Oriental Manuscripts and Miniatures
Oriental Manuscripts and Miniatures

Sale LN6647

Auction: Wednesday, 16 October, 1996 at 10.30 am

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Oriental Manuscripts and Miniatures

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Lots 1-118

Wednesday
18 October
1996
10.30 am
QUR’AN LEAVES AND MANUSCRIPTS

1

Two Qur’an bifolia in late Hijazi script on vellum, Western Arabia, Syria or Iraq, c.700 AD

Text: A: Sura 12 vv.26-50 and Sura 13 vv.35-Sura 14 v.9;
B: Sura 5 vv.57-80 and Sura 6 v.158-Sura 7 v.20

A: 17 or 19 lines per page written in small late Hijazi script in brown ink on vellum, no letter pointing, no relegation, no single verse divisions, tenth verse marked with a single red ring round the final letter of the verse or the first letter of the next verse, sura heading (Sura introduction) written in red, some crossing and rubbing, one short split at top, 155 by 192mm.

B: 17 or 18 lines per page, occasional use of letter pointing, no relegation, no single verse divisions, sura heading (Sura introduction) written in brown ink over red ink, some crossing and discoloration, 137 by 173mm.

These two Qur’an bifolia, from two separate manuscripts, are interesting examples of the transitional period of Qur’an production at the end of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth centuries when late Hijazi scripts were becoming more orderly and disciplined, but before so-called kufic script proper formed. The notable primitive features of these leaves are the letter forms themselves, which are loose and inconsistent, the lack of letter pointing (bifolium A has none at all, while B has little), the total lack of relegation, the relatively wobbly lines of script, the lack of verse markers and the fact that the sura divisions are marked by underlined red script which marks ‘final sura’ (the beginning of Sura ……), i.e. the words are merely indicating where the sura starts rather than constituting a title as such.

These primitive aspects are set against the horizontal format of the leaves, showing that, even if the script on these leaves is not yet kufic, the shape of the leaves was moving towards the kufic style, in which the stretching of the letters horizontally was allowed for by the extended shape of the leaf.

£1,000-2,000

2

Five Qur’an leaves in eastern kufic script on vellum, North Africa or Sicily, late tenth century

Text: Sura 73, vv.8-17; Sura 74, vv.17-31; Sura 75, vv.6-26; Sura 86, vv.2-Sura 87, v.1; Sura 98, vv.2-8

7 lines per page written in neat eastern kufic script in brown ink on vellum, relegation in red, verse divisions marked with a small gold fleur, fifth verse marked with a stylised kufic letter ha in gold and brown, tenth verse marked with an abrupt letter in gold on a green or red roundel, sura heading in gold kufic, ink on vellum slightly worn, 116 by 160mm.

These five leaves (one bifolium and three single leaves) come from an interesting multi-volume Qur’an which must have been produced in Tunisia or Sicily in the last quarter of the tenth century. The script is so-called ‘eastern kufic’, which was known and used in the Mediterranean region by this date, and bears a strong resemblance to the script of a Qur’an written on vellum at Palermo in A.D.992 (E. Déroche, The Abbasid Tradition, London, 1992, no.81, pp.146-151). Another fragment which can be closely compared is in the Al-Sahab Collection, Kuwait and has been attributed to tenth-century Tunisia (E. Atl, Islamic Art and Patronage, New York, 1990, no.4, pp.584-9). A section from the same multi-volume Qur’an as the present five leaves was offered in these rooms, 26th April 1995, lot 17.

£1,500-2,000

3

Illuminated Qur’an bifolium in naskhi script on paper, Turkoman or Ottoman, fifteenth century

Sura 6, vv.112-118 (opening verses of the 8th Juz)

9 lines per page written in fine, bold naskhi script on cream paper, gold dots between verses, text surrounded by marginal band of fine illumination, just heading written in gold thuluth on a finely illuminated panel of scrolling arabesques, trimmed at lower left corner, framed, 234 by 145mm.

This bifolium is the opening double page of the 8th Juz of a Qur’an.

£1,000-1,500
Illuminated Qur'an bifolium in bold ruyhani script outlined in gold, Western Iran or Mesopotamia, dated A.H.579/A.D.1183

Text: Surah 2, vv.250-252 (final verses of the 2nd juz)

f.1v with 5 lines of large, bold ruyhani script in black outlined in gold on cream paper, letter pointing ('jum') in green now oxidised, vocalisation in red, blue and gold, blue and gold roundels containing the word 'ruy' in gold between verses, fragment of illuminated device in margins, f.2r with five similar lines of ruyhani surrounded by tightly scrolling foliate decoration in purple, red and green within margins ruled in brown ink; f.2v with the colophon written in gold 'ruy' script surrounded by densely scrolling foliate decoration in purple, red and green, with rectangular panels above and below containing the last line of Qur'anic text and a line of eastern kufic script in blue ('Al-Qur'an Kalam Allah ghair makkina...') on red ground with foliate tendrils and arabesques, all within a frame of repeating gold knot-motifs with a stylised palmette extending into the margins; f.2b blank, some discolouration, edges soiled with some loss of marginal illumination, 355 by 230mm.

This is a fascinating survival of what must have been a very grand manuscript of the Qur'an. The ruyhani script is bold and elegant and emphasised with a gold outline, the interlinear decoration of scrolling foliate tendrils is finely executed and the presence of a colophon recording the date of the manuscript makes it an important document. There are very few surviving dated Qur'ans or fragments from this period and fewer which display such intense decoration as the present piece.

£4,000-6,000

Five Qur'an bifolia in eastern kufic script on paper, Persia, eleventh century

5 lines per page written in neat eastern kufic script on brown paper, vocalisation in red and green, fifth verse marked with stylised kufic letter ha in yellow, dimensions at top restricted to margins, 137 by 97mm.

A section of the same manuscript was sold at Drouot, Paris, 23rd April 1994, lot 403 and other bifolia have been sold in these rooms 11th October 1991, lot 896 and 15th April 1985, lot 62.

£2,000-3,000
Two illuminated leaves from a Qur’an in kufic script on vellum, North Africa or Near East, ninth/tenth century

Text: Opening verse of Sura 5

A: the illuminated page with a gold rectangular panel of interlaced and foliate motifs set around a geometric frame based on squares and rectangles, a stylized palmate in gold, blue and red extending into the margin; verse with five lines of kufic script in brown ink with vocalisation in red and a marginal notation in red inshallah marking the beginning of the 7th juz, 95 by 162mm.

B: the page decorated with a rectangular panel and marginal palmette of flower heads within tightly scrolling tendrils in brown ink, verse with an inscription in nasta’liq dated 1106/1694, 96 by 162mm.

These two finely decorated folios would have formed the opening and closing leaves of the 7th juz of a thirty-volume Qur’an. It is interesting that while the opening leaf is decorated with gold, the closing leaf has very finely drawn motifs in brown ink. This may be accounted for either because the brown ink constituted the outline for the gold to be applied and then unfinished, or because the illuminator intentionally differentiated between the opening and closing pages by the use of gold. The flower heads which are the main decorative theme of the closing page appear in the triangular spandrels of the opening page, while the design of the palmettes is very similar in both cases. The combination of simple geometric forms and foliate motifs is typical of the illumination of the period.


£8,000-12,000

Qur’an leaf in eastern kufic script on paper, Persia, perhaps Mashhad, eleventh/twelfth century

Text: Sura 5, v.83

2 lines of supraform kufic script in black on buff paper, lettering 9.5mm in black, vocalisation in red and blue, the entire background decorated with finely drawn floral and foliate scrolls in reddish brown ink, the three panels separated by gold bands of scrolling foliate tendrils, the whole contained within a gold band of nautilope motif, defective at upper left with evidence of a gold marginal palmette, laid down on modern brown paper, mounted, 233 by 163mm.

The leaf originates from one of the most spectacular and finely executed Qur’ans of the so-called ‘eastern kufic’ style. The script on the present leaf has been referred to on occasions as ‘Qurmashian kufic’. Although other Qur’ans of this period show breathtaking calligraphic displays and fine illuminated panels, the decoration of the entire background of every page was unprecedented and constituted an enormous undertaking.

The present leaf is the left half of an opening double-page frontispiece for the 7th juz of the Qur’an, which begins at verse 85 of Surat al-Mu‘ammad. While the majority of text leaves from this Qur’an have four lines of script, this one has only two. This arrangement indicates that the Qur’an was originally produced in thirty volumes. The Qur’an has been attributed to late eleventh century Mashhad and a comparison with other manuscripts of the period and with Nishapur epigraphic pottery shows interesting similarities in calligraphy and illumination.


£8,000-12,000
AN IMPORTANT KUFIC QU'RAN SECTION

8

Qu'ran section in kufic script on vellum, North Africa or Near East, c.900 AD

Text: fasc. 8, incomplete, text as follows:

f.1 Sura 7, v. 89
f.2 Sura 7, v. 164-5
f.3-31 Sura 7, v. 173-Sura 8, v. 33
f.32-3 Sura 8, v. 40-1

54 leaves, 5 lines per page written in bold, elegant kufic script in brown ink on vellum, letter painting (‘ajam) of short green dashes, vocalisation of red, yellow or green dots, verse divisions marked by triangular arrangements of three gold geometric shapes outlined in faint brown ink and decorated with red and blue dots, fifth verses marked in the text with a small kufic letter 'a and in the margins with a large illuminated fleur-de-lys containing the word khanaa in gold kufic on a green or red ground within a radiating band of gold ‘petals’, tenth verses marked in margins with the exact verse count (e.g. miisiit (thematic) written in gold kufic on a red or green ground within concentric gold bands and radiating ‘petals’, verse heading (Sura al-Anfal) written in gold kufic with a penultimate of gold, red, blue and green extending into the margin, one single and two double pages of floral and foliate illumination in gold with some use of red, blue and green, folio 1r with either of Ottoman royal library in black mica-sprinkled ink, final double page of illumination with fictitious attribution 'Katahaks AD' (i.e. Ali ibn Abu Talib) in brown kufic on a lozenge of green/gold brickwork pasted on top of original vellum, opening flyleaf and folios 1r and 54r with ownership inscriptions and seal impressions, few leaves with surface abrasion or edges repaired, later brown morocco binding with rectangular panels and avoid cuttings of gilt-stamped foliate motifs and cloud-scrolls, red morocco doublures with central rectangular panel and avoid cuttings of gilt-leather filigree over coloured grounds, 210 by 311mm.

continued
This manuscript is a superb example of early medieval Qur'an production, displaying all the elegant grandeur of the kufic script and the simple yet effective use of gold floral and geometric illumination.

There are four inscriptions on the flyleaves which tell us that in A.H.1280 (A.D.1863-4) the manuscript contained 87 folios. This would have constituted the complete ninth juz of the Qur'an. At present there are 54 leaves including the beginning and end of that juz. The Complete Qur'an would have comprised thirty volumes with a total of approximately 5800 leaves. If each section had five illuminated pages (as are present here) there would have been 150 pages covered in gold illumination. This was a very grand project indeed. It would have needed a flock of approximately 450 animals to produce enough vellum for the whole Qur'an and the scale and quality of the present section points to a royal patron, or at least a patron of enormous wealth.

The script is an example of the mature kufic script which was in use from around 860-950 A.D. It is characterised by great elegance and austerity, the brown ink arranged on the pale cream vellum in an intentionally graphic and artistic manner, the active areas of the script balanced with the passive areas of blank vellum. The variations in the width of the strokes of the letters and ligatures is another characteristic of this type of kufic. As the scribe has drawn the nib across the page, he has altered the angle at which he holds the stylus, changing the angle of the nib on the page and creating variations in the width of the stroke. This has the effect of accentuating the letters and ligatures and adding further to the visual rhythm.

The illumination is a typical arrangement of bold stylised vegetal and abstract motifs within essentially geometric frames with palmettes extending into the margins. The dominant colour is gold with subtle use of red, blue, black and green and the pale vellum itself in reserve.

The final double page of illumination contains two lozenge-shaped panels on which the fictitious attribution kustaba Ali has been overlaid in brown kufic on narrow strips of vellum. These have been surrounded by decorative brick-work in gold on paper. This attribution to the cousin of the Prophet is not unusual and is usually ascribed to a combination of factors. By the late medieval period kufic manuscripts were considered to be relics of enormous antiquity and were, to most people, illegible. Ali ibn Abu Talib, who was such an important Companion of the Prophet as well as his cousin, son-in-law and later the fourth Orthodox Caliph, was believed to have been a competent scribe at a time when literacy was a very rare skill, and it was appropriate and attractive to attribute many of these ancient manuscripts to Ali.


£106,000-150,000
Large Qur'an section, illuminated Arabic manuscript on paper, probably commissioned by Sultan Nasr al-Din Farag, in a fine contemporary tooled and stamped leather binding. Egypt, Mamluk, c.1390-1412

Text: Jus’ 19

24 leaves, 7 lines per page written in fine bold wusayyiq script in black on thick cream paper, diviseries in black, reading aids in red. Allah picked out in gold throughout, gold flowers decorated with coloured dots between verses, verse headings written in large gold thuluth script with diviseries in blue, margins ruled in gold, fifth and tenth verses and quarter, half and whole ½ disebrion marked in margins in white thuluth within finely illuminated circular or oval devices, ‘ṣajda’ indication written in white thuluth in square illuminated device, occasional commentary written diagonally in red in margin, illuminated opening page with text surrounded by gold cross-hatching within borders of foliate decoration in blue and gold, final folio decorated with large illuminated roundel in blue, red and gold surrounded by four smaller roundels, few leaves with edges slightly foxed, generally good condition, fine contemporary gold and blood-stamped brown morocco binding, the large central medallions filled with interlocking geometric motifs based around a star, decorated with punched dotted, corners pierced with punched cross-hatching and four radiating petals, concentric border heads of animal vine motifs, some skillful repairs to edges, 423 by 293mm.

This is a fine and grand example of Mamluk manuscript production of the early fifteenth century, still in its original tooled and stamped leather binding.

Provenance:


2. An inscription in pencil on the opening page of text reads U.J. Anderson Nos. 16 1847 (the same inscription is found on lot 10 in this sale).


The present manuscript and the one in the Bibliothèque Nationale seem to be the only recorded volumes of this grand series, but interestingly, one leather cover of exactly the same design and dimensions as the present piece is in the collection of the Oriental Institute, Chicago (Boch, Carwell and Petheridge, Islamic Bindings and Bookmaking, exhibition catalogue, Chicago, 1981, no. 62, pp. 176-78). Presumably it is detached from another section of the same thirti-volume Qur'an.

This manuscript and binding bear a close stylistic resemblance to a somewhat smaller thirty-volume Qur'an made for the Mamluk commander Amir Ayunish al-Bajist, who served during the reign of Sultan Barquq (1382-99, 1390-99), individual volumes of which are now in the British Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, The Freret Gallery and Library of Congress, Washington and the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore. Two sections were sold in these rooms, 25th May 1986, lot 283 and 12th October 1990, lot 209.

$20,000-30,000