A MONUMENTAL QUR’AN LEAF IN KUFIC SCRIPT, NEAR EAST OR NORTH AFRICA, CIRCA 850-950

TEXT: SURAT AL-IHSA (1), VERSE 42 - VERSE 66
Arabic manuscript on parchment, 18 lines to the page written in kufic script in brown ink, diacritics and vowel-points picked out in red and green ink, tenth verse marked with red a circle
text area 33 by 42cm.
leaf 39.6 by 54.4cm.
£ 30,000-50,000 - £ 33,000-56,000

The Qur’an leaf in kufic script is remarkable not only for its large proportions but also for its unornamented simplicity. Unlike the script of this unusually large Qur’an folio is close to style D) and D’ in Dianoche’s categorisation (Dianoche 1992, pp.44-45, although the al and terminal qa‘ are closest to style C), see pp.34-37, there are certain idiosyncrasies that differentiate it from other examples of kufic script such as the thin tail of the terminal letters that drop below the line (see the letter mim for example). Furthermore, the individual verses are not marked in the text, but the tenth verse is indicated with subtle red circles, differing from other more elaborate gold-verse markers existing in other Qur’an leaves that employ type D scripts. In fact, there are a few indications that the text may originally have lacked any diacritics or ornamentation altogether, consisting solely of the brown kufic text. Textual corrections, such as that on line 9 of the verses, have been rendered in the same red ink as the vocalisation, suggesting that both were added simultaneously sometime after the compilation of the text (see also Fraser & Kwiatkowski 2006, nos.5, 54-57 and Stanley 1995, no.2). Although relatively tightly packed together, the script is highly uniform and its legibility suggests that it may have been intended as an institutional copy, perhaps for a mosque or madrasa.

Two other folios from the same manuscript were exhibited in the exhibition Ink and Gold: Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, 2006 (see Fraser & Kwiatkowski, op.cit., pp.34-37). A further leaf can be seen in Bernard Quatrehomme’s, The Qur’an and Calligraphy: A Selection of Fine Manuscript Material, London, 1995, no.2, pp.53-55). Other leaves were sold in these rooms 8 October 2008, lot 5; 9 April 2008, lot 14, 34 October 2007, lot 3.
A QUR’AN LEAF IN KUFIC SCRIPT ON VELLUM, NORTH AFRICA OR NEAR EAST, EARLY ABBASID PERIOD, 9TH CENTURY

TEXT: SURAT AL-AN’AM (VII), VERSE 94 - PART OF VERSE 97
Arabic manuscript on vellum. 7 lines to the page written in large kufic script in black ink with diacritical points and vowel points marked in blue. Green and red dots, the recto with one marginal verse marker in green and gold. Wide outer borders indicating the leaves have not been trimmed. Text area: 19 by 25.5cm. Leaf: 28 by 37.5cm.

Another folio from the same Qur’an is in the Nasir D. Khalili Collection, and according to Francois Desorge his letter forms recall the characteristics of the D-Grop (Desorge 1992, no. 68, p.86). Moreover, he concludes that the Khalili leaf might have originated from NYS 322 at the Institute of Oriental Studies in Leningrad (al-Munajjed 1980, p.7), and Petriyov et al. 1995, no. 2, pp.114-115.

A leaf from the same Qur’an was sold in these rooms on 8 October 2008, lot 54; Christie’s, London, 15 October 2002, lots 44-52; Sam Fogg, Islamic Calligraphy, cat.1, nos.1-13; 19-20.

$3,000-5,000 / €2,500-4,000

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AN ILLUMINATED QUR’AN SECTION, MAMLUK, PROBABLY EGYPT OR THE YEMEN, CIRCA 1500-1550

TEXT: JUJ IV
Arabic manuscript on thick cream coloured paper, 21 leaves, 9 lines to the page written in black ink with diacritical points and vowel points in black, large gold rosettes decorated with alternating blue and orange dots between verses, upper heading written in thuluth script in gold with diacritical points and vowel points marked in blue. Illuminated double-page frontispiece in colours and gold, the four headings in white thuluth in gold cartouches, contemporary brown morocco binding with central oval medallions in gold raising palmettos above and below, with blind and gold-tooled borders with banded corners.

29 by 21cm.

Similar Qur’an sections to the present one were sold in these rooms on 8 October 2008, lot 15 and 14 October 1999, lot 31.

$8,000-10,000 / €6,000-8,000

6

A LEAF FROM THE ‘FIVE SURAH’S’, IN MUHAAQQAQ SCRIPT, COPIED BY ABU MUHAMMAD ABDUL QAYYUM IBN MUHAMMAD IBN KARIMSHAH TARIQI. PERSIA OR HESOPOTAMIA, PROBABLY JALALID RASHID, CIRCA 1570

TEXT: SURAT AL-‘AN’AM (VII), PART OF VERSE 159 - PART OF VERSE 161
Arabic manuscript on paper, 5 lines to the page written in elegant muhawwak script, black ink outlined in gold, diacritical points and vowel points also in black ink outlined in gold. Illuminated double-page frontispiece containing geometric crescents within dotted borders outlined in blue, margins ruled in red, gold and blue. Text area: 31.5 by 26.5cm. Leaf: 43.5 by 34.5cm.

This leaf and the following two leaves originate from a manuscript of selected chapters from the Qur’an known as the ‘Five Surahs’ which begins with the piahe al haumsa ilaj (chapters L V, XVIII, XXXIV and XXXVII). The colophon of the manuscript, now housed in a private collection, gives the name of the scribe as Abu Muhammad ‘Abdul Qayyum ibn Muhammad ibn Karim Shahr-i-Tariq. Abdul Qayyim Suleyman has suggested that stylistic grounds that the composition of Qur’an verses from which this leaf originated were made for the Jalalid ruler Shabak Uways (Suleyman 1990, nos.10 and 50-51).

The extremely fine illumination is reminiscent of earlier Ilkhanid imperial Qur’ans, such as Ushayar’s Mursa Qur’an and the superbe mawlawi script looks forward to the monumental Qur’ans attributed to Buxurguri but more likely commissioned by his grandfather Timur (1336-1405).

$20,000-30,000 / €15,000-22,000
A LEAF FROM THE 'FIVE SURAS', IN MUGHQAQ SCRIPT.
COPIED BY ABU MUHAMMAD ABDUL QAYYUM IBN MUHAMMAD
IBN KARIMSHAH TABBRI, PERSIA OR MESOPOTAMIA,
PROBABLY JAL ILI'IRI' BAGHDAD, CIRCA 1570

TEXT: SURAT AL-IMAM (V), PART OF VERSE 199 - END OF VERSE 122
Arabic manuscript on paper, 5 lines to the page written in elegant
mughaq script in black ink outlined in gold, diagrams and vowel points
also in black ink outlined in gold. 3 illuminated circular verse markers
comprising geometric knots within dotted borders outlined in blue
(a third of the verse) margins ruled in red, gold and blue
text area: 87 by 55cm.
leaf: 45.5 by 35cm.
£ 20,000-30,000 € 22,600-33,900

A LEAF FROM THE 'FIVE SURAS', IN MUGHQAQ SCRIPT.
COPIED BY ABU MUHAMMAD ABDUL QAYYUM IBN MUHAMMAD
IBN KARIMSHAH TABBRI, PERSIA OR MESOPOTAMIA,
PROBABLY JAL ILI'IRI' BAGHDAD, CIRCA 1570

TEXT: SURAT AL-AN'AM (V), PART OF VERSE 37 - PART OF VERSE 40
Arabic manuscript on paper, 5 lines to the page written in elegant
mughaq script in black ink outlined in gold, diagrams and vowel points
also in black ink outlined in gold. 3 illuminated circular verse markers
comprising geometric knots within dotted borders outlined in blue
margins ruled in red, gold and blue
text area: 35.8 by 25.5cm.
leaf: 41.5 by 35cm.
† £ 20,000-30,000 € 22,600-33,900
This fragment is likely to have originated from the famous Qur’an associated with the Timurid prince Baysungur bin Shamsi. According to David James, the main reason for its fame is its size, for the complete pages that survive measure about 177 by 101 cm. The text of this Qur’an was copied in seven lines on one side of these enormous sheets; the other side being left blank. Assuming the entire text of the Qur’an was transcribed, approximately 800 folios would have been required to contain it. It adds that the association with Baysungur dates back to the early 15th century when the noted collector of Oriental manuscripts, James Belletrist, saw a section of this Qur’an in Qushan, in north-east Iran. Although Baysungur was a competent calligrapher, there is no historical evidence that he undertook such a task as copying a Qur’an of this size since it would have taken between six and eight months to complete the work on the assumption that he was able to spend the time to copy ten pages a day. The undertaking would certainly not have gone unreported by his contemporaries and would have been recorded in the chronicles of the time. James concludes that the attribution was probably based on circumstantial evidence since at one stage the manuscript was kept in the mausoleum of his grandfather, Timur in Samarqand (James, 1992, pp18-20). It remained there until the city was captured by Nadir Shah in the 18th century. The Shah’s troops dismantled the manuscript and stole many of its leaves, which were later lost or badly damaged. However, in the exhibition catalogue, Timur and the Phoenix Vision, it was suggested that in fact the manuscript fitted more naturally under the patronage of Timur himself and that the great marble stand commissioned by Ulug Beg after Timur’s death in 1405, and originally located in the main chamber of the Friday Mosque at Samarqand, was probably made specifically for this Qur’an. Soudavar continues the argument with convincing technical details of the surface area of paper needed for such a manuscript, its weight, the estimated thickness of its spine and so on, all of which support the theory of Timur’s not Baysungur’s, patronage (see Soudavar, A., Art of the Persian Court, 1992, cat.204-6, pp.59-62).

Two small peculiarities must also be mentioned in connection with the present manuscript. On close inspection it can be seen that there are faint pencil markings around the text, visible in areas where the ink has deteriorated, something that has not been recorded on other leaves and lines from the Baysungur Qur’an. Since the exact details of these scribbles involved in the production of this manuscript are unknown, it is unclear what precise bearing these markings have on both this example and the manuscript as a whole. It may be that they were the result of some restoration, adding the re-inking of some of the lettering at a later date. Clearly, this two-line section fell into a fair degree of disrepair over the centuries and in order to keep it from further deterioration, the paper, whilst in keeping with a date of production circa 1400, has been split and re-led.

Other pages or fragments are in the Asien-i Oudi Library, Mashhad; the Gulistan Library, the Rashid-Abbasi Museum, the Malik Library, the Museum of Ancient Iran, and the National Library of Iran, Tehran; the Metropolitan Museum, New York; The Art and History Trust Collection, Washington D.C.; the David Collection, Copenhagen; the Nasser D’Khail Collection, London.

Pages or fragments from this Qur’an were included in the following sales: Sotheby’s, Geneva, 25 June 1985, lot 18 (4 leaves); Christie’s, London, 25 November 1985, lot 105 (1 line); Sotheby’s, London, 10 October 1986, lot 168 (1 page) and lot 169 (9 lines including sura 96:1-7); London, 21 October 1995, lot 66 (1 line); Drouot, Paris, 25 April 1994, lot 341 (2 lines); Sotheby’s, London, 22 April 1998, lot 15 (2 lines, same fragment as Paris sale); Sotheby’s, London, 12 October 2000, lot 15 (3 lines); Bonhams, London, 1 May 2001, lot 51 (1 page copied in the 14th/15th century) and Christie’s, London, 27 April 2004, lot 22 (1 page).
A SCROLL-FORM QUR’AN INCORPORATED INTO THE NINETY-NINE NAMES OF GOD IN MICROGRAPHIC SCRIPT, DATED A.H. 780/1378-1380, WITH LATER OPENING TEXT, PERSIA, SAFAVID, CIRCA 1600

Illuminated Arabic manuscript on cream paper, the text of the Qur’an written in fine ghalib script in a micrographic design to form the ninety-nine names of God in large thuluth script, demoticics and vowels in gold outlined in red, annotations in small naskh script in red between the text, margins ruled in colours and gold, opening illuminated section with bordered cartouches with scrolling foliate motifs on a gold ground; the opening verse of the Qur’an in naskh script within clouds, stamped verse markers against a foliate ground, with leather endpiece 8½ x 6⅞ in. approx. length

Qur’anic, annalists and salatimtas written in ghalib script in scroll form became popular from the 17th century onwards and calligraphers competed to display their skills in writing this micrographic script. However, such manuscripts that have survived from the Mamluk and Ilkhanid/Timurid periods are extremely rare.

According to al-Qalqashandī, the Mamluk chronicler who wrote on the subject of calligraphy, the ghalib (literally ‘dust’) script is thought to have derived from the naskh and wāḥi script. The invention of the script is attributed to al-Ahwālī who derived it from the wāḥi script in the 9th century. The letters are usually less than 3 mm and often as small as 1.5 mm. The script was originally invented to write messages carried by couriers, but it soon came to be used by calligraphers in the production of scrolls for liturgical and magical writings, and also for copies of the Qur’an, sometimes incorporated into a micrographic design, as in this manuscript. In this case, the entire Qur’anic text has been skilfully written into a design composed of the ninety-nine names of God. The compression of the text into the smallest possible space made it easier for the scroll to be attached to or carried by a person during his travels or in battle in order to protect him from any misfortune that might befall him.

An interesting feature of this scroll is the script of the Persian translation written in red ink which can be compared directly to that of the script used to write the indices and tables of content and titles in Ilkhanid scriptoria in the late 13th/14th centuries. For comparable script see that of an earlier medical encyclopedia dated 1275 sold in these rooms on 14 October 1999, lot 21. A 16th-century Mamluk prayer scroll was sold in these rooms on 13 October 1980, lot 92, whilst a further Ottoman example was sold on 26 April 1995, lot 22. For further reading:

Blasi, Sheila, Islamic Calligraphy, Edinburgh University Press, 2006, pp. 259-260;
Sattafi, Vein, Arabic Calligraphy, Thames and Hudson, London, 1992, p. 73;

£ 8,000-12,000  â‚¬ 9,000-15,000

SURA YASIN FROM THE QUR’AN, COPIED BY AHMAD AL-NAYIRI, PERSIA, SAFAVID, DATED A.H. 1120/A.D. 1708

Arabic manuscript on paper, 26 leaves, 8 lines to the page written in fine naskh script in black ink on cream paper, interlinear gilt with gold flowers between verses, wide outer margins, illuminated opening double page, folio leaves with seal impressions and ownership inscriptions, later red morocco binding with blue silk covers 21½ by 13 cm.

£ 8,000-12,000  â‚¬ 9,000-15,000

Ahmad al-Nayrizi was one of the most celebrated masters of naskh that Iran had produced under the patronage of Shah Sulayman and Shah Sultan Husayn. His repertoire of works include numerous copies of the Qur’an, prayer books, and a Qur’anic inscription in the Chahar Sultan palace in Isfahan. His style of naskh has been aptly described as “a particularly confident one, characterized by exceptionally well-formed letters. Vowels were given exactly the same weight as consonants, with care taken to ensure that the vowel signs were always placed at exactly the same distance above and below the consonants throughout the passage of the text” (see Rafi 1996, p. 12).

A further example of his work, a single-volume Qur’an, can be found in the Nasser D. Khalili collection (see Bayat et al (Eds) 1999, n.114, pg.20, fols 156).
A LARGE ILLUMINATED QUR'AN, PERSIA, CIRCA 1560-70

Arabic manuscript on cream paper, 321 leaves. 12 lines to the page in naskh script in black ink, excision marks in red ink, framed in red, blue, and gold, gold wash illumination on several folios, single verse divisions marked with star-shaped medallions in colours and gold, nine headings written in whiteWithin a gold ground decorated with polychrome floral sprays, margins ruled in colours and gold, fifteenth and sixteenth verses marked in margins with large roundels, decorated with floral motifs on a blue ground, opening folio containing an eight-pointed shamas followed by two illuminated double pages of text, illuminated headpiece starting suurat al-Baqara, the end with an illuminated leaf with 6 lines of large white naskh in cartouches of gold and blue, the final filled with floral motifs composed of red dots, left-hand companion page lacking, decorated headpiece on final leaf, contemporary brown morocco binding with gilt-stamped panel of floral motifs and cloud scrolls, border cartouches stamped with floral scrolls and arch-shaped designs, double cover gilt stamped with figtree work on coloured grounds.

£30,000-40,000

THE ILLUMINATION

The opening page would almost undoubtedly have originally been part of a double-page opening with two shamas containing an inscription with the Sura bahar' al-fawad / The lawyers, v.88 (the second half of this verse is inscribed in the remaining shamas).

"When men and jinn to band together in order to come up with the like of this Qur'an, they will never come up with the like of it, even if they back up one another."

OTHER ILLUMINATED FOLIOS ARE

Folios 1b-2a. One fully illuminated double page with Sura al-Fatihah / The Opening in blue and gold, the text in white, multi within central lozenge-shaped cartouches, the inner and outer margins filled with floral sprays and arabesques in gold on a blue background.

Folios 2b-3a. One illuminated headpiece containing the heading for Sura al-Baqara / The Cow, in blue and gold with polychrome floral arabesques, the text within cloud bands on a gold ground decorated with polychrome floral sprays.

Folios 120r-3. One illuminated page with six lines of prayer in large naskh and mukhayyam in white on coloured grounds.

Folios 121r-2. Part of a decorated shamsa, containing forty-two small squares, the text in naskh script alternating in white ink on a ground of gold with floral motifs composed of black dots, and text in black on a ground of pink with floral motifs composed of red dots.

The fine illumination can also be compared to that of a Safavid Qur'an sold in these rooms, 27 April 1994, lot 19.