ARTS OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD
London  Wednesday 27 April 2005

AUCTION
34-36 New Bond Street
London W1A 2AA
Wednesday 27 April 2005
at 10.30 am

EXHIBITION
Friday 22 April
9 am to 4.30 pm
Sunday 24 April
12 noon to 4 pm
Monday 25 April
9 am to 4.30 pm
Tuesday 26 April
9 am to 4.30 pm

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EMBARGO ON THE IMPORTATION OF
PERSIAN/IRANIAN WORKS OF ART AND
CARPETS TO THE U.S.A.
SPECIALISTS FOR THIS AUCTION

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC ART DEPARTMENT

LONDON
Edward Gibbs
Head of Department
020 7293 5332
Sala Ismail
020 7293 5165
Holly Brockenbury
020 7293 5112
Fax 020 7293 5586

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1 LARGE QUR'AN LEAF IN KUFIC SCRIPT ON VELLUM, NORTH AFRICA OR NEAR EAST, 10TH CENTURY

TEXT: SURA LXXI, AULU'FI', V.1-6

5 lines per page written in fine, kufic script in brown ink on vellum, no decorations, illumination in red, green, blue and yellow dots. Single verses marked with gold roundels surrounded by petals in brown ink and containing exact verse number. Sura heading in bold kufic in gold on a rectangular panel of gold with a scrolling foliate motif outlined in brown ink, patmette originally extending into margin, trimmed to text and across patmette.

20.9 by 33 cm.

This leaf comes from a Qur'an with a very distinctive script, examples of which are very rarely seen on the market. The only other leaves from this Qur'an to have appeared at auction were sold in these rooms: 23 April 1979, lot 9 (a pair), 8 July 1980, lot 157 (single leaf with sura heading), 29 April 1998, lots 10 and 11, and lots 30 and 31; 12 October 2000.

The script is notable not only for its elegance but also for several other distinguishing features, such as the extended vertical letters, the wide, curving terminal nun, and the occasional slender curving tail of the terminal mim. This set of features only occur on two other known copies of the Qur'an, Leaves from the first can be found in the Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait (Dodd 1992, fig.1, p. 117); the Tareq Rajab Museum, Kuwait, and the Nasser D. Khalili Collection, London (Dener 1992, no. 56b). While leaves from the second are in the National Library, Tunis (Rutth 52, Linge and Safadi, no. 54) and the Musée des arts islamiques, Qairawan (Carthage, no. 35b).

A further unusual feature of the script is the manner in which the vertical parts of the letters ta and za and terminal jaf curve forwards. This feature is most commonly associated with eastern kufic script, i.e. in the extended vertical and the playful confrontation of the lam alif in the word ilah also in evidence here. The eastern kufic script was present in the Muslim west towards the close of the tenth century A.D., and the present leaf may be an early example of the spread of this script westwards across the Islamic world.

The present leaf is also notable for the detailed attention to each verse ending which is marked by a stylised rosette of considerable size containing an exact number, as well as its lightly illuminated and bold sura heading. Of the other known leaves from this Qur'an only two show sura headings, each with similar large gold panels and confident inscriptions (see Islamische Buchkunst 1980, p. 54, no. 35 and Sotheby's London 8 July 1980, lot 157 later published in Fehervari & Safadi 1981, p. 28, no. 1).

£10,000-15,000
€14,000-21,000
ILLUMINATED OPENING LEAF FROM A KUFIC QUR’AN ON VELLUM, NORTH AFRICA OR NEAR EAST, 9TH CENTURY

The leaf decorated on both sides with large, rectangular panels of geometric motifs with extending palmate, the recto in colours and gold with central panel of interlocking octagonal medallions, the outer border split into alternate rectangular panels with illuminated or finely hatched foliate motifs, and square panels bearing knotted ropework; the verso in striking dark green and black with illuminated geometric border of overlapping octagonal medallions surrounding a central panel of a finely hatched foliate motif

22.8 by 31.5cm.

This large vellum leaf, finely illuminated with a range of motifs typical of the ninth and tenth centuries, would have formed one half of the frontispiece of a magnificent Kufic Qur’an. It is noteworthy that the rectangular panels on both the recto and verso are perfectly aligned, whilst its unusually large size suggests that it has not suffered the extent of cropping that many other Kufic leaves have undergone.

Its size and well-executed marginal palmettes identify it as a leaf from a ninth century Qur’an, a section of which (Lz2-13) is in the Museum of Islamic Arts, Tehran (429A); see A Selection of Qur’ an Manuscripts in the Museum of the Islamic Period, Tehran, 1370, sh.; and Lings 1976, pl.5; James, 1980, nos.5, p.18. A number of examples of such illuminated pages can be found in Carthage 1983, nos.341, 345, 356; James 1980, nos.480; Arberry 1967, pls.13-20; Alfi 1975, no.5; London 1976, no.503; Splendour, nos.3, 6; Deroche 1992, no.67; Quaritch 1999, nos.1-2.

£25,000-35,000
€30,400-51,000

2 detail of verso