AN IMPORTANT TAFSIR AL-QUR'AN PROBABLY MADE FOR SHAH TAHMASP, AND COPIED AT MECCA.

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KAMAL AL-DIN HUSAIN BIN ALI AL-KASHIFI, KNOWN AS HUSAIN VA'IZ KASHIFI, MAWAHIB AL-AL'IYYA (A COMMENTARY ON THE QUR'AN, KNOWN AS TAFSIR I-HUSAINI), COPIED BY KAMAL AL-DIN HUSAIN AL-HAFIZ AL-HARAVI AT MECCA

DATED 953 AH/1548-9 AD

Illuminated Persian manuscript on paper, 574 leaves, 21 lines per page, written in fine gold and black nasta'liq script on cream paper, Qur'an text written in gold throughout, Tafsir text written in black ink, small illuminated fragments between Qur'anic verses, margins ruled in colour and gold, headings in white chalis script on illuminated panels, occasional marginal glosses, opening double page of fine Safavid illumination in colour and gold, folio 12 and colophon page decorated with fine scrolling floral motifs in gold, several small impressions, one dated 1553-1554; remarqued throughout, perhaps in the 17th-18th century. Mandib brown morocco covers repaired and set into modern leather 26.9 by 17.5cm.

This is an important and very fine copy of one of the most famous commentaries on the Qur'an, that of Husain Va'iz Kashifi, copied at Mecca by the royal Safavid scribe Kamal al-Din Husain al-Haravi, quite possibly for Shah Tahmasp himself.

The author of the text, the scholar and poet Husain Va'iz Kashifi, was born at Shahr-i-Khurasan and during his lifetime lived in Meshed, Mashhad and Herat, where his patrons were the Timurid prince Sultan Husain, Baghara and his famous vizier Ali Shahr Naqsh. He was renowned as a very eloquent preacher with a beautiful voice. As well as the present text, his works include Anvar-e Sherah, Raveshat-e Shahrak, Jawabi al-Tafseer-i Tufidat al-Ameen and Ashk-e Murtazi. He died in 954 AH in Herat.

His present work, the Mawaheb al-A'liyya, also known as the Tafsir-i Husaini, is a commentary on the Qur'an dedicated to his patron Ali Shahr Naqsh, and completed in 953 AH (1548 AD). Over the centuries it has proved to be one of the most popular Qur'anic commentaries, being translated into several other languages including Urdu, Hindi and Persian, and it was the specific commentary referred to by the European scholar Eminius (d. 1624) in his Arabic grammar, printed at Leiden in 1657 and again in 1666.

The scribe Kamal al-Din Husain al-Haravi, known as va'iz al-ayn (the one-eyed), was born in Herat and spent time in Qum, Mashhad and at the royal court at Tabriz under the patronage of Shah Tahmasp (1524-76). The well-known treatise of Gadii Ahmed of 1606 describes him thus, "Halu Kamal al-Din Husain Va'iz al-ayn (the "One-eyed")... was a native of Herat. He wrote good nasta'liq, combined the "si" script, and was an expert in all kinds of topics. From Khorasan he came to (Persian) Iraq, where he lived for some time in Qum. He was a good reader of the Qur'an. From Qum he went to the royal camp (court) He was offered the post of reader of the Qur'an, but replied: "Reading does not become me." He was a humble person. Shah Tahmasp bestowed upon him a tent, a horse, a camel, harness and equipment, but he did not accept them and was not tempted. He dressed in felt and travelled on foot. He possessed great knowledge in the science of the philosopher's stone. From Iraq he returned again to Khorasan and died in Mashhad in 964/1556-7." (Mirmard 1958, p.525).
To this biography can now be added the fact that he was in the Hijaz in 1948-49, based on the colophon of the present manuscript. Other recorded works by him are a copy of the Sayings of Ali, executed at Mashed in 1931/531, in the Gulistan Library, Tehran. Two undated albums of page, one in the Gulistan Library, Tehran, the other in the Khazinah Library, Istanbul, an inscription in naskh script in the Friday Mosque of Isfahan, dated 1939/1551.

The present manuscript is very important and of very high quality. Calligraphically it is unusual, firstly because the script has written the whole text in naskh script, an extremely rare choice for a Qur'anic text, and secondly because he has chosen to calligraphize the actual text of the Qur'an from that of the commentary by writing all the Qur'anic text in gold throughout, and that of the commentary in black. It is also unusual because, although it is written and illuminated in the typical mid-sixteenth-century script of the Safavids, the colophon tells us that it was executed at Mecca. Manuscripts written at Mecca are relatively rare, and the majority of surviving ones are of Mamluk or Ottoman style. Some dates to the Meccan association of this fine Safavid manuscript lie perhaps in a legend concerning the scribe Kamil al-Din Husain. It was reported that, when Kamil al-Din arrived at court, the Shah asked him to sing, but the scribe declined (surely a version of the story mentioned by Gokl Ahmed (see above) in which he declines the post of Qajar in favor of the Shah). The Shah apparently warned him, appreciating his honesty and openness, and gave him a horse, a tent, a camel and a horse, but he declined these too (again, see similar episode described above). This displeased the Shah, who told him that he would forgive him only if a Qur'an written in gold naskh script, copied in the Holy City of Mecca, was presented to him. Kamil al-Din therefore travelled to Mecca and stayed there for five years, during which time he completed the writing of the text of the Qur'an in Tafsir in naskh-iq. On his return he presented the manuscript to Shah Tahmasp and was forgiven.

The present work, although a commentary on the Qur'an, does of course contain the entire text of the Qur'an. The Qur'anic text is written in gold naskh throughout, thus effectively becoming a Qur'an written in gold naskh-iq (just what the Shah ordered), with a manuscript of the Tafsir. It is fitting to associate the present manuscript with this legend of Shah Tahmasp and Kamil al-Din, and certainly the quality and refinement of the manuscript is of a level that would befit a royal commission.

Another relevant context of the possible royal connection is that the 1540s was the period in which Shah Tahmasp is widely considered to have become increasingly religious, abandoning his interests in and patronage of Persian miniature painting in favor of a more pious outlook. The commissioning of a finely illuminated copy of one of the central religious texts of Islam – that of the commentary on the Qur'an, especially one authored by a revered scholar – executed at Mecca, would be emphatically in the context of Shah Tahmasp's growing religious interest. Thus the legend described above may have a basis in real historical episodes.

Further reading and references:
£ 200,000-250,000
£ 244,000-204,000
30 PRAYERS FOR THE SEVEN DAYS OF THE WEEK, ILLUMINATED FOR AHIH AL-SULTAN, COPIED BY AQA-JAN PARTO AND ALI BIN AL-HUSAYN. PERSIA, QAJAR, DATED 1129 AH/1717 AND 1304 AH/1886 AD

Illuminated Arabic manuscript on paper, written in black naskhi script on cream paper, headings written in gold rubric, interlinear gold throughout, fully illuminated margins throughout, contemporary blue and brown leather binding with gilt floral motifs 19.2 by 11.3cm.

This small prayer book is exquisitely illuminated throughout, and is of a very high quality. The final page of the manuscript mentions two different scribes and dates. At the end of the main text of prayers is the name of the scribe Aqa-Jan Parto and the date (f)129/1717. At the end of marginal text of the final double page note tells us that it was completed by Ali bin Husayn in the year 1304/1886. In the top margin of the same double page is the dedication to the Qajar prime minister and power broker Amin al-Sultan, also known as Arabchi-i Azam, whose name was Mirzâ Ali Asghar. It seems possible therefore that the original manuscript of prayers was compiled by Aqa-Jan Parto in the 1717 and was perhaps left un-illuminated. Then in 1304 it was fully illuminated, many pages displaying an archaic Safavid style which may have been a direct reference to the date of the original text (which was just before the end of the Safavid era), and presented to Amin al-Sultan. Whether the scribe of the marginal text, Ali bin Husayn, was also the illuminator is not clear.

£4,000-6,000 €4,900-7,300

31 A SMALL QURAN, COPIED BY IBN MUHAMMAD HADI SAYYID MUHAMMAD AL-HUSAYNI. PERSIA, DATED 1191 AH/1777 AD, WITH 19TH CENTURY QAJAR ILLUMINATION

Illuminated Arabic manuscript on paper, 152 leaves, 19 lines per page written in fine, naskhi script, interlinear gold throughout; small gold flourishes between verses, some headings written in red or gold thuluth script on illuminated panels, 'al' and 'ba' divisions marked in margins with illuminated devices; three opening double pages of very fine Qajar illumination in colours and gold, five Qajar floral lacquer bindings 14.5 by 8.8cm.

This small Qur'an is exquisitely illuminated, with three opening double pages executed in a style associated with the third quarter of the 19th century. Several Qur'âns copied by the famous Ansarian family of scribes are illuminated in a very similar manner, size, for instance, examples sold in these rooms 22 April 1990, lot 292 (dated 1866) and 15 October 1998, lot 33 (dated 1865). The text of the present Qur'an, however, was written in the late Zand period and must have been left un-illuminated when completed by the scribe in 1777.

£7,000-10,000 €8,600-12,200