foundation of Sultan Sha'bân. There are two ways in which this could have happened. In 1307 the Amir Jamāl al-Dīn, Usūddār of al-Nāṣir Faraj, commenced work on a madrasah in the Bāb al-Ikl area. When this was completed he furnished it with material taken from the Ashrafiyah foundation of Sultan Sha'bân. Maqrīzī in the Khiṣāḥ relates: “And in the madrasah of al-Asrāf Sha'bân ibn Husayn ibn Muḥammad ibn Qal'ūn, which was in the rough ground opposite the Tālibkānah of the Citadel, there were windows of copper inlaid with gold, doors faced with copper, exquisitely worked with inlay, Qur'āns, books on Ḥadīth and Fiqh and other religious sciences. [Jamāl al-Dīn] bought this from al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ al-Manṣūr Ḥājjī, son of al-Asrāf,48 for the sum of six hundred dinars—when it was worth ten times that amount—and took it to his house. Among these were ten Qur'āns whose height and length were between four and five spans (zākhē),49 including one by Yāsīt, another by Ibn al-Bawwāb and the remainder in elegant scripts,50 superbly bound and in bags of woven silk. There were also ten loads of precious books, all of which had the endowment certificate of al-Asrāf on their first page. And they were put in his madrasah...”

The Ashrafiyah Madrasah was subsequently demolished by order of al-Nāṣir Faraj and the Muṣāṣṭah of al-Muṣayyid Shaykh built on its site.44 Our first suggestion would be that the manuscript was among items remaining in the Ashrafiyah Madrasah and was bequeathed by Faraj. However, Maqrīzī’s account implies that everything of value was taken by Jamāl al-Dīn. A second possibility is that after the execution of Jamāl al-Dīn by al-Nāṣir Faraj, the Sultan wanted to destroy his madrasah but was dissuaded from that course by his secretary Fāṭḥ al-Dīn ibn Fāṭḥalāh.45 By certain dubious legal measures, details of which are given by Maqrīzī, al-Nāṣir Faraj tore up the endowment deed of Jamāl al-Dīn and made his own new endowment, changing the name of the madrasah from that of his ex-Usūddār to his own. Maqrīzī continues: “Then the Sultan examined the religious books with which the madrasah had been endowed [i.e., those taken from the Ashrafiyah] and selected a number, and on the cover [zāḥār] of every one was a note containing the waqfīyah of the Sultan. Then he took many of the books and sent them to the Citadel.”46 There is every reason to believe some of the books were Qur’āns, of which this manuscript was one. This would mean that the four surviving ajzāʾ are part of the work of Ibāḍī al-ʿĀmidī 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’āns, indeed some of the finest Qur’āns 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’āns 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’ān of 1336 (Cat.24). Other Qur’āns are the work of the illuminator Ibāḍī al-ʿĀmidī, whose name and style of painting show him to originate from the Diyarbakr area, although he must have made his way to Cairo in the 1360s. Ibāḍī al-ʿĀmidī 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 Qurʾān production in Mamlūk Cairo begins in 1304 with the appearance of the Qurʾān of Baybars al-Jāḥnagīt (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 Mamlūk work.

Apart from Cat.1 and 2 there seems to have been virtually no monumental Qurʾānic 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 Qurʾāns in single volumes, such as the 1320 Cat.9 manuscript, do we see the employment of a larger muhaqqiq hand, and not until after 1356 is muhaqqiq-jalī used for all or part of the text.

Ibn al-Wahlīd is the only Mamlūk 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 Mamlūk and later Egyptian historians who wrote about calligraphy never mention him. Neither al-Qusayrāmī nor the eighteenth-century writer al-Zāthīdī, 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 Qurʾān, Sandal, 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 Qurʾān (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, Aydughḏī ibn ʿAbdallāh, down to 1320, because Aydughḏī is connected with Shāhīh ibn Muḥammad, a minor member of the Aydughḏī family, with whom he worked on several manuscripts, notably Cat.6, which they produced for al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. Both men may have left Egypt to work in ʿAṣmāʾ for the famous historian Abūʾl-Fadl (1273-1331). Shāhīh, a distant relative of Abūʾl-Fadl, was still working as a scribe in 1334, when he produced a manuscript, which is now in the Academy of Sciences, Leningrad.
Although a high standard of calligraphy was maintained in Egypt and Syria throughout the reign of al-Nasir Muhammed, the quality of illumination deteriorated in Cairene work. At the beginning of the fourteenth century manuscripts were relatively small, with the illumination carefully thought out and superbly executed, but later manuscripts become larger and the illumination looser in concept, more casual in execution, and eventually crude and mechanical. Almost all the manuscripts which survive from that time are single volumes. Multi-part copies undoubtedly existed as their surviving containers indicate. However, no fragments have survived from before c.1330 except Cat.1. In fact, few multi-part copies survive from fourteenth-century Cairo, despite their mention in such works as that of the khāniqāh of al-Nasir Muhammed.

It is not known where work on manuscripts such as the Laybars Qur‘an was carried out. Ibn al-Walid, unlike Sandal, was a secretary, and it is unlikely he owned a commercial workshop, as Sandal did. Laybars may have met Ibn al-Walid when the minarets of the mosque of al-Hikam were being rebuilt after the 1302 earthquake. As the mosque was virtually next-door to Laybars’ khāniqāh, Ibn al-Walid may have written the text there, but the illumination, carried out by Sandal, Aydughdi and Muhammed ibn Mubadir, must have been done at Sandal’s workshop, somewhere else in Cairo. Sandal is the only person mentioned in connection with the illumination, so we must assume that the others were associates or apprentices. Aydughdi certainly was.

Magnificent though many of the Cairo manuscripts are, most of them pale into insignificance beside Qur‘ans produced at Baghdad in this period. The two great multi-part copies made by Ahmad al-Suhrawardi and Muhammed ibn Aybak (Cat.39 and 40), are among the finest illuminated Qur‘ans ever produced. They are of exceptional size, and their calligraphy and illumination are beautiful. Manuscripts of this type, some of them made in Iraq and Iran, must have provided the impetus for the creation of the Laybars Qur‘an, but whether the idea came from Laybars or Ibn al-Walid, we do not know. But Ibn al-Walid, according to his biographers, had spent some time in Baghdad as a pupil of Yaqut, the famous Iraqi calligrapher. We have another important link with Baghdad in Ibn Mubadir, who also worked on the Laybars Qur‘an—several features of his work occur only in Baghdad manuscripts. Thus we can point to the influence of Baghdad on Cairo several decades before the arrival of the magnificent Hamadan Qur‘an, made originally for Oljayti. This was a present for al-Nasir Muhammed in the 1320s, and had no influence at all on Qur‘an production in Cairo. The unique calligraphic and painterly style of this manuscript was alien to Mamluk taste, and the method of presenting the text was unusual. What similarities there are between the Hamadan Qur‘an and contemporary Cairo manuscripts can be shown to be coincidental.

A much more influential manuscript was the Qur‘an bequeathed by the amir Sirghimish al-Nasir in 1356 (Cat.72). This is of Iraqi (or perhaps Iranian) origin, and may have arrived at the court of al-Nasir Muhammed at the same time as the Hamadan Qur‘an. Both Bakhtamur al-Saqiq and Sirghimish were amirs of al-Nasir Muhammed and both may have been given Qur‘ans by him. There is hardly any other way Bakhtamur could have obtained the Hamadan Qur‘an, which had passed through the hands of al-Nasir Muhammed when the certificate of endowment was tampered with. The Sirghimish Qur‘an was copied in muhaqqiq-jali, which appears in Cairo manuscripts only after 1356: we see it in a manuscript probably commissioned by Sultan Hasan (1354–61) (Cat.24). This manuscript introduces what we have come to think of as the “classical” style of Mamluk Qur‘an illumination. A series of manuscripts in this style is associated with the court of Sultan Sha‘ban. The work of the illuminator Ibraham al-Amidi, they form the largest single group of Qur‘ans produced in one spot for a group of fourteenth-century patrons. The large group produced for Sultan Oljayti comes from three different places. Cairo manuscripts made in the 1320s and 1340s show no hint of the meticulous, highly-financed, “classical” style, which appears to originate in Syria. Even in the early years of the century Syrian manuscripts possessed a stylistic tradition of their own, some features of which can be seen in Qur‘ans produced in Syria, like Cat.10, made in Tripoli, or by craftsmen with Syrian names, such as Cat.8. The classical style first occurs in a manuscript dated 1338–9 (Cat.20), which we have attributed to Damascus. From there it appears to have reached Egypt, where the old Sandal style was completely exhausted.

Alongside the classical style in the third quarter of the century there appears another: that associated with Ibraham al-Amidi. His name suggests he came originally from the Diyabaker area of northern Syria and south-eastern Turkey, and his work suggests that he spent some time in Anatolia, Iraq, and perhaps western Iran. His manner of working was entirely original and in many respects is the antithesis of the classical style. He may have been invited to Cairo to work for the court of Sha‘ban, because of a shortage of painters there. The fragmentary evidence leaves several questions unanswered about Ibraham and the other painters who worked for the court. Some of which might be: was there a court studio during the reign of Sultan Sha‘ban or were there two separate workshops in Cairo where the two main groups of manuscripts were produced? The Star Polygon manuscripts are so closely related that, though we are ignorant of the names of the craftsmen and calligraphers involved, we can assume there to have been a group of people working together. In the second group there were undoubtedly three and probably more persons working in close concert. Was this another workshop or were both groups working in a studio specially set up for the production of the Qur‘ans to be endowed to the two madrasas? What can we say with certainty is that the two groups were not working at precisely the same time, although their activities do overlap. Work on the Star Polygon manuscripts commenced soon after 1361 and came to an end in 1369, when the final manuscript was endowed. The second group of craftsmen appears to have been operating from around 1367 and, unlike the Star Polygon craftsmen, was still active in 1374, and probably continued right up to the overthrow and execution of Sha‘ban in 1376. What the study of secular manuscripts in this period and later will determine is whether these craftsmen, in particular Ibraham al-Amidi, continued to work in Cairo on more mundane manuscripts, following the demise of their royal patrons. More information may emerge from a detailed study of non-Qur‘an manuscripts of this period, which is beyond the scope of this survey.