposedly by Yahyâ al-Šufî (Cat.63), while another, perhaps Syrian, incorporates the entire Sūrat al-Nâs (Cat.75). No other examples appear to have survived.

A simplified type of strapwork in which knots alternate with squares, which was first used in the 1330s, appears on the opening pages of all three manuscripts. One (Cat.29) stands somewhat apart from the others as strapwork is not used on its opening page of illumination. Instead, a chain of gold blossoms enlivened with green, on a gold ground, encircles the three main panels.

The fact that all three manuscripts of the Star Polygon Group make use of the same type of strapwork is of some importance. Although virtuoso pieces were often produced, as in the Baybars Qur'an (Cat.1), strapwork was a complicated, time-consuming business, which is presumably why simplified strapwork with squares was introduced.

Fig. 131 (Cat. 24). Right-hand frontispiece, folio 1v, Cairo, 1356. The earliest example of a Cairo Qur'an in the "classic" tradition which seems to have originated in Damascus, Fig. 98. The central star polygon pattern is identical to that used in an earlier Mamlûk manuscript of 1313 (Cat. 6), but with more tightly-controlled decoration in the interstices of the trellis. Earlier artists placed loose arabesque scrolls in the central star. Here we have a wreath with leaves projecting into each point. Much of the decoration is rich gold chinoiserie on gold, which is found in the Damascus Qur'an of 1339 (Fig. 96). Only in the outer borders do red, green and black occur.
Fig. 132 (Cat. 29). One half of a double frontispiece, folio 2r, Cairo, circa 1367–9.
This Qur’ān, together with the other members of this Star Polygon group (Cat. 29, 30), constitute some of the finest illuminated copies of the sacred text ever produced. They are the culmination of a tradition going back to the 1330s, but it would be equally correct to regard them as the culmination of a process begun centuries before. Like many of the outstanding religious Medieval European religious works of art, these Qur’āns are neither signed nor dated. All were made for Sultan Shāhīn, (1361–96), his mother, or officials of his realm.

Fig. 133 (Cat. 29). Illuminated page, folio 3r. Sūrah II Al-Baqara (The Cow), āyāt 1–5.
The script is a gold masbahaqālī. The opening pages of all manuscripts in the Star Polygon group are illuminated in the same manner. All undoubtedly came from the same workshop patronized by the court, and perhaps even located there.

Fig. 134 (Cat. 28). Right-hand frontispiece, folio 1v, Cairo, circa 1366–8.
The design of the central geometric panel is identical to that of Fig. 131. The fillers used in the interstices—such as oval palmettes and whirling shamsāhs etc.—are also similar. In the borders polychrome kimisāyītī abounds. The flat inscriptions are the standard ones, Sūrah LVI, al-Waqā’ah, 77–8, but the script is highly idiosyncratic.
Fig. 135 (Cat. 30). Opening illuminated pages of text, folios 27–30. Magnificent black mawqif calligraphy outlined in gold, approximately twice the size of the script in the remainder of the text. The scribe is 'Abd ibn Muhammad al-Ashraf. The text is written over a wave-diaper pattern and decorated with cicada-shapes and composite blossoms which otherwise occur only in the Qur'ān copied in Cairo in 1344, Fig. 102. In contrast to the rest of the pages, the kufic inscriptions are quite sober and traditional.
لا تتهاو في هذة الصحراء
من يحل الوسطANCE
وعلى الغضوب عليه ولا الصالح
من الله العلماء فلا يزال
لا يعيب
The method of producing strapwork was to make series of dots and join them up to give the effect of interlacing. Evidence suggests that strapwork was an area where a certain amount of standardization was maintained in the studios in order to speed up the process of illumination. Besides this group of manuscripts in the period of Sha'bân, there is the work of Şandal, Ayduhî and Ahmad al-Mutanabbi, which ranges from 1304 to 1334, in which a simple double knot is used for strapwork bands.

In the circular marginal medallions there is much less room for manoeuvre and all three examples follow the same pattern, that is, one of gold arabesques around a lotus bud. The medallions in Cat. 29 are perhaps the most adventurous, with parts of the arabesque scroll-work picked out in red.

The details of illumination in the three main Qur'ans studied here indicate that, although they are not the work of a single individual, they are produced by painters and calligraphers who were almost certainly working together. Quite possibly some of the manuscripts, such as Cat. 29 and 30, were being worked on at the same time. The atelier was somewhere in Cairo, and the members did not work exclusively for the Sultan and his mother. Two calligraphers were probably involved, one producing Cat. 28 and the other Cat. 29 and 30. There are enough links between Cat. 24 and some of the later manuscripts to make us believe that one of the artists of these later works may have been the painter of Sultan Hasan's 1356 Qur'an. This would account for a certain continuity of style. It may also partly explain how that manuscript came into the hands of Sultan Sha'bân.

The Qur'ans of Ibrāhîm al-Āmidi

The second group of Qur'ans consists of manuscripts illuminated by Ibrāhîm al-Āmidi (Cats. 31–32, 34–35). The illumination is novel in comparison with what had gone before in Egypt, and belongs to an entirely different tradition of painting. Two Qur’ans in the National Library, Cairo (Cats. 31 & 32) can be shown, on stylistic grounds, to be the work of Ibrāhîm al-Āmidi. We suggest, was responsible for a series of manuscripts, several of which have not previously been attributed to him. First we examine his single signed work.

Fig. 138 (Cat. 71). Pars Museum, Shiraz 417. Three details of illumination. On the richly illuminated opening page of Juz'13, folio 19, there is a large multi-lobed medallion which contains an endowment certificate in the name of Turan-Shâb Muraflîd, vizir of Shiraz, dated 1375–76. This obscures an earlier inscription. The manuscript was probably made in Shiraz, although its vivid colouring and the quality of its execution are superior to those of earlier Shirazi Qur'ans, such as Cat. 69 which was copied in 1344–46.
The signed manuscript in Cairo was completed by the calligrapher on the 12 July 1372, as we can see from its particularly imposing colophon, which occurs directly opposite Surat al-Nâs. **This Noble Qur’ân (mukarram)** was completed on the 15 of Muḥarram 774 [12 July 1372] at the hands of the poorest of God’s creatures and most in need of forgiveness, ‘Alî ibn Muhammad al-Muktiq al-Ashraf, thanking God for His blessing and purity and praying for the Prophet and his Companions. **This copyist was a superb practitioner of the art of calligraphy. His name al-muktiq, sometimes written al-mukattah, can be interpreted as “teacher of writing”, while al-Ashraf means he was a mamluk or servant of the Sultan al-Ashraf Sha‘bân.**

The Waqfiyyah

On the opening page we find a magnificent waqfiyyah written in qir‘a in a pink multi-lobed medallion on a ground covered with arabesques and cica-da-shapes. **Our lord, the highest abode, the Sultan, the possessor, the royal, al-Ashraf Abūl-Muẓaffar Sha‘bân ibn Ǧusayn, son of the martyrs, the late, our lord, the Sultan, the royal, al-Nâṣir Muhammad, son of our lord, the royal, al-Muṣṭafir Qalī‘ūn al-Šalāhī, may God reward them both with His mercy, has bequeathed all this Noble Qur’ân as a legal true bequest to find favour with his Lord and has declared that its location and place of reading should be in the Ashrafiyah Khānqâh-Madarasah-Mosque, known as the foundation of the noble abode, opposite to the Maṣṣṣāh Citadel in Cairo. He declared that he will be responsible for it all the days of his life, then after him it will be entrusted to the person responsible for the affairs of the Khānqâh, Muḥarram 778 [May-June 1370].** The manuscript was thus bequeathed to the Ashrafiyah foundation. The terms of endowment are more usual for Qur’âns of this type than are the terms of the manuscripts left to the Umm al-Sultan Madarasah, making no mention of conditions under which Qur’âns may be removed. The waqfiyyah is dated some four years after the completion of the text. This may seem a long time, but we should bear in mind that the former date refers only to the completion of the text, and that the illumination must have taken considerably longer. Indeed, the waqfiyyah is clearly the work of the illuminator, since it is identical in script decoration to the illuminator’s colophon on the final folio. It is rare to find a colophon so prominently displayed in Mamluk Qur’âns, whose illuminators were usually anonymous. The colophon contains a list of purely fanciful information regarding the text of the Qur’ân. **The number of ayât in the Enduring Book is 6,666 of which 1,000 are commands, 1,000 denials, 1,000 promises, 1,000 narratives and 1,000 proverbs. 500 tell what is permitted and what is forbidden, 100 are prayers and supplications, and 60 are abrogating and abrogated.** The Prophet said: ‘Whoever honours a learned man, it is as if he honours seventy Prophets’. The illumination of this Noble Qur’ân was completed at the bands of God’s weakest slave, Ibrāhīm al-Āmidī, may God forgive him...”

The Text Pages

Each page is surrounded by a border which consists of an elongated “S” shape with a loop at each end. The strap or ribbon-work is unpainted but the loops are red. There is no evidence for this type of work in great quantity before the Sha‘bân period, and we may consider it a part of the illuminator’s repertoire only from this time. Sūrah headings for the most part have large vertical panels at each end, and these give the numbers of the ayāt and the number of letters in each sūrah. To arrange this there must have been agreement between calligrapher and illuminator so that the final words of each sūrah would be copied leaving a space at the sides. The titles are always in simple white kufic over gold arabesque fragments on orange-red, occasionally dark blue, grounds. Surrounding borders are of plain or gold strapwork after the fashion of the page border.

The opening pages bear the text of al-Fīriqab alone in superb black mushaqqaq jalī outlined in gold, three lines to the page. The script is much larger than that in the body of the text, and the alif here is approximately twice as big as on the normal page. In the Star Polygon Group manuscripts there is a difference in size between the opening text and the remainder, but not to this extent. Moreover, this appears to be one of the earliest examples of the opening chapter alone occupying the two pages. The text is written on a wave-diaper
ground with a treble-dot motif at the centre of each wave. This pattern which is of Chinese origin, came to Egypt via Il-Khanid Iran. While it is common in Iran (one of the earliest examples in the fourteenth century being that in Cat.43, which was copied in Baghdad in 1311), it took a long time to appear in Mamluk Qur’āns. Its first recorded appearance is in the manuscript signed by Mubarak Shâh al-Suyûti in Cairo in 1344 (Cat.67). The next recorded example is the work of al-Āmidī some thirty years later. The same is true of the cicaea-shapes and composite blossoms with which this page is liberally sprinkled.

The exotic Chinese cloud-scrolls which are so prominent on these pages exist in no previous Mamluk Qur’ān, though they do occur in at least one later example: the final page of the manuscript divided between the Chester Beatty Library and the John Rylands Library, Manchester. The exact route by which these scrolls reached Mamluk illumination is unknown. They do not occur in any extant Iranian or Iraqī Qur’āns of the fourteenth century, and the cloud scroll, probably because of its extreme irregularity, is not found elsewhere in Mamluk art, though we might have expected it to find its place.

The kufic script in the upper and lower panels conforms more closely to the classic type, although as in all examples of decorative kufic it has its individual peculiarities. Among these the most distinctive is the addition of pieces of pseudo-kufic at the beginnings of lines and above them. This is not a Mamluk characteristic, but does occur in several Iranian Qur’āns, such as Cat.62, dated 1337, Cat.61, dated 1338, and Cat.63, dated 1339. The text of the final pages is in a pronounced muhaqaq with three dots above the long alif. Around the text in a grisaille technique are cicaea shapes and composite blossoms together with cloud scrolls. All this is over a cross-hatched ground with red dots. The decoration of the ground is not found in previous Mamluk work, with the interesting exception of a thirty-part Qur’ān (Cat.35). But it is found much earlier in the 1307-13 Baghdad Qur’ān (Cat.40) and the Türk ve Iran Eserleri Müzesi Qur’ān dated 1320 (Cat.49), which was perhaps also produced in Baghdad.

The Illumination

This examination of the text pages suggests that we are dealing with an artist of some originality, who was familiar with other traditions, unlike the painters of the Star Polygon Group. The opening pages of illumination confirm this impression.

The trellis is composed of decagons, each of which encloses a pentagon. This is unusual, as the deployment of irregular geometric figures makes almost impossible the unity of design which we would normally expect in Islamic pattern. Furthermore, in trellis designs the interior is practically always linked physically to the outer frame. Here, many elements are independent and free-standing.

The pentagons at the corners of the decagons on both pages are not aligned according to any discernible system, neither in the total double page composition, nor in its constituent parts. The axes differ, so that on the right-hand page the axis of the central and lower left pentagon is not the same as the others, and on the opposite page the lower right pentagon is out of axial alignment with the other four. Examination of the compositional structure will reveal many other examples of distortion and alteration. The result is that, although the two pages have the superficial appearance of a piece of Islamic "infinite" pattern, it is the exact opposite—yet cleverly disguised. One of the basic tenets of Islamic pattern is the idea that it mirrors somehow a greater whole: that it is only a section of an infinite pattern and can be extended accordingly. Numerous metaphysical ideas are believed to be involved in this form of pattern, whether or not they are present to the artist's conscious mind. The pattern of Cat.32 is not a pattern but a composition inspired by Islamic geometry, to which only the artist holds the key.

A detailed examination of all known earlier Mamluk frontispieces confirms that the geometric design of the al-Āmidī frontispiece is quite unlike anything produced by Mamluk artists. But it is possible to find examples of manuscript illumination in which the same principles appear to be involved. For example, in the frontispiece to Jaz' 18 in the Hamadan Qur’ān of 1311-14 (Cat.45), the diverging axial element occurs in the fan-tailed shapes which are aligned according to no apparent plan. Similarly, in the opening illuminated pages of Jaz' 16 in the same manuscript, the design consists of free-moving circles which overlap but are not directly linked to the frame, resembling the 1372 al-Āmidī composition (Cat.32), though the latter is more complex. There is, however, no reason to think of any direct links between the Hamadan manuscript and the later Mamluk one. Everything about the Hamadan manuscript in terms of colour and design is radically different from the 1372 Qur’ān.

The colours of the artist's palette in this opening composition range widely: dark blue, gold, black, white, chocolate, light blue, green, orange, red and pink. The palette of the Star Polygon Group artists is much more restricted, perhaps deliberately so. We do not find in that group the delicate juxtaposition of vivid primary colours on a black ground to heighten their intensity. To find parallels to this use of vivid colour in Qur’ān illumination we must look outside the Mamluk realm to Iran, to a Qur’ān produced in Shiraz in the mid-1370s (Cat.72), to which we shall return shortly. We can trace this back through the work of Muhammad ibn Saff al-Din al-Nasqish in Baghdad in the 1330s and 1340s, to that of the master-painter Muhammad ibn Ayyub early in the fourteenth century, also working in Baghdad. Such colour schemes and their use in Qur’āns appear to be an Iranian/Iraqi phenomenon.

Colour reversal is another practice more common in Eastern manuscripts, as we can see from the portion of the Qur’ān copied in Mosul for Oljaiyit and now in the British Library (Cat.42). Colour change from one half of the double-page composition to the other is quite systematic. In the Mamluk Qur’āns of the Star Polygon Group, on the other hand, colour change occurs only in a very limited way—in the frontispiece of Cat.30 for example—and is not systematic. In fact, it is more likely to be due to inability to obtain some colour than to any aesthetic principle. In the al-Āmidī composition, on the other hand, we find the red, blue and pink of the decorative floral details carefully reversed from one page to the other.
The Career of İbrâhîm al- Âmidî

İbrâhîm al-Âmidî is undoubtedly the most original and interesting illuminator of the Sha'bân period, although he stands apart from the mainstream of Qur'ân illuminators. What do we actually know about him? We know for a fact that he worked in Cairo for a number of years before 1376, when he finished illuminating the Qur'an commissioned by Sha'bân for his Ashrafîyyah Madrasah (Cat.32). His style of illumination contains many new and unusual features, and to receive a commission from the Sultan must have meant that he was considered a painter of the top-rank. This presupposes that he had been in Cairo long enough for his work to have become known. We intend to show that he was there before 1359.

The second point we know about him is his name. The fact that we have merely his given name and nisbah strongly suggests that this is how he was known to his contemporaries, İbrâhîm "of Âmid", rather than İbrâhîm "the Painter", or İbrâhîm "son of Muhammad". This supposition, and the fact that his style of painting is so different from that of his contemporaries who produced the Star Polygon Group, suggest that he came to Cairo from Âmid after being trained as an illuminator elsewhere, and within a relatively short time was so highly esteemed that he was commissioned to work for the Sultan and other Mamûlîk amirs.

It was by no means uncommon for people from Syria, Anatolia and Iran to live in Cairo at this time. The biographical dictionaries of al-Šâfâî, Ibn Hajar and Ibn Taghribirdî contain many nisahh and biographies of men from even further afield. Copious literary evidence of the presence of Iranians working on architectural decoration makes it likely that artists from further east found work in Cairo too. A Qur'an dated 1366-61, in the National Library, Cairo (Cat.25), is copied by someone whose nisbah is given as al-Nakhschivânî, from Nakshchivan, in north-western Iran. So it would not be surprising to find someone from Âmid, a city much nearer than Nakshchivan, and within the Mamûlîk political orbit, working in Cairo for a Mamûlîk patron.

The city of Âmid lay in the province of al-Jazîrâ, on the upper reaches of the Tigris west of Lake Van.26 Âmid was the capital of the area known as Diyarbekir, and this name eventually came to be used for Âmid itself, as it is still today. Âmid and the surrounding area were controlled by the Artuqids in the twelfth century, descendants of a Turkoman officer in the Seljuk army.27 At the end of the twelfth century Saihâ al-Din established Ayyûbîd authority in Diyarbekir and from that time onwards the area was subject to one or other of the neighbouring powers. Only Mârûn remained under the direct control of Artuqid rulers, who managed to survive there until the end of the fourteenth century. They appear to have acted as loyal servants of the Il-Khanîds who controlled the area, and thus regained control of Âmid and Mayyâfîrîqîn. After the fall of the Il-Khanîds in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, the Artuqids, Turkomans, Mamûlîks and the petty Ayyûbîd dynasty of Hûn Kayfî wrestled for control of Diyarbekir. Eventually it came under the control of the Aq Qoyunlu Turkomans, who were given it as a reward for their support by Timûr.28

We are aware of no fourteenth-century Qur'âns from Diyarbekir, and so it is difficult to establish what traditions of manuscript illumination and calligraphy may have existed there. A script with talent as an illuminator would have tended to make his way West, to one of the Anatolian Beyliks, or South to Iraq or Western Iran. If al-Âmidî did undertake such a journey it must have been in the 1350s. A short digression is required to try to establish the traditions al-Âmidî may have brought from his homeland.

We know little about manuscript production and illumination in Anatolia in the mid-fourteenth century. It was a time of chaos as the Beyliks were gradually taken over by the Ottomans. However, in the Mevîlîîîa museum in Konya there are a number of Qur'âns and other manuscripts dating from before 1370 which give us some idea of Qur'anic calligraphy and illumination at this time. They consist of an outstanding copy of the Mevîlîîîa dated 1279-80,29 a Qur'an written for a Qaramânîd prince Khalîl ibn Muhîd ibn Qaramân in the city of Konya in 1314-15 by İsmâ'îl ibn Yûsuf and illuminated30 by Ya'qûb ibn Ǧihâd al-Qûnawî;31 a Qur'an copied in 1326-27 by İsâ al-Dîn al-Khaṭîbî al-Sârî;32 and a copy of the Mevîlîîîa of 1359, both of the latter probably being copied in Konya.
Along with such earlier work as has survived, they show us that there was a thriving tradition of illumination and calligraphy in central Anatolia around Konya, the Mevlevi metropolis. If we examine this tradition, and other Anatolian manuscripts from the end of the thirteenth century, we can see some parallels with the work of Ibrāhīm al-Āmīdī. In the 1279-80 Mesnevi we notice many of the characteristics of al-Āmīdī’s compositions: innovation, fine quality, unusual colours, a wide repertoire of motifs, and certain similarities in composition.35

The other area where al-Āmīdī could have worked is Baghdad and western Iran, controlled by the Jalāyirids, the Ḥūjarids, and later the Muẓaffarids. We have noted that the vivid colours and Chinese-inspired decorative detail were characteristic of both the great Baghdad master Muḥammad ibn Aybak, and Ibrāhīm al-Āmīdī. Unfortunately, we cannot tell how Ibn Aybak’s work influenced later manuscript illuminators in and around Baghdad. All we can say is that some features of his style appear in a muted form, in the Qur’āns illuminated by Muḥammad ibn Sayf al-Dīn al-Naqqāsh. But in the Pars Museum in Shīrāz I came across several hitherto unknown ajzā’ from an Qur’ān which appears to be a direct successor to the tradition of Ibn Aybak. These ajzā’ 1, 12 and 13, bear an almost obliterated waqfyyah, which gives enough text to enable us to establish that it was bequeathed by Tūrān-Shāh, the vizir of Shāh Shuja’ (1357-84), Muẓaffarid ruler of Shīrāz, to the Jāmī’ al-ʿAṭiq in that city, in the year 1375-76 (Cat.71).36 We cannot be certain that the manuscript dates from this time, as the waqfyyah may have been written over an earlier one. But assuming that it is original, and that the manuscript was illustrated in Shīrāz, it is of great interest because parts of it are very close to the work of al-Āmīdī. This is perhaps most noticeable in some of the khamshah and ṣahrār signs where the same vivid colour combinations appear, together with the bent-petal motif in compositions that have some of the al-Āmīdī extravagance about them. Floral arabesques have the same highly articulated detail along with the combination of black, white and brighter primary colours. We also see the border made up of "S" shape and loops, though here there are two loops, not one as in the Cairo manuscript. With such slender clues, all we can say is that al-Āmīdī was almost certainly trained outside Cairo, probably in Iraq or Iran, and perhaps had some Anatolian connections.

Ibrāhīm al-Āmīdī’s Other Works

There are three other Qur’āns which, on stylistic grounds, we can attribute to Ibrāhīm al-Āmīdī. These are Cat.31, 34 and 35.

Fig. 144 (Cat. 31). One half of a double frontispiece of the first half (Nūf 1), folio 2r, Cairo, circa 1367-9. The design of the central panel conforms to the accepted laws of Islamic “infinite” pattern, unlike

Fig. 135, but the colours are reversed in many parts of the two pages. This process is noticed in earlier Ḥūṯānī work but not to the degree to which we see it here.
The geometric trellis knots together to form a series of highly unusual shapes which are filled with flowers or palmettes on a blue or black ground. The combination of bright colours and black backgrounds is one favoured by Ibrahim al-Amid, illuminator of this and several other Qur'ans for Sultan Sha'ban. Unlike other artists he rarely uses marginal palmettes on opening compositions such as this.
QR'ANS OF SULTAN SHA'BAN, 1363-76

Cat. 31

This is an unusual two-volume copy, bequeathed by Sultan Shaʾban to his mother’s madrasah along with three other Qur’ans on 25 March 1369. It is unsigned, and, to judge from the style of the calligraphy, which is a good muhaqqaq, not the work of ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Mukhlib. In the borders of many of the pages the authorized variants of certain aya’l are given. These are in a fine small hand, which looks superior to that of the main text, and may be the work of someone else.

Each of the two parts of the Qur’an has a magnificent frontispiece. These differ in the design of their central trellises, and there is no connection between them and the frontispiece of Cat. 32. Both, however, do employ schemes that appear to be entirely original, in the sense that they have not appeared previously in Mamluk manuscripts.

The frontispiece of Nisf 1 is the best known, having been exhibited and reproduced several times. It is fully described by Atıl, and there is little that needs to be added to her article.23 We find the same finesse of detail here as we do in Cat. 32; the same intense articulation of the palmettes and other details; the same use of vivid primary colours together with black and white. In this double-page composition the principle of geometric regularity is adhered to throughout: there is no break-up of the trellis into free-moving parts. Yet we should bear in mind that there is a gap of five or six years separating Cat. 31 and Cat. 32, in which the artist’s ideas would surely have developed. The practice of colour-change which we have noted in the work of al-Āmidī is here even bolder. It is applied to all areas of the composition, not merely to the central panel. It is subtly and carefully done so that it is only on close inspection that the observer becomes aware of the full extent of the changes from the right-hand side to the left. This is precisely what happens in the frontispiece to Cat. 31, though here it is applied to geometry. The two sides look identical, and it is only after close examination that we realize how wrong we were.

The opening pages of Nisf 1 were closely copied when al-Āmidī came to illuminate Cat. 32, its outer border using the same overall pattern and many identical details. Perhaps the most telling detail is a feature that we may call his "trademark". If we examine the smaller square panels at the ends of the rectangular ones bearing inscriptions we see the familiar pentagon-in-a-decagon motif. Yet again, exactly as in Cat. 32, one of the pentagons is out of alignment: that on the bottom right of the second page is angled to the left instead of the right, so that the balance of the four pentagons is thrown out. Also worthy of mention is the introduction of a type of edging not seen in Mamluk Qur’ans before; this consists of a blue line and dot which is exceptionally rare in the Near East. Equally rare is

Fig. 144 (Cat. 35). Left-hand frontispiece, Juz’ 4, folio 2r.

The irregular interlocking segments are characteristic of the work of al-Āmidī (Fig. 142), as are the multi-coloured flower-chains on a black ground with white treble-dot motif. The rare shade of turquoise occurs only in the work of this painter at this time in Cairo.
the white edging decorated with alternating “teeth”, which is used all over this manuscript, but only in one minute area in Cat. 32, almost as if it had been deliberately suppressed.

The pages of Nifż 2 are hardly known at all. All that has been published of them so far are the black and white drawings of some details by Bourgin. The central panel contains a piece of repeat block-pattern, formed by the interlocking segments of the trellis. These knit together in such a way as to form three very distinct shapes: a circle with four lobes; a circle with fan-tails at the top and bottom, and with semi-circular “bites” out of the sides; and an almond lozenge with lobes on either side. The impression is quite un-Mamlûk. The interiors of these shapes are filled with flowers or palmettes on a blue or black ground.

There can be little doubt that this manuscript is the work of al-Âmîdî. Although he may have had one or more assistants, the similarities between this manuscript and Cat. 32 are such that they must be the work of the same man. Having examined the frontispiece designs and compared them with all known earlier work, Mamlûk, Iranian/Iraqi, and Anatolian, we are forced to the conclusion that there is no exact prototype, but in Anatolian and Iranian work compositions can be found which follow similar principles, whereas among Mamlûk manuscripts there are none.

In the case of Nifż 2 the basic principle is the overlapping of designs based on circles and segments of circles to create unusual and irregular shapes, which are then worked up by the painter and form the pattern. This idea does not seem to have been much used after the first decade of the fourteenth century in Iran and Iraq, but there are some excellent examples in the Qur‘ân illuminated by Ibn Aybak in Baghdad after 1306 and left by Ýayyûrî to his mausoleum in Sulţân Ýûsûf (Cat. 10). We find more examples in a Qur‘ân made in 1311, and now in the Topkapî (Cat. 44), though earlier Iranian manuscripts do not offer us any. Although this design may be an invention of the Il-Khânîd painters, it is used by the illuminator of the 1279-80 Menevi in Konya, Muhîlîn ibn ‘Abdallâh al-İhindî.

The opening pages of text bearing the first ayt of Sûrat Maryam, Mary (XIX), are elaborately embellished with cicada shapes and composite blossoms in a grisaille technique, as in Cat. 32. The border is a particularly fine example of this artist’s technique of exquisitely-drawn palmettes and arabesques in bright primaries in combination with black and white. A novel feature occurring in the border round the kufic inscriptions, are the “peonies” depicted from the side, a motif which was to become very common in fifteenth-century illumination.

The final pages of text in this part bear Sûrat al-Falaq, the Daybreak (CXIII), and Sûrat al-Nâs, Mankind (CXIV), and have panels above and below which are among the most elaborate in the work of al-Âmîdî. Unlike all the other examples, these panels are conceived as a compositional unity instead of being divided into three separate component parts. They are created by circular and oval forms, formed by interlocking and overlapping circles and segments of circles. Of special interest are the pear-shaped medallions at the end of each panel. The shape itself is relatively uncommon in Mamlûk work of this date. The border is a splendid classic example of a three-pointed leaf in an oval with a similar one behind creating an overlapping effect. The only other dated example of this device is in the

Fig. 145 (Cat. 33). Left-hand frontispiece, Jaz’ 12, Cairo, circa 1370-71, folio 12v. Part of a multi-volume Qur‘ân made for Sultan Shâbân (1363-76) and largely illuminated by İbrâhîm al-Âmîdî. The composition of the central panel is clearly an adaptation of the frontispiece of the second half of Fig. 142.

Fig. 146 (Cat. 33). Right-hand frontispiece, Jaz’ 9, folio 11v. This must be the work of another artist, as the design and decoration differ from that of İbrâhîm al-Âmîdî. It is one of the old patterns used by Şendal and his associates at the beginning of the century (Fig. 33). The illumination of the remainder of the Jaz’, however, does not differ substantially from the other three sections of this Qur‘ân. This manuscript was one of those taken from Sultan Shâbân’s mahâfizât at the beginning of the fifteenth century and eventually became the property of Sultan Faraj (1399-1405, 1406-12).

Topkapî, which is signed by Mubârak Shâh-NAME (1279-80) and dated Cairo 1344 (Cat. 67). Thus, al-Âmîdî was not only an outstanding painter, but he had an extremely wide repertoire of designs and motifs, quite a number of which he seems to have invented.

Cat. 34

This is a single-volume Qur‘ân commissioned by the Amir Şirîhteşshî al-Ashrâf and copied by Muḥàmmâd al-Mukîb al-Shâhâkî in April 1374. It offers all the characteristics of al-Âmîdî’s style. The text is written over a ground of finely-drawn arabesque scrolls.
enlivened with gold on a background of gold cross-hatchings. The only other instance of this is in Nisf 1 of Cat. 31. The kufic script in the panels is identical to that in Cat. 31 and 32.

The manuscript belongs to the period during which we know al-Ámiri was working in Cairo, that is from c.1368 to 1376. It may be objected that an artist working on commissions for the Sultan would be unlikely to accept work from elsewhere; but the artists of the Star Polygon Group also produced a Qur’án for the Amir Arghun Shah. And Sirghitmish, like Arghun Shah, was an intimate of the Sultan, so that it would have been quite natural for him to engage the same craftsman. Also, like Arghun Shah, Sirghitmish went into hiding at the time of the Sultan’s downfall, was captured, and executed in 1376. Ibn Taghri-Birdi’s biography of him differs little from that of Arghun Shah. He is to be distinguished from Sirghitmish ibn ‘Abdallah al-Naji who died in 1358 and who founded the madrasah in 1366, to which the thirty-part Qur’án signed by Muharrak-Shih ibn ‘Abdallah (Cat. 72) was left. Although there are full accounts of the madrasah founded by Sirghitmish al-Naji, there is no record of a mosque, madrasah, tomb or any institution founded by our Sirghitmish.

Both Sirghitmish al-Ashtafi and Arghun Shah ordered Qur’áns from a workshop which also produced manuscripts for the monarch and his mother. Although these manuscripts form two distinct groups, our Star Polygon and Ibráhím al-Ámiri groups, it seems probable that we are dealing not with two separate workshops, but one, the royal studio, established by Sha’bán or his mother to produce Qur’áns for the foundations that they were commissioning.

Cat. 35

This manuscript’s only documentation is a waqfijah in the name of Sultan al-Najjar Faraj (1399-1412).3 How much earlier it was produced than Faraj’s reign can be established by stylistic examination of its first three parts, which strongly suggest that most of the work is by al-Ámiri; there is also good circumstantial evidence that the patron of this manuscript too was Sha’bán. Let us begin by looking at the trellis designs of the four ajas of al-Ámiri not only employs unusual trellis patterns but also tends to re-use them, or parts of them, in different manuscripts, and we know of no other painter who employs them. The trellis design of jaz’ 12, is quite clearly adapted from that of the frontispiece of Nisf 2 of Cat. 31. The arabesques of the surrounding border are modelled with the same intense feeling for detail that we see throughout the manuscripts illuminated by al-Ámiri, and the same conjunction of black and white occurs. There are other tell-tale details; for example, the three-pronged base of each alternate “spike” in the margin is also seen in Cat. 31.

In the frontispiece of jaz’ 4, we can see further clear examples of the hand of al-Ámiri. Once again the trellis composition is constructed from interlocking lobed circles and segments of circles, with the irregular areas receiving the most elaborate decoration. The floral chains at the top and bottom of the composition are painted in precisely the same fashion, and constructed, modelled and coloured in just the same way on a black ground with a tiny white treble-dot motif. Among the colours used is the rare turquoise that occurs only in al-Ámiri’s work. The decorative details include the square-ended strapwork knot in the centre, and perhaps most important, white edging with a tooth pattern. As we have noted, this is extremely rare and no previous example is known in Mamluk work.

The question of jaz’ 9 is more complex. Although the decoration within the section does not differ substantially from that in the other ajas, the decoration of the frontispiece does. The design of the trellis is much more archaic than any of the other designs used by al-Ámiri. It is in fact one of the old designs favoured by Sandal and his pupils. And the fillers used for the trellis are of an entirely traditional type. Nor do the design and decoration of the outer border suggest al-Ámiri. It may have been executed by another artist working with him, but we cannot be absolutely certain of this.

It would seem a fair assumption that this Qur’án was among those commissioned by Sultan Sha’bán or his mother, although our only evidence for this is circumstantial. The only inscription on the manuscript appears on jaz’ 9, in the British Library. This has been almost entirely scrubbed out, but under ultraviolet light can be read quite easily: ‘Our Lord the Sultan al-Malik al-Najjar Faraj, son of the late Sultan Barquq, may he be victorious, has bequeathed this as is stated in jaz’ 1. ’’ jaz’ 1 is missing, so we cannot say exactly what the terms were; presumably they differed little from those of other bequests.

We suggest that this manuscript came into the hands of Faraj from the Ashraflyah
foundation of Sultan Sha'bân. There are two ways in which this could have happened. In 1407 the Amir Jamâl al-Dîn, Ustâdâr of al-Nâşir Faraj, commenced work on a madrasah in the Bâb al-Ṭâd area. When this was completed he furnished it with material taken from the Ashrafîyyah foundation of Sultan Sha'bân. Maqrîzî in the Khatâ'î relates: "And in the madrasah of al-Ashrâf Sha'bân ibn Husayn ibn Mûhammad ibn Qâlimûn, which was in the rough ground opposite the Tabâkhânah of the Citadel, there were windows of copper inlaid with gold, doors faced with copper, exquisitely worked with inlay. Qur'âns, books on Hadîth and Fiqh and other religious sciences. [Jamâl al-Dîn] bought this from al-Malik al-Šâlîb al-Maṣûrî Hâji, son of al-Ashrâf, 43 for the sum of six hundred dinars—when it was worth ten times that amount—and took it to his house. Among this were ten Qur'âns whose height and length were between four and five spans (aslâb), 44 including one by Yâqût, another by Ibn al-Bawwâb and the remainder in elegant scripts, 45 superbly bound and in bags of woven silk. There were also ten loads of precious books, all of which had the endorsement certificate of al-Ashrâf on their first page. And they were put in his madrasah..." 46

The Ashrafîyyah Madrasah was subsequently demolished by order of al-Nâşir Faraj and the Mîrâtîn of al-Mu'ayyid Shaykh built on its site. 47 Our first suggestion would be that the manuscript was among items remaining in the Ashrafîyyah Madrasah and was bequested by Faraj. However, Maqrîzî's account implies that everything of value was taken by Jamâl al-Dîn. A second possibility is that after the execution of Jamâl al-Dîn by al-Nâşir Faraj, the Sultan wanted to destroy his madrasah but was dissuaded from that course by his secretary Fâthî al-Dîn ibn Fâthîllâh. 48 By certain dubious legal measures, details of which are given by Maqrîzî, al-Nâşir Faraj tore up the endowment deed of Jamâl al-Dîn and made his own new endowment, changing the name of the madrasah from that of his ex-Ustâdâr to his own. Maqrîzî continues: "Then the Sultan examined the religious books with which the madrasah had been endowed [i.e., those taken from the Ashrafîyyah] and selected a number, and on the cover [zâhir] of every one was a note containing the wafqfâyih of the Sultan. Then he took many of the books and sent them to the Citadel. 49 There is every reason to believe some of the books were Qur'âns, of which this manuscript was one. This would mean that the four surviving ajâ'îs are part of the work of İbrâhîm al-Âmîdî for Sultan Sha'bân and an important addition to his work.

The patronage of Sultan Sha'bân and his mother resulted in a series of magnificent Qur'âns, indeed some of the finest Qur'âns ever produced. The manuscripts were produced in Cairo by a number of calligraphers and illuminators who may have been assembled by the royal couple for this purpose. Some of the Qur'âns mark the culmination of a tradition which has been traced back to Damascus in the 1340s—such characteristics make their first appearance in the Qur'ân of 1356 (Cat.3). Other Qur'âns are the work of the illuminator İbrâhîm al-Âmîdî, whose name and style of painting show him to originate from the Diyârîbâr area, although he must have made his way to Cairo in the 1360s. İbrâhîm al-Âmîdî worked in Iran, Iraq and perhaps in Anatolia, since aspects of his works show parallels with fourteenth-century manuscripts from Anatolia.

CHAPTER NINE
The Century Reviewed

The history of Qur'ân production in Mamûlîk Cairo begins in 1304 with the appearance of the Qur'ân of Baybars al-Jâshâni (Cat.1). The like of this manuscript was not seen again in Cairo until the third quarter of the fourteenth century, and it is clear, even though we know nothing of what may have been produced in Cairo between 1250 and 1304, that its size, format and quality distinguished it from contemporary Mamûlîk work.

Apart from Cat.1 and 2 there seems to have been virtually no monumental Qur'anic calligraphy produced in the first two decades of the fourteenth century in Cairo, because all surviving manuscripts are written in small or medium-sized naskh. Only after the appearance of larger-format Qur'âns in single volumes, such as the 1320 Cat.9 manuscript, do we see the employment of a larger muhasil hand, and not until after 1356 is muhasil found for all or part of the text.

Îbn al-Walid is the only Mamûlîk calligrapher about whom we know a considerable amount, and one of the few famous fourteenth-century masters, of whom we still have a genuine example of his hand. Despite his obvious importance, the Mamûlîk and later Egyptian historians who wrote about calligraphy never mention him. Neither al-Qâlîshânî nor the eighteenth-century writer al-Zâbîdî, whose work is based on earlier sources refer to him. Indeed, they ignore all the masters we discuss in this book. The fourteenth-century calligraphers who do appear in earlier sources, with two possible exceptions, have left no examples of their work.

The master illuminator of the Baybars Qur'ân, Şandîlî, has the distinction of being the only illuminator mentioned by name in an historical chronicle. Although we cannot associate him with any other dated manuscript, his name appears on a copy of the Holy Qur'ân (Cat.3) roughly contemporary with the Baybars manuscript. His influence was very important. A manuscript was illuminated in his style as late as 1330, and it survives, although somewhat debased, in several other Cairo manuscripts, from the fourth decade of the century. We can follow the career of at least one of his pupils, Aydûhî ibn 'Abdallah, down to 1320, because Aydûhî is connected with Şâhidî ibn Mûhammad, a minor member of the Ayûbîd family, with whom he worked on several manuscripts, notably Cat.6, which they produced for al-Nâşir Mûhammad. Both men may have left Egypt to work in Jâmâ for the famous historian Abû'l-Fidâ'î (1273-1331). Şâhidî, a distant relative of Abû'îl-Fidâ'î, was still working as a scribe in 1334, when he produced a manuscript, which is now in the Academy of Sciences, Leningrad.