2
A LARGE QUR'AN LEAF IN KUFIC SCRIPT ON VELLUM. NORTH AFRICA OR NEAR EAST, 8TH CENTURY

TEXT: SURAT AL-ANBIYA, VS. 19
Arabic manuscript leaf on vellum, 16 lines per page written in bold, stretched Kufic script on vellum in brown ink, letter-pointing of brown dashes, vocalization of red and green dots. Single verse divisions marked with a row of diagonal brown ink dashes, fifth verse marked with an illuminated letter alif, verses marked with an illuminated knotted roundel, worn at edges, ink on recto worn
30 by 56cm.

For a discussion of the Qur'an from which this folio originates, see footnote to the previous lot.

The text of the recto of this folio begins at verse 5 of Surat al-Anbiya, and the offsetting of the decorated sura heading, which would have been on the previous page facing the present one, is visible at the top right across to the top left, showing traces of the same type of design and palette as those on lots 1 and 3.

£ 15,000-20,000 € 16,300-24,400
A LARGE QUR'AN LEAF IN KUFIC SCRIPT ON VELLUM, NORTH AFRICA OR NEAR EAST, 8TH CENTURY

TEXT, SURAT AL-IMRÁN (3), VERS 4-5, 5-6, 6-7. Arabic manuscript leaf on vellum, 16 lines per page written in bold, stretched Kufic script in brown ink, letter-pointing of brown dashes, vocalisation of red and green dots, single verse divisions marked with a row of diagonal brown ink dashes, fifth verse marked with an illuminated letter al-A, verse heading consisting of a horizontal panel and two lateral panels filled with foliate and scrolling motifs in brown and green, worn at edges, ink on verso worn and partly re-inked 31.2 by 41.5cm.

For a discussion of the Qur'an from which this folio originates see footnote to lot 1.

The Qur'anic title on the present folio is interesting not only for its archaic polychrome style, but for the fact that it has two decorated horizontal registers, a feature that occurs on a very few other early Qur'ans, notably two large Qur'an manuscripts published in Montez, Arabic Palaeography, Cairo, 1995, nos. 11, 19, 20.

£ 15,000 - 25,000 $ 18,500 - 30,000
A LARGE QUR'AN LEAF IN KUFIC SCRIPT ON VELLUM, NORTH AFRICA, OR NEAR EAST, 8TH CENTURY

TEXT: SURAT AL-NASR, XVII, VIMS-T01

Arabic manuscript leaf on vellum, 16 lines per page written in bold, stretched Kufic script in brown ink, letter-painting of brown dashes, vocalization of red and green dots, single verse divisions marked with a row of diagonal brown ink dashes, five verses marked with an illuminated letter alif at edges, ink on recto worn 30.4 by 24.6 cm.

For a discussion of the Qur'an from which this folio originates, see footnote to lot 7.

An interesting feature of Kufic calligraphy, evident here and on certain other early Qur'an folios, is the intention of the scribe to nearly fill the text space on the page. This results in words occasionally being split between lines, with the first letter or letters at the end of one line and the rest at the beginning of the next (e.g., lines 11-12 of the verse, the word aladiwd is split). This shows the graphic and aesthetic intention of the scribe to produce a balanced and regular text space with lines of exactly equal length.

£15,000-20,000 €18,000-24,000
A QUR'AN LEAF IN KUFIC SCRIPT ON VELLUM.
NEAR EAST OR NORTH AFRICA, LATE 9TH CENTURY

TEXT: SUKA AL-ZHAIRA (Q), VS. 274-275
Arabic manuscript leaf on vellum, 6 lines per page written in brown ink,
no letter-pointing, vocalization of red, blue, green and yellow dots,
verse divisions marked with a triangular cluster of gold dots
19.2 by 27.7cm.

The elegant, well-spaced and graphically precise script of this folio is
typical of the mature Kufic scripts popular under the Abbasid dynasty, and
tclose to the script used on the well-known manuscript known as the
‘Amajjí Qur’an, written in three lines per page and donated to a mosque
in Tyre, Lebanon, in 875-6 AD by Amajjí, the Abbasid governor of
Damascus.

† £ 7,000-10,000  € 8,600-12,900
A LARGE QUR’AN LEAF IN GOLD KUFIC SCRIPT ON BLUE VELLUM, NORTH AFRICA OR NEAR EAST, 9TH-10TH CENTURY

TEXT: SUJU' AL-Baqara (2), VS 64-17

Arabic manuscript leaf on vellum, 15 lines per page written in stitched Kufic script in gold outlined in reddish-brown ink on blue-dyed vellum, occasional letter painting of gold diagonal dashes, single verse divisions marked with silver dots decorated with coloured dots, faintly incised guidelines 28.7 by 36.7cm.

This leaf is from an exceptional manuscript commonly known as the Blue Qur’an. When complete it must have been one of the most luxurious manuscripts ever produced in the early medieval period in the Islamic world. Other examples of dyed vellum are known, but rare, and yellow was the more usual choice of colour. Blue was probably symbolic as well as merely luxurious and it is probable that the blue vellum and gold script together were meant to rival the most luxurious manuscripts of the Byzantine empire, which were dyed blue or purple (see Freer and Kwiatkowski 2006, no.46).

The exact origins of the Blue Qur’an are unknown, but several theories have been put forward over the last century. F.R. Martin, who acquired a group of leaves in Istanbul in 1912, suggested that the manuscript was commissioned by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu’tamid 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 of the Great Mosque of Qairawan in 1294 (published in 1956 by Chabbi), 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, J.M., ‘Al-Mu’tamid’s Blue Qur’an’, Revue des études islamiques, LXIV 1986, pp.59-65; and The Blue Qur’an: An Early Fatimid Kufic manuscript from the Maghreb, Les manuscrits du Maghreb-Orient, Vaia Tarcisio, VIII, Istanbul and Paris, 1998, pp.95-99).

More recent research by T. Stanley (Quarterly 1999, pp.7-15) points to an Andalusian patron, and M. Fasoula suggests an Aghlabid or Kairouanian provenance (Freer and Kwiatkowski 2006, p.46). A recent very detailed and very thorough study of the manuscript by Alan George attributes the manuscript to the early Abbasid period in the late eight or early ninth century (George, ‘Calligraphy, Colour and Light in the Blue Qur’an’, in Journal of Qur’anic Studies, Volume XI, Issue 1, 2009, pp.75-125).

If the exact origins of the manuscript remain elusive, it is universally agreed that it is a startlingly luxurious example of early Islamic manuscript production, whose patron must have been a ruler of enormous wealth and ambition, and that 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 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge Massachusetts and various private collections including the Aga Khan Museum Collection, Geneva, and the Nasr D. Khalil Collection, London. Several leaves have been sold in these rooms, most recently 11 October 2006, lot 3, and in the sale of the Collection of the Berkeley Trust, 12 October 2004, lot 1. For further references please refer to the latter catalogue note.

£ 2,000,000-3,000,000 € 2,400,000-3,600,000
A QUR'AN LEAF IN GOLD KUFIC SCRIPT ON VELLUM, NEAR EAST, 10TH CENTURY

TEXT: SURAT AL-SABA' (26:1-3), V.14-32
Arabic manuscript leaf on vellum, 5 lines per page, written in fine gold kufic script on vellum, letter-pointing (kufic) of thin brown dashes, recto: red, blue, and green dots, single verse divisions marked with illuminated gold crowns, double verse divisions marked within the text with a gold mandorla containing an illuminated letter (rum) and adjacent in the margin with a larger illuminated roundel containing the accent verse count (thirty-five in this case)
14.5 by 21.8 cm
£ 20,000-30,000 € 24,400-36,600

This folio is one of only a handful of surviving Qur'ans in which the main body of text has been executed entirely in gold kufic script. This was a very rare, luxury aspect of manuscript production, indicating a commission at the highest level of patronage. The technique of writing in gold (chryography) differed from the normal process of writing in black ink. Kufic script in black ink was applied with a wide style, dipped in ink and drawn smoothly across the page from right to left. For gold kufic, the outline of the letters was drawn in black ink with a very fine nib (visible here to the naked eye) and the interiors of the letters were then filled with gold ink, the scribe having to keep as accurately as possible to the pre-determined outline of the letters so as to keep the whole calligraphic display as neat as possible. This process was a lengthy and expensive one, hence the rarity of these luxury gold script manuscripts.

The Qur'ans so far identified as originating from this folio originates, now widely dispersed in various institutional and private collections, had been attributed for some time to Qairawan (Lings and Sefat 1994, nos.51-57; Geneva 1985, nos.). However, Stanley has pointed out that the ajab system used in the verse count of this Qur'an is the so-called Eastern ajab system (Qur'an 2:123, p.38), which was used predominantly in the Central and Eastern Islamic lands rather than North Africa.

Other leaves and sections from the same Qur'an are in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Tunis, the National Institute of Archaeology, Tunis, Beit al-Qur'an, Bahrain, and the Nasser D. Khalili Collection, London, and several have been sold in these rooms, most recently 16 October 2000, lot 4, where further references are given.
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A QUR'AN LEAF IN GOLD KUFIC SCRIPT ON VELLUM
NEAR EAST; 10TH CENTURY

TEXT: SURAT AL-SHURA (XXI), VS. 40-41
Arabic manuscript leaf on vellum, 5 lines per page written in fine gold Kufic script, letter-pointing (qalamj) of thin brown dashes, vocalization of red green and blue dots, single verse divisions marked with illuminated gold nasras. 14.9 x 11.7cm

For a discussion of the Qur'an form which this folio originates, see footnote to previous lot.

£ 15,000-25,000

10

A QUR'AN LEAF IN KUFIC SCRIPT ON VELLUM, NORTH AFRICA OR NEAR EAST, 9TH CENTURY

TEXT: SURAT AL-MUMINUN (XX). VS. 167-168
Arabic manuscript leaf on vellum, 15 lines per page written in clear Kufic script in brown ink, no letter-pointing (qalamj), vocalization red dots, verse divisions marked with rows of angled dashes, fifth verse divisions marked with a small Kufic letter ba (representing the number 5 in the abjad system), tenth verses marked with a small illuminated rounder containing an alif alif letter in gold (in this case ya, representing 10), sura heading (Surah al-Za'validated) written in gold Kufic script 15 by 14.6cm.

This fine Qur'an leaf is a relative rarity on the market. Only three other leaves from this manuscript have previously appeared at auction. All were sold in these rooms 18th October 2001, lot 49, 10th October 1988, lot 160 and 19th April 1988, lot 15. The script is a well-balanced and well-spaced Kufic that corresponds with Drieho's category D3. According to Drieho, the D3 group of Kufic scripts can be associated with the early 9th to early 10th century, based on dated waqf inscriptions found on several examples, including the famous Amara Qur'an, which bears a waqf inscription dated 253/825-6, when it was donated to a mosque in Tyre by the Abbad governor of Damascus (Drieho 1992, pp.36-7).

£ 8,000-12,000
A LARGE QUR’AN LEAF IN KUFIC SCRIPT ON VELLUM, NORTH AFRICA OR NEAR EAST, 10TH CENTURY

TEXT: SURAT AL-MU'ADDAH (XXXI), VS.34 - SURAT AL-GUYAAMA (XXXV), VS.12

Arabic manuscript leaf on vellum, 5 lines per page written in fine-stretched Kufic script in brown ink, occasional letter-pointing of brown diagonal dashes, vocalization of red, green and blue dots, single verses marked with gold roundels surrounded by petals in brown ink and containing the exact verse number (Rhahini, Fathaha, Yasa, etc.) in small gold Kufic, tenth versus marked in margins with large illuminated roundels containing the word ‘ahda, susa heading (Surat al-Qu‘ara) written in large gold Kufic outlined in brown ink on a gold ground decorated with fine foliate motifs in brown, the large rectangular panel with a finely illuminated palm tree extending in the margin, ink on recto worn

Visible page: 23.3 by 40.5cm

LITERATURE
Published in 1950 Years of Islamic Art, p.28, no.12

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 leaf from this Qur‘an to have appeared at the auction were sold in these rooms 23rd April 1999, lot 9 (p3r), 8th July 1995, lot 11 (single leaf with susa heading) and 29th April 1998, lots 10 and 11, and 12th October 2000, lots 30 and 31, while a folio is in the Staatsbibliothek, Berlin (see Berlin 1980, p.54, no.35).

The script is notable not only for its elegance and marked horizontal stretching (masahq), but also for several features which set it apart from most Kufic scripts. The pertinent features are the very tall vertical letters, the wide, curving terminal run and the occasional dot, curving tail of the terminal mina, a set of features which only occur on two other known copies of the Qur‘an. Leaves from the first include lot 13 in this sale, and others in the Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait (Al-Arba‘a, fig. 1, p.117), the Taneg Trez Museum, Kuwait, and the Qa’ada D. Khali Collection, London (Detoche 1992, no.58) while leaves from the second are in the National Library, Tunis (Roba‘ 52, Lings and Suleik 1976, no.24) and the Musée des Arts Islamiques, Geneva (Ghenaim no.70). Another unusual feature of the script is the playful confrontation of the baa all italicised in the word ‘aab, a characteristic move commonly associated with Eastern Kufic. Another feature more typical of Eastern Kufic is the vertical parts of the letters ta and za and the terminal aaf which curve forward. A fully formed Eastern Kufic script was present in the Mediterranean around the end of the 10th century A.D. (witness the Palermo Qur‘an of 962-3) and the present leaf may therefore be an early example of the spread of Eastern Kufic features in this part of the Islamic world.

The present leaf is also notable for its relatively large size and impressive gold susa heading. Of the other seven known leaves from the Qur‘an, two show susa headings, each with similar larger gold-painted and finely detailed marginal medallions (see Berlin 1980, p.54, no.35 and Suleik’s, London 19th October 2000, lot 30), giving a sense of how spectacular the complete Qur‘an would have appeared.

For a full discussion of related Kufic scripts see Feser and Kwiecinski 2006, nos.13 and 14.

£ 50,000-60,000 = $66,000-80,000