Arts of the Islamic World
INCLUDING FINE CARPETS AND TEXTILES

LONDON 9 APRIL 2008

Sotheby's
Arts of the Islamic World
INCLUDING FINE CARPETS AND TEXTILES

AUCTION IN LONDON WEDNESDAY 9 APRIL 2008 | 10 AM

PLEASE NOTE
THIS AUCTION WILL START AT 10AM

EXHIBITION
Friday 4 April | 9 am - 4.30 pm
Sunday 6 April | 12 noon - 4 pm
Monday 7 April | 9 am - 4.30 pm
Tuesday 8 April | 9 am - 4.30 pm

EMBARGO ON IMPORTATION OF PERSIAN/Raman
WORKS OF ART TO THE U.S.A.

These clients considering purchasing Persian/Raman works of art with the intention of exporting them to the U.S.A. should ensure of the relevant U.S. Government Department regarding the proper importation of such items.

The Islamic Department does however remain available to assist buyers with such enquiries, so far as practicable. Buyers should be aware that Sotheby's does not represent that this approval will be granted.

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London

Arts of the Islamic World
8 October 2008
London

Modern & Contemporary
Arab and Iranian Art
9 October 2008
London

SPECIALISTS AND AUCTION ENQUIRIES

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For all lots marked with a * or **, please refer to the VAT information pages at the back of the catalogue.

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Masterpieces of Calligraphy from a European Private Collection
This magnificent leaf is a rare example of Kufic manuscript production from the early period of Islam. The earliest Qur'an fragments which have survived down through the ages are few and far between. Their scarcity makes them fascinating objects of historical documentation, bringing new evidence to the scarcity information available on the development of the Arabic script, and Islamic manuscript production in general. The eighth and early ninth centuries saw a stylistic standardisation - with the introduction of vocalisation and diacritics, the calligraphic focus on the horizontal as opposed to the vertical, the change of the page format from vertical to horizontal, the regulation of the number of lines and, eventually, the enrichment of the palette. Examples of these standardised Kufic manuscripts from the ninth and tenth century can be seen in folios 5-2, 11-15 and 17.

A stylistic comparison of this particular folio with leaves dated to the later Abbasid period reveals immediately a lack of vocalisation and diacritics, indicating a production date earlier than the ninth or tenth centuries. Furthermore, the verse markers are primitive in format, a series of brown dashes, or a coloured square at the tenth verse, no illuminated rosettes have been the inordinate expense of producing such huge sheets of vellum - again evidence of an early date. These features combined with careful script and a horizontal format suggest a production date during this time of stylistic synthesis, with a likely dating to the eighth century. Confirmation comes in the form of carbon dating which shows a probability of 66% that the leaf dates to between 640 and 705 A.D., and a 95% probability of a date between 595 and 685 A.D.

Approximately one third of the Qur'an from which this leaf originates, the 'Ultumur Qur'an' is housed in Tashkent in Uzbekistan. This is not the only instance of a monumental Kufic Qur'an of this date ending up in central Asia (see Déroche 1999), but the Qur'an in question is the largest that has yet come to scholarly attention. Déroche remarks that 'The itinerary followed by these folios remains somewhat obscure', but it seems likely that this Qur'an was carried along the Silk Road, via Merv, Bukhara and Samarkand. Tashkent lies on the road to Kandahar, one of the trade routes' principal nodes. Later in the nineteenth century, the manuscript was in St. Petersburg, where it formed the object of a study by A. F. Shevunov; a facsimile was published in 1905 by Uspenskii and Pisarev. It would appear that during the period in St. Petersburg a number of pages were separated from the manuscript, amongst them this example. Later, a paleographical study of the remaining section of the manuscript was made bySalahuddin Al-Munajjib in 1977.

This manuscript was clearly an exceptional work, and this leaf is necessarily a document of the greatest importance for the study of the early history of Islamic texts, their construction and their dissemination.

A further leaf from this manuscript can be found in the collection of the Aga Khan, see the exhibition catalogue Oeuvres d'art islamiques de l'Aga Khan Museum, Louvre 2005, cat.33, p.106.
A LARGE AND UNUSUAL NISHAPUR CALLIGRAPHIC POTTERY DISH, CENTRAL ASIA, 10TH CENTURY

the red earthenware body of shallow form with incurved rim supported on a low foot, decorated in dark brown slip on a cream slip ground with a single line of corpulent kufic script with drop-form motifs on the rim above and below

33SCN DAHA

INSCRIPTIONS

bāšala wa mīnsa

'Blessing and God's Grace'

£ 80,000-85,000 € 99,000-106,000
3 A NISHAPUR POTTERY DISH, CENTRAL ASIA, 10TH CENTURY
of truncated conical form with straight flaring walls and short finely
turned foot, decorated with brown and red slips on a cream slip
ground with a central lobed motif in a roundel enclosed by a teardrop
kufic inscription with elegant lettering separated by shaped panels with
dots and stippling framed by a saw-tooth border around the rim
14.5CM, DIAM.
£ 10,000-15,000 € 11,500-16,900

INSCRIPTIONS
Kalilu ha'iyan meryan
'May all eaten from this [bowl] be wholesome'

This unusual late bowl is finely potted with an elegant and well-turned
font indicative of an accomplished potter. The painted decoration is also
a high calibre and lends a monumentality that belies its compact size.
The Persian/Iranian motifs in the sinteredness of the design are strongly,
reminiscent of the celebrated bowl in the Freer Gallery of Art,
Washington, which was found at Nishapur (see Afi 1975, m12, pp56-57;
and Sourati 1983, p54, fig.32, illustrated in colour)

4 A NISHAPUR CALLIGRAPHIC POTTERY BOWL
CENTRAL ASIA, 10TH CENTURY
of truncated conical form with straight flaring sides and short foot,
decorated with a single line of kufic below the rim in raised black slip
20.5CM, DIAM.
£ 50,000-60,000 € 59,000-68,500

INSCRIPTIONS
'He who believes in what follows excels in generosity. Blessing to the
owner.'
A saying attributed to Imam 'Ali
This crisp and elegant bowl displays the essence of fine kufic
calligraphy balancing vertical flourishes with horizontal ligatures in a
harmonious composition. The raised texture of the black slip adds a
serious touch to this compact masterpiece.
TWO QUR’AN LEAVES IN KUFIC SCRIPT ON VELLUM, NORTH AFRICA OR NEAR EAST, CIRCA 9TH CENTURY

TEXT: SURAT MAR陈列 (XV) vv. 56-57 AND SURAT TAHAN (XX) vv. 15-17
7 lines per page written in kufic script in black ink on vellum, vocalization of red and green dots, single verse divisions marked by a large Florin decorated with red, blue and green dots around central gold and green dots, fifth verse marked with a stylized gold star "assailed in brown
26.8 BY 17 AND 27.5 BY 36.2CM.
(2)
£ 15,000-25,000  € 16,900-34,700

QUR’AN LEAF IN KUFIC SCRIPT ON VELLUM, NORTH AFRICA OR NEAR EAST, CIRCA A.D. 900

TEXT: SURAT AL-‘ANFAK (V) 11-12
7 lines per page written in bold extended kufic script in brown ink on vellum, letter painting of brown diagonal dashes, vocalization of red and green dots
25 BY 33CM.
The distinctive attenuated style of the kufic script exhibited here relates it to a group of leaves that rarely appear at auction. Prior to this sale only a few others have been offered publicly, including two single leaves in these rooms, 18 April 2001 lots 1 and 2, and prior to that 5 May 2001 lots 4, 5 and 6. The calligraphic style of these leaves can be associated with a manuscript in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Although the measurements of the two manuscripts are not exactly aligned to the leaf or those sold previously (the section in the Bodleian measures 20.2 by 31cm, and is probably slightly trimmed), the script, its arrangement on the page and the vocalization would indicate that they are all from one and the same manuscript.

£ 6,000-8,000  € 8,000-10,000