25 Prayers of Zain al-Abidin, copied by al-Abd Muhammad, India, probably Decan, dated A.H.1090/A.D.1679
17 leaves, 11 lines per page written in fine naskh script on cream paper, dental interpolations in gold, margins ruled in red and gold, catchwords in black in wide margins, two illuminated headpieces in gold and red, contemporary gilt-stamped brown morocco with arabesques and flower heads scroling within geometric frames, repaired at edges, brown morocco doublures with central medallions of black filigree over gold, blue and green grounds, with flap 190 by 107mm.

This is an interesting manuscript of the Dooms of Hafiz principally because the preface seems to be unique to this copy. It mentions that in the year 1503, during the reign of Sultan Husain Baigaar of Herat (d.1506), his son Prince Faridun Husain Mirza, ordered the poems of Hafiz to be collected, corrected and copied. A few of Faridun’s own poems are also given in the preface. No other manuscripts of Hafiz appear to contain this preface. (For references to the main text and other prefaces see Thackston 1989, pp.X:224,234).

£7,000-10,000

26 Omar Khayyam. Ruba’iyyat (Quatrain), illuminated Persian manuscript on paper, copied by Ali Naqi al-Shirazi ibn Mirza Yusuf Mudahhib-Bashi by the order of Mirza Ahmad Khan ibn Mizra Muhammad Taqi Khan Mi’ayyad-al-Mulk, Persia, Isfahan, dated A.H.1337/A.D.1919
112 leaves, 12 lines or fewer per page, interlinear gilt decoration throughout, intercolumnar band of gilt decoration throughout, headings written in thuluth in coloured inks on gilt illuminated panels, one opening double page of illumination with headpiece, fine original floral lace covering binding 205 by 138mm.

This elegant and profusely illuminated copy of Omar Khayyam’s famous Ruba’iyyat is interesting from a literary point of view, for the preface tells us that Ahmad, the son of Mi’ayyad-al-Mulk, having learned French and Russian at school, became interested in Persian literature. After having read the poems of Omar Khayyam, which at that time (c.1900-1910) were being translated into various foreign languages, he noticed clear errors. He decided to collect as many old copies of Omar Khayyam’s poetry as possible, and collate and edit them. The oldest he could find was 350 years old (which would date it to the middle of the 16th century). With the help of other literary specialists, including the poet Fushi al-Mulk Sharideh (the poet, scholar, painter and author of Atkar-i-‘Ajam, a work on the geography and history of Fars), Ahmad studied diverse divans of poets and their commentaries, and produced the present critical edition. However, being aware that people may dislike the omission of poems which had traditionally been thought of as Omar Khayyam’s work, he included them, but with the names of the correct poets.

£3,000-5,000

27 Muhbi, Khatib Futeh al-Haramain (a poetical description of the Holy Sites and the Hajj), illuminated Persian manuscript on paper with eighteen diagrams, Northern India, dated A.H.1123/A.D.1711
41 leaves, 17 lines per page written in neat naskh script on cream paper, headings in red, margins ruled in gold, 18 diagrammatic illustrations of sites concerned with the Holy Pilgrimage, including the Mosque and Ka’ba at Mecca, and the Prophet’s Mosque at Medina, some dampanstamping and unruling mostly restricted to margins, supplementary text of 10 leaves added at beginning, quire loose, textblock loose in binding, brown morocco with central medallion and coverpieces of gilt-stamped paper mica, acorn, red morocco doublures, cloth covering 284 by 175mm.

£2,000-3,000

28 Calligraphy from the Collection of Mr Cyrus Ghani

29 Illustrated page of nasta’liq calligraphy by two couples by Sultan Ali al-Mashhadi, Iran, probably Herat, Timurid, c.1490
7 lines of fine nasta’liq calligraphy written diagonally in four lines in black ink on gold-strikked buff paper, upper cornerpiece finely illuminated in colours and gold with floral motifs, lower cornerpiece containing signature in reserve on a ground of blue and gold floral motifs and cross-hatching, borders of small green paper speckled with gold, margins ruled in colours and gold, framed text area 182 by 75mm.

See footnote to lot 32.

£3,500-2,000
Large illuminated album page of nasta’i q Script, by Aybili, Iran, Safavid, probably Mashhad, c.1530-60

Five panels of fine nasta’i q calligraphy written diagonally in black ink on cream or buff paper, the grounds decorated with gold flowers, gold flowers or silver cloud-bands, corner pieces and interwoven are finely illuminated with gold and blackish floral and foliate motifs in colours and gold, borders of gold-sprinkled marbled paper, framed 341 by 182mm., with border 38 by 76mm.

This is an important album page notable for its fine quality and is a rare example of the hand of the Safavid calligrapher Aybili. The page has been put together to form a highly decorative composition, and the illumination, especially the bold, split leaf at the top, is of high quality.

Aybili was one of the leading calligraphers of the second quarter of the sixteenth century, and although he was recorded by Qadi Ahmad in his treatise (see Miforski 1991, pp.135-4), he is less well-known than some of his contemporaries.

This page is due partly to the fact that surviving examples of Aybili’s work are extremely rare (only thirteen recorded examples survive), and this page is certainly one of the finest and most important in existence.

According to Qadi Ahmad (ibid), Aybili was a native of Herat, but moved to Mashhad where he was employed in the royal library, and where he received generous favours and a regular salary from Prince Sultan Ibrahim Mirza. In nasta’i q he followed the style of Sultan Muhammad Nur. Only two of his works are dated, one 1537-8, the other 1538-9. He died at Mashhad in 1572-3.

£2500-3000

Illuminated page of nasta’i q calligraphy, by Mir Ali al-Katib, Iran, Safavid, probably Herat, early 16th century

8 lines of fine nasta’i q written diagonally and vertically in black ink on blue and cream marbled paper, the interlinear ground and corners pieces decorated with floral motifs in colours on gold, inner border of purple paper decorated with gold scrolling floral motifs, outer border of brown paper with margins ruled in colours and gold, framed text area 174 by 103mm.

Mir Ali was one of the master calligraphers of the first half of the sixteenth century and is considered to be one of the greatest exponents of the nasta’i q script ever to have lived. He studied under Zayn al-Din Mahmud and Sultan Ali al-Mashhadi. He worked at Herat until 1528, when he was taken by the conquering Uzbek Ubayd Khan to Bukhara, where he stayed until his death. The year of his death has not been established, but different sources mention 1533, 1544 and 1558. He was highly esteemed in his own day and Qadi Ahmad tells us that he ‘carried off the ball of pre-eminence and superiority, for in laying down the foundations of nasta’i q he was the initiator of new rules and of a praiseworthy canon’ (Miforski 1991, p.126, see also pp.126-31).

£2500-3000

Two illuminated pages of nasta’i q calligraphy, by ‘Abd al-Husain written for a Sahib-Jam, Iran, Qajar, dated A.H.1298/A.D.1880

Each written diagonally in black ink on gold-sprinkled cream paper decorated with a ground of gold scrolling foliate motifs, edges decorated with gold cloud-bands, borders of green and pink motu paper, both framed (2) text area 335 by 210 and 330 by 210mm.

The text asks for blessing and long life for the patron, who seems to have been a chief accountant or treasurer. The calligrapher of this pair of pages can be identified with Abd al-Husain Khwantsari Zarin Qanin, the scribe of the period of Nii-Din Shah Qajar who wrote inscriptions for the shrine of Abd al-Azin, south of Tehran. See Bayari, vol.2, p.270.

£2000-3000

Leaf of fine nasta’i q calligraphy in coloured ink on green paper, from a manuscript of the poetry of Jami. Timurid, probably Herat, c.1400

In fine to the page written horizontally and diagonally in fine nasta’i q in white, blue and gold ink on buff paper, interlinear and double interpolation rules in gold, margins ruled in colours and gold, borders of gold-sprinkled cream paper, borders stained and defective. Text area 140 by 84mm.

This leaf can be closely compared with a folio from a partly-dispersed manuscript of Sultan Husain Mirza, copied by Sultan Ali al-Mashhadi. The majority is now in the Turk ve Islam Museum, Istanbul, and a leaf is in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. (Lentz and Lovey, cat.149, pp.270, 339-41). Other leaves from the same manuscript were sold in these rooms 29th April 1998, lot 47; 18th October 1995, lot 72; 2nd June 1984, lot 13; where the footnotes mention further references.

£1000-1500

Page of thuluth calligraphy in gold, by Mahmud al-Sultani, written at the Dar Al-Sultana, Herat, dated A.H.846/A.D.1442

Five lines of gold thuluth written on cream paper with interlinear colophon written in smaller blue thuluth, inner blue borders, later outer beige border 145 by 96mm.

£3500-4500
Illuminated page of nasta’liq calligraphy, written for Muhammad Shah Qajar by Asadullah Shirazi, Iran, Qajar, dated A.H.1255/A.D.1839

7 lines of fine nasta’liq calligraphy written diagonally in black ink on buff paper reserved on a gold ground, occasional interlinear floral illumination, border of blue paper speckled with gold, framed text area 314 by 210mm.

Asadullah Shirazi was a well-known and sought-after scribe of the periods of Fath Ali Shah, Muhammad Shah and Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar, who received the title ‘Khub al-Sultani’ from Muhammad Shah. He worked in the style of Mir Ismail al-Hassani and his dated works are from 1836-52. Several are in the Gulistan Library. The only known Qajar Qur’an copied entirely in nasta’liq is by him, dated 1851, also in the Gulistan Library. See Bayani, vol.3, pp.60-64.

£3,000-5,000

Large illuminated page of calligraphy, by Mishkin Qalam Baha’i, Iran, Qajar, dated A.H.1307/A.D.1890

A pious passage written in ornamental muhaqqaq script in black ink on blue paper, the text decorated with trailing foliate motifs forming stylised meandering bands, inner black border, outer brown border, framed 226 by 367mm. with border 262 by 400mm.

Mishkin Qalam was one of the foremost calligraphers of the late 19th century and was a notable member of the Baha’i faith. An extremely similar calligraphic design by this calligrapher, using the same set of pious words, was sold at Christie’s, 23rd April 1996, lot 28.

£3,000-4,000

PERSIAN MINIATURES

The Combat of Gw and Gurwai, illustrated leaf from a dispersed ‘Small Shahnama’, Persia, Shiraz, c.1340

Leaf from a manuscript of the Shahnama of Ferdowsi, gouache with gold on a gold ground, six columns of text above and below the miniature, headings at top and centre written in gold Thuluth, reverse with thirty-one lines of text in six columns, two further headings in gold Thuluth, margins ruled in red miniatures 74 by 116mm. text area 244 by 173mm. leaf 304 by 210mm.

Provenance:
Formerly in the Hagop Kebrvorkian Collection, sold in these rooms, 23rd April 1979.

This leaf originates from an important manuscript of the Shahnama, almost certainly produced at Shiraz about 1340. Known as the first ‘Small Shahnama’, it is now dispersed and leaves are in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Cincinnati Art Museum, the Freer Gallery, Washington D.C., and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Other leaves from the same manuscript have been sold in these rooms 24th April 1996, lot 50, 12th October 1990, lot 156; 7th July 1973, lots 21-24; 11th July 1972, lot 42; 1st December 1969, lot 36 and 6th December 1967, lots 13-14. For reference and discussion see: Binyon, Wilkinson and Gray, pl.XIV; Arberry 1962, vol.1, pls.4-13; Gudie 1962, nos. 14-18, pp.21-27; Simpson 1979.

£5,000-8,000
This illustration is from the Great Mongol Shahnama, one of the most important Persian manuscripts ever put together, a monumental project whose brilliance and complexities have only started to be revealed in the last 20 years. Of the 57 surviving illustrations, 49 are in institutional collections and eight are in private collections. Of these, eight are in public collections which may be considered permanent. The last leaf from the manuscript to appear at public auction was the present leaf when it was sold in these rooms, 27th April 1981, lot 14. The leaf is not only of the greatest significance in art historically, but is also of the utmost rarity in market terms.

In the last twenty years, two major analyses of the manuscript have been carried out. The first, "Epic Images and Contemporary History," by Oleg Grabar and N. Blair was published in Chicago in 1980. The second, "The Saga of the Abu Sa'id Idasman," by Azizel Rezak, was published in 1990 as part of the Oxford Studies in Islamic Art, volume XII, "The Court of the Il-Khans, 1250-1340." The vast majority of information set out below is gleaned from these two admirable studies and we would refer all readers to these works.

Provenance:
1. The manuscript was possibly conceived and begun under the Il-Khans Sultan Uljaytu's vizier Rashid al-Din around 1314.
2. After his death it may have been purposed by the Il-Khans Sultan Abu Sa'id and his vizier Chiyah al-Din (Rashid al-Din's son).
3. It was certainly owned by the Jalayirid Sultans at the end of the 14th century, whose artists carried out work on certain aspects of the manuscript.
4. According to Dast Muhammad in his treatise on "Calligrapher and Painters," the manuscript was in the library of the Timurid prince Sultan Husain Mirza at Herat.
5. It may well have passed from the Timurid royal house to the Safavid, and then on through the Afsharid and Zandid dynasties, for it was almost certainly in the possession of the 19th century ruler Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar (1848-96), under whose care the remargining of the pages using Russian watermarked paper was probably carried out.
8. His sale in these rooms 7th December 1985, lot 14.

Since its "discovery" by western scholars and collectors during the 1920s, when it was dishonored by the Paris dealer Demotte, the Great Mongol Shahnama has rightly been considered one of the most significant works of art Iran has produced. It was conceived on a monumental scale, both physically and thematically, and it represented the ultimate example of Il-Khansid manuscript production. More recently, however, the studies by Grabar and N. Blair and Reza have revealed that it is a masterpiece at a deeper level, with an extraordinarily sophisticated set of contemporary Il-Khansid political themes running through many of the illustrations. It has been revealed not simply as a finely illustrated manuscript of the Persian national epic, but as a complex political tool, in which illustrations depict not only a scene from the Shahnama stories, but also (subtly) a specific episode from the history of the Il-Khans or their Mongol forebears, the Mongol protagonists disguised as characters from the Shahnama. In this context it can be seen not only as a great artistic monument to an important period of Iranian history, but also a literary and historiographical masterpiece of rare skill.

THE SUBJECT OF THE ILLUSTRATION: ITS SHAHNAMA SCENE AND ITS CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE

The Shahnama Story

The present miniature depicts the good king Faridun storming the fortress of the evil king Zahhak, whose patricide, encouraged by the devil, had been accompanied by
the spouting of a black serpent from each shoulder. The diet of these serpents was exclusively human brains. Faridun is pictured arriving with his troops from the left. The castle ramparts are seen angling diagonally towards the upper right, while two archers feebly attempt some resistance. A window in the walls and standing on the top at the far right two women welcome Faridun with open arms. (Soudavar suggests that the two arms protruding from the right edge may be those of Zahhab.)

Groher, Blair and Soudavar have discerned the hands of several different calligraphers within the manuscript as a whole, and Soudavar detects five original and one Jalayrid hand. The present leaf is by his "calligrapher A," who has been identified as "Abdallah Sayyari, the early 13th century master, and pupil of Yaquf al-Mas'udi."

THE PATRON AND THE PRODUCTION

It is just possible that the manuscript was originally conceived by Uljaytu's historian and vizier Rashid al-Din, whose illustrated copies of his fami al-Toos mirrors are now in Edinburgh University Library and the Khalili Collection, London (see Gray 1978, Taib 1997, Blais 1995). However, it was more likely the brain-child of Rashid al-Din's son Ghiyath al-Din, who was vizier to Uljaytu's successor Abu Sa'id. Ghiyath al-Din had not only the experience of the court and its learned men, but also the maturity and sophistication to direct and encourage the young Il-Khan in his cultural and literary tastes. Thus, while the ultimate patron was probably Abu Sa'id, the prime mover was probably Ghiyath al-Din. This would mean a later date for the beginning of the project, although recent arguments have been made for Abu Sa'id himself having conceived the idea and set it in motion, perhaps in 1315. Ghiyath al-Din must have gathered a formidable group of scholars whose knowledge of both the Shihnama text and Mongol and Il-Khanid history was great enough to recognise the potentially syncretic episodes. Their task, along with the artists, was then to ensure that the manuscript remained at heart a Shihnama, while successfully achieving the political propaganda which its patron desired.

IL-KHANID MANUSCRIPT PRODUCTION

The Il-Khanid rulers were in the habit of commissioning manuscripts on a monumental scale, and the great Mongol Shihnama fits very much into this mould. Abu Sa'id's predecessor Uljaytu had commissioned two copies of the Qur'an, whose physical dimensions, as well as the illumination, were on the grandest of scales. One, produced at Mosul in 1306-11 measured 57 by 83 cm, a size that is akin to that of the present leaf, and another, produced at Baghdad in 1306-13 measured a gigantic 72 by 83 cm. The subject matter of the manuscripts produced at the Il-Khanid court were also grand in their scope. As well as the Qur'an itself, which was essential in the religious context, the illustrated historical texts included works such as Rashid al-Din's fami al-Toos, The Gathering of Histories, Edinburgh University Library, Ms. Arab 20, al-Biruni's Al-Athar al-Baqiyya (History of the Ancient Peoples, Edinburgh University Library, Ms. Arab 161) and Ibn Bahshishu's Manafi' al-Hayawan (Encyclopaedia of Animals) Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, M.500, while the library field was represented by the epic of the Shihnama itself, the grandest of all Persian poetical texts.

Forty-nine of the fifty-seven surviving illustrated leaves from the Great Mongol Shihnama are in the collections of the following museums and libraries: The British Museum, London; the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin; the Musée du Louvre, Paris; the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva; Benston Collection, Florence (Harvard University Museum); The Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran; the Freer and Sackler Galleries, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the
41. Ashkabas killed by an arrow from Rustem’s bow: illustrated leaf from a manuscript of the Shahnama, Turkman, c.1490-1500. Gouache with gold on paper; nasta‘liq text above and below in four columns, reverse with 13 lines of text written horizontally and diagonally in four columns, with interlinear floral decoration, in mount miniature 157 by 146mm, text area 224 by 146mm.


Mrs. M. L. H. Roberts, £1,200-1,800

42. Rustem mourns the dying Sohrab: illustrated leaf from a manuscript of the Shahnama, Turkman, c.1490-1500. Gouache with gold on paper; nasta‘liq text above and below in four columns, heading in gold bluish within illuminated panel, reverse with 21 lines of text written horizontally and diagonally in four columns, with interlinear floral decoration, in mount miniature 145 by 146mm, text area 223 by 148mm.

From the same manuscript as the previous lot.

Mrs. M. L. H. Roberts, £1,200-1,800

43. Rustem rescues Rihzan from the pit: illustrated leaf from a manuscript of the Shahnama, Turkman, c.1490-1500. Gouache with gold on paper; nasta‘liq text above and below in four columns, reverse with 13 lines of text written horizontally and diagonally in four columns, with interlinear floral decoration, in mount miniature 165 by 146mm, text area 224 by 146mm.

From the same manuscript as the previous lot.

Mrs. M. L. H. Roberts, £1,200-1,800

44. Iskander converses with the simurgh at the water of life while Khizr and attendants look on: illustrated leaf from a manuscript of Persian poetry, Persia, Shiraz, c.1560-80. Gouache with gold on paper; nasta‘liq text above and below in two or six columns, reverse with 35 lines of nasta‘liq text in six columns, margin ruled in blue and gold, miniature 205 by 175mm, text area 234 by 146mm.

Mrs. M. L. H. Roberts, £2,000-3,000

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University; the Art Institute, Detroit; the Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts; the Cleveland Museum of Art; the Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City; McGill University Library, Montreal.

Eight illustrated leaves are in private collections, including the following:

The Keir Collection, Ham; The Nasser D Khabili Collection, London; the Art and History Trust Collection (on loan to the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.)

As well as the two major studies mentioned above, other references and discussions of the great Mongol Shahnama and of associated historical and artistic aspects can be found as follows:


Mrs. M. L. H. Roberts, £200,000-250,000