In the Scribe’s Hand
A selection of Islamic manuscripts
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In the Scribe's Hand
Aflih al-susun wa al-yasmin. [Perhaps Damascus], 690 AH (1291 AD).

Arabic manuscript on thick paper; 202 x 137.5 mm; text area 152.5 x 95 mm; ff. 1-10; i: 15 lines of black medium-sized page; chapter headings supplied in a later hand; a few worm-tracks and some damp-staining. Text affected in parts but legible. F. 14o with an internal tear, partially repaired. Anonymous; title and author supplied in the colophon (f. 16v) and in a variant manner on the verso of the front fly-leaf by a later hand; extensive Turcic annotation to the verso of the rear fly-leaf, in sound, blind-rulled modern border.

An unrecorded botanical compilation by the twelfth-century Andalusian poet Ibn al-Barrāq dealing with the cultivation of jasmine and lilies, the present text is an example of the flowering of agricultural literature in Moorish Spain. Between the eleventh and twelfth centuries the gardens and patrones of al-Andalus spurred the creation of a body of botanical literature. The texts authored by this wave of Muslim horticulturists were compendious in nature, and combined extensive knowledge of existing sources, both Islamic and pre-Islamic, with a keen interest in empirical observation. Ibn Basal’s Dhuwa‘ al-falak is the most notable example of this practical streak, drawing solely on the author’s own extensive experience.

Despite a passing reference to the cultivation of saffron by Jews and Christians (f. 1.r), a brief note on hashish, Ibn al-Barrāq’s focus is the cultivation of ornamental plants, specifically the known variants of jasmine and lily. The questions of sun and shade, soil type, and flowering are among the many issues addressed by the present compilation, and the sources cited include the great names of Andalusian botany, with Ibn Basal (circa 1050 - 1110) perhaps the latest of the text’s readily identifiable sources, while Ibn Wahabhiyya (f. 6r, circa 930) is both the earliest known author of an Arabic agricultural treatise and one of the earliest sources cited by Ibn al-Barrāq. The poet Ibn Barrat al-Qastall (f. circa 1080) is yet another prominent Andalusian figure cited, and Ibn al-Barrāq even draws on Ishaq b. ‘Imad (f. 6v, circa 980), better known for his foundational work on melancholy, but here discussing variation in plants.

Ibn al-Barrāq was born 1135 at Guadix, then a Moorish fortified town, to a distinguished local family. His known corpus and the surviving biographical traditions make it plain that he was best known as a poet and an author of letters, albeit with an interest in medicine. However, his extant works are all poetry, making the present manuscript unique evidence of this text, and Ibn al-Barrāq’s wider range of interests.

The ten leaves supporting the text are of a thick paper with faint, closely-spaced chain lines and no laid lines. The copyist’s hand, the composition of the text, and the paper itself are all consistent with a Near Eastern rather than North African production (for a comparable specimen, see MS Arab 5555, Huntington Library, Harvard University, f.1.r – 40v; the copyist’s note gives a mosque in Damascus as the place of production, and a date of 1287). The two fly-leaves are of a later, probably sixteenth-century, European laid paper, with a partial watermark visible in the gutter of the front flyleaf.

Ibn al-Barrāq is not listed in GAL; for a useful précis of his life and work, see Vizcaíno, ‘Barruq al-Barrāq’ in Henry al-d'Aubray, 9 (1992), pp. 47-81. See also Ceroit II, p.77, for a list of his works held at the Exeter.

Arabic manuscript on paper; 170 x 125 mm, text area 115 x 75 mm; ff. 164, i; 13 lines of black naskhī per page; section titles in red, catchwords in black; a handful of later marginal annotations, ff. 78r, 86r, and 97r with prose phrases in a later majuscule to the outer margins, f. 79r with the roughly erased remains of another majuscule inscription, ff. 135v – 136r with calligraphic inscriptions; some marginal damp-staining (text unaffected), one spine a little loose, in a later binding of leather-backed boards; lacking its flap, a small portion of leather from the top of the spine detached; all in all worn but sound.

An iconic work of Arabic grammar, in a well-executed copy; the Tashīl of Ibn Mālik (1203-1274) was a remarkable exercise in concision, drawing on an earlier text, al-Fawa‘īd fi al-‘uḥūb, no longer extant. The present manuscript, complete and early, is an excellent example of a pivotal moment in the work of Arabic grammarians: the shift from an emphasis on witness accounts to an acceptance of hadīth as reliable testament to the true Arabic of the Qur’ān and classical poetry. Ibn Mālik was one of the leading scholars in this thirteenth-century movement, and one whose reputation and textual legacy would persist long after his death. The Tashīl alone prompted almost thirty commentaries, in part owing to the challenges imposed on the reader by Ibn Mālik’s preference for terse prose over lengthy exposition.

Ibn Mālik’s interest in hadīth is evident in other works; he collaborated with al-Yunānī on the latter’s edition of the Sāhib al-Sudūr, and wrote an exposition on the grammatical challenges of the text.


For text see Berlin 6628.

I. 1v - 12r: Abūqrāt. Kitāb taqdimat al-ma‘rifā.
II. 12v - 74r: [An untiiled but complete pharmaceutical treatise.]

Arabic manuscript on paper, 242 x 90 mm; text area 190 x 64 mm; ll. 74, 27 to 32 lines of black text per page; text occasionally marked in red; signed and dated colophons at f.12r and f.74r; extensive, contemporary marginal annotation and correction, including a short notation, apparently in Greek, to f.72v; edges trimmed (slight effect to marginalia); edges of first leaf and a few corners neatly strengthened; a handful of minute wormholes and one worm-track, the latter in-filled (slight effect to text); a handful of scribal corrections and 3 lines of f.17r heavily crossed and rewritten by a later hand; in modern embossed leather; a square seal impression to f.12v, dated 05/175 AH (c. 1440 AD).

Rare and unusual; a complete copy of Hunayn’s translation of the Prognostics of Hippocrates together with an apparently unknown pharmaceutical treatise, both copied by the same scribe, one Ahī al-Babānī al-Ṭabarānī, in a distinctive rectangular format. Seguin gives an extensive list of surviving copies of the Taqdimat al-ma‘rifā in European and Near Eastern repositories, but only three of the dated copies cited precede the present manuscript, and of those three preceding copies, one (Chester Beatty 3127) is fragmentary. The present manuscript is one of a handful of early, complete copies extant, and its conjunction with a heavily-annotated, working copy of a pharmaceutical treatise is particularly striking.

The corpus of Hippocrates (variously Abūqrāt or Būqrāt) was one of the rich well-springs from which medieval Islamic medicine drank. Though Galen and pseudo-Galen works to some extent overshadowed Hippocrates in the eyes of Arab physicians and scholars, his Prognostics proved enduringly popular, as demonstrated by the quantity of copies still extant. The Arabic text is attributed to Hunayn b. Ishāq’s prodigious period of translation in the ninth century, though whether his ultimate source was a Greek text of Hippocrates or a translated Galenic commentary on the Prognostics is unclear. In any case, both Hunayn’s translation and the translation of Galen’s commentary on the Prognostics share a simple division into three sections.

The question of the authenticity of the Hippocratic corpus remains a current one, but the Prognostics were received into Arabic as an authentic Hippocratic work, and would be treated as such by succeeding Muslim scholars, Ibn al-Nafis and Ibn Hajar, among others; wrote commentaries on the Taqdimat al-ma‘rifā in the thirteenth century, in addition to the Galenic commentary noted earlier. The present manuscript’s text is complete and carefully copied, corresponding to the known, complete texts from which Kähler produced his nineteenth-century published edition.

The accompanying text, though untitled, is readily identified as a pharmaceutical treatise. Beginning abruptly, and lacking any apparent citations, it arranges prescriptions loosely by disease, encompassing everything from digestive upsets to splitting headaches. The array of prescriptions provided is broad, from pills to herbal teas, gargling to powders, and the ingredients listed are similarly diverse, encompassing even frankincense. Copied by al-Ṭabarānī at the same time as the Taqdimat, it was clearly arranged for practical, personal use, with individual prescriptions highlighted through the use of words in majuscule.

Persian manuscript on paper; 268 x 178 mm; text area: 165 x 110 mm; ff. 1-226, i. 21 lines of black naskhi per page; chapter and section headings in red, catchwords in black, f. 1r with an illuminated cartouche in blue, gold, white and red, containing the title in gilt; initial folios with extensive later marginia; f. 1 with paper repairs and reinforcements (slight aect to text), the following few folios with marginal reinforcement; in a nineteenth-century morocco binding, the boards blind-tooled and stamped with floral medallions; joints discreetly strengthened; f. 1r with an arrestment of seal impressions and later inscriptions; f. 226v with an inscription dated 1285 AH (1868 AD), another dated 1253 AH (1837 AD) on the rear pastedown.

An early, handsome manuscript of this medieval materia medica, comprising the first part of Zayn al-‘Attār’s ikhtyārāt-i bādī‘ī. The text consists of an explanatory preface, followed by an alphabetical index of simple medicines, and presents the reader with an insight into the state of medical practice at the court of Shah Shuja, whom Zayn al-‘Attār served as court physician. The title refers to the princess Badī‘ al-Jamāl, to whom the work is dedicated, and about whom little else is known.

Such works were the bedrock of medieval Islamic medicine, equipping physicians with a battery of substances suitable for almost any ailment. From the tenth to the fourteenth centuries, Islamic scientists and physicians, drawing on classical works, enormously expanded the pharmacopeia available to doctors, and through experimentation with existing simples and compounds further refined the existing body of pharmaceutical knowledge.

Zayn al-‘Attār’s work proved popular, and there are more than eighty extant copies, though the present copy is one of only a handful dated before 1500.

Provenance: ex Hagop Kevorkian (Sale, Sotheby’s, ‘Fine Oriental manuscripts,’ 26 April, 1982, lot 140).

For text, see BL, MS Pers. Add. 16748.


[5a] ff. 92 recto - 96 verso: [A commentary on the preceding text.]

Arabic manuscript on paper; 182 x 128 mm; text area 120 x 74 mm; ff. 46, 96, 13-19 lines of black text (also mīrūb) per page, the first three texts is a similar hand, the fourth in another hand, and the fifth and its commentary in a different hand again; several texts with section headings and underlining in red, numerous textual and illustrative diagrams in red and black, extensive annotations in text, together with various autes and inscriptions in black; edges slightly trimmed (occasional affect to margins); in a twentieth-century binding, its boards incorporating panels of earlier red Levantine morocco.

A fifteenth-century compilation of mathematical and astronomical treatises, including a contemporary copy of Sīh al-Māridīnī’s treatise on the use of the sine quadrant, extensively annotated in various hands and illustrated copiously. The present manuscript was most likely intended as a general primer on astronomy and mathematics: the first two texts treat the theory and use of the astrolabe and sine quadrant, and are followed by a commentary on al-Samarkandī’s presentation of Euclid’s propositions by Qadīzāde, Ulugh Beg’s teacher of mathematics. The latter two are dated to various points in 1485, with the first text likely copied slightly earlier. The final two texts, both general mathematical works, in distinct hands, seem to have been added subsequently by other scholars.

The first text of particular interest, as it was copied during the author’s lifetime (he died c. 1506), and illustrates the spread of Sīh al-Māridīnī’s texts at an early stage, from the Mamluk sphere of influence where he spent his career, as an astronomer and the muwaqqat of al-Azhar in Cairo, to the territories of the rising Ottoman empire.


[Perhaps Cairo or Damascus, latter half of the 15th century.]

Arabic manuscript on cream, pink, and white paper; 228 x 150 mm; text area 170 x 90 mm; 1225 lines of black naskh per page; text written in black throughout; 1 l.r. with an illuminated frontispiece comprising nine lines of gold calligraphy, within a blue and gold frame, surmounted by a gilt cartouche, the whole set within an elaborately decorated frame of gilt and green fillets on a blue ground; section headings in blue, red, and gold title illumination rubric; margins trimmed (some affect to margins) and text block resewn, several annotations in a corrosive ink, worn tracks in the gutter of initial and final folios, occasional paper reinforcements to gatners and marions; the majority of the text block, however, is crisp and sound; in a nineteenth-century binding of leather-backed, paper-covered boards, with flap; paper label with numerical shelf-mark to spine.

An anthology of medieval Arabic poetry, compiled anonymously, ranging in length from single couplets to extensive excerpts, and encompassing poets from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, this manuscript is a fascinating survival, and testament to the literary tastes of the Mamluk court. Selected according to the siloysnatic taste of the compiler, and presented in a pell-mell fashion, with poets' names provided in illuminated headings and selections drawn from different poems delineated by additional illumination, the sheer variety of material is striking; such anthologies were generally ar ranged according to clear demarcations of form, content, chronology, or geography, amongst others - the present manuscript includes authors from the extreme east and west of the Islamic world, and the compiler cites nearly seventy poets by name. Though many of the names given are those of well-known authors, several may be pseudonyms of contemporary authors.

The compiler's identifiable choices range from the iconic Abigail verse of Abi Nuwas (d. circa 914) to Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240); from Ibn Matrith (d. 1251), an Ayyubid versifier, to Ibn Hanid (d. 1332/3), a Sicilian poet. The verses selected are amorous, and courtly, and speak of a well-educated, well-read compiler, writing for an appreciative audience. The elaborate scheme of illumination, thorough vocalisation of the text, masterful execution of a thirteen-line format throughout the manuscript, and carefully balanced and varied use of colour in the text headings, all suggest a significant undertaking. The use of three different coloured papers of such striking quality further points to a most luxurious work.

The use of red, blue, and gold illumination in the text’s headings, together with the devices and colour scheme of the illuminated frontispiece all suggest a Mamluk origin, and the manuscript may be usefully compared to another copied in 1471/2, now MS Garrett 46231 in the Princeton University Library. The Princeton manuscript, a beautiful thirteenth-line copy of the Sar’ al-ardari, was executed in a hand similar, but not identical, to that of our manuscript, and employs illuminated titles of some similarity. It seems likely that our manuscript is a comparatively late Mamluk production, part of the wave of cultural activity prompted by the extensive patronage of Qa’it Bay, who ruled as Sultan of Egypt and Syria from 1468 to 1496.
AL-'URDI, Mu'ayyad al-Din. Risāla fi kāfiyyat 'aml al-ʿalā al-rafādīyya [Risāla fi kāfiyyat al-arsād]. [Perhaps Persia, first half of the 16th century.]

A sequence of treatises on several subjects.

Arabic manuscript on paper; 180 x 120 mm; text area 126 x 65 mm; ff. 66, 17 lines of black, unpointed naskhī per page (the later sequence of treatises in another hand); headings in red; ff. 3v, 8r, 9v, 20r, 32v, 34v, 16r, 18r, 19v, and 21r; with instrumental diagrams in black ink; the following treatises with a handful of astronomical diagrams, a few tipped-in on loose sheets: f. 1v with a brief note on al-'Urdu in a later hand (perhaps that of the second author); f. 2v with faint traces of annotations in another hand; f. 1 with a short, thin, disrepaired, no affect to ligibility, occasional reinforcements and edge repairs; f. 66 substantially reinforced; for all this, crisp and clean, in crudest isolation, twelfth-century leather; ff. 22r and 66r with the seal impressions of Muhammad al-Husayn, bearing the date 1195/579 [1780/40].

Rare and important; the only contemporary illustrated account of the astronomical instruments of the medieval observatory at Maragha, written by its instrument-maker, the Damascene astronomer Mu'ayyad al-Din al-'Urdu, in a fine, early copy. The text describes the series of large-scale instruments, many of them designed by al-'Urdu himself, which were installed at Maragha to support the activities of the astronomers assembled by Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, under the auspices of the first Ilkhanid ruler, Hulagu Khan. Al-'Urdu assigns a number of them to Polony, but among the original designs are instruments for measuring the apparent diameters of the Sun and the Moon, the altitude and azimuth of stars, and another for determining culmination altitudes, among others. Another of the instruments described, ascribed neither to al-'Urdu nor to Polony, would be constructed by Tyrho Bana at Uraniborg more than three centuries later, and described in his Astronomiae instrumentlia mechanica as the 'parallaxicum altitudinum regularum tam altitudines quam azimutha expedientes'.

The observatory at Maragha preceded those of Samarkand and Uraniborg by centuries, and may be considered the forerunner of modern, observational astronomy. During the latter half of the thirteenth century the body of astronomers assembled by Hulagu and al-Tusi, from all corners of the Islamic world, carried out a sustained series of observations, created the great Ilkhanid astronomical tables known as the Zīj Ilkhanī, and wrote works of theoretical astronomy that foreshadowed the later advances of European astronomers.

Our manuscript was copied in 1540 at the latest (though likely earlier). We conservatively place it in the first half of the sixteenth century on the basis of the colophon on f. 66r, dated 947 AH [1540 AD], which concludes the sequence of additional treatises, copied in a hand quite distinct from that of the Risāla fi kāfiyyat 'aml al-ʿalā al-rafādīyya. The paper of the manuscript is consistent with such a date.
We locate only four copies of this text in institutions: MS Arabe 2544 in the Imr (Brockelmann erroneously cites a second copy as MS Arabe 15932); MS 3176 in Arberry’s catalogue of the Arabic manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Library; and two in Istanbul (Aya Sofia MS 2673/1 and Nuru Osmaniyi MS 2971/6). A fifth copy appeared at auction in London (Sale, Christie’s, ‘Art of the Islamic and Indian worlds’, 4 April, 2006, lot 30).

We are unaware of any dated copies which precede the present manuscript, while of the undated copies, the Paris copy is sixteenth or seventeenth-century, in the catalogue’s opinion; the Christie’s copy was tentatively assigned to the fifteenth century on stylistic grounds; and the Chester Beatty copy is perhaps thirteenth-century (according to Arberry). We have found no indication of dates, assigned or otherwise, for the Istanbul manuscripts.

The present manuscript is thus among the earliest copies of this text known; moreover, our text employs a longer, variant title known only in the Chester Beatty copy, suggesting that the two copies drew on the same source text; the other extant copies are titled *Rūṣāl fī ṣafābāt al-dārid*, the construction employed in the incipit of the text.

The Paris manuscript was translated and published in 1928 by H. J. Seeman as ‘Die Instrumente der Sternwarte zu Maragha;’ for a more recent reprint of his translation, see pp. 98-151 in volume 51 of *Islamic Mathematics and Astronomy*, Frankfurt, 1998.
الطعون في العصر العثماني

IBN KEMAL [Shams al-Din Ahmad b. Sulaymân b. Kemal Pasha].
Risâlat al-arwâh fi dafîq al-ashâhâh. [Turkey or the Balkans], 976 AH (1568 AD).


[2] ff. 76r-78r: [An untitled numerological treatise]


Arabic manuscript on paper; 214 x 160 mm; text area 150 x 90 mm; ff. iv, iv, 15-17 lines of black naskhi per page, the first two texts in one hand, the third in another; initial words in red, text with occasional red notation; marginal notes of coloured inks, occasional annotations; a few marginal dampstains, a bend of pages loose; in a contemporary morocco binding; boards with stamped extensions, spine with paper label; lacking flap, lower board nearly reattached, edges somewhat worn, leather a little soiled, but sound overall; front pastedown with pen and pencil ownership inscriptions from the 20th century, Ltr with Latin inscriptions documenting the manuscript's looting from Ottoman Buldu in 1686 and subsequent donation in 1687 (see below).

A fascinating assembly of texts, with a remarkable provenance, the present manuscript contains a treatise on plague by the sixteenth-century Sheikh al-Islâm, Ibn Kemal (1468-1534), prolific and eminent author of Arabic and Turkish treatises on numerous subjects, together with two further treatises addressing related subjects.

The epidemics of plague which bedevilled the eastern Mediterranean, and the Islamic world more widely, prompted various textual responses. Medieval Islamic medical authorities document plague as a disease, detailing its symptoms and treatments, while a further literature was developed by the ulama, which treated these epidemics as theological conundrums. Drawing on the ahadith, Ibn Kemal’s work seeks to reconcile pius Muslims to the effects of plague. The text which follows treats with fate from a numerological, isoteric perspective, while the final text is a treatise on the unity of God. The manuscript as a whole presents a sixteenth-century response to the enduring theological challenge of reconciling God and his creation.

Provenance: Latin inscription recording the manuscript’s removal from Ottoman Buldu by Saxon troops following the siege of that city in 1686; further Latin ownership inscription of Christoph Ludwig Kruschnauff dated 1687, recording that the manuscript was given to him by ‘a certain friend’. Latin ownership inscription of Georg Friedrich Kruschnauff dated 1734; St Thomas Phillipps (1792–1872), his MS 4492 (paper label on spine), bought from Franz Varversteg (1776–1851) of Frankfurt circa 1823 according to a pencil note; subsequently (1973) with Maggs Bros according to a note on front free endpaper.

GAL II, pp. 597-602.


Arabic manuscript on paper; 194 x 155 mm; text area 154 x 83 mm; ff. 258; 19 lines of black-naskh per page; double-rulled red frames; text vocalised throughout; headings in black and red majuscules; ff. 3 x 4r with a coloured world map; f. 235r with a textual diagram of a chess board; occasional marginalia in sopa maghrībī; some marginal worming; occasional paper reinforcements; a single, small wormhole affecting initial fals; the map a little rubbed; in a contemporary morocco binding with flap boards, double-rulled, blind-tooled frames and stamped floral devices; rubbed and worn, foreedges renewed.

A well-executed Ottoman example of an exceedingly popular cosmography, preserved in its original binding, containing a double-page, coloured world map, an excellent illustration of medieval Islamic cartography. The work is generally ascribed to the later Ibn al-Wardī (d. 1456), with several copies supplying a composition date of 1419, though it is plainly indebted to previous sources and authors, some acknowledged, others unnamed.

Ibn al-Wardī provides a topographical survey of the known world, by city, geographical feature, and sea, amongst others, together with its flora and fauna; subjects as diverse as Constantinople, dogs, and soft fruit are swept up in this compilation, providing ample illustration of the diverse interests of a fifteenth-century audience. These sections are followed by a series of historical notices, from Quranic prophecy concerning Constantinople to the life of Jesus. Moreover, our copy, as with several others known, includes a sequence of additional texts; a poem on the resurrection, a treatise on probability, and a series of verses by Ibn al-Habībīyya on chess, together with a diagram of a chess board.

The manuscript itself bears a striking resemblance to an undated copy of the same text, with the same sequence of additional texts at the end, now in the Schoenborn Collection at the University of Pennsylvania (LS5497). The physical dimensions of the two manuscripts differ by half a centimetre, the line counts by two lines, and the Schoenborn manuscripts lacks the ruled frames of the present manuscript; the hand, however, seems identical, down to the red and black majuscules employed, and the rather scratchy vocalisation of the text. Taken together, the two manuscripts suggest an active Ottoman scriptorium, circa 1600, producing copies of this popular text.

GAL II, p. 163.

For text: BL MS Or. 1525.
A large, late Safavid Qur'an in a splendid contemporary binding; the present manuscript bears all the marks of the calligraphers and illuminators of Isfahan, from the attractive naskh of the text and the minuscule shabkash of the interlinear Persian translation to the brilliant decoration of the binding.

The composition and hand of the text exhibit the influence of Ahmad al-Nayrizi, and there is some temptation to ascribe the manuscript to him. Moreover, Nayrizi wrote on lacquer as well as paper, and the present manuscript bears a striking resemblance to a calligraphic lacquer binding signed by Ahmad al-Nayrizi and now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (accession number 2003.258) as to bear further consideration.

Nayrizi's reputation as the creator of Iranian naskh is not entirely accurate; for he falls in the middle of a long line of Persian calligraphers writing in this script. The naskh employed in the present manuscript first appeared in sixteenth-century Iran, and Qajar calligraphers continued to copy Qur'ans in the same hand. Nayrizi, however, one of the most prominent of the calligraphers who wrote in this distinctive naskh. Active between 1682 and 1739, he enjoyed the patronage of Shah Sultan Husayn at Isfahan, and continued to work after his patron's murder in 1722. His skill, longevity, and position as one of the last Safavid calligraphers explains the esteem both of his contemporaries and later generations, and his enduring influence on Persian calligraphy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Two illuminated Safavid manuscripts now in the Khalili Collection (accession numbers QUR201 and QUR246) may be usefully compared to this manuscript. QUR201 is a single-volume Qur'an signed and dated 1669-90 AD, most likely produced at Isfahan. Its initial bismillah, though more elaborately illuminated than the present one, shares some points of style and colour. However, the resemblance is most striking in the scheme of the text itself. The inner frames of QUR201 are illuminated in the same sequence of colours as those of the present manuscript. The single-celled marginal frames in gold are identical, as is the use of gilt-rulled lines to divide the lines of the text. The verse markers are, as in the present manuscript, unadorned whorls of gold. QUR201 has eleven lines of text per page, as opposed to the twelve of the present manuscript, but it is the smaller manuscript by several centimetres. The proportions of the lines and text area, however, are strikingly similar.
QUR246 is also a single volume Qur'an, likely an Isfahan production, signed by Ahmed al-Nayrizi and dated 1706-7. The format of the text frames and line divisions is rather simpler than that of the present manuscript, though stylistic kinship is apparent. The points of useful similarity lie in the illuminated initial bifolium of QUR246. The sections of the bifolium are divided by illuminated red-on-white lines; the calligraphic cartouches contain a comparable red rim, the margins are illuminated to a floral scheme; the six lines of the first folio are set within gilt cloud-bands. There are also, naturally, points of dissimilarity, consistent with the manuscript being a contemporary, non-Nayrizi production, rather than a later imitation.

The binding is of a piece both with the signed Nayrizi binding at the Metropolitan Museum described above, and with several examples of calligraphic lacquerware signed by Nayrizi in the Khalili Collection (accession numbers LAQ470 and LAQ277). LAQ470 is a bookbinding, and the calligraphic frames of its boards are similar to that of the present binding: the use of floral gold-on-red to divide the sections of each board, the similarity of the hand and the almost identical arrangement of the frame, with six calligraphic cartouches surrounding a central rectangle, the cartouches alternating with floral motifs, all divided neatly by fine lines of gold-on-red. LAQ277 is a useful point of comparison for its use of gold-on-black floral decoration, which provides one of the most striking elements of the present binding. This pattern is distinctly archaic, harking back to the early Persian lacquerware of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The eighteenth century saw a "revival" streak appear in lacquer, and the present binding is a fine example of the synthesis of calligraphy and archaic pattern which this brought about. It stands as an artistic production equal to the signed Nayrizi pieces noted above.

The manuscript offers a simple conundrum: the colophon is a later addition, but the text and binding are consistent with the date of the added colophon, if not necessarily with the Nayrizi signature. The single line bearing Nayrizi's ostensible signature occupies almost exactly the same area as a noticeable stain. Examination under ultraviolet light reveals no traces of earlier text, but the thinness of the underlying paper suggests it has been washed and the original colophon rubbed out. This, in turn, suggests that whatever the original line may have contained, it did not contain the name of Nayrizi.

Speculating about the contents of the original colophon is futile, but the hand that supplied the existing colophon is likely a modern one, as the incentives for doing so are those of a twentieth-century dealer. An anonymous, pious line noting the completion of the text, or the honest signature of some less prominent calligrapher of Nayrizi's day would not have the immediate and obvious cachet of a signed and dated Nayrizi Qur'an. The supplied colophon corresponds to extant Nayrizi signatures, which suggests some care in its composition.

Despite the many similarities to the work of Nayrizi, one can but conclude that this is a superb, anonymous example of Safavid binding and calligraphy. It remains a glorious example of its age, and a testament to the vibrancy of Isfahan under Safavid rule.

FERDOWŠI. Šahnāma. [Kashmir], 1259 A.H. (1842 AD).

Persian manuscript on paper; 366 x 235 mm; text area 282 x 156 mm; ff. 582; 25 lines of black nasta’iṣ in four columns per page, within triple-lined frames of black, blue, and gold; column divisions illuminated in red, blue and gold; large, illuminated headpieces at ff. 2r, 153r, 307v, and 465v, each two different design, comprising two to three cartouches of red or gold calligraphy surmounted by illuminated panels, surrounded by foliated frames, all in various permutations of gold, blue, black, white, red, and pink, strikingly executed; section headings in red or gold calligraphy carried throughout, and sections of the text arranged into diamond patterns, with the interstices floretted in gold; 50 three-quarter-length miniatures, vibrantly coloured and superbly preserved; one marginal inscription at f. 161r, f. 165 with the gift cartouches left blank; a few marginal notes, else fine; a splendid copy in a contemporary binding of blind-stamped red leather with brass clasps (perhaps later additions), with the original headbands, discreetly rebacked, retaining the original spine; the fly leaves and pastedowns removed; a Persian inscription to f. 1v, supplying a location, and an English cataloguer’s note in brown ink, supplying the work’s title, author, and date of copying, to the rear pastedown.

A superb manuscript in remarkable condition, and a splendid example of the scribal traditions of Kashmir, containing the greatest work of Persian epic verse, Abū al-Ḳasim Ferdowsī’s Šahnāma, arranged into four sections, each extensively illustrated with large, handsomely executed miniatures, all brilliantly coloured. Completed in 1010, Ferdowsī’s poem charted the course of Persian history and kingship through myth, legend, and dim history, and was written as a response to the growing pressure upon Persian culture in an age of Turkish, Arab, and Islamic ascendancy. Succeeding ages saw it copied and recopied, illuminated, and illustrated, according to the needs and means of the rulers of the age.

Our copy was produced some eight centuries after Ferdowsī composed the Šahnāma; the dated colophon at f. 463r marks our manuscript as a late flowering of Kashmiri manuscript production. The large format, numerous miniatures, and varied illumination schemes suggest an expensive, time-consuming production, and one undertaken only four years before Kashmir was acquired by the East India Company in the aftermath of the First Anglo-Sikh War, only to be sold to the Maharaja of Jammu.

The condition of the manuscript is excellent, and that fact, together with the cataloguing note in a nineteenth-century English hand, suggest that this manuscript was acquired mid-nineteenth century and sent back to England shortly thereafter.

For a comparable Kashmiri copy of the same text, see MS Mitutoki 134 in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, dated 1245 A.H. (1830 AD), which shares many features of its decorative scheme and miniature painting with the present manuscript.

Merza Mohamed Hadee [sic]. \textit{Kanzu-l-hadit}. Calcutta, 1282 AH / 1865 AD.

Arabic and Urdu manuscript on paper; 195 x 115 mm; text area 135 x 75 mm; pp. [1], blank; 2-23 (table of contents), [1, blank]; 451 (copyist's pagination); 15 lines of various scripts (including north/ru, naskhi, and an extensive puff) in black ink per page; text fully vocalised; section headings and section numbers are from the text variously separa, blue, purple, and red ink; penwork headpieces and tailpieces throughout; elaborately illustrated, with depictions of men, beasts, ships, and a variety of other items, together with numerous textual and numenological diagrams, and pictographic and alphabetic tables; pages of first two leaves guarded (minor effect to text); some marginal dampstaining, paper slightly brittle, occasionally resulting in small losses at edges (no affect to text); no contemporary quire, with flap, covers with gilt tooled medallions; gilt edges, recaused, endpapers renewed.

A highly unusual autograph manuscript; a compendium of knowledge assembling and elaborating upon material from East and West alike, the present work encompasses astronomy, navigation (including extensive tables of latitude and longitude for various locations), astrology, numerology, linguistics (including a Kufic grammar), hermetic philosophy, and various esoteric subjects. Merza Mohamed Hadee seems to have attempted the compilation of an ersatz occult encyclopedia, and the resulting text, a substantial and carefully arranged array of tools to describe and comprehend the world, is both striking and bizarre.

Hadee's pictorial vocabulary is indebted to various sources, as indeed is his text; his alphabets owe something to those attributed to the tenth-century alchemist Ibn Wahshiyya; one of his figures is reminiscent of the anatomical sketches seen in Islamic medical texts, while another seems to have been inspired by an eighteenth-century European illustration, wig and all. Moreover, both the alphabetic tables and several of the emblems Hadee employs are remarkably suggestive of the illustrations found in the works of Athanasius Kircher. It is highly probable that Hadee undertook research for his \textit{Kanz} in the Calcutta Public Library, whose 1846 catalogue records copies of both China illustrata (Amsterdam, 1679) and \textit{Terra Babel} (Amsterdam, 1667). Both works contain linguistic elements which have direct relevance to the present manuscript. The library was open to both British and Indian users by subscription, and already had Indian members of staff by 1846.

We have found no other copies of this work, and we have no recollection of any similar manuscript passing through our hands.
Abbreviated Reference Key


In the Scribe’s Hand
A selection of Islamic manuscripts

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