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Oriental Manuscripts and Miniatures

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QURAN LEAVES AND QU'RANS

Large Qur'an leaf in kufic script on vellum, North Africa or Near East, c.790 A.D.

TEXT: SURA 17, VS 95-98

5 lines per page written in fine kufic script on vellum, letter-pointing of thin brown diagonal dashes, variation of red, yellow, blue and green dots, single verse divisions marked with a large gold and green roundel containing the word 'bihawal in gold kufic, in very good condition, 226 by 310mm.

This is a very fine example of the mature stage of Qur'anic manuscript production in the Abbasids and their contemporary dynasties during the ninth and early tenth centuries A.D. The vellum is of high quality and almost transparent clean, the script is an extremely elegant, spacious and controlled kufic with great attention paid to the distribution of the text over the page, creating a balance of active and passive space, and the few instances of illumination indicate a high programme with gold rosettes for every verse and large illuminated roundels every five verses. On this basis the tenth verse markers, the sura headings and the opening and closing illumination of each section must have been spectacular.

The bifolium can be compared closely with a section sold in these rooms 16th October 1990, lot 8, which included the opening and closing illumination of the page, giving us an idea of what other leaves of the present piece might have looked like. Other related leaves and manuscripts are as follows: Qu'ranan, Musée des arts islamiques (Cantin, no.531; Lings and Saladi, no.10); Tehran, Iran Bastan Museum, Ms.1399 (Lings, 1976, no.5); Nasir D. Khalili Collection, London, KF65 (Déroche, 1992, no.35, p.70); Sotheby's, London, 4th April 1979, lot 94; Christie's, London, 11th October 1988, lot 37; 10th October 1989, lot 201; 25th April 1990, lot 20.

Another bifolium from the same manuscript is sold 7 in this sale, while a single leaf has been published by Bernard Quaritch (1991).

£8,000-12,000

accompanied decorated panels in an early style, with long, thin horizontal panels decorated with zigzag patterns of stylized vegetal and abstract motifs and attached palmettes of similar motifs. These were the main features of the sura headings, while the titles, written in small kufic script in red ink, were framed in above the decorated panels. Furthermore, the wording of the sura headings was interesting, starting with the word 'Jimilst muzu' (the beginning of the sura ...), indicating simply that this was the point where each sura started, rather than constituting a title as such. This feature is pertinent since we now consider as the titles of the sura (al-Qur'a, al-Qur'aan, al-Qur'a, etc.) were not used as such in the earliest Islamic period (see Bell and Watt, 1978, p.58-9).

Other leaves from the same Qur'ans are in public and private collections including the David Collection, Copenhagen, (lot 96, no.34) and the Nasir D. Khalili Collection, London, KF65 (Déroche, 1992, no.35), while several have been sold in these rooms, 15th April 1989, lots 48-49; 21st November 1984, lots 2045-2051; 20th November 1988, lots 2354-2360, 4th December 1987, lots 182-183, 11th October 1991, lot 885; 30th April 1992, lot 317; 22nd October 1995, lot 50; 18th October 1995, lot 5; 23rd April 1997, lot 15, and at Christie's, London, 14th June 1987, lot 72 and 15th October 1996, lots 45-46.

£4,000-6,000
34

Qur'an bifolio in gold kufic on vellum, Near East or Persia, 9th-10th century

TEXT: SURA 88, VS.5:25-28, SURA 88, VS.28

3 lines per page written in fine gold kufic script on vellum, letterpointing of thin brown diagonal dashes, vocalisation of red, green and blue dots, single verse divisions marked with gold rosettes, fifth verses marked with gold rounds containing the word 'khwaas' either in gold kufic on a blue ground or in reserve on a gold ground, tenth verses marked within the text with a gold rounded containing an abjad letter and in the margin with a larger illuminated round containing the verse count (as in this case) in reserve on a gold ground, very slightly frayed at outer corners, otherwise in good condition, in mount, 144 by 230mm.


Published: Falk, 1985, no.1, p.34.

This bifolio comes from one of a handful of surviving Qur'ans to have been executed in gold kufic script. The two most famous are the 'Blue Qur'an' written in gold kufic on blue-dyed vellum, which single leaves and fragments are in many public and private collections (see lot 5 in this sale), and a large Qur'an written in gold kufic on cream vellum, of which the second half is in the National Museum Library, Istanbul (Lings 1976, no.34).

The technique of writing kufic script in gold (chrysography) differed from the normal process for brown ink. Brown ink kufic was applied with a wide stylus dipped in oak-gall ink and drawn across the page from right to left. For gold kufic, the outlines of the letters were drawn using pale brown ink on a very thin nib and the interior of the letters then filled with the gold which had been ground up and suspended in a solution. The process was lengthy and expensive one, hence the rarity of gold kufic Qur'ans.

The Qur'an from which the present leaves originate has been attributed on several occasions to Qurawan, apparently because sections of the Qur'an were discovered in the mosque there (Lings and Safadi, nos.16-17; Falk, 1985, no.1 and several auction catalogues). The current whereabouts of a manuscript does not necessarily indicate its place of origin and Stanley has recently pointed out (Quaritch, 1233, p.18) that the abjad system used for the verse count in this Qur'an is the so-called 'eastern' abjad. This makes a Maghribi origin (including Tunisia) very unlikely.

Other leaves and sections from the same Qur'an are in various public and private collections, including the following: Tunis, Bibliothèque National, Robi 198 (Lings and Safadi, nos.1617; p.41); Cambridge, no.54); Tunis, National Institute of Archaeology (Lings and Safadi, 1976, nos.18-19; p.41); Beirut, Quaran, Bahrani, The Tarq Najib Mucuned, Kuwait; The Nasser D. Khalili Collection, London (Beschler, 1992, nos.10; 102); and several have been sold in these rooms 18th October 1995, lot 16; 28th April 1996, lot 74; 18th April 1998, lot 169; and 18th October 1998, lot 170, where further references are given.

£10,000-15,000

4

Four Qur’an leaves (two bifolia) in maghribi script on vellum, North-West Africa or Southern Spain, 13th century

TEXT: SURA 14, VS.17-SURA 14, VS.20

9 lines per page written in bold maghribi script in brown ink on vellum, vocalisation and diacritics in red, green, blue and orange, illuminated roundels between each verse with the word 'aqa' in gold kufic, fifth verses marked with large stylised kufic letter 'he', tenth verses marked with large illuminated margin device containing the word 'asira' in white kufic, brown heading (Suraat al-Hijr) written in gold kufic with an illuminated panel extending into the margin, slight indent damage at lower inner corners, 265 by 230mm.

A manuscript with a related script is in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (Ms.1159, Arbery, 1967, no.127, pl.44) and a similar bifolio is in the Nasser D. Khalili Collection, London (James, 1992a, no.55, pp.218-9). Several similar leaves and sections have been sold in these rooms 18th October 1995, lots 1/2 and 23rd October 1999, lots 5/5.

£4,000-6,000

5

Qur’an fragment in maghribi script on vellum, North-West Africa or Southern Spain, 12th-13th century

TEXT: SURA 9, VS.27-29, VS.32, VS.34; SURA 10, VS.35-38; SURA 17, VS.16-160

12 leaves, 9 lines per page written in bold maghribi script in brown ink on vellum, vocalisation and diacritics in green, red and orange, gold stylised devices between verses, fifth verses marked with a gold stylised kufic letter 'he' in the form of a scallop, tenth verses marked in the text with a gold vespes and in the margin with a larger illuminated roundel containing the word 'asira' written in gold kufic, five holes, occasional fraying at edges, 275 by 216mm.

The script of this fragment of a maghribi Qur’an most closely resembles that of a giant copy measuring 535 by 605mm in the Turk ve Islam Mucune, Istanbul (Ms.7366, Lings, 1976, no.1784) of which individual leaves are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Cleveland Museum of Art (Al-Qudseia, no.53, p.314). The Islamic World (pp.350-7), A. Welch, 1979, no.701). It also relates to a fragment in the Nasser D. Khalili Collection, London (James, 1992a, no.57, pp.222-3).

£4,000-6,000
Large Qur'an leaf in gold kufic script on blue vellum, North Africa or Southern Spain, 9-10th century

The exact origins of the Blue Qur'an are unknown, but several theories have been put forward over the last century. J.R. Martin, who acquired a group of the leaves in Istanbul in 1912, suggested that the manuscript was commissioned by the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun for the tomb of his father Harun al-Rashid, and that the dark blue colour of the vellum was a symbol of mourning. However, based on an inventory, published in 1956 by Chabchoub, of the Great Mosque at Qairawan dated 1294, which mentions a Qur'an written in gold on blue parchment, J.M. Bloom has argued that a North African provenance is the most likely (Bloom, 1986, pp.945–949, 1989, pp.59–65), while more recent research by T. Sunley (Quaritch, 1975, pp.515) points to an Andalusian patron. If the exact origins of the manuscript remain obscure, it is generally agreed that it is a startlingly luxurious example of Islamic manuscript production, whose patron must have been of enormous wealth and ambition. Indeed, it was one of the most important manuscripts of the Qur'an produced in the medieval Arab world.

A section of the manuscript is in the National Institute of Art and Archaeology in Tunis while detached leaves or fragments are in the National Library, Tunis, the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts and various private collections including the Suduiraud Aga Khan Collection, Geneva and the Nasser D. Khalili Collection, London. Several leaves have been sold in these rooms, 16th April 1970, lot 227, 8th July 1980, lot 199; 16th April 1984, lot 147; 15th October 1984, lot 226; 25th June 1985, lot 11; 22nd May 1986, lot 243; 19th October 1991, lot 15; 26th April 1995, lot 19.


£15,000-20,000

£5,000-7,000
81 Qur'an leaf in eastern kufic script on paper, Iran or Mesopotamia, c.1100 A.D.

TEXT: SURA 6, VV.1-2
5 lines per page written in fine eastern kufic script in black ink on buff paper, letter pointing of gold dots, vocalisation in red and blue, single verse divisions marked with a radiating gold roundel containing an oblong letter in gold on a red or blue ground, sura headings (Nasr al-Asam) written in gold ornamental kufic within a finely illuminated panel decorated with gold scrolls on red, blue and green grounds with a similarly decorated palmette extending into the margin, the Meccan attribution of the sura written within a square device in the margin in large gold ornamental kufic on a ground of pink cross-hatching, in good condition, in overall, 265 by 200mm.

Provenance:
Sotheby’s, London, 8th July 1980, lot 159.
Published: Falk, 1985, no.14, p.44-5.

This leaf comes from a dispersed manuscript of the Qur’an notable for its superb eastern kufic script and lavish illumination. The script is a prime example of the most abstract levels which eastern kufic could achieve and can be compared with the script of lot 10 in this sale. However, whereas that script is surrounded by tightly scrolling devotions, the script on the present leaf is left alone on the plain paper, the better to focus attention on its attenuated, almost archetypal form.

The Qur’an, or at least part of it, must have been in Egypt during the fifteenth century for a section sold in these rooms, 13th October 1989, lot 78, bore a similar inscription of the Mamluk Sultan Qu’ay Bay (r.1468-96).

Other sections or leaves from the same Qur’an are in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (Ms.1917, Janes, 1966, no.16); the Boston Museum of Fine Arts; the Sadurudin Aga Khan Collection, Geneva (Linge, 1976, no.12), Welch, 1979, no.12; Welch and Welch, 1982, no.12; Falk, 1985, no.D, p.46) and the Al-Shaib Collection, Kuwait (Abit, 1990, no.54).

£10,000-15,000

82 Large Qur’an bifolio in eastern kufic script on paper, North Africa, probably Fatimid, 11th century

9 lines per page written in bold eastern kufic script in black ink on buff paper, divisions and vocalisation in black, ‘Allah’ picked out in gold, gold flourishes between verses, three verses marked in the margins with large illuminated roundels containing the exact verse number (as in, asr, ad-dhuha, asr, isha, etc.) written in white or gold kufic script, sura headings written in gold eastern kufic script on a ground of brown cross-hatching within gold-coated panels and with boldly illuminated palmettes extending into the margins and containing the attribution of the sura (Makmur), five verses marked in the margins with a small gold palmette and rectangular device containing the words ‘Rahma wa yaw’ in white thuluth script, text area contained within a border of pale blue mevwal in gold with gold half-palmettes extending into the margin from the upper and lower corners, dismounted, in overall, 311 by 214mm.

Provenance:
Formerly in the Collection of Philip and Frances Hofer, c.1961.
Published: Falk, 1985, no.13, p.44.

This leaf originates from one of the most spectacular and finely executed Qur’ans of the so-called ‘eastern kufic’ style and the script on the present leaf has been referred to on occasions as ‘Qur’an al-kufic’. Although other Qur’ans of the period show breathtaking calligraphic displays and fine illuminated panels (see lot 8 in this sale), the decoration of the entire background of every page was entirely unprecedented and constituted an enormous undertaking. 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.

£7,000-10,000
Large Qur’an section, illuminated Arabic manuscript on paper, made for Amir Aytimish al-Bojasi, a commander of Sultan Barquq, in a fine contemporary tooled and stamped leather binding, Mamluk, late 14th century

TEXT: JUZ 14

48 leaves, plus one blank flyleaf, 5 lines per page written in strong waslaq script in black ink on cream paper, gold rosettes decorated with coloured dots between verses, fifth verses marked in the margins with illuminated rounds containing the word 'khamsa' in gold knife, tenth verses marked in the margins with illuminated rounds containing the word ‘thuluth’ in gold knife, further text divisions (rub‘, kufi, kufi kufi, kufi, etc) and ‘sigillar’, instructions marked in the margins with illuminated rounds, roundels or squares containing the relevant wording in white thuluth, some headings written in white thuluth on large illuminated panels with a small palmeta extending into the margin, opening page with the juz’ title written in white thuluth on a large illuminated panel with a small extending palmeta, very slightly trimmed, fine contemporary brown morocco binding tooled and stamped in gold and blind with a central medallion suffixed with geometric motifs, trefoil cornerpieces and border bands of stamped repeating motifs, the flap with a large central roundel filled with repeating multi-pointed stars on a field of interlocking rope motifs, brown floral vellum endpapers, skillfully repaired at edges, 369 by 267mm.

This manuscript is the fourteenth part of a fine thirteenth Qur’an made for the Mamluk commander Amir Aytimish al-Bojasi (died 1400), who served under Sultan Barquq (reigned 1382-99, 1390-99). Another section from the same group is in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, and bears a inscription of presentation to the then Amir Aytimish madrasa at Tripoli in northern Lebanon. Further sections of this Qur’an are in the British Library, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, the Bibliothèque National, Paris, and the Library of Congress, Washington D.C., and two have been sold in these rooms, 12th October 1990, lot 209 and 23rd May 1986, lot 225.

The binding is a fine example of Mamluk work, with a typical design of blind and gold tooled and stamped motifs with central protruding foliate-geometric medallions and similar cornerpieces. The fore-edge flap is a particularly fine example with a central roundel of complex multi-pointed stars and a field entirely filled with reticulated rope-motifs, and in very good condition.

£8,000-12,000