

SABANCI UNIVERSITY  
SAKIP SABANCI MUSEUM  
ISTANBUL

# Treasures of the Aga Khan Museum



ARTS OF THE BOOK & CALLIGRAPHY





Treasures of the Aga Khan Museum ~  
Arts of the Book & Calligraphy



Sabancı University Sakıp Sabancı Museum, Istanbul  
November 5, 2010 — February 27, 2011

Treasures of the Aga Khan Museum ~  
Arts of the Book and Calligraphy  
Sabancı University  
Sakıp Sabancı Museum, Istanbul  
5 November 2010 – 27 February 2011

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**Treasures of the Aga Khan Museum  
Arts of the Book and Calligraphy**

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## EDITORS' NOTE

Twenty-eight years ago, an exhibition organised by Anthony Welch and Stuart Cary Welch at the Asia Society in New York brought to public attention many of the superb miniature paintings and manuscripts in the collection of Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan. In 1998 and 2000, Sheila Canby, then at the British Museum, presented the exhibition *Princes, Poets and Paladins* in London and Geneva, enabling the European public to share the discovery. Since then, Prince Sadruddin passed away in 2003 and His Highness the Aga Khan integrated the collection into a wider context, with a view to creating a museum dedicated to Islamic arts in Toronto, Canada: the museum is under construction as we write.

The opportunity for a major exhibition of the Aga Khan Museum's holdings in the the arts of the book and calligraphy – extended to include epigraphy – arose with the Sabancı Museum's offer to host the show within the context of 2010 – Istanbul, European Capital of Culture. This justified the effort to prepare a substantial catalogue including essays by a broad range of experts. Our contributing authors are to be sincerely thanked for their good grace in the face of the inevitably tight schedule that a project of this nature entails.

Some of these essays contain broad considerations on the word and the book in the Islamic world, and will remind readers of the specificity of the field being presented in the exhibition. A second group contains essays examining approaches to the catalogue contents. Finally, the third group contains specific investigations into some of the most exciting manuscripts in the AKM collection. Their authors “discovered” that these manuscripts were in the Aga Khan Museum collection – mainly through the exhibitions which have taken place in Western Europe since 2007. We sincerely hope that through the development of the AKM website, and later through the publication of a “Catalogue raisonné” of the collection, even more researchers will turn their attention to the numerous treasures which the Aga Khan Museum will put at their disposal for research and study when it opens in 2013. A first step in this direction has been to digitise some 20 manuscripts, which will be available on the AKM website ([www.akdn.org/museum](http://www.akdn.org/museum)) by the end of 2010; a sustained development in this direction, in cooperation with the Centre de Conservation du Livre in Arles, should enable all of the 90-odd manuscripts of the AKM collection to be available for study in digital form within the next two years.

Folios, manuscripts and documents of the Arts of the Book and Calligraphy form well over half the collection of the Aga Khan Museum, and in our opinion they are the prime source for understanding the cultures and civilisations of Islam and their artistic and spiritual accomplishments. Beyond the barriers of language, the arts of the book are witnesses to a heritage which plays a key role in today's world and about which too little is known outside the *Umma*. This catalogue and its accompanying essays are an attempt to go a little further than scratching surfaces. The texts are the work of academics and researchers, but aim at being of interest to the widest possible public.

With a wide readership in mind, diacritical marks have been kept to a minimum within this volume. To afford the interested reader the chance to understand the pronunciation of proper names, titles of works and technical words transliterated from Arabic or Persian, within the essays and the title information of the catalogue entries long vowels have been indicated with macrons, the letter 'ayn is indicated by the symbol ' , and *hamza* by the symbol ' . For convenience, the plurals of transliterated words have been formed following the English convention of adding *s*. Words that have entered English usage (Mani, Baghdad, sufi and so forth) have not been provided with diacriticals. For similar reasons of simplicity, dates are given in the Common Era (CE) calendar unless otherwise stated. One piece which had originally been intended for this exhibition was unfortunately unavailable; subsequently, item no. 64 has been removed from the catalogue.

Margaret S. Graves  
Benoît Junod

و بر باره در رسم در پیش  
 پری آهسته سین دخت در پیش  
 سه بت روی با او سکا بد  
 پیش سپید فرور بخند

ا  
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ننتا بکافلک یا با





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## His Highness the Aga Khan

### *Preface*

I am very grateful to the Sakıp Sabancı Museum, and to the Chairman of its Board, Ms Güler Sabancı, for hosting this presentation of treasures of the future Aga Khan Museum's collections, particularly in this year 2010 when Istanbul celebrates its heritage as cultural capital of Europe.

Istanbul has always been a nexus between Europe and the Muslim world, and it is even more so today than ever before. This has been brilliantly demonstrated by the exhibition, on the city's 8000 years of history, which preceded ours. Our exhibition now takes, so to speak, a step eastwards – or to be more precise, towards the broader Dar al-Islam, in its classical extension which spread from Spain and the Maghrib to the Far East.

The choice was made to focus on the arts of the book and calligraphy, themes which have been central to Islamic culture for close to fifteen hundred years. They are the core of the future Aga Khan Museum's collection, and the works on parchment and paper shown here are complemented by a range of objects (metalwork, ceramics, wooden beams, textiles, jewellery, etc.) bearing examples of fine epigraphy, both Qur'anic and poetic.

The collection presented here will provide the public with greater insight into the pluralism of Muslim cultures, with aesthetics as contrasting as those of the Mughal Empire in India and the Fatimids in Egypt. At the same time, a common ground can be perceived, as well as the cross-cultural exchanges which at all times took place with local cultures, as with the Far East and Europe. At a time when ignorance of different specificities breeds intolerance, this exhibition seeks to underline commonalities and draw attention to our shared artistic heritage.

The Aga Khan Museum, which will house the pieces in this exhibition and close to one thousand other objects, spanning a millennium of Islamic history, is under construction in Toronto, Canada, and will open in 2013. It will be the first museum dedicated to Islamic arts and culture in North America, and will have a key role in the field of education. Hopefully this exhibition at the Sakıp Sabancı Museum will be the first step in a durable cooperation between our institutions to bring understanding of the cultural accomplishments of our civilisations to the attention of a wider international public.



**Nazan Ölçer** DIRECTOR — SABANCI UNIVERSITY SAKIP SABANCI MUSEUM

## ***Preface***

The script in which the Qur'an is written has been the primary contributing element to Islamic art, having developed over the centuries and provided Islamic art with its most constant decorative character.

The concern to duplicate copies of the Qur'an in the most perfect form possible opened up an incomparable horizon for the art of calligraphy. Calligraphers were considered the most important practitioners of Islamic art; they created new styles of calligraphy, providing craftsmen such as the designers, illuminators and bookbinders involved in the arts of the book with an important breeding ground for creativity.

But the art of calligraphy is not limited solely to the orthography of the Qur'an. Accounts of historical events and scientific research, literary texts and albums of portraits were prepared with the same diligence. Commissioning the writing of a book or developing a library became an expression of privilege and prestige for sovereigns, the nobility and persons of wealth. In a parallel with the patrons of the great painters and sculptors in the West, this tradition in Islamic art was directed in greater part to the arts of the book.

From this aspect, the Aga Khan collection hosted by the Sakıp Sabancı Museum today should be viewed as a distinguished contemporary representative of this long tradition.

The backbone of the collection consists of exceptional calligraphic inscriptions, typical of those in the collections of sovereigns of previous eras, accumulated with deep knowledge and love by Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, which like all the libraries created by the noble classes of the past, has been available to academic circles.

This collection, together with the rich collection of works in various branches of Islamic art accumulated by His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan from a diversity of places from Africa to Spain, Eastern Europe to the Near East, India to Central Asia and China, will be presented to visitors at the Museum building in Toronto, Canada, when it has been completed in 2013.

We are indebted to the great patron of the arts, Prince Ayn al-Hayat Aga Khan, for his desire to display this important collection in our museum during Istanbul's 2010 celebration as European Cultural Capital.

It would have been very difficult to realize this project without the tremendous support of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) Director General Luis Monreal, who joined the International Board of Advisors of the Sakıp Sabancı Museum when it was still in the early days of its foundation. The AKTC Museums and Exhibitions Director Benoît Junod was at least as desirous of the realization of this exhibition as we were.

Exemplary work was contributed by the team of Stéphane Ipert, director of CCL Arles, France, renowned centre of book and paper conservation, and responsible for the conservation of the Aga Khan collection, who, together with Benoît Junod and Margaret Graves, provided the catalogue texts; by our Museum's director of collections Hüma Arslaner and her team of Pelin Sarpkan and Charlotte Bulte, who provided their expertise at every phase of the project; by Collection Director Ayşe Aldemir Kilercik and Conservation Laboratory Director Nurçin Kural Özgörüş.

The exhibition here of the world-renowned Aga Khan Museum collection of works of Islamic art chosen from a variety of geographical areas that we do not always have the chance to view provides a wonderful opportunity for our Museum's art-lovers.

We are deeply indebted to the Aga Khan Trust for Culture for providing the possibility for this important encounter, to Sabancı Holding for giving us the chance to realize this exhibition, to Chairperson of the Board of Directors Güler Sabancı and to the Board itself for supporting our project.

I am very happy to have had the opportunity to work with architect Boris Micka and his team on this as well as many other projects. It is also my hope that this presentation of Islamic art in all its dynamism and universality will provide a challenge to the more established and static techniques of exhibition to which we have been accustomed thus far.

In the belief that the Aga Khan Museum exhibition will represent a new milestone in the history of the still very young Sakıp Sabancı Museum, I offer my thanks to the members of all the departments of the Museum who have contributed their efforts to the exhibition.



Alnoor Merchant

## A Medium of Discourse, a Vehicle of Discovery and Understanding: The Collection of the Aga Khan Museum

The arts have always had a special significance for my family. More than a thousand years ago my ancestors, the Fatimid Imams, encouraged patronage of the arts and fostered the creation of collections of outstanding works of art and libraries of rare and significant manuscripts. Many of my family members are art lovers and collectors.<sup>1</sup>

These words, expressed by His Highness the Aga Khan in the catalogue of the *Spirit & Life* exhibition held in London, reflect a remarkable and special relationship that has existed between artistic, intellectual and cultural patronage and the Shi'a Ismai'li Imams throughout history. The purpose of this short essay is to provide an historical overview, and to trace the more recent history leading to the development of the Aga Khan Museum's collection of the arts of the Muslim world.

In his *Kitāb al-majālis wa'l-musāyarāt* (Book of Homiletic Sessions and Accompaniments on Journeys), the jurist-scholar al-Qādi al-Nu'mān describes numerous events associated with the early decades following the establishment of the Ismai'li Fatimid caliphate in North Africa in 909. In particular, he reports on the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mu'izz as a great constructor of palaces, gardens, irrigations works, canals and reservoirs, including an aqueduct begun in 959 conveying water on its arches to the city of Qayrawan. This interest in scientific and technical matters is reflected in al-Nu'mān's description of the Imam-caliph's commissioning the construction of a fountain pen. Al-Nu'mān relates an occasion when al-Mu'izz mentioned the topic of the pen:

We wish to construct a pen which can be used for writing without having recourse to an ink-holder and whose ink will be contained inside it. Whenever a person wishes to write with it, he fills it with ink and thereby writes whatever he likes. When he wishes to stop writing, and the ink has ceased flowing and the pen has become dry, the writer can then put it in his sleeve or anywhere he wishes and it

will not stain it at all, nor will any drop of ink leak out of it. The ink will only flow when he expressly desires it to do so and when there is an intention to write it. [Such a pen] will be a remarkable contrivance, [the like of] which we are unaware of anyone ever previously constructing.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequently, the craftsman to whom the construction of this device was assigned, brought a pen fashioned from gold, which “when a secretary takes up the pen and writes with it, he is able to write in the most elegant script...[and] when he lifts the pen off the sheet of writing material, it holds in the ink.”<sup>3</sup>

That writing was inextricably linked to the notions of intellectual and philosophical inquiry, scientific pursuits and artistic endeavour is best exemplified by the Fatimids’ establishment of the *Dar al-‘Ilm*, the “House of Knowledge”, in Cairo on 24 March 1005. In his account of this day, the court chronicler al-Musabbihī (as quoted by al-Maqrīzī) writes:

On this Saturday...the so-called House of Knowledge in Cairo was inaugurated...Into this house, they brought all the books that the commander of the faithful al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah ordered to bring there, that is, the manuscripts in all the domains of science and culture, to an extent to which they had never been brought together for a prince...People from all walks of life visited the House; some came to read books, others to copy them, and yet others to study.<sup>4</sup>

This centre of learning attracted the finest minds of the age, whatever their religious persuasion. Under the year 1012–13, al-Musabbihī reports: “From the House of Knowledge a number of mathematicians, logicians and jurists, as well as several physicians were summoned by al-Hakim; the representatives of each discipline appeared before him separately, in order to argue in his presence; thereupon he presented all of them with robes of honour and gifts.”<sup>5</sup>

The libraries established by the Fatimids were unmatched anywhere in the Muslim world. For example, in 993–94 the Imam-caliph al-‘Azīz had, in his library, more than thirty copies of the lexicographical masterpiece *Kitāb al-‘ayn* of al-Khalīl ibn Ahmad, twenty copies of al-Tabarī’s multi-volume *History*, and more than one hundred copies of Ibn Durayd’s *al-Jamhara*. In 1012–13, nearly 1,300 manuscripts of the Qur’an were taken to the *Dar al-‘Ilm*, and in 1045, the library was said to contain 6,500 volumes on various subjects. When the Fatimid palace was looted in 1068, the

number of book chambers was forty, including eighteen thousand books on ancient sciences and two thousand four hundred manuscripts of the Qur’an. They were written in well-proportioned calligraphy of the highest beauty and illuminated with gold, silver, and other [paints]. This was apart from [the books] kept in the vaults in *Dar al-‘Ilm* in Cairo.<sup>6</sup>

It would be intriguing if a number of Qur’an pages and sections in the present exhibition (cat nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 11 and 17) were part of the manuscripts housed in the Fatimid libraries.

As impressive and extensive as the libraries were the Fatimid caliphal treasuries. Textual sources which provide details of the looting of the Fatimid treasuries that occurred in 1068–69

describe the articles that were brought out: textiles with thick gold embroidery, military equipment inlaid with enamel, emeralds, turquoise and pearls, silver staffs with their gold-embroidered cases, knives with handles made of precious stones, chess and backgammon pieces made of all kinds of gemstones, saddles and bridles, swords and leather shields, rock crystal tablewares, as well as penboxes made of gold, sandalwood, ebony, ivory and other kinds of wood, all adorned with precious stones and other types of ornament.<sup>7</sup> While only a few of these objects have survived – the *tirāz* textile (cat. no. 22) in the current exhibition being an example – they illustrate the outstanding artistic vitality of the Fatimid period and “are impressive enough to lend substance to the vivid picture painted in the historical accounts of this vanished world of luxury”.<sup>8</sup>

In the late eleventh century, the Ismai‘li Imams moved to northern Iran, where they established a state comprising a defensive network of fortified settlements centred on Alamut. The Ismai‘li rulers continued their policy of patronage towards men of learning – the outstanding philosopher-scientist Nasir al-Dīn al-Tūsī being amongst the most prominent – and impressive libraries were created in these fortresses. This is confirmed by the vizier and court historian of the Mongols, ‘Atā Malik Juwaynī who, in his *Ta’rikh-i jahān-gushā*, writes:

Being desirous of inspecting the library, the fame of which had spread throughout the world, I suggested to the King [Hülegü] that the valuable books in Alamut ought not to be destroyed. He approved my words and gave the necessary orders; and I went to examine the library, from which I extracted whatever I found in the way of copies of the Koran and [other] choice books... I likewise picked out the astronomical instruments such as, armillary spheres, complete and partial astrolabes.<sup>9</sup>

After the destruction of the Ismai‘li state by the Mongols in 1256, the Ismai‘li Imams lived in various parts of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Iran for several centuries. The beginning of the modern phase of Ismai‘li history in the mid-nineteenth century brought about a renewal of artistic and intellectual patronage. The forty-eighth Ismai‘li Imam, Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III, in his autobiography, writes about the family’s extensive library of books in English, French, Persian and Arabic, and the long conversations on Persian poetry and Arabic literature that he shared with his mother.<sup>10</sup> Throughout his life, Aga Khan III viewed the works of Firdawsī, Nizāmī, Rūmī, Sa’dī, Qā’ānī and Hāfiz as a vast and almost limitless treasure; indeed, he saw in poetry and prose, as well as in art and literature, the wealth and splendour inherent in the human soul. On one occasion, commenting on Safavid art, he wrote: “...so rich in architecture and in textiles, in beautiful metal and glass work, in its lovely brocades and carpets. Can we deny that there is here immense search for expression of the highest aspirations of man’s soul?”<sup>11</sup>

Aga Khan III’s appreciation of art, poetry and literature had a particular influence on his son, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan<sup>12</sup> who, recalling his first exposure to Islamic art, writes:

My first awareness of art from the Islamic world goes back to the library of the Villa Jane-Andrée at Cap d’Antibes where my parents spent much time before and after the Second World War. It was a musty and dark place. The curtains were often drawn to prevent the Mediterranean sun from bleaching the huge 14th-

century Mamluk Qur'an which lay open on the rosewood stand, usually at the beginning of 'Surat-ul-Nas', which my father never tired of quoting. I was fascinated by the power of its calligraphic counterpoint, the diacritics and illuminations. Though I could not decipher the text, the burnished pages and their dark corners where thumb and forefinger had left their mark over the centuries exuded a special mystery which I never forgot.<sup>13</sup>

It was at Harvard University, where Prince Sadruddin arrived as a freshman in 1950 and first met his mentor and fellow collector, Stuart Cary Welch, that his interest in the cultural heritage of the Muslim world took on a new dimension. During his years as a student at Harvard, Prince Sadruddin made frequent visits to New York, where several art dealers – Adrienne Minassian, H. Khan Monif – possessed collections of outstanding miniatures, calligraphies, ceramics, metalwork, and other objects; these proved to be a treasure house and a collector's dream. Indeed, Prince Sadruddin's first acquisition was "a page from a 14th-century Mamluk Qur'an for which the dealer Khan Monif... was asking thirty dollars".<sup>14</sup> This page is now displayed (cat. no. 28) in the current exhibition.

Over the course of the next two decades, Prince Sadruddin bought from dealers in London, Paris, and Switzerland, as well as from auction house sales, so that by the early 1970s his collection of Islamic art had already "become one of the most important in private hands".<sup>15</sup> Over the next two decades (1976–1995), Prince Sadruddin acquired additional outstanding art works, including the "Album page with four mounted paintings" (cat. no. 144), the "Portrait of Sultan Selim III" (cat. no. 135), the "Letter from the Crown Prince 'Abbas Mirza to Napoleon I" (cat. no. 91), as well as a number of folios from the *Shahnama* of Shāh Tahmāsp (cat. nos. 121 and 123). Prince Sadruddin shared his treasures, both as a frequent lender of important works to temporary exhibitions, and through exhibitions devoted to specific elements of the collection. In 1982–83, the first public exhibitions concentrating on the collection's greatest strength, the arts of the book, were presented in New York, Fort Worth and Kansas City,<sup>16</sup> and during 1998–99, one hundred and forty-five paintings and drawings from the collection of Prince Sadruddin and Princess Catherine Aga Khan were exhibited at various museum venues in Europe and the United States.<sup>17</sup> In 2003, Prince Sadruddin passed away, and the collection of the arts of the book will form part of the Aga Khan Museum's collection.<sup>18</sup>

Like Prince Sadruddin, Prince Ayn Aga Khan<sup>19</sup> made his first purchase while a student at Harvard: an eighteenth-century chinoiserie screen for his student rooms. While not specifically devoted to the arts of the Muslim world, Prince Ayn's collection, divided between Paris and Geneva, "calls to mind the style of the Wallace Collection in miniature, an epicurean collection in which the decorative arts set the tone",<sup>20</sup> and comprises drawings by Watteau, Boucher, and Fragonard, paintings by Canaletto, Robert, Chardin, and Liotard, with furniture and porcelain pieces of the highest quality, as well as a select and choice collection of Ottoman and Qajar art works.

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III, passed away in July 1957, having designated his grandson, Prince Karim, to succeed him as the forty-ninth hereditary Imam of the Shi'a Ismai'li Muslim community. Under the leadership of His Highness the Aga Khan, the institutions and activities of the Ismai'li Imamatus have expanded far beyond their original scope. Over the past

four decades, His Highness the Aga Khan has expressed on numerous occasions his own engagement with the artistic heritage of Islam. In a speech to the Asia Society, New York, made in 1979, His Highness reflected on the importance of architectural heritage in Muslim societies and how it is entwined with matters of faith:

Islam does not deal in dichotomies but in all-encompassing unity. Spirit and body are one, man and nature are one. What is more, man is answerable to God for what man has created. Many of our greatest architectural achievements were designed to reflect the promises of life hereafter, to represent in this world what we are told of the next. Since all that we see and do resonates on the faith, the aesthetics of the environment we build and the quality of the social interactions that take place within those environments, reverberate on our spiritual life. The physical structure of Islam is therefore an important concern for me, charged as I am with the leadership of a Muslim community.<sup>21</sup>

A few passages later, His Highness continues:

... the overwhelming unity of Islamic life which sees no division between body and spirit, between this world and the next, was a powerful influence on Islamic architecture. The desire to bring to this world some of the beauty of the hereafter acted as a constant barrier to the discordant or the haphazard in Islamic styles. The calligraphy which adorns so much of what we have built was a constant reminder of spiritual content through its common design, the endless expression of the name of God.<sup>22</sup>

Nearly thirty years later, His Highness highlighted this important observation in his Foreword to the *Spirit & Life* exhibition:

The Qur'an has inspired works in both art and architecture, and shaped attitudes and norms that have guided the development of Muslim artistic traditions. Scientific pursuits, philosophic inquiry and artistic endeavour alike are seen, within Islam, as a response to the Qur'an's recurring call to ponder creation as a way to understand God's benevolent majesty. Faith challenges the artist, as much as the mystic, to go beyond the physical – the outward – to unveil that which lies at the centre and gives life to the periphery. Masterpieces are like the ecstasy of the mystic: a gesture of the spirit, a stirring of the soul that attempts to capture that which is ineffable and beyond being.<sup>23</sup>

In his commitment to create an environment that manifests this understanding, His Highness the Aga Khan has, over the past decades, established a variety of programmes and initiatives: in 1977, the Aga Khan Award for Architecture was established to enhance the understanding and appreciation of Islamic culture as expressed through architecture; also in 1977, the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture was established at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme was

established in the early 1990s to promote the conservation and re-use of buildings and public spaces in historic cities in the Muslim World; in 1999, ArchNet, a web-based international community of scholars, students, and professionals working in architecture, planning, landscape design, and related fields focussed on addressing the built environment in Muslim societies, was established; and, in 2000, the Aga Khan Music Initiative in Central Asia (AKMICA) was created to support the efforts of Central Asian musicians and communities to sustain, further develop and transmit musical traditions that are a vital part of their cultural heritage.

In 1977, His Highness the Aga Khan established, in London, the Institute of Ismaili Studies to promote scholarship and learning on Islam, and this research institute included a library devoted to acquiring and collecting manuscripts, books, artefacts and other material of interest and relevance to Islam. In the initial period, the Institute's library focused on acquiring printed textual materials and, although an important collection of manuscripts on various aspects of Ismaili and Shi'i history had been gathered, a more concerted programme of acquisitions was initiated in late 1998. Among acquisitions made in 1999 were the *tirāz* textile (cat. no. 22), the Qajar Qur'an manuscript (cat. no. 74) and the fifth volume of Ibn Sinā's *Qānūn fi'l-tibb* (cat. no. 94). Besides a number of highly important Qur'an folios and manuscripts (cat. nos. 1, 3, 17, 30, 47, 48, 74 and 79), additions to the collection in 2000 included two exquisite lacquer penboxes (cat. nos. 59 and 75) and two folios from the *Shahnama* of Shāh Tahmāsp (cat. nos. 120 and 124). During 2001–02, a third folio from Shāh Tahmāsp's *Shahnama* (cat. no. 122) and further manuscripts (cat. nos. 32 and 98) were added, as well as a number of outstanding objects, including the carved wooden beam (cat. no. 24), and fourteenth-century planispheric astrolabe (cat. no. 103). These and other acquisitions, made in consultation with both Prince Ayn and Prince Sadruddin, provided a strong framework when, in October 2002, the Aga Khan Development Network announced its intention to establish a museum dedicated to housing its exceptional collections of Islamic art in Toronto.<sup>24</sup>

With this announcement, the task of collection development was continued under the aegis of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, and astute acquisitions have allowed the collection to grow to its present form. In 2004, the Mamluk bowl (cat. no. 34), Safavid boat-shaped vessel (cat. no. 43), scribe's cabinet (cat. no. 51), bronze lamp holder (cat. no. 52), and a number of pottery pieces (cat. nos. 111–114) were acquired alongside art works on paper, including the folio from a monumental Qur'an (cat. no. 11), the calligraphy by Ismā'il Jalāyir (cat. no. 49), and the Qur'an manuscript from Sulawesi (cat. no. 80). In 2005, acquisitions included works on paper – the manuscript of the '101 Nights' (cat. no. 53) and the miniature of the prince with mystics (cat. no. 142) – alongside pottery pieces (cat. nos. 9 and 10), as well as the marble capital (cat. no. 83). The marble stele (cat. no. 7) and the three albarelli (cat. nos. 100–102) were significant additions to the collection in 2006, alongside three sets of doors (cat. nos. 84, 85 and 87) acquired in 2007. The Mamluk tray stand (cat. no. 33), the Iznik dish (cat. no. 70) and the miniature of an Ottoman dignitary (cat. no. 138) were among major acquisitions in 2008–09, and the most recent acquisitions made earlier this year – the Ottoman inlaid box (cat. no. 44) and the Safavid hunting carpet (cat. no. 133) – are being exhibited for the first time.<sup>25</sup>

The collections of the Aga Khan Museum are still being developed, and it is hoped they will show, as Prince Ayn has remarked, "the diversity that exists within the cultural

expressions of a single religion”.<sup>26</sup> Prince Ayn further elaborates upon this aspect of diversity as being an integral element of the Museum’s mission: “The mission of the Museum will be to make the art of Islam in all its diversity better known. It will show the multiplicity of voices with which Islam has spoken. I hope, too, that it will show something of the dialogue that has existed between the arts and the aesthetics of the non-Muslim world and the Muslim world”.<sup>27</sup> And as elucidated by His Highness the Aga Khan:

The Aga Khan Museum... is conceived primarily as an educational institution in the field of Islamic art and culture, a specific mandate unique in North America. It will be dedicated to presenting Islamic arts and culture in their historic, cultural and geographical diversity, with the aim of fostering knowledge and understanding both within Muslim societies and between these societies and other cultures.<sup>28</sup>

The mission of the Aga Khan Museum, its collection, and its educational programmes is to become a medium of discourse, a vehicle of discovery, and “to promote intellectual openness and tolerance and to create increased cultural understanding”.<sup>29</sup>

1 His Highness the Aga Khan, 'Foreword', in *Spirit & Life: Masterpieces of Islamic Art from the Aga Khan Museum Collection* (London 2007), 7.

2 As quoted in C. E. Bosworth, "A Mediaeval Islamic Prototype of the Fountain Pen?", *Journal of Semitic Studies*, XXVI/2 (1981), 232.

3 *Ibid.*

4 As quoted in Heinz Halm, *The Fatimids and their Traditions of Learning* (London 1997), 73–74.

5 *Ibid.*, 74.

6 As quoted in Ghada al-Hijawi al-Qaddumi (trans. and ed.), *Books of Gifts and Rarities: Kitab al-Hadaya wa al-Tuhaf* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), 240.

7 *Ibid.*, 230–41.

8 Richard Ettinghausen, Oleg Grabar and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture, 650-1250* (New Haven – London 2001), 200.

9 Halm, *Fatimids and their Traditions*, 94–95.

10 See Aga Khan III, *The Memoirs of Aga Khan: World Enough and Time* (London 1954), 16–20.

11 Aga Khan III, *Hafiz and the Place of Iranian Culture in the World* (London 1936), 5–6.

12 Prince Sadruddin, His Highness the Aga Khan's uncle, was the United Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations' Coordinator for assistance to Afghanistan and United Nations' Executive Delegate of Iraq-Turkey border areas.

13 Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, 'Foreword', in Sheila R. Canby, *Princes, Poets & Paladins: Islamic and Indian Paintings from the Collection of Prince and Princess Sadruddin Aga Khan* (London 1998), 6.

14 *Ibid.*, 7.

15 Stuart Cary Welch, 'Introduction', in Anthony Welch, *Collection of Islamic Art: Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan Volume 1* (Geneva 1972), 8. A substantial part of Prince Sadruddin's collection of Islamic art was presented in a four-volume, limited-edition catalogue that appeared between 1972 and 1978; volumes 1 and 2 generally included art works purchased before 1967, and volumes 3 and 4 centred on purchases made in the nine subsequent years until 1976.

16 See the catalogue by Anthony Welch and Stuart Cary Welch, *Arts of the Islamic Book: the Collection of Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan* (Ithaca 1982).

17 See Canby, *Princes, Poets & Paladins*.

18 Princess Catherine Aga Khan has generously donated the showcases and ceramics of the 'Salon Persan' in Bellerive Castle, Geneva, to the Aga Khan Museum, where the room will be reconstituted.

19 Prince Ayn, His Highness the Aga Khan's brother, joined the United Nations Secretariat, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, following his graduation from Harvard in 1965. Since 1968, Prince Ayn has been closely involved with the governance of the principal development institutions of the Imam. He is Director of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) and a member of the Board of the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED) and Chairman of its Executive Committee. Prince Ayn was also deeply involved in the establishment and the development of the Tourism Promotion Services (TPS). He is also a Director of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), which is responsible for the Aga Khan Museum project.

20 James Stourton, *Great Collectors of Our Time: Art Collecting since 1943* (London 2007), 41.

21 Speech given by His Highness the Aga Khan to the Asia Society, New York, 25 September 1979, reproduced in full at [http://www.iis.ac.uk/view\\_article.asp?ContentID=101437](http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=101437) [accessed 21 September 2010], n.p.

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Spirit & Life*, 7–8.

24 Due to open in 2013, the Aga Khan Museum has been designed by one of the best known contemporary architects in the world, Fumihiko Maki from Japan. Elucidating the choice of Toronto for the Aga Khan Museum, Luis Monreal, General Manager of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, explains:

His Highness thought about several possible locations, initially in London, but gradually the idea emerged that this entity could be effective in North America. Toronto was the logical choice for a number of reasons. The first is the pluralistic environment that exists in Canada, as His Highness as often stated. It is an environment that is very open, very liberal and very curious about other cultures and civilizations, including Islam. Secondly, Toronto is strategically placed – there are sixty to seventy million people within one hour's flying distance, constituting a potentially very significant audience for the Museum. The favourable attitude of government instances and civil society to this project in Canada was another determining factor. It was also a happy coincidence that a piece of land was found next to another project that had already been started – the Ismaili Centre in Toronto, designed by Charles Correa. His Highness the Aga Khan availed himself of an opportunity to join two large sites and create an interesting landscaping project in an excellent location.

(As quoted in Philip Jodidio, *The Aga Khan Museum Toronto* [Munich 2008], 24.)

25 Since 2007, selections of art works from the collection have been exhibited in various European cities: Barcelona, Berlin, Lisbon, London, Madrid, Paris Parma, and Toledo.

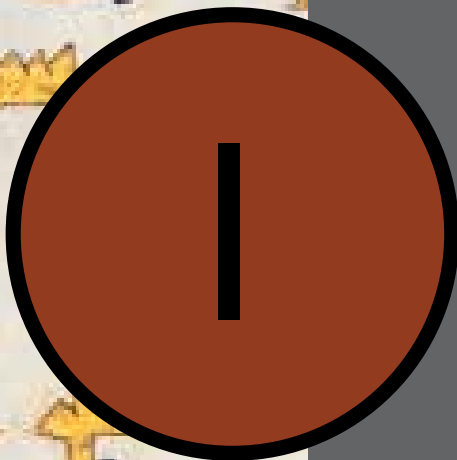
26 Prince Ayn Aga Khan, as quoted in Jodidio, *Aga Khan Museum*, 32.

27 *Ibid.*, 23.

28 His Highness the Aga Khan, as quoted in Jodidio, *Aga Khan Museum*, 7.

29 *Ibid.*, 10.





## Early Kufic and the Transition from Parchment to Paper

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Prince Ayn Khan

## The Word in Muslim Tradition

Of all the Muslim art forms, calligraphy holds pride of place as the foremost and perhaps most characteristic of the modes of visual expression in Islam. From China to Canada and from Russia to South Africa, the widespread use of calligraphy still unites Muslims and visibly differentiates them from the adepts of other religions.

This tradition started with the earliest written versions of the Qur'an in the mid-seventh century, gained speed between the ninth and tenth centuries when Arabic calligraphy entered a more codified form, knew a slight decline with the spread of printing through the Muslim world, but basically enjoyed ten centuries of uninterrupted growth and splendour. It is a tradition which still endures today among Muslims scattered across the far reaches of the globe.

Just as the Qur'an and its message pervade every aspect of a Muslim's life, secular or religious, material or philosophic and abstract, almost any physical object can bear calligraphy, whether sacred or secular, whatever its size and use.

Calligraphy is indeed ubiquitous in the arts of Islam. It is perhaps most visible in architecture, and particularly in places of worship, but it is present on all forms of decorative arts – from coins to jewellery, textiles, weapons and armour and even household utensils, painting and, of course, on all manner of written documents such as manuscripts, scientific documents, political acts, and so forth.

For Muslims, calligraphy has never had the Greek connotations of simply "Beautiful Writing". It goes far beyond such a definition and has an importance both deeper and broader. Beautiful writing existed in the West in the Middle Ages, but largely in monasteries and generally playing little role in purely secular circles, and it virtually disappeared with the birth of printing.

In Islam, the Divine message was passed through the Prophet, first orally and subsequently written down as the Qur'an. Muhammad (pbuh) is Allah's Prophet, a Messenger who transmits faithfully to humanity Allah's words addressed directly to him. Muhammad

being a Messenger, it is his message, the Word of Allah, that is all-important and the Qur'an is the direct visual embodiment of Allah's Message.

The written form of the Qur'an is the visible reflection of the Eternal and for mankind the perpetual ability to glimpse the Divine. Where most other Faiths make use of, or turn around, figural images to express their essential beliefs, the figural imagery of Islam is largely the written word, which is held up in opposition to the image. Since the words of the Qur'an are of Divine origin, both in form and content, it is natural that the word should become the sacred symbol of Islam.

The written word thus has from the outset a symbolic content for Muslims which underlines and inspires the aesthetic significance that it developed as calligraphy grew to become a genuine art form. The written word as a symbol, with both religious and aesthetic significance, is pervasive and is as important today as it was several thousand years ago. Contemplation of the written verses of the Qur'an, or of the names of Allah and holy persons, becomes an aesthetic path to a spiritual, a religious experience.

In this sense, the Word becomes epigraph, a visible manifestation of the Intangible, the Eternal and Divine. By extension, the Word or name can become monogram – all the more so as the monogram is a natural bearer of symbolic meaning and content. This tradition endured right through the nineteenth century, for instance in the Turkish *tughras*.

Letters themselves, which convey both the text of the Qur'an as well as the ninety-nine names of Allah, tend thus to become also imbued with a special aura. They were studied with the greatest care by scribes, scholars, mystics and even lay people, in many periods of Muslim culture, and the symbolism inherent in the Word is extended to include the individual letter, individual letters thus becoming imbued with esoteric meanings.

This tendency was perhaps reinforced by the famous *Alif Lām Mīm* letters which occur in the Qur'an and whose exact significance has been much debated, as also, for instance, by the fact that the word *Allah* begins with an *Alif* which is the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, the numerical equivalent of one and the symbol of Divine unity, and that the Prophet's name begins with *Mīm*.

It was thus not unnatural that in the Muslim world the Word should have come frequently to be considered to possess talismanic properties, or that individual letters should have been thought by some to have cabalistic and mystical qualities as well as pictorial associations.

Script is the binding visual medium not only of Muslims through the Qur'an, but also between the various peoples and minorities forming the Muslim *Umma*. It thus becomes the formal expression of Islam's universality and of its universal aspirations. The visible testimony of Islam on buildings, objects and elsewhere, was an affirmation of religious and cultural belonging and it was this affirmation which held a vital social function. The role of calligraphy in uniting believers in Islam and in strengthening their feeling of having their own religious identity cannot be overstated.

The Arabic script lends itself by its very nature to a decorative treatment, with its diacritics that can be used purely or largely as embellishment, and its mixture of ascending

verticals, descending curves, discreet horizontals and isolated letters which give it a measured visual balance, in the static perfection of the individual forms of different isolated letters, as well as visual rhythm of upward and downward movement, straight and circular forms.

The range of possibilities with the Arabic script is almost limitless: words and individual letters can be compacted or drawn out, curved into almost any shape and embellished in almost any way. Perhaps only the scripts of China and of the civilizations of regions under Chinese influence present such possibilities and I wonder whether even they have the flexibility of the Arabic script and its consequent aesthetic power. It is meant to be both read and admired. Islamic calligraphy blends content and design which, whether legible or not, conveys, when used on religious text, the central symbol of Faith.

The calligrapher is an artist who copies, and the text which he has to copy is given in advance. As the meaning of what he writes unfolds and simultaneously images appear, logic and imagination are combined and calligraphy becomes enchantment, writing itself tends to become an absolute, the Absolute. As I have indicated, although Islamic calligraphy assumes to some extent the Greek attitude that writing is a fine garment clothing meaning (as Abū Hayyān al-Tawhīdī put it, “Hand-writing is jewellery fashioned by the hand from the pure gold of the intellect. It is also a brocade woven by the pen with the thread of discernment”), in part Islamic calligraphy also assumes the status of a fundamentally sacred character.

The Qur’an makes several references to the pen and to writing, in particular pointing out that Allah teaches by the pen (and teaches man) that which he does not know. As the Qur’an is eternal, both in content and form, the Word of God embodied in physical form in the process of Divine emanation, so the pen becomes an actual agent of creation.

Legibility, in fact, becomes of minor importance, since calligraphy always conveys and constitutes by its very essence the central symbol of Faith. The attitude that the intrinsic meaning or content is secondary to the beauty, i.e. to the form and the abstraction of the letters considered as artistic composition, can lead one to positions not far distant from the “art for art’s sake” school of the West, so many centuries later. Abu’l Fazl, author of the *Akbar-nāma* in the late sixteenth century, says that “the written letter is spiritual geometry emanating from the pen of invention”. A closeness to Plato’s view that writing is the geometry of the soul is evident.

Monumental architectural inscriptions, like those in tiny household objects, were more often observed and admired than read. If religious in content – that is, if extracted from the Qur’an – for most Muslims the recognition and the understanding of part of the inscription sufficed for him or her to know what the rest of the inscription said and for the viewer to recognize that he found himself before a building or an object emanating from his own culture and tying him to his religious brethren. Such inscriptions, however, if unread or even illegible to the mass of believers, served a symbolic function confirming the power and rectitude of Islam simply by their presence.

Every human in Islam is invited to copy the text of the Qur’an and to do so in the most beautiful manner possible. Calligraphy appears in religion as it does in political and cultural life. It is not an art reserved to any particular group or minority. It is intended to produce a beautiful

work of art and simultaneously to constitute a pious act of faith, to be practised by any man, whether a professional scribe or a common believer. Throughout Muslim literature and philosophy one finds connections between moral rectitude and calligraphic excellence.

Civilization and sedentary culture developed rapidly throughout the expanding Muslim empire in the early years. Books were copied and recopied, they were written and bound. Libraries were created and filled with them, and the libraries vied with each other and rivalled each other in their collections. These copies covered everything from biographies to scientific treatises, works of literature, poetry, letters, devotional literature, works of philosophy and many other subjects and they not only preserved culture but they enabled (and indeed were essential to) the dissemination of knowledge throughout the Islamic world.

Most skilled calligraphers were also scholars and many were also poets and prose writers. Indeed, the later master calligraphers came to be respected both as scholars and artists, just as Renaissance painters gained greater respect among intellectuals following the invention of one point perspective. It strikes me though, that the “Renaissance man” of the Islamic world, well-versed in astronomy and medicine, botany and the arts, philosophy and mathematics, preceded his erudite Italian counterpart by several hundred years. There is a link, both historic and essential, between the development of calligraphy and the development of scientific and philosophical thought.

The pervasiveness of this one single art form in Islamic culture did not have a stultifying effect, partly because the development and the use of different scripts and partly because of the inventive way in which Islamic calligraphy is treated, yielding simultaneously fascination and variety. The invention of distinctive calligraphic styles went very fast and largely endured even after the tenth century. From the outset, calligraphy has played a role in bringing simultaneously unity and diversity to the arts of Islam.

This ethnic variety and historical debt still vitalises Islamic culture. Traditional motifs and styles can be traced in contemporary Muslim art even as modern Muslim artists explore new techniques such as mixed media or collage, and adopt new formats. There is a continuing tradition that has maintained its full diversity from spectacular monuments to infinitely refined, if modest, amulets, garments and household wares.

For the time being, the collection of the future Aga Khan Museum, planned to open in Toronto in 2013, is composed of the classical arts of the Islamic world, from the eighth to the eighteenth century. It incorporates the important collection of works on paper collected by my uncle, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan – essentially calligraphies and manuscripts, miniatures, illustrations and paintings – as well as several hundred objects acquired by my brother over the last twenty years with a view to the creation of this museum. Many of these objects are adorned with calligraphy – and in all imaginable styles of writing. In the exhibition presented at the Sabancı Museum, they are the counterpoint to works on paper.

My hope is that visitors to the exhibition, and people who peruse this catalogue, will understand more fully the depth and vitality of an essential tradition of Islam.

Oleg Grabar

## The Book in the Islamic World

Whether at the learned level of academic discourse, in the simplified and usually poorly informed statements of the media, the strident proclamations of religious extremists, or the mundane world of the general public, the world of Islam is almost always associated with “The Book,” the Qur’an, the written record of the prophetic revelation which created Islam and with which Islamic thought, beliefs, and practice are forever bound. Other religious systems, most strikingly Judaism and Christianity but many forms of Hinduism and Buddhism as well, also used holy, if not always sacred, books in a great variety of ways, but none gave to one book the uniqueness of the Qur’an for Muslims; for many of them, it is the eternally existing uncreated Word of God.

This conception of an extraordinary and, so to speak, timeless Book is presumed to have had many consequences in the world of art, of material creativity, of man-made things in general, even though there is no clear evidence of its direct and immediate impact on the arts. Nor am I aware of an incident or of a statement suggesting that it was a model for something else. Much in the contemporary explanations of the many old Qur’anic fragments and of the social and aesthetic uses of the Book is a construct whose logic satisfies academic, social, or pious minds rather than an explanation justified by actual documents.

In the paragraphs which follow I will identify and then comment upon a few of the ways in which the belief in a unique Book may have affected the making of books in general and their decoration. These are the ways through which one can study and admire many of the treasures in the exhibition.

One material reflection of this uniqueness of the Book has been that, almost from the very beginning of Islam in the seventh century, the text of the Qur’an acquired one or more scripts, usually angular ones known as “Kufic”. That script was distinguished visually from a cursive *naskhi* script used for more mundane subjects for writing, as on papyri dealing with taxes or appointments. Contemporary scholarly thought has understood this development as the

creation of calligraphy, “beautiful writing,” as a form of art developed during the first decades of Islamic history. Although much studied in recent years and with much progress in their understanding, the many fragments from these early manuscripts, of which there are several examples in the exhibition, are still difficult to date (between the seventh and the tenth centuries) and to localize (were they Syrian, Iraqi, Yemeni, or Arabian?) properly. But, perhaps more importantly, we have no idea of the technical practice or aesthetic inspiration used for the creation of these scripts and especially for the contemporary evaluation and judgement of the results. Some of these early Qur’ans were restricted to private reading, others were meant for collective recitation. In some cases, it has even been argued that each page was composed so as to fit the needs of groups of public reciters, something comparable to much later sheets of Psalter fragments for church reciters in Christian liturgies. In all instances, it can be assumed that, at least after around 700 CE, all manuscripts copied a single model for the text, but could use different variants of scripts, thus reflecting some external, social or even political, perhaps pious, function and interpretation of forms.

Other features affected the development of scripts and of books. One was the appearance of paper in the second half of the eighth century which made the making of books less expensive and which increased the number of places where copying could take place. Another feature was the development of techniques of power in the central government, especially after the establishment of the ‘Abbasid caliphate in Iraq around 750 CE. Successful governance required a consistent and relatively easily read script to transmit orders and to exchange documents and information. A tendency toward standardization was a means of control. From the tenth century technical reforms attributed to the vizier Ibn Muqla all the way to the variety of scripts defined and practiced by the great calligrapher Yāqut in the thirteenth century, a set of canonical cursive scripts replaced the old angular types, which only remained in occasional use for Qur’ans or for sections of the holy book in order to enhance its visual quality.

There is thus a continuity and an evolution in the copying of Qur’ans and, after c. 1300 in Mongol Iran or Mamluk Egypt, eventually in Ottoman Istanbul and Safavid Iran, magnificent and luxurious codices of the holy book were made, of which there are several examples in the exhibition. They all show technical perfection in writing and decoration; the divisions within the text are clearly indicated; the titles of Suras are often written in a different script from the one used for the text and are surrounded by illuminations, usually in gold or on a golden background. The names and titles of illustrious patrons as well as the date of production or all sorts of statistical lists of the number of signs, letters or words in the Qur’an are usually included in the composition of the pages and the layout of the book. Altogether, there is something classically proper, formally restricted, about these Qur’ans. They are beautiful, richly soothing to the senses, but perhaps without visual excitement in the perfection of their designs. Curiously, it is the rather unique and relatively late Chinese Qur’an in the exhibition which strikes the viewer with its originality (cat. no. 82). It is not perfect in design, nor is its script particularly refined, but its decorative medallions and its occasionally very original combination of letters in the margins clearly reflect the desire to make a uniquely striking work of art, not to copy a standard manner, however high its quality.



In order to understand in full these manuscripts within a fairly well established history which begins with the appearance of Islam, we are still lacking the essential element of the contemporary judgment passed on them. How were they read by believers who usually knew the text by heart? As reminders of things to do or as revelations affecting private piety? Was there some special psychological need to read passages already inscribed in one's memory? Perhaps, as so often with Christian liturgies, passages were recited without being understood. Their very recitation was the act of piety, not the understanding of their meaning. Alternately, it is possible that these Qur'ans were not so much meant to be read as they were to be owned. They were part of the pious baggage or treasure belonging to the faithful, from whose perusal, at times purely haphazard, one could derive solace or simply act out one's faith. In fact, in Ottoman times, some Qur'ans were used as divination books to answer queries about the personal needs of the believers. And it is a striking feature of taste throughout Islamic history that pompously large manuscripts, like the one made for Timur which had to be carried in a wheelbarrow and for which impressive stone stands still exist in Samarqand (cat. no. 30), were made alongside minuscule Qur'ans on a single sheet of paper or in tiny hexagonal boxes, whose texts cannot be really read, at best recalled, but whose physical presence among one's possessions was a testimony of faith and piety.

In short, there is still a lot to learn about the many available manuscripts of the Holy Book. Some of this learning may well flow from detailed analyses of individual pages or manuscripts. Some may emerge from a better understanding of the human and social settings in which they were used. Most of it will come from a better awareness than we currently have of the judgments of those who, even today, admire both the writing and the book.

While Qur'ans form the most unique corpus of fancy books produced from the Atlantic Ocean to Indonesia or China, they were not the only texts to become books in Islamic civilization. Especially after the development of paper in the late eighth century, books became the most common way of acquiring knowledge, developing thought, spreading ideas and knowledge wherever Islam went, eventually making it available beyond the frontiers of the Islamic world. Initially these books were all in Arabic, whether they were copied in Central Asia or in Andalusia. Many stories have been preserved about the large size of some private, palatial, or public libraries as early as the tenth century, and the contrast is particularly striking with the Christian world and its monastic libraries with a few volumes of sacred texts on parchment. Some collections had even several copies of the same text, implying thereby an instinct for hoarding books, a form of speculation in acquiring books, or reflecting some more practical purpose we have yet to figure out. This hoarding can easily be seen in the manuscript collections of Istanbul. Originally attached to religious institutions, most of them contain many copies of the same text.

From the thirteenth century onward, other languages appear for books, the most common one being Persian, and it is interesting to note that very soon afterwards several fancy calligraphic scripts appeared for the transmission of Persian literature in general and poetry in particular. These new scripts were usually very delicate and elegant. In contradistinction to earlier Arabic scripts, they did not lend themselves easily to monumental inscriptions, but they

revolutionised the design of individual pages, especially for poetical texts usually copied in several columns. At times single pages with elaborately copied poems and more or less fancy illuminations were kept in albums together with images of all sorts (cat. no. 147). What we see today as a book was in fact the repository, almost a museum, of treasures made for the albums in which they were found or gathered from various sources. These book-albums contain some of the most amazing treasures of Islamic art next to unique historical documents without particular aesthetic value.

When they were not albums with exhibitions of works of art, what were these books other than Qur'ans, regardless of the languages in which they were written? And how should we look at them today?

Sometimes, they were simply texts of history, theology, law, philosophy, literature and whatever else concerned the elites of Muslim societies. Their interest, beyond curiosity, disappears once the text is found in print and it is only a form of simple-minded romanticism that explains the pleasure we can encounter in touching, as I did decades ago in an Istanbul library, a copy of the *Maqāmāt* of al-Harīrī that had been put together by the author himself, or for him, some time in the eleventh century. The existence of such manuscripts, like Ibn Sinā's in the exhibition (cat. no. 94), can help in defining the history of a text but is of secondary value for the collector of works of art.

A special case can be made around what are usually called "scientific" manuscripts, depictions of the heavenly bodies, technological manuals like various books on engineering practices, long catalogues of plants usually with some medicinal purpose, or books on the "usefulness" of animals which are a mixture of scientific observations and legendary accounts about real or fictional animals. These manuscripts were often illustrated, especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and some of them, like the exhibition's own book on the usefulness of animals (cat. no. 95), comprise carefully composed pages in which images, titles, and stories are successfully intertwined. The subjects of these pages and books are easy to understand and to identify, but how should we look at them today? One answer is purely codicological, as we seek to understand and explain the variety of means scribes and illustrators (at times the same individual) have used to present plants or animals meaningless to us and probably of little use to the physician and pharmacist of the time. Each drawing or each page must be seen as a sort of advertisement for much more than itself, as an illustration of the range of information available to the owner or user of the whole book. Another answer is more physical, more sensuous. We must see these pages as demonstrations of a deep-seated desire to make practical purposes – the reading of a book, the usefulness of a plant, the story of an animal – attractive to the senses, in the ways in which we today are more easily attracted, if not seduced, by the advertisements for products than by the products themselves. The whole issue of the visual and psychological impact of these illustrations to technical and restricted texts still requires more scholarly attention than it has received.

Finally, there are books with literary subjects provided with images reflecting the stories found in the books. Here we have an art of painting penetrating into the fabric of the book and other essays will discuss the ways in which this art of painting operated then and can still affect

us today. Images transform our relationship to the book, in the sense that they are often separated from the text which surrounded them and become works of painting rather than pages of a book. From our point of view in this essay of understanding the book, their importance is difficult to evaluate. Should they be seen separately from the rest of the book? Or should we develop a way of looking at a book and see its images together with its text and all the illuminations found in it? For the Qur'ans we know more or less the forms of belief and piety that were present in the minds of every Muslim. But we are far less informed about the ways in which secular literature like the epic of the *Shahnama* or the lyric mode, often tinged with mysticism, of Nizāmī's *Khamsa* or of the poems of Hāfiz and Jāmi, affected those who knew them. How important were images to those who read the poems? Are they involved in a better understanding of the text or simply ornaments?

There is still much work to be done. And, beyond the inner structure of the book with its texts and decoration, the making of the book developed a set of side activities: bookbinding, many varieties in the making of the paper, many uses of colours and pens of different sizes, and so forth. This technology of the book affected everything in it, from its appearance to its format and the design of individual pages. The book in the Islamic world was a universe of its own that we are only beginning to discover.





## **Early Kufic and the Transition from Parchment to Paper**

CATALOGUE ENTRIES 1 — 26

**Calligraphy** is the major theme of Islamic visual culture, primarily because of the sacred significance of written Arabic as the language of the Qur'anic revelation. The tremendous spiritual authority of the Qur'an generated a wider respect for the written word, pens, calligraphers and Arabic language across Islamic culture, and also made considerable early demands upon the art of writing and its development. This section of the exhibition demonstrates how Muslim calligraphers developed Arabic scripts in response to a remit of daunting responsibility: to record and transmit the Qur'an, the text of supreme spiritual, political and legal importance in the Islamic world. These scripts not only needed to be clear and unambiguous, but were also required to appropriately beautify and exalt the recording of the divine transmission, and to promote a new creed.

Early Qur'ans were written on vellum, or animal skin, and usually laid out in a horizontal format. Elements of punctuation, orthography and text-markers counting verses and chapters could be rendered in gold, silver, plain colour or illuminated designs (cat. no. 3), but the strongest aspect of these early manuscripts is their striking calligraphy (cat. nos 4, 11). Calligraphers exploited the remarkable elastic quality of Arabic script, stretching words and letter-combinations in order to fit the page area in a harmonious fashion, without distorting the style of the script. The remarkable Blue Qur'an (cat. no. 2) not only demonstrates this subtle calligraphic technique, but also offers a rare and lavish format, that of gold script (chrysography) written upon deep blue indigo-dyed vellum, to superb graphic effect. More commonly, the graphic contrast was achieved with dark brown or black ink written upon pale cream vellum. This aesthetic seems to have been imitated with some wit by ceramic artists in the northeastern Iranian provinces of Khurasan and Transoxiana (cat. nos 8–10). Earthenware vessels and plates were covered with a white slip and inscribed with Arabic proverbs in dark brown slip, written in fine calligraphy distinctly reminiscent of contemporary luxury manuscripts (cat. Nos 9, 12, 13, 18, 20). One example here (cat. no. 10) reverses the colour formula, with some humour.

## 1

## Qur'an leaf in gold Kufic script

North Africa, ninth or tenth century  
 Ink, opaque watercolour and gold  
 on vellum  
 17.9 x 26 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo479  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 35 (no. 2);  
 AKTC 2007b, p. 31 (no. 2);  
 Makariou 2007, p. 112 (no. 36);  
 AKTC 2009a, p. 32 (no. 1); AKTC  
 2009b, p. 32 (no. 1); AKTC 2010a,  
 p. 33 (no. 1).

This page is one of the few surviving folios from an extremely lavish early Qur'an manuscript, two other leaves from which are now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Tunis. Like the famous Blue Qur'an (cat. no. 2), the laborious and expensive process of chrysography has been employed on this folio to create gold letters in Kufic script: the letter forms were first written in glue, then filled in with a solution containing a suspension of finely-ground gold, and finally outlined in a fine brown ink. By thus creating a painstaking "painting" of each word, the scribe was in fact imitating the forms of letters executed with a single stroke of the pen: see the slanted terminals of the letter shafts, which reproduce those created by a skilled calligrapher with a reed pen. A further interesting aspect of this manuscript is the inclusion of red, blue and green vocalisation dots next to individual letters, which were sometimes used to aid reading and recitation of the rather austere Kufic script employed in Qur'ans of this period. Additionally, the small letter *kaf* which is contained within a rosette on the second bottom line is a marker in the *abjad* system of verse division, whereby every letter of the Arabic alphabet is assigned a numerical value corresponding with a verse number in the chapter. Here *kaf* has been assigned the value twenty and signals the end of the twentieth verse of the Sura, in this case *Sura Qaf* (50: 14–22).

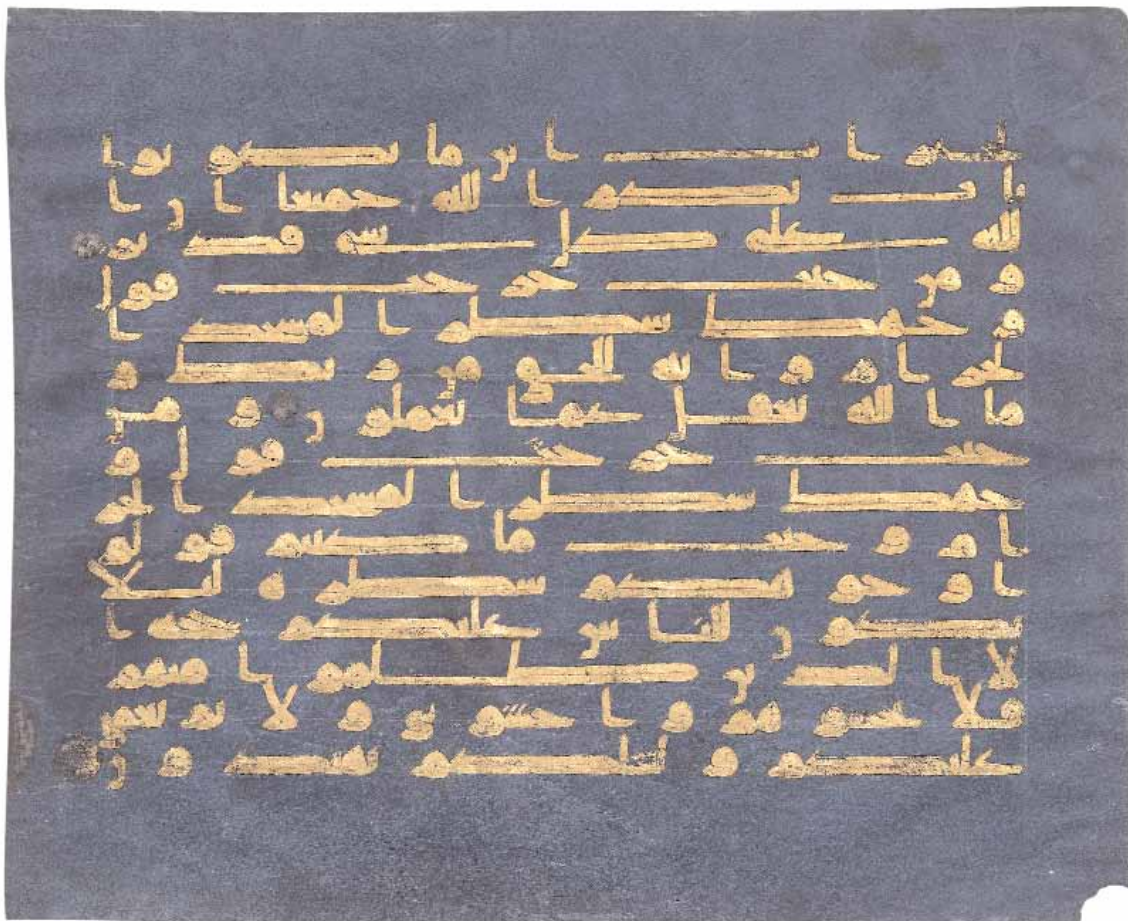


## Folio from the “Blue Qur’an”

This folio comes from the renowned and unique “Blue Qur’an”, perhaps the most famous of all early Qur’an manuscripts. The text is from *Surat al-Baqara* (2: 148–155). The complex art of writing letters in gold, known as chrysography, can be seen on other Qur’anic manuscripts from the early period, but no other surviving manuscripts of the Qur’an make a comparable exploitation of the dramatic potential of gold lettering with that achieved here through the use of a deep blue ground. Bloom has proposed that other gold-on-blue manuscripts of the Qur’an were recorded in Fatimid times but have since been lost; the Blue Qur’an has also been linked with contemporary Byzantine manuscripts written in gold on vellum painted with murex purple, although the so-called “purple codices” that survive are generally much more rosy in colour and do not carry the same magisterial depth of contrast as that seen in the Blue Qur’an. On the basis of both the colour scheme and the stately, measured Kufic script of the manuscript, the regularity of which has been achieved through the use of ruling lines, comparisons have frequently been made with the gold-on-blue mosaic inscription found in the interior of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (completed 691). In spite of this very early point of comparison, recent scholarship has largely settled on a site of production in Fatimid North Africa prior to the conquest of Egypt in 969; however, a very recent article has opened discussion on this enigmatic masterpiece once more by suggesting an early Abbasid date and more eastern provenance for the Blue Qur’an (George 2009).

2

North Africa (?), tenth century or earlier  
 Ink, gold and silver on indigo-dyed vellum  
 28,5 x 35,3 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00248  
 Publ.: Raeuber 1979, fig. 5; Welch–Welch 1982, no. 1; AKTC 2007a, p. 36 (no. 3); AKTC 2007b, p. 32 (no. 3); AKTC 2008b.



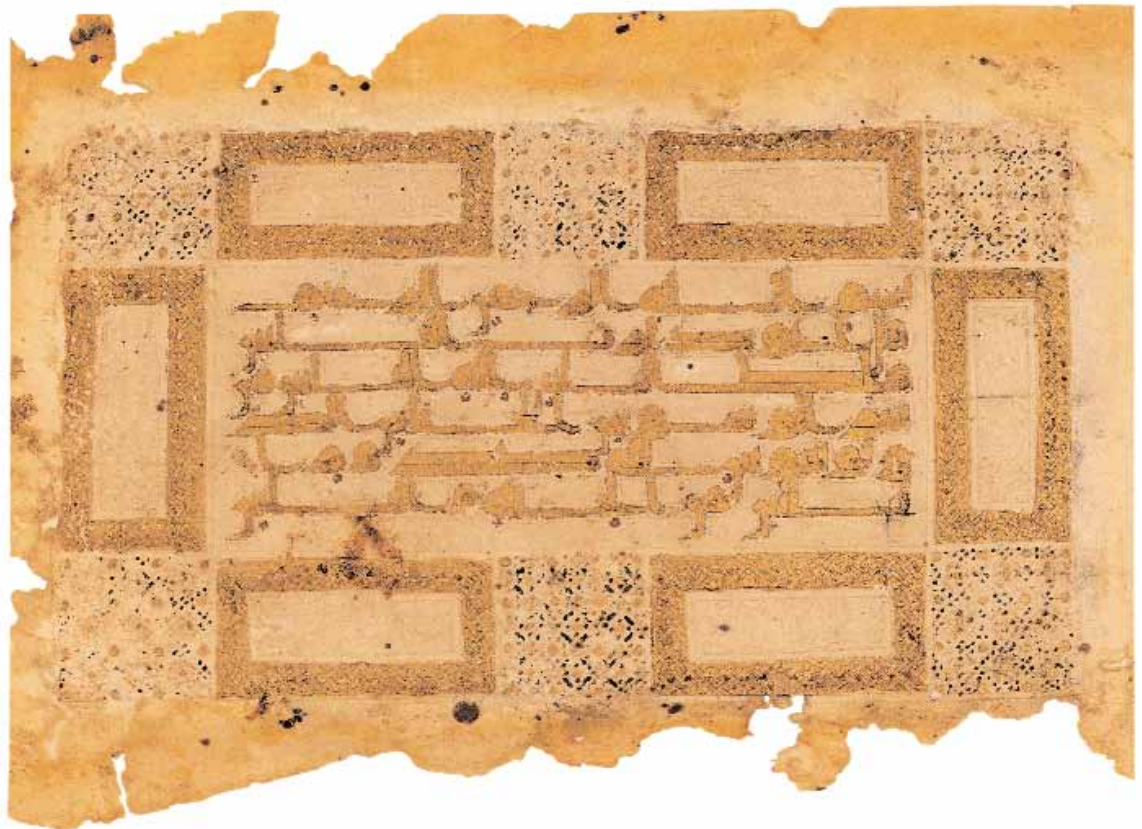


## 3

**Qur'an leaf with gold Kufic script**

North Africa, ninth or tenth century  
 Ink, colours and gold on vellum  
 16 x 25 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo478  
 Publ.: Makariou 2007, p. 110 (no. 35).

This unusual Qur'an folio gives the complete text of the final Sura of the Qur'an, *Surat al-Nas* (114: 1–6). The verse, one of the shortest in the Qur'an, has been written in an elongated Kufic script, again executed in the technique of chrysography (see cat. nos 1 and 2) and, like cat. no. 1, includes vocalisation dots. In this instance not only have the gold letters of the Sura been outlined in brown ink, but a further outline has also been created around each word by the use of delicate brown hatching in the blank space between the lines of text, leaving only a fine margin of clear ground outlined around the sacred words. This strong decorative impulse is not limited to the text itself. The illuminator, who may have been the same person as the scribe, has built up an extremely dense arrangement of ornamental blocks around the central text panel: delicate vinescroll motifs executed in ink have been framed by tight panels of interlace in gold, alternating with squares of a repeating geometric design picked out in gold and ink. The overall effect is one of the utmost luxury with the golden text itself becoming a decorative component of the overall design whilst simultaneously retaining its sacred primacy. A written reference on the verso of this leaf states that the manuscript was made in the Great Mosque of Qayrawan in Tunisia; it is not known at present whether the whole manuscript would have been as densely and expensively illuminated as this final Sura.



## Qur'an folio in Kufic script

The progressive refinement of the letter forms enacted by individual scribes took the script type that is very generally referred to as "Kufic" in a number of different directions. This leaf from a dispersed Qur'an presents *Surat al-Nisa* (4: 52–56). The elongation and attenuation of the script is coupled with an extraordinary level of control on the part of the scribe. For example, in addition to near-perfect regularity, the crescent-like terminal letters lying below the baseline also attest to a masterful control of the pen in order to maximise the width of the stroke at both the beginning and end of the curve. This particular script style is only found on two known manuscripts, both now dispersed: pages from these are now held in the National Library, Tunis; the Museum of Islamic Arts, Qayrawan; the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; the Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait, and the Nasser D. Khalili Collection, London, and two further folios are held in the Aga Khan Museum collection, AKMoo481 and AKMoo483. Leaves from this manuscript are also characterised by the use of red, green and yellow dots for vocalisation, short black diacritical lines, triangular arrangements of six gold dots (as seen on the middle line here) functioning as verse markers, and large medallions with gold illumination. In addition to the very high quality of the scribal execution and illumination, the huge amount of breathing space given to the script with only three lines of text presented on each page must have made this manuscript a colossally costly undertaking: parchment was an extremely expensive material to produce.

4

North Africa or Near East, tenth century  
 Ink, opaque watercolours and gold on parchment  
 23.8 x 33.1 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo482  
 Publ.: AKTC 2008a, pp. 46–47 (no. 3).



## 5

**Beam with Qur'anic inscription**

Egypt, Tulunid, ninth century

Carved wood

Length: 120 cm

Inv.: AKM00701

Publ.: AKTC 2009a, pp. 114–115

(no. 64); AKTC 2009b, pp. 114–115

(no. 64); AKTC 2010a, pp. 116–117

(no. 66).

Woodwork from the early and medieval periods is very rare today because of its perishable nature, and this wooden beam is one of only a scarce handful of surviving inscribed wooden elements produced under the Tulunids, the first independent Islamic dynasty of Egypt. The beam contains both mortice and tenon joints and may have been originally intended to form part of a mosque furnishing such as a Qur'an stand, rather than functioning as an architectural element. The use of a form of Kufic for the Qur'anic inscription that decorates this object demonstrates the broad application of that script in sacred contexts, and recalls the early development of Kufic as an architectural and lapidary script. The strong baseline and gravity of Kufic script made it eminently suitable for the communication of the Qur'anic message in both architectural contexts and manuscripts, and in time the script itself seemed to acquire something of an aura of sanctity through association with the sacred text. The inscription on this piece contains verses from the sixty-seventh Sura of the Qur'an, *Surat al-Mulk* (67: 13–14) “[13] And whether ye hide your word or publish it, He certainly has [full] knowledge, of the secrets of [all] hearts. [14] Should He not know, He that created? and He is the One that understands the finest mysteries [and] is well-acquainted [with them]” (...[a]jharū bihi innahū ‘alimun bi-dhāti al-sudūr. Ā-lā ya‘lamu man khalaqa wahuwa al-lat[if]...).



## Architectural fragment

Egypt, owing to its climate, presents a more complete story of carved woodwork from the early Islamic period than many other countries: the earliest surviving pieces of Egyptian Islamic woodwork are from the seventh century and show a strong connection with Coptic artistic traditions (Contadini 1998, pp. 111–112). The Fatimid period in Egypt (969–1171) saw the development of more elaborate and complex woodcarving designs, as woodwork came into its own as an artistic medium in Islamic North Africa, and very ornate examples of figural woodcarving have survived from the eleventh century. Far more austere in appearance are these two lines of carved inscription without any decoration, which have much in common with architectural inscriptions of the time found on stone. The text on this fragment has not yet been deciphered: it may well be Qur'anic, and the wooden fragment that bears it may have been part of an architectural element. Although rather thickly cut, the style of the Kufic script shows the spatulate endings to the letter shafts that would be subsequently elaborated into floriated Kufic (see cat. no. 7).

**6**

Fatimid Egypt, tenth or  
eleventh century  
Carved wood  
Length: 28,5 cm  
Inv.: AKMoo629  
Unpublished



## 7

## Funerary stele

North Africa, dated 377 H / 987 CE  
 Carved marble  
 Height: 59.7 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo662  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, pp. 72–73  
 (no. 42); AKTC 2007b, pp. 68–69  
 (no. 42); AKTC 2009a, pp. 104–105  
 (no. 58); AKTC 2009b, pp. 104–105  
 (no. 58); AKTC 2010a, p. 107 (no. 59).

There is a long tradition of inscribed marble funerary steles in the Islamic world. This stele is a fine example of North African production, typically Tunisian, during the tenth and eleventh centuries. The fifteen-line Kufic inscription includes the name of someone who was possibly a leather merchant (*jallad*, although this could also imply the profession of a torturer, according to Abdullah Ghouchani). Mid-Sha'ban 376 H / 29 December 986 CE is the date given for his death and for the collection of his body by his brother from the city in which he died. The date inscribed for his burial in another city, most likely his hometown, is mid-Jumada 377 H / 15 October 987 CE, which means he was interred some ten months after he died. The city of death has been read as Cairo (*Misr*) but also as *Mansuf*. The stele has been made from a reused piece of architectural marble, in this case a Roman baluster with large scrolling acanthus leaves carved in deep intaglio, as can be seen from the back view. The use of marble spolia in this manner for a funerary marker indicates both the prestige and scarcity of the material in areas such as North Africa. The carving of the Kufic inscription demonstrates the departure from the more restrained manuscript styles that had taken place in architectural scripts: the letters are lively, closely crowded and vertical in emphasis, with little space between the lines; foliation has begun to take place on the letter shafts, as their exaggeratedly thick trumpet-like serifs begin to turn into vegetal volutes.





## 8

Khurasan (Nishapur) or Transoxiana (Samarqand), late ninth or tenth century  
 Earthenware, white slip with black slip decoration under a transparent glaze  
 Height 19.8 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00544  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 174 (no. 148);  
 AKTC 2007b, p. 174 (no. 148);  
 AKTC 2008a, pp. 274–275 (no. 107);  
 AKTC 2009a, p. 170 (no. 122);  
 AKTC 2009b, p. 170 (no. 122);  
 AKTC 2010a, p. 170 (no. 124).

## Vase

The calligraphic ceramics of the eastern Iranian world that were produced in the late ninth and tenth centuries must, at their best, be ranked alongside the great calligraphic achievements in the more typical media of manuscripts and architectural decoration. Rather than relying on expensive or luxurious materials, the greatest practitioners of this craft used only earthenware, most commonly covered in a white slip (a semi-fluid coloured clay) and decorated with black or dark brown slip, sometimes with touches of red, to create calligraphic masterpieces. A final coating of transparent glaze sealed the decoration. The inscription reads *Baraka li-sahibihi* (“blessing to its owner”). Although the message of this vase is a wholly formulaic expression, found on a huge number of mid-status objects from across the medieval Islamic world, the inscription has been executed with a degree of skill that lifts the piece to an altogether higher artistic plane. The debt this object owes to manuscript calligraphy is clear in the exaggerated tapering uprights on the upper surface of each vertical letter, mimicking the slanted pen-work of scribal letter forms, and in the remarkable degree of comfort with empty space exhibited in the design of this piece and related ceramics (cat. nos. 9 and 10).

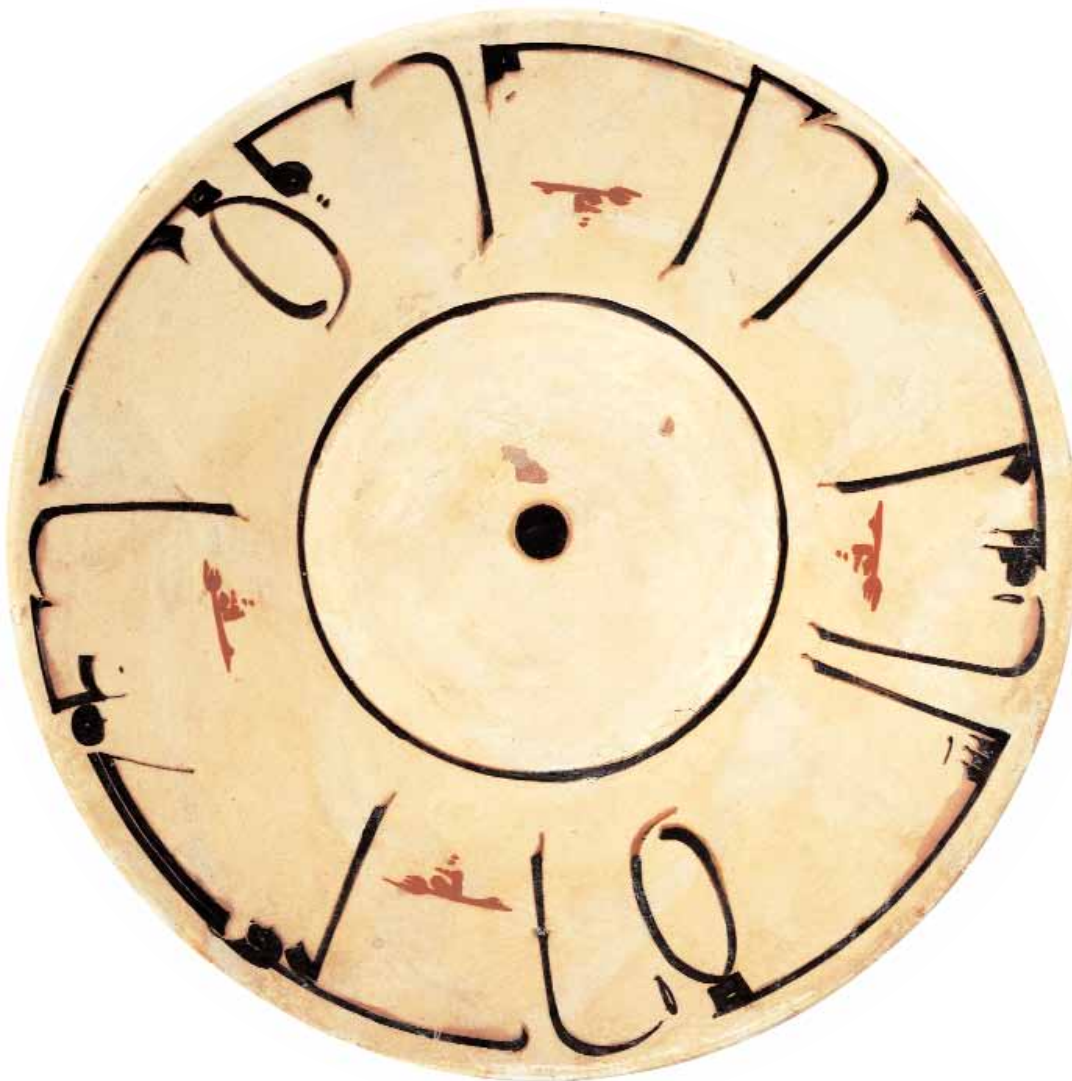


## Dish

The fine Kufic inscription on this dish displays the features that are most prized in slip-painted calligraphic wares of this period. The rhythm and balance of the near-black script, with its elongated shafts forming spokes towards the centre around which the radial design turns, is punctuated by the smaller repeated inscription in red. The overall message of the inscription is fairly typical of this group of wares, which generally present pious aphorisms of this type: the Arabic inscription “Generosity is the disposition of the dwellers of Paradise” (*al-jud min akhlaq ahl al-janna*) is written in dark brown, and “Good health” (*al-sala[ma]*) in red. The frequency with which these dishes allude to noble qualities within the context of food, eating or health suggests that they may have been intended as tableware, rather than purely decorative pieces, although the lack of reliable archaeological data makes it frustratingly difficult to gauge their original social context. Epigraphic slipwares of this type have been excavated at or attributed to centres of production at Nishapur and Afrasiyab (old Samarqand), and are presumed to have been made for local consumption rather than mass export: they are not found in excavations west of central Iran or at Rayy. These wares, along with a great number of other styles of ceramic decoration, are commonly associated with the Samanids, the first native Persian dynasty in Greater Iran after the Arab conquest, who ruled Khurasan and Transoxiana in the tenth century.

## 9

Tashkent, late ninth or tenth century  
Earthenware, white slip with dark brown and red slip decoration under a transparent glaze  
Diameter: 34.9 cm  
Inv.: AKM00546  
Publ.: Ilyasova–Imamberdiyev 2005, 93 fig. 4; AKTC 2007a, p. 174 (no. 149); AKTC 2007b, p. 175 (no. 149); Makariou 2007, pp. 176–177 (no. 62); AKTC 2009a, p. 171 (no. 123); AKTC 2009b, p. 171 (no. 123); AKTC 2010a, pp. 170–171 (no. 125).





## 10

Khurasan or Transoxiana, ninth or tenth century  
 Earthenware, black slip with white slip decoration under a transparent glaze  
 Diameter 33.5 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00545  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 174 (no. 150); AKTC 2007b, p. 175 (no. 150); Makariou 2007, pp. 178–179 (no. 63); AKTC 2009a, p.171 (no. 124); AKTC 2009b, p.171 (no. 124); AKTC 2010a, pp. 170–171 (no. 126).

## Dish

This dish employs the tonal inverse of cat. no. 9 to equally striking effect. Samanid ceramics that employ a white-on-black colour scheme are much less common than their black-on-white counterparts, and it has been suggested by Wilkinson that the high-quality examples of this colour scheme found at Nishapur were imports. A large number of white-on-black wares of apparently local manufacture were also found at Nishapur, but these tend to have far less carefully-executed inscriptions, with no sharpening or tidying of the outlines, and are not really comparable with the example displayed here in terms of the quality of their inscriptions. Letter features that owe much to developments in manuscript calligraphy, such as the interlaced *lam-alif* that curves back on itself like a pair of callipers or the greatly exaggerated distance between certain letters (see cat. no. 12), are here employed as compositional devices and very successfully adapted to the radial format of the dish. The inscription in Arabic reads as: “Be aware of the fool, do not associate with him, and do not trust the bewildered admirer. With blessing” (*Iyyaka wa-l-ahmaq la tu’ashiruhu wa-l-ta’ih al-mu’jab la tujawiruhu. Bi-l baraka*).





## 11

## Large Qur'an leaf in Kufic script

North Africa, eighth century  
 Ink on parchment  
 55 x 70 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00475  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 34 (no. 1);  
 AKTC 2007b, pp. 30–31 (no. 1);  
 Makariou 2007, pp. 106–107 (no.  
 33); AKTC 2008a, p. 42 (no. 1).

The very earliest extant Qur'an fragments were written in a script that slants to the right, known as *Hijazi* after the tenth-century scholar Ibn al-Nadim's attribution of that script to the Hijaz region of the Arabian peninsula, and were normally inscribed in parchment manuscripts of vertical format. Subsequent developments saw horizontally oriented Qur'an manuscripts come to the fore, and the horizontal format remained the standard for the most luxurious Qur'ans for several centuries. Simultaneously, the more refined and regulated Kufic script evolved rapidly into the script of choice for religious texts. This example is unusually large – most early Qur'ans are relatively small – but it is typical of early Kufic examples inasmuch as it has no diacritical or vocalization marks to aid reading and recitation, and makes no use of gold decoration. Verse endings are marked by little panels of diagonal lines, but the strong, well-modulated Kufic script is largely left to speak for itself. The text is from *Surat al-Anbiya'* (21: 76–82). The extensive use of *mashq*, a horizontal elongation of certain letters, gives the text a stately visual rhythm: the fifth line contains a particularly pronounced example of this. The folio comes from a monumental Qur'an of which approximately one third is held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, while individual leaves are held in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and the Forschungs-und Landesbibliothek, Gotha. The manuscript was held in St. Petersburg in the nineteenth century and it is conjectured that it must have travelled along the silk roads at some point in its history, reminding us that even the largest manuscripts are portable, and that highly regarded objects have a tendency to travel.

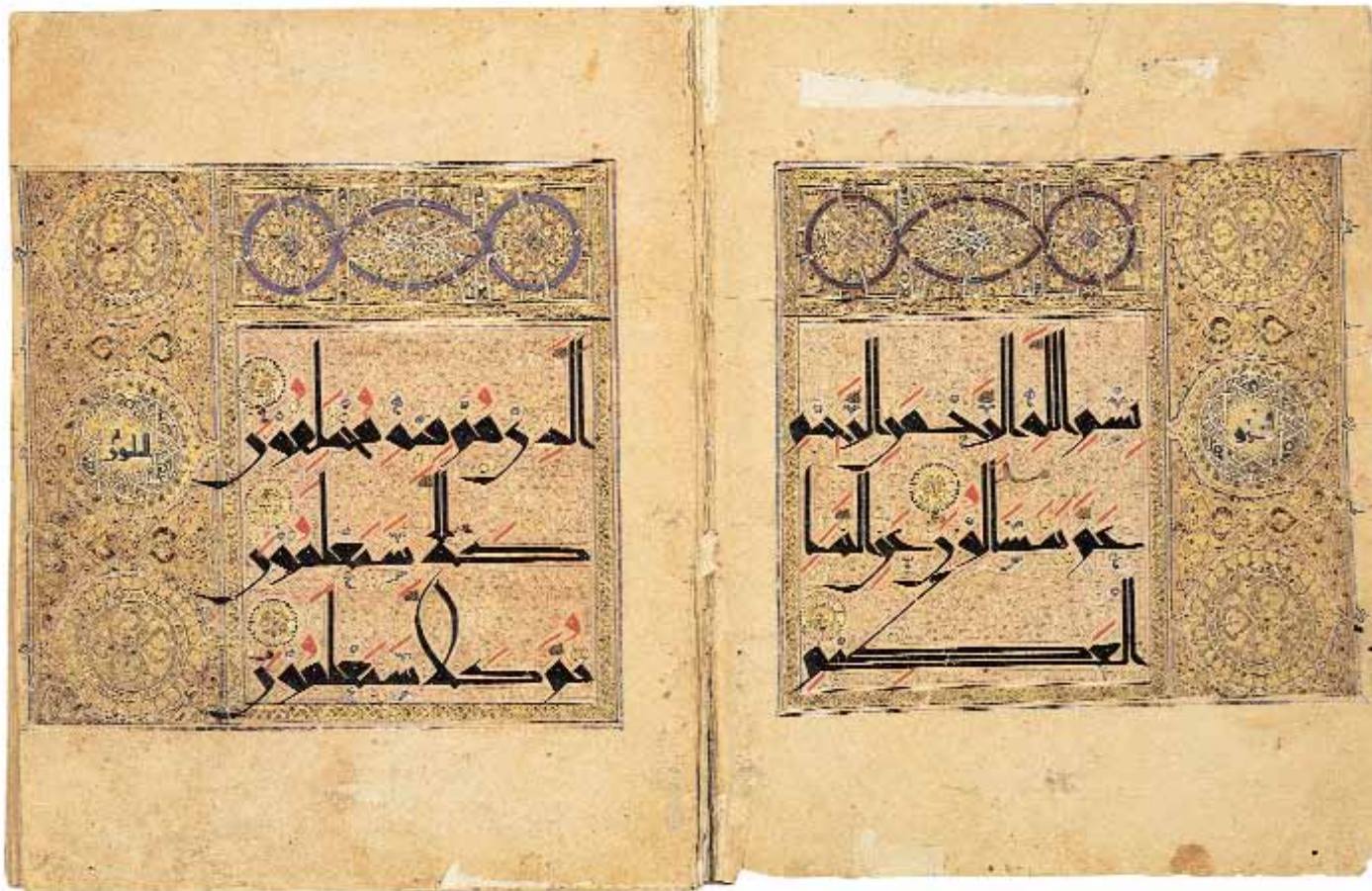


## Fragment of *Juz' Thirty* of the Qur'an

The Qur'an can be divided into thirty even parts, or *Juz'*, so that one section may be read on each day of the month. Thirty-volume Qur'an sets were produced, and these folios are from the final volume of such a set, *Juz' Thirty*. The opening pages shown here display the first verses of *Surat al-Naba'* (78: 1–5) with only three lines to a page and densely ornamented border panels to mark its special status as the start of both a new *Juz'* and a new Sura: subsequent leaves employ five lines to the page, still richly decorated with gold roundels for *abjad* verse-counters and text markers. The distinctive angular script of this manuscript with its elongated slim verticals is sometimes termed "eastern Kufic", and was used in the Iranian world from the second half of the tenth century to the thirteenth: it can be related to the script used on Samanid ceramics (see cat. nos. 9 and 10). This manuscript marks a number of new departures taking place in Qur'anic manuscripts by the end of the tenth century: paper was beginning to replace parchment as the preferred medium of transcription, and the vertical format was beginning to appear more regularly, while it has also been argued that the appearance of this script shows scribal practice moving closer to the cursive styles that would come to dominate Qur'an production and other types of inscription in the centuries to come (Makariou 2007, pp. 116–117).

12

Iran or Iraq, eleventh century  
Ink and gold on paper  
25.4 x 19.5 cm  
Inv.: AKM00261  
Publ.: Welch 1972b, pp. 21–22 and  
25–27; Welch 1979a, pp. 62–63  
(no. 12), Makariou 2007, pp.  
116–117 (no. 38); AKTC 2008a,  
pp. 48–49 (no. 4).



## 13

## Folio from the “Qarmathian Qur’an”

Iran, mid twelfth century

Ink, gouache and gold on paper

Page: 31 x 20.8 cm; text 21.4 x

14.2 cm

Inv.: AKMoo256

Publ.: Welch–Welch 1982, pp.

46–48 (no. 11); AKTC 2007a, pp.1

38–39 (no. 5); AKTC 2007b, p.

34–35 (no. 5); AKTC 2009a, p. 36

(no. 5); AKTC 2009b, p. 36 (no. 5);

AKTC 2010a, p. 37 (no. 5).

The so-called “Qarmathian Qur’an” from which this leaf originates is thought to have comprised some 4,500 pages in its original state (Blair 2008, p. 198). The high level of decoration seen on this page was apparently employed on every folio in the manuscript, which must have made this in its entirety an extraordinarily time-consuming project. The text is from *Surat al-Ma’ida* (5: 44–45). Like the text of cat. no. 3, the lines of script are set within contour panels against a ground filled with linear decoration, in this case quite complex scrolling foliate designs that recall contemporary ceramic and metalwork decoration. A frame of braid-like decoration in gold surrounds the text panel of each leaf, and the overall impression gained from the complete volume must have been one of unceasing visual stimuli. Four lines of text are allotted to each page, using a broken angular script that has come to be called, with little apparent foundation, “Qarmathian”. The script itself is characterised by towering verticals and a dramatic modulation between thick and thin strokes, with a strict baseline. In contrast with earlier Qur’an manuscripts this example does not break lines in the middle of a word. Taken in conjunction with the comprehensive use of vocalisation and diacritical marks seen in Qur’ans by this time, this suggests a shift had taken place in the way the text was used, changing from the role of *aide mémoire* for recitation towards a document that was expected to be immediately and fully comprehended through reading.





Handwritten text in Arabic script, likely from a manuscript or letter, written on aged, yellowed paper. The text is dense and covers most of the page, though some parts are obscured by the angle and shadows. The script is cursive and appears to be a form of Maghrebi or Ottoman script. The paper shows signs of wear, including creases and discoloration, particularly along the edges.

## Prayer amulet and accompanying case

This tiny prayer amulet would have been worn about its owner's body to ensure protection from illness or misfortune. The text, which has been translated by Abdullah Ghouchani, contains excerpts from different Suras of the Qur'an, including parts of Suras 2, 3, 6, and 15. The use of Qur'anic texts as a form of personal talisman can be seen in a whole range of different types of apotropaic material, including miniature Qur'ans and shirts decorated with the holy text, and appears to have formed part of everyday life at all levels of society. This example is an extremely rare and interesting object: not only is the amulet apparently unique in being accompanied by its original case, but the text has also been produced in a very early form of printing known as *tarsh*. This involved creating the letters in reverse on a block of wood, or possibly metal. It is not at present known which material was used, and whether the print block would have been carved, cast or moulded from a clay matrix (see Bulliet 1987). The early history of printing in the Middle East is still an under-researched area, but several printed amulets have been found in Fustat (old Cairo) and can be dated from the archaeological context to the tenth century or thereabouts; the form of Kufic employed on this piece would also fit with a Fatimid date.

## 14

Egypt, probably eleventh century  
Ink on paper, lead case  
Paper: 7.2 x 5.5 cm; case: 2.7 x 1.3 cm  
Inv.: AKM00508  
Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 61 (no. 30);  
AKTC 2007b, p. 58 (no. 30);  
Makariou 2007, pp. 130–31 (no. 45);  
AKTC 2008a, pp. 86–87 (no. 23);  
AKTC 2009a, p. 60 (no. 27); AKTC  
2009b, p. 60 (no. 27); AKTC 2010a,  
p. 62 (no. 28).





## 15

Egypt, eleventh or twelfth century  
 Gold with repoussé and chased  
 decoration  
 4.2 x 3.7 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00599  
 Publ.: AKTC 2010a, pp. 120–121  
 (no. 84).

**Amulet case**

Like cat. no. 14, this little amulet case would almost certainly have contained Qur'anic texts written on paper, and was probably designed to be hung around the wearer's neck, suspended by loops. However, as it is made from gold and therefore a far more expensive and luxurious item, the present example has been worked into a very beautiful object of personal adornment and is entirely different in appearance from the functional lead case of cat. no. 14. Within the decorated face of this gold example, the notched band running across the middle and the style of the Kufic inscription are characteristic of metalwork from Fatimid Egypt. A comparable form of Kufic script, with similar notched bands framing the upper and lower edges of the inscription, can be seen on a silver mirror-back from eleventh-century Egypt, now in the Benaki Museum (acc. no. 13770; Bloom 2007, p. 98). Similarly the vegetal decoration with trefoil palmettes seen below the inscription on the amulet case can also be compared with the repeating s-shaped palmettes, ending in trefoil buds, of the same mirror. The inscription on the amulet case reads *al-mulk li'llah* ("Sovereignty to God"), a pious phrase found on a wide variety of objects in various media (for example, cat. no. 16), and particularly appropriate to the apotropaic function of the personal amulet.



## Bead and pendant necklace

Rock crystal is a pure, transparent form of quartz, distinct from crystal glass. This necklace, which bears six faceted cylindrical beads, four with Kufic inscriptions, as well as plain polygonal beads and a crescent pendant, is a composite of rock crystal pieces from different sources. While Fatimid Egypt (969–1171) is justly famous for its use of rock crystal, with a number of spectacular and well-known rock-crystal vessels surviving from that period, less often discussed is the early Islamic tradition of rock crystal work from Iran. Iranian rock-crystal work does not appear to have been made significantly later than the eleventh century, leading Kröger to suggest that by the time of the Mongol invasion jade had already overtaken rock crystal in popularity (Kröger 1993, n.p.). An Iranian rock-crystal bead excavated at Nishapur has been published, and the form seems to have been relatively common (Jenkins–Keene 1982, pp. 30–32); other common uses in early Islamic Iran include various forms of talisman and seal, to which the four inscribed beads in this collection may be related. The cylindrical beads with Kufic inscriptions include the common pious phrases “I put my trust in God”, “Sovereignty to God”, “Might to God”, and “Praise be to God”. The form of the central, crescent-shaped pendant is known from a number of other Iranian examples thought to date from the ninth century. A closely comparable example has been published by Pinder-Wilson (1998, pp. 292–293), who has provided an interesting interpretation of the distinctive form of these pieces and their symmetrical decoration of grooved lines: he suggests that the lines imitate the bindings of a small leather bag, and the whole pendant symbolises an amulet case worn around the neck.

16

Iran or possibly Egypt, ninth –  
eleventh centuries  
Rock crystal, drilled and carved  
Full length: 45 cm  
Inv.: AKMoo654  
Unpublished



## 17

**Miniature manuscript of the Qur'an**

Probably Fatimid or Ikhshidid North Africa, tenth century  
 Brown ink with gold and colours on vellum; gilt red morocco binding (not contemporary with manuscript)  
 10 x 8.2 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo825  
 Unpublished

The text of this diminutive incomplete volume of the Qur'an, Suras 7 (*al-A'raf*) to 90 (*al-Balad*), is written in a tiny, finely wrought form of script that appears to be related to the so-called "eastern Kufic" styles that began to appear widely in the tenth century (see cat. no. 12). These have been convincingly argued by Whelan and latterly Blair to be descended from a chancery script rather than solely from angular Kufic, and scripts of this type have been named by them "broken cursive" (Blair 2008, p. 144). The combination of a closely written broken cursive script with red vocalisations dots, the vertical manuscript format and the use of vellum make this an unusual and arresting manuscript: paper, which had been introduced to the Islamic world via Chinese soldiers captured at the battle of Talas (in modern-day Kyrgyzstan) in 751, took longer to take hold in the western Islamic world than the eastern, and parchment continued to be used for Qur'anic manuscripts in the western Islamic world until the eleventh century and even later. The illumination of the manuscript, meanwhile, is comparable with that of some larger tenth century Qur'ans, with gold Sura headings extended with gold and blue margin palmettes, and lobed gold roundels functioning as verse markers further decorating the margins (see also cat. no. 4). Two vertical-format parchment manuscripts in the Khalili Collection, London, dated by Déroche to the tenth century, bear close resemblances to the current codex in terms of both script type and decoration (Déroche 1992, nos 78 and 87, pp. 143 and 153).



## Bowl

The design of this dish, with isolated palmettes in black and red standing out sharply on a white ground, roundels floating in isolation, and abstracted, debased or “pseudo-Kufic” inscriptions, is typical of one of the many forms of ceramic decoration that developed alongside each other in the Eastern Iranian world in the Samanid period. Wares of this type can be related to some of the calligraphic bowls of similar provenance (cat. no. 9) in terms of materials and colour scheme, but the draughtsmanship and composition cannot be compared. Rather than the highly skilled, meditative and meticulously planned decoration of the purely calligraphic pieces, these wares blend a more rapid and less precious style of drawing with appealing but often eccentric composition. Presumably located somewhere in the middle of the social scale, such pieces often bear inscriptive content that is difficult or impossible to make out, as inscriptions were slowly abstracted into illegible design elements.

## 18

Khurasan (Nishapur, Iran) or Transoxiana (Samarqand, Uzbekistan), tenth or eleventh century  
Earthenware, white slip with black and red slip decoration under a transparent glaze  
Diameter: 28.6 cm  
Inv.: AKM00547  
Publ.: Welch 1972b, p. 81.



## 19

Khurasan (Nishapur, Iran) or Transoxiana (Samarqand, Uzbekistan), tenth century  
 Earthenware, white slip with black, red and olive slip decoration under a transparent glaze  
 Diameter: 36.8 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00742  
 Publ.: Welch 1972b, p. 81; Falk 1985, p. 218 (no. 211).

## Dish

The dense and colourful decoration of this dish pivots around a central panel containing a debased inscription based on a repetition of the name of God, "Allah". It is not entirely clear whether the debased and sometimes illegible inscriptions that appear so frequently on the ceramics of this period were the work of craftsman who were not fully literate, or if they were the result of the image of the word gradually becoming more important than its legibility, at least at the lower levels of production. The contrast between the inscriptive panel of this piece and the radial or symmetrical patterns based on vegetation that dominate the composition places the inscriptive content as a static centre within a revolving design. In the braided design that encircles the central area of the dish there is a distant echo of the knotwork motifs sometimes used to decorate Qur'an manuscripts (see cat. no. 3), which are in turn thought to refer to the ancient use of knotwork as an apotropaic device. This piece is exhibited with the kind permission of Princess Catherine Aga Khan.



## Dish

In common with other wares of this type, the calligraphic decoration of this piece has thus far proved resistant to being deciphered, in spite of the appearance of several recognisable letter shapes within the dark brown repeating designs: a comparable example can be seen in Pancaroğlu 2007, p. 27. The rather ebullient execution of the calligraphic elements sees the long letter shafts dangling down into the centre of the dish in a lolling rhythm, rather than forming the tight spokes seen on the more controlled calligraphic slipware (see cat. no. 10). The “words” themselves are surrounded by contour panels – the blank, red-outlined bubble that surrounds the dark brown calligraphic decoration – a device that has been borrowed from manuscript illumination (see cat. no. 13). The ground outwith the contour panels has been filled in with a restless decoration of red-rimmed “peacock’s eyes” and dense small dark dots, further adding to the sense of rhythmic dynamism that makes this an excellent example of the so-called “Samarqand wares”. This piece is exhibited with the kind permission of Princess Catherine Aga Khan.

## 20

Eastern Iranian world or Transoxiana, possibly Samarqand, tenth century  
Earthenware, cream-coloured slip with dark brown and red slip under a transparent glaze  
Diameter: 23.8 cm; height: 6.5 cm  
Inv.: AKMoo748  
Unpublished



## 21

**Blue silk robe**

Central Asia, possibly thirteenth century

Woven silk

Length from collar to base: 142 cm;  
width of arm span: 197 cm; width of  
waist: 60 cm

Inv.: AKMoo816

Unpublished

Long-sleeved robes with flared skirts suitable for riding and crossover frontal openings are depicted in many surviving miniature paintings from the eastern Islamic lands (see for example cat. no. 109), although the robe most commonly seen in miniature paintings is that with front panels that cross right over each other to fasten at the sides of the body, as is the case on a further robe in the Aga Khan collection (AKMoo677), but not on this garment. The structure of the present garment is comparable to a silk lampas robe sold at Sotheby's London, 31 March 2009 (lot 94), which was also decorated across the front of the shoulders with a calligraphic band. In the present instance the calligraphic decoration appears to be pseudo-Kufic rather than a true script: the use of pseudo-Kufic, sometimes plaited, in high quality silk textiles developed in the eleventh century in the eastern Iranian area and apparently spread to the rest of the Islamic world. The question of why pseudo-Kufic, frequently associated with lower quality products, should be used in such instances in preference to true script has not yet been solved (Folsach–Bernstead 1993, pp. 44–47). The high regard in which “cloth of gold” or *panni tartarici* from Central Asia was held in Europe as well as the Middle East is borne out in its presence in church treasuries and burial contexts (Kadoi 2009, p. 21).







## 22

***Tirāz* textile**

Egypt, late tenth or early eleventh century

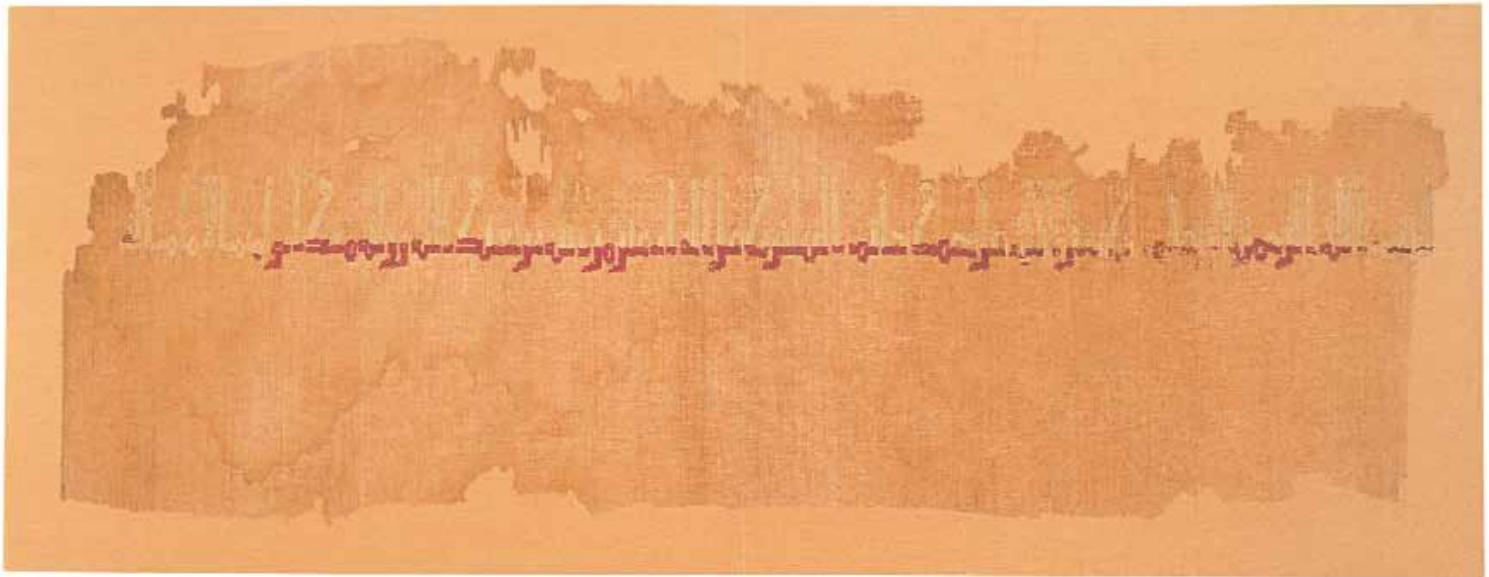
Linen, tapestry-woven silk

151 x 51 cm

Inv.: AKM00670

Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 93 (no. 62); AKTC 2007b, p. 91 (no. 62); AKTC 2009a, pp. 122–123 (no. 84); AKTC 2009b, pp. 122–123 (no. 84); AKTC 2010a, p. 122 (no. 86).

The term *tirāz* is used to refer to both a type of inscribed textile, and the government-run factories in which those textiles were produced. *Tirāz* can also refer to the band of inscription itself: this could be woven, embroidered or painted, and generally bore laudatory or benedictory phrases and the name of the ruler. It was the prerogative of the ruler to distribute these textiles to his courtiers as badges of honour, effectively making them “walking advertisements for the monarch” (Hillenbrand 1999, p. 50), and to judge from slightly later manuscript paintings (such as those of the 1237 *Maqamat* of al-Hariri) *tirāz* came to function in the Islamic world as a form of portable, wearable status symbol. The Fatimid caliphs were fully aware of the propagandistic value of impressive ceremonial, and periodically outfitted the court with new clothing for religious, civil and military ceremonies. In this light it is not surprising that Fatimid Egypt became famous for its luxury textile production and the *tirāz* factories of Damietta, Alexandria and other cities produced *tirāz* for the Fatimid caliphs and possibly also for their rivals the Abbasid caliphs. The foliated Kufic inscription of this textile includes blessings to the Prophet Muhammad and to the Fatimid caliph al-Mu‘izz li-Din Allah (r. 952–975): “In the name of God the Beneficent, the Merciful; may God’s blessing be upon Muhammad, Seal of the Prophets, and his family... from God... for the servant of God and His believer, Ma‘ad Abu Tamim, the Imam al-Mu[‘izz]” (trans. Abdullah Ghouchani).



### Woven *tirāz* fragment

The circulation of large numbers of high-quality *tirāz* textiles (such as cat. no. 22) in the upper levels of Egyptian society appears to have generated a middle-class, aspirational market for inscribed textiles. The significance of textiles within the medieval Islamic world as a widely-traded form of material wealth has sometimes been overlooked, due to the relative lack of surviving remains. However, textual evidence shows that huge quantities of luxury textiles were given as gifts between rulers (al-Qaddumi 1996, p. 77) and a thriving market can be assumed at the middle levels of society as well. The inscription on this fragment is a repetition of the phrase *Nasr min Allah* ("Victory from God"): textiles with repeating benedictory formulae emulated the court textiles inscribed with caliphal protocol but were executed in less luxurious materials. Some others bear inscriptions that are not of sufficient quality to make them legible; again, these may have been manufactured for the commercial market. The use of a cursive script, rather than the formal Kufic that was often employed on caliphal *tirāz*, suggests that this piece was intended for a less stately environment than the court, and may also point to a date in the twelfth century.

23

Egypt, eleventh or twelfth century  
Linen (?)  
11.2 x 40.2 cm  
Inv.: AKMoo675  
Unpublished



## 24

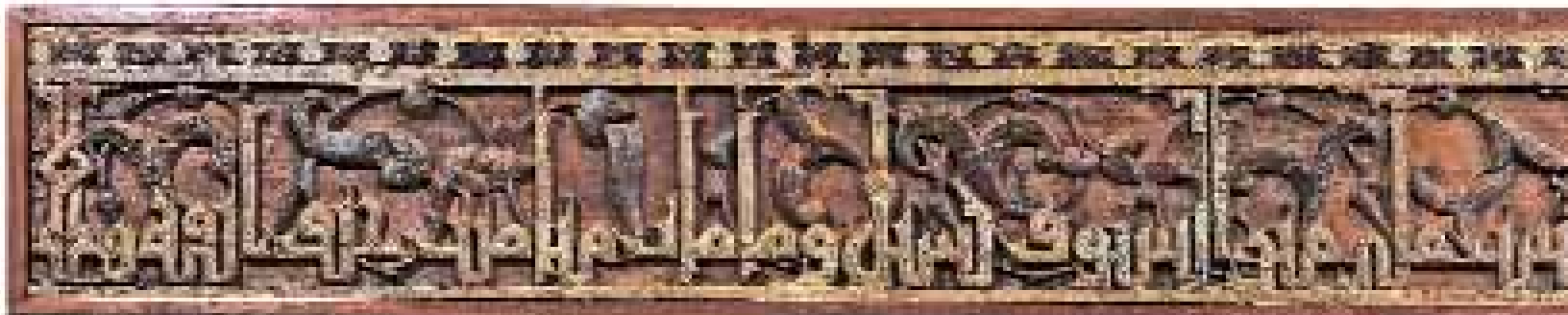
Fez, Morocco, Almohad period,  
twelfth century  
Pine, carved and painted  
30.8 x 313 cm  
Inv.: AKMoo631  
Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 189 (no. E);  
AKTC 2007b, p. 191 (no. E);  
Makariou 2007, pp. 192–193  
(no. 70); AKTC 2008a, pp. 252–253  
(no. 99); AKTC 2008b; AKTC  
2009a, pp. 100–101 (no. 54);  
AKTC 2009b, pp. 100–101 (no. 54);  
AKTC 2010a pp. 102–103 (no. 55).

## Polychrome wooden beam

Inscription (Arabic):

We are a people who do not find shame at death in combat  
Even when we consider [the tribes of] Amir and Salul.  
Love of death brings us closer to our fated time  
Whereas they hate the moment and drag out the hours.  
None of us has died in his bed  
And no one was killed without being avenged.  
Our lives are run on the steel of our swords  
On nothing but our blades do they meet their end.

This beam is the second half of a pair that together would have been placed on two perpendicular walls, probably at the base of the ceiling. In conjunction the two beams originally presented a pre-Islamic Arabic poem of a type known as a *qasida*, by Jahiliyya Samaw'al ibn 'Adiya, who died c. 560. The use of pre-Islamic poetry deserves to be highlighted: it indicates a particularly literate environment resonant with memories of original Arab poetry. This sensitivity underscores the Maghrib's self-ordained role as the land of the preservation of classical Arab poetry. This in turn gave way, more than a century later, to a dialogue between the most illustrious of poets, historians and viziers of Nasrid Spain, Lisan al-Din ibn al-Khatib (died in 1374), and one of the great historians of Islam, Ibn Khaldun (died in 1406), on the preservation of the vestiges of the literary glory of the Arabs at the end of Arab Spain. The inscription itself is written in an angular script without diacriticals and with a low emphasis: the letters are reduced to a third of the available height, while the stabbing white shafts of the tall letters rhythmically punctuate the upper area of the panel. Certain aspects of the script, such as the twisted form of the *ha* on the partner beam (not pictured), indicate a date later than the eleventh century. However, it is the simplicity of the plant-like decoration behind the white inscription that affirms the twelfth-century date.



## Nasrid beam

The integration of inscriptions into architecture was a mainstay of Islamic architectural decoration from the early Islamic period onwards, leading to a sometimes overwhelming volume of text in richly-decorated interiors. This skilfully carved, long rectangular wooden beam includes an inscription in Kufic of an Arabic couplet framed between two horizontal bands, and the entire inscription is intertwined with, and almost subsumed by, an intricate vegetal design composed of interlacing vine scrolls ending in single leaves and split palmettes. Vegetal and epigraphic ornament here manage to retain their separate identities through the addition of fine detailing and inner lines carved into the foliate pattern, in contrast with the smooth bevelled surface of the inscription. The overall carving style seems to have been common in Nasrid Spain (1238–1492) and even in contemporary North Africa in a variety of media, such as the stucco decoration of the “Hall of the Two Sisters” at the Alhambra. Similar motifs involving calligraphy juxtaposed with vegetal carving can also be observed in a wooden beam from Toledo dated 1360 and in a carved stucco panel from thirteenth- or fourteenth-century Spain or North Africa, both in the David Collection, Copenhagen (von Folsach 2001, p. 270 [no. 434, inv. no. D 14/1986] and p. 251. [no. 400, inv. no. 35/1978], respectively).

25

Nasrid Spain, fourteenth century  
Carved wood  
29.8 x 146 cm  
Inv.: AKM00725  
Publ.: AKTC 2009a, pp. 100–101  
(no. 53); AKTC 2009b, pp. 100–101  
(no. 53); AKTC 2010a, pp. 102–106  
(no. 54).



## 26

Timurid western Central Asia,  
late fourteenth century  
Carved terracotta with  
turquoise glaze  
51.8 x 37.5 x 6.4 cm  
Inv.: AKMoo827  
Unpublished

## Ceramic architectural tile

Glazed tile, already established as a sophisticated and expensive form of wall covering in Iran under the Ilkhanids (1256–1353), underwent rapid developments in technique and aesthetic under the Timurids (c. 1370–1507) and emerged as the medium of some of the Islamic world's most breathtaking architectural decoration. The extraordinary Timurid predilection for turquoise and lapis lazuli blues, often highlighted with white, is apparent in both the extant tile work revetments found at sites such as the funerary complex of Shah-i Zinda (Samarqand, c. 1370–1425), and in the tile panels that are now in museums around the world. The technique of carving precise and intricate motifs in high relief into thick earthenware to create designs which, although largely monochromatic, make great play of light and shade, was perfected in western Central Asia in the fourteenth century and in fact seems to have been largely abandoned in favour of newer methods in the fifteenth century. This example boasts both a panel of the finely carved interlace palmettes that are a hallmark of the genre (see Pancaroğlu 2007, pp. 151–152) and a more unusual plaited Kufic inscription of remarkable complexity, which forms part of the common pious phrase *al-mulk [li'llah]* ("Sovereignty to God"). Elaborate and dominating inscriptions are a notable feature of imperial Timurid architectural decoration, and this tile would have been part of a larger inscriptive frieze, itself possibly only one element amongst a larger inscriptive programme. Carved and turquoise-glazed tiles with comparable inscriptions in plaited Kufic are held in the Metropolitan Museum (no. 2006. 274) and the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin (illustrated in Kalker–Pavaloi 1997, p. 90).







# 2

## Later Calligraphic Scripts





Annie Vernay-Nouri

## Calligraphy and Scripts in the Islamic World

Over the course of several decades a people from the Arabian Peninsula, bearers of a new religion, conquered a vast territory that extended, at its peak, from Spain to the Indus. Arabic, the liturgical language of the newly converted population, thus became the principal instrument of communication. As such it was the principal tool for the transmission of knowledge and for the administration of the empire. Writing, at the heart of the Arab-Muslim civilization, very quickly assumed a triple function, at once religious, utilitarian and ornamental. It was this same script that was later used to write down other languages such as Persian and Ottoman Turkish.

The Arabic language, which belongs to the Semitic group, has since its origin employed a consonantal alphabet and is written from right to left. There are three long vowels in addition to the notation of twenty-five consonants. The letters, with the exception of six that are partially or completely separated, are bound together by their ligatures. Their shape varies slightly according to their position: initial, central or final. Difficulties of interpretation due to confusion between consonants of the same line (there are only eighteen different characters) and the absence of notation of short vowels quickly led to the invention of more legible signs. The vowels were indicated by the addition of coloured dots placed above or below the letters. This custom, which according to legend is attributed to Abū al-Aswad al-Du‘alī (d. 688), was modified and led to the current practice of noting the vowels with small signs on or under the characters. Indeed, the need to standardize the Qur’anic text more accurately than the existing script allowed quickly became a necessity. Writing, born long before the time of Muhammad and confirmed since the early sixth century, was practiced by few people and served mainly to record commercial transactions or contracts. The word of God, revealed orally to the Prophet in revelations beginning around 610 CE was then, according to tradition, taken down in written form under the Caliph ‘Uthmān in 653, breathing great momentum into writing and giving it a strong symbolic connotation. The desire to glorify the sacred word rapidly made calligraphy, from the earliest Qur’anic text onwards, an essential component of Arabic-Muslim art.

Furthermore, the great conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries led to the Islamisation and Arabisation of much of the non-Arabic speaking population. With the decision of 'Abd al-Malik in 685 to Arabise the administration, Arabic became the language of the chancellery of the empire. Writing then developed along two axes: one for non-book written forms, in cursive, which served to record on papyrus official documents; the other for majestic scripts on parchment codex reserved for religious texts, principally Qur'ans. The earliest of the preserved Qur'ans date from the late seventh century and were copied in a script that is called *Hijāzī*, of which there are several variants. This name was given by nineteenth-century European paleogeographers in reference to Ibn al-Nadīm, who in the tenth century described in the *Fihrist* ("catalogue" or "bibliography") early scripts used in Medina and Mecca, cities of Hijaz. While limited at that time, this aesthetic preoccupation grew over the following decades. The Qur'anic text then came in a variety of scripts, angular and varied, slow to execute and difficult to read but of great beauty. They were grouped together under the traditional term Kufic, now sometimes known by the name "ancient 'Abbasid script". The same paleographers, still relying on Ibn al-Nadīm, thought this written form was originally from the city of Kufa in Iraq and they opposed the idea that the earliest *Hijāzī* writings came from Arabia. Modern studies have shown that they were in fact widespread throughout the burgeoning Muslim world, from the Maghrib to Iran.

Between the late eighth and tenth centuries, volumes of the Qur'an on parchment, of an oblong format, presented great diversity in size, number of lines, and the form and the module of the letters (cat. nos 11, 4). The line was strongly pronounced, the horizontal component emphasized, while the vertical elements were brought back as much as possible to the perpendicular. The scribe played on the numerous possibilities that were offered to him: he stretched certain letters horizontally and contracted others, counterbalancing the vertical height of letters such as *lām* and *alif* (cat. no. 11). He contrasted the coloured red, yellow or green dots designating the vowels with the white parchment across which cut the black writing. He made ample use of the possibility to break a line in the middle of a word, which would later be inadmissible. Geometric ornamentation was predominately in gold with motifs from late antiquity such as palmettes highlighting the different punctuations of the Qur'anic text: beginnings and endings of volumes, titles of Suras and groups of verses (cat. no. 3). More luxurious specimens were copied in letters of gold (cat. no. 1). There is a single example of a Qur'an probably executed in Tunisia on dyed blue parchment, pages from which are now dispersed around the world (cat. no. 2). In the tenth century, the format for Qur'ans became vertical and paper was substituted more frequently for parchment. A new style of writing developed, similar to administrative cursive with broken lines and angular shapes found particularly in the east of the Islamic Empire. The contrast between the thickness and delicacy of the letters was clearly marked, and the long vertical letters were bevelled on the ends (cat. nos 12, 13).

The introduction of a new technique, paper, offered a medium that was less expensive and less fragile than papyrus or parchment. It coincided in the tenth century with the increasing need for more copies of religious books as well as scientific and literary volumes. As a result the current administrative writing, *naskhī* (or *naskh*), gradually became the most common script of the entire Arab world. This supple and rounded script without prominent angles was more

legible and quicker to execute than the stately Kufic. At the same time, another cursive script from the Maghrib and Muslim Spain with more generous curves, *maghribi* (cat. no. 27), was also in common use. With the advent of printing it was replaced by *naskhi*. More bulbous than the angular Kufic script and with a light line, *maghribi* maintained the ancient custom of noting the vocalization in colour. The large curves of the letters spilled over to adjacent words and into the lines above and below. Two consonants *fā'* and *qāf* had a different notation from that of the eastern scripts. *Maghribi* had many regional variations, like the small-sized *andalūsi* or *fāsi* scripts, and it gave birth to the style used throughout the West African Sudan, a dense script of fairly thick letters.

Paralleling the development of these scripts, a calligraphic knowledge theorised over the centuries came into place, codifying letter-forms and writing styles. Other more elaborate cursive scripts replaced Kufic for copying the Qur'an and other costly works. Kufic was then used largely in an ornamental manner in epigraphy or in the titles of manuscripts (cat. no. 95) where it became a decorative element, opposing with its angular letters the rounded *naskhi*. The letters became true ornaments adorned with braids or interlacing.

Arabic script possessed in this way a dual status, at once material and aesthetic, contained in the word *khatt*. Arabic in fact uses this unique term to designate the act of writing and the art of calligraphy. Ordinary writing (cat. no. 53) and calligraphy coexisted and corresponded to the different requirements of the book, yet the differences between the two were sometimes subtle. State dignitaries, wealthy merchants and notables commissioned precious specimens where the writing, as well as the quality of the paper, the delicacy of the illuminations and the richness of the bindings, contributed to the creation of a harmonious whole. At the same time, there was a constant increase in the number of copied manuscripts intended for the enrichment of knowledge; in these the writing did not require the same care but it could still be of high quality and take into account a certain aesthetic dimension.

Whether for an ordinary copy or a luxurious one, the work of the scribe always began with the preparation of the sheets of paper and his instruments. The paper was often tinted with vegetable dyes boiled in water in which the sheets were soaked. They were then coated with a special formula based on starch or egg white, and then smoothed with the aid of a burnisher or an agate to allow better movement of the pen. Under the Persians and the Ottomans there developed a taste for brightly coloured paper and for the use of gold-dusted sheets (cat. no. 66), marbled paper (cat. no. 54) decoupage (cat. no. 67) or illuminated margins in precious manuscripts. It was the scribe who decided the layout of the page and the distribution of full and empty spaces, based on the needs of the text. The definition provided by a ruling-board determined the number of lines and the width of the margins. It also delineated the spaces allotted to the text, calculated probably by the length of the latter and the space reserved for comments or, in the case of decorated manuscripts, illuminations or paintings. The *mistara* (ruler), widely employed in the Islamic world, consisted of a piece of cardboard or wood on which were drawn tight the threads that correspond to the lines of justification and to the line ruling. The transcriber slipped it under the sheet, and gently rubbing the threads with his fingers, highlighted a slight relief on the paper. Less commonly, the margin could also be the object of a

ruling-board; the lines were then placed vertically or diagonally (cat. no. 71). After preparing his black or coloured ink from a base of different ingredients (recorded in numerous recipes) and placing it in an inkwell of ceramic or metal, the scribe sharpened with knives his reed pens, the choice of which complied with particular orders of script. For each style of writing there corresponded a reed of a size adapted to the thickness of the letters. The ink was not poured directly into the inkwell, but onto a lock of wool or cotton from which the pen did not withdraw more than the amount of ink necessary. The position of the body also played a very important role that calligraphers of today continue to emphasise. One sees in certain miniatures (cat. no. 65) the scribe, sitting on the floor and resting the sheet on which he is writing on his right thigh. He used a blotter of soft leather that permitted high mobility of the hand and rested on his knee. In other portrayals dating back to Ottoman times the scribe was shown writing on a low piece of furniture with his different instruments arrayed in front of him. The reed pens were carefully arranged in inkstands of inlaid and carved metal (cat. no. 56) or of lacquered papier-mâché (cat. no. 59). The instruments could be grouped in boxes (cat. no. 51) of wood or metal. There were also scissors for cutting paper.

The art of the calligrapher relied on these widely described practices. Legend attributes the codification of perfectly proportioned writing to vizier Ibn Muqla (885/6–940). He established in his treatise on calligraphy (“Epistle on writing and the reed pen”) a system of rules whose primary base was the line of an *alif* around which one constructs a circle to serve as a standard. Each letter was then developed from this circle. He was also credited with the reduction of the growing number of cursive scripts to six predominant styles.

His works were, according to tradition, greatly enriched by Ibn al-Bawwāb, who died in Baghdad in 1022. There is a single Qur’an by Ibn al-Bawwāb, with illuminations as harmonious as the calligraphy, preserved at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin. He instituted the practice of point-measure, obtained by light tracing at an angle that leaves the reed on the paper and from which one measures each letter. He perfected and embellished the different scripts, especially *naskhi* and *muhaqqaq*. The last great calligrapher of the Abbasid court, Yāqūt al-Musta‘simī, who died in 1298, was credited with the ultimate perfection of the art of writing and the final theorization of the “six styles”.

Each style possessed very specific differentiations defined by tradition. The first of these was the length of the letter *alif* defined by a system of point-measurement that determined the size of the other letters. Next came criteria such as the form of the letters: isolated or connected, thickness of line, and elongations. The composition, in relation to the line and how to place the various diacritical marks, also played an important role. *Naskhi*, one of the first cursive scripts to develop, was characterized by its respect for proportions, its legibility and balance. This is the script used today in Arab countries. *Muhaqqaq* appeared later and enjoyed great favour with copyists of the Qur’an, especially under the Mamluks and Ilkhanids. The letters, large in size, were open on the ends and very legible, with no variation in thickness. The curvature in the lines was light, slender and elongated with virtually no embellishment (cat. no. 30). *Rayhānī* (or *rayhān*) was very similar to *muhaqqaq* but the individual letters were smaller units, and very delicate. It was used for smaller Qur’ans. *Thuluth*, a larger and more elaborate version of *naskhi*,

had rounded forms, and a supple and rhythmic movement that was particularly suitable for titles. There is one example of a Qur'an copied in *thuluth* in gold letters. Lastly *tawqī'* (or *tawāqī'*) and *riqā'*, similar to *thuluth*, were the writings of administrative documents; these scripts are poorly represented in manuscripts. *Ghubār* (or *ghubārī*) was a derivative form. This tiny script was first used for short messages sent by carrier pigeon and it was reserved for Qur'ans in rolls or in very small sizes for talismanic use (cat. no. 48).

After the fall of Baghdad in 1258, the Persians under the Ilkhanids and then the Timurids brilliantly cultivated calligraphy and came to rival the Mamluks (cat. nos 28, 76), the last bastion in Egypt and Syria of Arab cultural continuity, in calligraphic virtuosity. The Ottomans, in power since the sixteenth century, also placed writing at the centre of their artistic creation (cat. no. 78). The Persians and Turks gave a new impetus to the six styles, each developed according to their own tastes but also according to the particularities of their languages, stemming from very different linguistic families. New scripts more suited to these characteristics were then created. The first, *ta'liq*, which literally means "suspended", was mainly used for official correspondence because the words and the detached letters could be linked. It gave birth in the Ottoman world to *divānī*, which was reserved for the imperial council. This majestic script left no space between the letters and the words did not note vowels: it could not be forged, and was reserved for important documents and decrees. The combination of *naskhī* with *ta'liq*, originating in mid-fourteenth century Iran, led to a new script called *nasta'liq* that quickly became important for copying books (poetry, literature, history; cat. no. 67) in the Iranian and Ottoman worlds but also in India and Afghanistan. It is this script that is currently used for Persian and Urdu. Extremely graceful and light, it gave rise to exercises of calligraphic virtuosity (cat. no. 46) that made numerous Persian masters famous. In *nasta'liq*, the elongations were abnormally long, the half-circles important, and letters and words had very precise dimensions that did not follow the horizontal of the line. In the seventeenth century, *shikasta* ("broken"; cat. no. 45) was reserved for poetry and albums. Other scripts were related to particular regions of the Muslim world, such as *bihārī* script in India, which was reserved for Qur'ans and came into being from the sixteenth century (cat. no. 31), or the script which was particular to China and aptly named *sīnī* ("China").

In Turkey and Iran, calligraphy began to escape the strict framework of book reproduction and spread into albums (*muraqqa'*; cat. no. 68). Very widespread in Turkey, Iran and India, such albums gathered together selected works signed by different masters or individual pieces created specially for the album context: calligraphy exercises, Qur'anic verses, *Hadīth* or panegyrics. Pieces of calligraphy were specially designed for this purpose: these were usually displayed in the form of a rectangle, the text copied on only one side. This paper was generally glued to the centre of a cardboard support with four decorated margins. The precious papers and documents were joined together and bound in accordion fashion.

Calligraphy became the subject of instruction, obeying very precise rules as well as historical precedent. The constant reference to near-legendary masters of calligraphy in the Arab, Persian and Turkish worlds followed from the need to be connected with a line of authoritative figures, functioning (as in other sciences) to bestow legitimacy. The training of a calligrapher required long years of apprenticeship. Under the guidance of a master, the student

recopied the models endlessly until achieving perfect mastery of each style of writing. Once obtained, the master freed his disciple, giving him the authorization (*ijāza*) that allowed him to practice his art and to sign his works. He was obliged throughout his career to continue to exercise his hand to retain suppleness, and the many writing exercises in which he engaged could be mounted in albums.

Apart from the copying of texts, writing constituted an ornament in itself, developing concurrently with a prohibition of figurative images. Magnified in the arts of architecture (cat. no. 37) and of stone but also metal (cat. no. 34), ceramics (cat. nos 8–10), textiles (cat. no. 23) and glass, calligraphy and inscriptions became a dominating part of Islamic decoration and, as such, magnificently illustrated the manuscripts. Script, whether of gold or silver, black ink or colour, was integral to many compositions, becoming, like geometric interlace or the arabesque, a decorative component in its own right. Yet, escaping the strict confines of the academic page, as occurred within the Persian and the Ottoman traditions, it blossomed into mural compositions and embraced the most varied forms: animals (cat. no. 69) and geometric constructions in Kufic characters took the art-form to the limits of legibility.

Writing, finally, was endowed with a singular power. A privileged instrument of the divine word, the art of calligraphy was also a purveyor of magic. It became customary in the fourteenth century to copy in a minuscule script complete or partial Qur'ans in the form of rolls or tiny volumes, which were carried on the body for protection from misfortune. Certain Suras or single verses became known for their prophylactic virtues (cat. no. 14). Talismanic shirts covered with protective verses were sometimes worn under armour in battle.

Mediation between man and God or mere instrument of knowledge, handwriting remained central in Islamic lands until the advent of printing in the late nineteenth century. It persists today in the living art of calligraphy. It remains important that it either strictly obeys the traditional rules of the old masters, or that it renews them through both the texts chosen and the freedom of form and colour.

Fahmida Suleman

## Epigraphy and Inscriptions on Objects

The act of inscribing or writing on objects pre-dates Islam by several centuries and may be considered a fundamental human impulse. Take for example the famous Rosetta Stone, a large slab of granite made during the time of Ptolemy V, the teenage sovereign of a dynasty that ruled Egypt after the death of Alexander the Great. The Rosetta Stone was inscribed in 196 BCE with a royal decree in not just one, but three languages: hieroglyphic (an ancient Egyptian script read only by priests at this time), demotic (the native Egyptian script used for daily purposes), and ancient Greek (the language of the governing administration). The historical importance of this antiquity was immediately recognised by Napoleon's soldiers who dug it up in 1799 in the town of al-Rashid (i.e. Rosetta) in the Nile Delta. A few years later a French scholar, Jean-François Champollion, used the Greek portion of the text to crack the code on how to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs. Significantly, a fourth inscription had been added to the Rosetta Stone, by then in English: "CAPTURED BY THE BRITISH ARMY IN 1801; PRESENTED BY KING GEORGE III". Thereafter, the Rosetta Stone was brought to the British Museum in London where it has been on display ever since.

The story of the Rosetta Stone elucidates a number of themes that also pertain to objects from the Islamic world and will be explored in this essay. The themes to be covered include: the power of the written word on objects from political, religious and amuletic contexts; the political motivations behind some inscriptions depending on who commissioned the writing and who was meant to read it; and lastly, the use of languages and scripts – both familiar and unfamiliar to the intended audience. Throughout this essay, I will refer to the objects on show in the exhibition *Treasures of the Aga Khan Museum – Arts of the Book and Calligraphy in the Islamic World*, citing their catalogue numbers in order to illustrate my points.

### **Islam and the Transformation of the Arabic Language**

A discussion on inscriptions from the Islamic world necessitates a brief explanation of the importance of Arabic and the transformation of the written word with the coming of Islam in the

seventh century. Before the advent of Islam, Arabic was mainly a spoken language used by various tribal kingdoms established in central Arabia, southern Iraq, Jordan and Syria. Although these kingdoms developed sophisticated traditions of poetry, the verses were unwritten and passed down orally from generation to generation. The oldest known inscriptions written in a form of “proto-Arabic” were discovered in Syria. These inscriptions, sometimes bilingual (Greek-Arabic), seem to point to a Syriac ancestry of the Arabic characters, although some scholars disagree and argue for an Aramaic derivation of the characters.<sup>1</sup>

Despite scholarly disagreement on the origins of the Arabic script, it is clear that the coming of Islam and the Qur’anic revelation radically changed the importance of the language and its day-to-day usage. Allah’s first revelation to the Prophet Muhammad transmitted through the Archangel Gabriel in the year 610 was:

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.  
 Read in the name of your Lord Who created.  
 He created man from a clot.  
 Read and your Lord is Most Honourable,  
 Who taught (to write) with the pen (*al-qalam*),  
 Taught man what he knew not.  
 (Qur’an 96:1–5)

Indeed, the Qur’anic revelation was the initial catalyst for the systematization and proliferation of the Arabic language in written form. During the lifetime of the Prophet, several of his companions are said to have prepared their own written copies of selected revelations. To be sure, the Holy Book itself refers to writing materials (e.g. the pen, ink and parchment) and to written books, thus implying the practice of physically recording the text in addition to memorizing it.<sup>2</sup> The death of the Prophet in 632 marked the closure of the revelatory process. At that point, there was a growing concern among the elected leadership regarding the existence of different versions of the revelation and the added distress that many Qur’an reciters were losing their lives in battle. Hence, under the reign of the third caliph ‘Uthmān, a standardized recension of the Qur’an was established and all variant readings were decreed unlawful and ordered to be destroyed.<sup>3</sup>

It appears that from this point forward the written word was accorded a privileged place in Islam and the evidence of early Qur’an manuscripts and Arabic inscriptions on milestones, tombstones, coinage and architecture attest to the rapid diffusion of writing in the Umayyad period. The most significant development of the Arabic script during the ‘Abbasid period was the codification of the main cursive scripts by Ibn Muqla (d. 940) based on strict orthographic rules that were later refined by Ibn al-Bawwāb (d. 1022) under the Buyids. The history of these codified scripts, the so-called “Six Pens”, is covered elsewhere in this volume; however, it must be reemphasized here that this development not only transformed the arts of the book, but also impacted upon the application of inscriptions on architecture and objects. For example, ‘Alī Rizā ‘Abbāsī, the favourite calligrapher of the Safavid ruler Shāh ‘Abbās, produced exquisite



calligraphic works on paper in *nasta'liq* script. However, he was also commissioned to design the most important architectural inscriptions of the time. These include the majestic *thuluth* inscriptions in Isfahan at the Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallāh and the Masjid-i Shāh, as well as the splendid gold plaques fitted on the dome, minaret and tomb cover at the holy shrine of Imam Reza at Mashhad.<sup>4</sup>

### Factual Inscriptions

As Sheila Blair rightly remarks, “inscriptions, like geometric designs and arabesques, are some of the most distinctive and persistent motifs used to decorate works of art and architecture made in the Islamic lands”.<sup>5</sup> Epigraphy is defined as the “study or science of inscriptions”. By studying inscriptions on objects or architecture, we are better able to understand the function of the artefact or building, the date of production, the identity and concerns of the patron or artist, and sometimes aspects of the social and cultural history of a specific time.

There are a number of reasons why people chose to adorn objects and architecture with inscriptions in the Muslim world. Some inscriptions are purely factual such as the Persian inscription on a pair of superbly carved wooden doors (cat. no. 84) which states: “The work of Ustād ibn Hājji Najjār with the...of Darvīsh ‘Alā’uddin, work [completed] in the year 892”. From this reading we can deduce that Ustād ibn Hājji Najjār was the master woodcarver (“*najjār*” literally means woodcarver or carpenter) and that he was assisted by Darvīsh ‘Alā’uddin, who was perhaps the calligrapher who designed the inscriptions. The inscription also furnishes the exact year of completion, 892 H, which corresponds to 1487 CE.

The choice of inscriptions also helped to contextualise or even sacralise a building or object. The architectural decoration and furnishings in mosques, *madrasas* and mausoleums were often inscribed with verses from the Holy Qur’an combined with non-figural designs such as geometric and vegetal patterns, like those on the large lustre-painted wall tile (cat. no. 37). The bold, raised inscription from *Sūrat al-Jum’a* (Qur’an 62:8) in the centre is picked out in cobalt blue and surrounded by a background of golden lustre and white vine-leaves painted in reserve. The tile’s decoration is further enhanced on the top and bottom with borders of Qur’anic inscriptions executed in fully vocalised *naskhi* script. Moreover, specific Qur’anic inscriptions were chosen for certain types of religious objects. For example, the *Āyat al-Nūr* (Qur’an 24:35) or “The Verse of Light” was appropriately inscribed on mosque lamps, whereas the following verse from *Sūrat al-Baqara* (Qur’an 2:144), was inscribed on the precious textiles that covered the interior of the Holy Ka’ba at Mecca:

We see the turning of your face (for guidance) to the heavens: now shall we turn you to a *qibla* that will please you. Turn your face in the direction of the sacred mosque (*al-Masjid al-Haram*, i.e. the Ka’ba). Wherever you are, turn your faces in that direction. The People of the Book know well that that is the truth from their Lord. Nor is God unmindful of what they do.<sup>6</sup>

The use of figural decoration was reserved for secular settings, such as palaces and for the home. Yet inscriptions, both secular and religious, also proved popular in palatial and domestic

architecture, as exemplified by a wooden beam in the AKM collection (cat. no. 24). The unusual inscription on this ceiling beam from twelfth-century Morocco is derived from a pre-Islamic Arabic *qasida* (ode) and celebrates courageousness and heroism in the face of adversity:

None of us has died in his bed  
 And no one was killed without being avenged.  
 Our lives are run on the steel of our swords  
 On nothing but our blades do they meet their end.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast, some palaces and domestic settings also included religious inscriptions, such as prayers, the Beautiful Names of Allah (*al-Asmā' al-Husnā*) and verses from the Qur'an, which are positioned by windows, doors and gateways for talismanic purposes. A popular source for architectural inscriptions in Ottoman Turkey and in the Malay Peninsula is the *Qasīdat al-Burda*, a thirteenth-century praise poem dedicated to the Prophet Muhammad. Composed by Imām Sharaf al-Dīn Muhammad al-Būsīrī (d. c. 1294), the verses of the *Burda* are widely believed to have protective powers.<sup>8</sup>

### Inscriptions as Decoration

At the other end of the spectrum are inscriptions that are purely decorative and sometimes undecipherable. An artefact in the AKM collection illustrates the point (cat. no. 18). This earthenware bowl, made in the tenth or eleventh century in Eastern Iran (i.e. Khurasan) or Transoxiana, belongs to a tradition of slip-painted wares that are elegantly inscribed with pithy words of wisdom or blessings to the owner (e.g. cat. no. 10). Here, the potter painted a symmetrical pattern of elongated black palmettes and applied red slip to highlight the design on a stark white background. As a further embellishment, four sections of pseudo-calligraphy, that is, decorative elements that look like writing but make no sense, were painted on the bowl's rim. Why did the potter add a nonsensical epigraphic element to the bowl? Was s/he illiterate? Was the customer purchasing the bowl illiterate? Perhaps the answer lies in the context in which the bowl was produced in Khurasan or Transoxiana during the time of the Samanid dynasty.

The texts on these types of ceramics are usually Arabic aphorisms, such as "Generosity is a quality of the people of Paradise" (cat. no. 9), an essential quality of a good host who most likely used this dish to serve food. However, it is assumed that the majority of the vessels were produced and consumed by Persian speakers. During the mid-ninth century, the Persian language itself underwent serious modification, with the development of a new literary language, so-called "New Persian", which was deeply affected by the absorption of a large proportion of Arabic vocabulary and, most significantly, the adoption of the Arabic script.<sup>9</sup> Hence, the literary and cultural context in which these Samanid epigraphic wares were produced is highly significant. Artists and consumers already recognised the importance of Arabic as the language of the Qur'an and administration, but now they had to accustom themselves to the changing script of their own native language. This may have inspired an artistic impulse to experiment with the Arabic script and cultivated a consumer demand for pottery in the "new style", thus

resulting in the proliferation of this type of Samanid pottery. Therefore, the Persian potter who made the bowl in question may not have understood Arabic or mastered the script like some of his contemporary artists but s/he, nevertheless, was still keen to adopt the epigraphic trend by using Arabic characters as design elements on the bowl.

### Inscriptions and the Body

The belief in the inherent potency of inscribed words when worn close to the body – be they verses from the Holy Qur’an, the Beautiful Names of Allah or pious phrases – has a long history in Islamic cultures around the world that persists to the present day. The collection has several artefacts that illustrate the medieval practice of wearing inscribed amulets for protection from misfortune and illness. In addition, they confirm the pervasiveness of the practice regardless of social background. For example, one amulet dated to eleventh-century Fatimid Egypt comprises a small *tarsh* text, or block-printed page inscribed with several verses from the Holy Qur’an (cat. no. 14). The *tarsh* text was folded up and enclosed within a tiny lead case measuring just over one centimetre tall and under three centimetres wide. It could have been worn around the neck or fastened to the upper arm and even tucked inside a man’s turban. In contrast, another amulet case from roughly the same period is made from gold, indicating that it once belonged to an affluent female member of Fatimid society (cat. no. 15). Although the original Qur’an page once sealed inside the amulet case is missing, the pendant’s potency is not completely lost as it is inscribed on the front with the Qur’anic invocation, *al-mulk li’llāh* (“Sovereignty belongs to God”).

A third example of an inscribed piece of jewellery demonstrates how medieval Muslims increased the effectiveness of amulets by combining pious inscriptions with natural materials ascribed with magical properties. The collection includes a unique necklace made of faceted rock crystal beads inscribed in Kufic script with the Arabic phrases: “I put my trust in God”, “Sovereignty belongs to God”, “Might to God”, and “Praise be to God” (cat. no. 16). Rock crystal (*billawr*), the purest kind of quartz, has been highly prized throughout the centuries by many different cultures. However, medieval Muslims not only admired rock crystal for its intrinsic beauty, they also revered it for its curative properties such as healing kidney disease and toothache and providing protection against haemorrhaging and thirst when worn as an amulet.<sup>10</sup>

In complete contrast, political motivations played a key role in the choice of inscriptions applied to textiles for the body, namely *tirāz* textiles. These woven textiles were produced in state-run factories during the ‘Abbasid and Fatimid periods and were fashioned mainly as turbans, shawls and robes of honour for the caliph, his family and courtiers. A beige linen *tirāz* fragment in the collection (cat. no. 22) is inscribed in tapestry-woven red silk as follows: “In the name of God the Beneficent, the Merciful; may God’s blessing be upon Muhammad, Seal of the Prophets, and his family...from God...for the servant of God and His believer, Ma’ād Abū Tamīm, the Imām al-Mu’izz”. The Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Mu’izz (d. 975) and his successors showcased *tirāz* textiles on public occasions by not only wearing them, but also presenting them to their loyal members of staff. Additionally, *tirāz* fabrics played a key role in Fatimid ceremonial

processions that were designed to create awe-inspiring spectacles for the public. The sources describe in detail how the caliphs rode on horseback in full regalia accompanied by exotic beasts, such as elephants and giraffes, followed by hundreds of royal troops wearing heavy silk brocade uniforms, undoubtedly inscribed with *tirāz* bands, and carrying silk banners inscribed with Qur'anic slogans.

According to the eleventh-century *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, the origin of inscribing *tirāz* textiles with the name of a ruler can be traced back to the Umayyad Caliph Hishām ibn 'Abd al-Malik:

He [i.e. Caliph Hisham] had drapes, clothing and textiles with the inscription of his name embroidered (*tirāz*) on them, something that no one before him had had. He was the first to adopt the *tirāz*...Hisham adopted the *tirāz* in the year 108 [727 CE], and he wrote to all parts of the world to make for him something in the same manner with regard to every type of textile, furniture, vessel, and equipment.<sup>11</sup>

By the time the Fatimid caliphs adopted the long-standing tradition of *tirāz*, the impact of these prestigious textiles was felt way beyond the court. Material and documentary evidence also confirms the production of imitation *tirāz* textiles aimed at the middle-class urban bourgeoisie of Fatimid society (cat. no. 23).

### Inscriptions on Ritual Objects

An important function of inscriptions on Islamic objects, and the last to be discussed in this essay, is best illustrated by examining two very different Chinese porcelain dishes in the AKM collection. The first is a large blue-and-white dish produced during the Ming Dynasty in the first quarter of the sixteenth century (cat. no. 42). At first glance it displays a typically Chinese decorative aesthetic, with a restrained pattern of blue-painted cloud-scrolls and lotus flowers on a plain white background. However, the centre of the dish is inscribed in a style of Chinese-Arabic calligraphy with the word *Tahārat*, meaning purity. It is further inscribed on the rim with the pious phrase (possibly a Prophetic *Hadīth*), “Blessed is he who purifies his hand from wrongdoing”. Additionally, the exterior of the dish is also inscribed with a saying, “Ablution upon ablution is light upon light”, a *Hadīth* traced back to both the Prophet Muhammad and the Shī'ī Imām Ja'far al-Sādiq. Here, the presence of inscriptions confers ritual significance upon an object, transforming it from a serving dish to one reserved only for ritual ablutions, performed by Muslims as part of the preparation for the obligatory prayer (*salāt*).

The second porcelain dish (cat. no. 41) is replete with religious inscriptions, allowing it to function as a vehicle for another type of rite: a healing ritual. Dated to the seventeenth century, this dish was manufactured in China but its ultimate destination may have been Safavid Iran or Sumatra (another Shī'ī stronghold governed by the sultans of Aceh). The Shī'ī connection to this bowl is apparent from the inscription on the cavetto surrounding the central circle, which is the *Nad-e 'Ali* prayer, an invocation to Imām 'Alī for his assistance and protection from harm. Other inscriptions on the bowl include the *Āyat al-Kursī* (Qur'an 2:255) or “Throne Verse”, as well as *Sūrat al-Ikhlās* (Sura 112) and *Sūrat al-Nās* (Sura 114), three very popular verses often inscribed on

amulets, seals and architecture. A Twelver Shi'i treatise on Prophetic medicine, *Tibb al-a'imma*, composed during the ninth century, provides a key to how this bowl might have been used:

The *Tibb al-a'imma* refers several times to Qur'anic verses being written in ink on paper and then washed in the water that was to be subsequently consumed. It also mentions the practice of reciting a certain Qur'anic verse 30 times over a bowl of water that is then to be drunk.<sup>12</sup>

The practice of using magic-medicinal bowls in this way seems to have developed further with inscriptions engraved directly on the bowls as evidenced by the recommendation from a fourteenth-century treatise on Prophetic medicine, "...protection against delusions and melancholia (*waswās*) could be gained by drinking, before breakfast for three days, a liquid from a bowl on which Qur'anic verses and a particular magic square had been written."<sup>13</sup> Hence, the power of God's Word is transferred directly from the bowl to the liquid and into the body of the believer.

Inscriptions, therefore, fulfil a variety of purposes in Islamic material culture. By studying them in their historical contexts we open a gateway to a better understanding of the plurality of Muslim aesthetic tastes, political ambitions and religious beliefs and practices across centuries and vast territories.

- <sup>1</sup> Alain George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy* (London 2010), 21–34.
- <sup>2</sup> Venetia Porter and Heba Nayel Barakat, *Mightier than the Sword – Arabic Script: Beauty and Meaning* (Malaysia 2004), 21.
- <sup>3</sup> John Burton, 'The Collection of the Qur'an', *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Vol. 1, 351.
- <sup>4</sup> Sheila Canby, *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran* (London, 2009), 42–44, 193–194. Sheila S. Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh, 2008), 421–423.
- <sup>5</sup> Sheila S. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions* (Edinburgh, 1998), 3.
- <sup>6</sup> Hulya Tezcan, 'Ka'ba covers from the Topkapi Palace collection and their inscriptions', in Fahmida Suleman (ed.), *Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and its Creative Expressions* (Oxford 2007), 227–238; this ref. 231.
- <sup>7</sup> See the catalogue entry for details of the full poem.
- <sup>8</sup> Huism Tan, 'Qur'anic inscriptions on woodcarvings from the Malay Peninsula', in Fahmida Suleman (ed.), *Word of God, Art of Man*, 205–216, this ref. 210.
- <sup>9</sup> Éva M. Jeremiás, 'Iran/Languages/New Persian', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 12, 425.
- <sup>10</sup> Anna Contadini, *Fatimid Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London 1998), 17.
- <sup>11</sup> Ghada al-Hijawi al-Qaddumi (trans.), *The Book of Gifts and Rarities: Kitab al-Hadaya wa al-Tuhaf* (Cambridge MA 1996), 204–205.
- <sup>12</sup> Emilie Savage-Smith, *Science, Tools and Magic, Part 1* (Oxford 1997), 72.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*



## Later Calligraphic Scripts

CATALOGUE ENTRIES 27 — 49

**From** the mid tenth century, Arabic calligraphy was subject to government reforms intended to perfect the script as a vehicle for a clear and unambiguous text of the Qur'an. Around the same time, six specific canonical cursive scripts were defined, appropriate for different contexts. Cursive scripts could be written more quickly than the more rigid Kufic scripts of the early Islamic period, and some varieties were also prized for their clarity and legibility. Others developed as secretarial scripts of the chancellery, used primarily for official documents and records in the various administrative centres of the Islamic world. In keeping with these developments, the Qur'an began to be copied in the newly-determined cursive *naskh* script (as opposed to earlier angular Kufic scripts). Qur'an manuscripts also began to be produced on paper instead of vellum, as paper technology had markedly improved in the Middle East by the year 1000 CE.

The new range of scripts introduced a clearer professionalism to the calligrapher's art, and written texts began to exploit the expressive powers of several available scripts by combining them for different effects and contrasts on the same page (cat. nos 28, 29, 31, 32). A clearer identification of canonical scripts also precipitated more precise analysis of the calligrapher's skill, and the growth of connoisseurial appreciation and specimen-collecting in *muraqqa'* or albums (cat. no. 45). Such skill and appreciation are exhibited to great advantage in large-scale Qur'an manuscripts written in majestic and dramatic *muhaqqaq* or *thuluth* scripts, produced throughout the fourteenth century for various competing dynasties, and culminating in a gigantic Qur'an associated with the Central Asian conqueror Timur (cat. no. 30).

As with other art forms, mastering calligraphy required training from an expert. This training did not primarily recommend originality or innovation, but faithful conservatism to the styles of one's teacher. Only once the student could replicate his master's calligraphic hand would the master finally issue the diploma, or *ijāza*. In this manner, calligraphic scripts have been preserved over many generations of teachers and students, and the ancestry of one's training is remembered and respected. The renowned calligrapher Yāqūt al-Musta'simī (d. 1298) is traditionally recorded as having trained six students, known as *al-Sitta* ("the Six") – and for a later calligrapher to be able to claim artistic 'descent' from any of the Six was long regarded as the benchmark of his professional status.



## 27

## Qur'an folio from al-Andalus

Granada, Spain, c. 1200  
 Ink and gold on vellum  
 Page: 26.4 x 17.9 cm;  
 text: 20 x 14.5 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo224  
 Publ.: Welch 1972b, p. 13; Raeuber  
 1979, fig. 19; Welch–Welch 1982, pp.  
 22–24 (no. 2); Falk 1985, (no. 6).

After the dominance of angular Kufic scripts in the calligraphy of the early Islamic period, the late eleventh to thirteenth centuries saw the development of a wide array of round scripts. The enormous size of the Islamic world by the medieval period made it inevitable that distinct regional styles would evolve in the various urban cultural centres at Baghdad, Cairo and so forth, as copyists sought ways to turn their regular writing into elegant forms of script suitable for large manuscripts. The style employed in this folio is known as *maghribi* and was practised in the western Islamic world (the Maghrib), in several regional variations: this example is from a Qur'an manuscript made at al-Andalus under the Almohads or Nasrids. The text is from *Surat al-Isra'* (17: 71-79). The most obvious visual characteristic of *maghribi* script is the use of rounded, cupping swoops on the letters that descend below the baseline. Here the descending swoops overlap each other and sometimes also overlap the taller letters on the line below, but the scribe has maintained order by applying the black outlining of each gold letter in such a way that the crossing strokes are depicted as overlaying each other, rather than fusing into a mass. Another notable aspect of *maghribi* script, shown clearly in this example, is the relatively uniform thickness of the strokes, with the differences between thick and thin far less obvious than in highly stylized scripts such as the so-called "eastern Kufic" (cat. no. 12).



## Qur'an folio from Mamluk Cairo

The combination of angular Kufic headings and a body text written in a cursive script is not uncommon in Qur'an manuscripts of this period. The script employed for the main part of this manuscript, known as *muhaqqaq*, came to be regarded as the best form of script for copying the text of the Qur'an in Mamluk Egypt and was particularly widely used in luxurious Qur'ans made during the second half of the fourteenth century. *Muhaqqaq* was the first and most highly regarded of the so-called rectilinear scripts, and its name literally means "exact" or "perfectly executed" (Blair 2008, p. 319). This and related styles are known as the rectilinear scripts because although cursive they were characterised by straight and regular uprights, and fairly flat and stiff sublinear strokes. This creates a strong and regular rhythm on the page but is also highly legible, unlike the very formalised Kufic script reserved for the Sura heading. The tight angularity of the white line of Kufic in the header panel causes it to appear rather etiolated next to the more dynamic *muhaqqaq*, but also serves as a reminder of the continuing significance of Kufic script as a medium for religious texts. Throughout the *muhaqqaq* text gold rosettes are used to mark individual verses, and an illuminated medallion extends into the margin from the Sura heading. Such motifs were used to provide visual punctuation in the dense text, as well as enabling quick location of verses and Suras. The text comprises *Surat al-Hashr* (59: 22–24) and *Surat al-Mumtahana* (60: 1).

28

Cairo, Mamluk Egypt, c. 1300  
Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
on paper  
Page: 45 x 33.3 cm; text: 35 x 24.5 cm  
Inv.: AKM00225  
Publ.: Welch 1972b, p. 15.



## 29

## Illuminated folio from a Qur'an

Possibly Yemen, c. 1300–1350  
 Ink, opaque watercolour and gold  
 on paper  
 38.9 x 6.4 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00814  
 Publ.: AKTC 2010a, p. 41 (no. 9).

There are varying suggestions as to the original area of production of this Qur'an. Although an origin in Ilkhanid Persia or Mamluk Egypt cannot be discounted, the folio has certain features that suggest a possible alternative place of manufacture, possibly Yemen, during the period of Rasulid rule (1229–1454). The text, *Sura Yunus* (10: 109) and *Sura Hud* (11: 1–15) is copied in a combination of three scripts: the first and last lines are in *muhaqqaq*, the middle line is in gold *thuluth*, and the remainder of the text is written in black *naskh*. It is rare, although not unheard of, to find Mamluk Qur'ans copied in different types of script, and none are yet known that present three styles on the same page (James 1992, p. 160). Although all three script types are cursive, *naskh* is a smaller script related to *muhaqqaq* and traditionally used for copying, although increasing in popularity for expensive Qur'an manuscripts in the fourteenth century; *thuluth*, meanwhile, had developed as a chancery script and is typified by a faint slant to the left visible in the *alifs* of this example. Another unusual feature of this piece is the decoration of the chapter heading: in this case, that of *Sura Hud*. The text is in white Kufic and this is set within a gold panel with latticework decoration at either end, terminating in a teardrop-shaped medallion in the outer margin; squares of interlace, although seldom found on Mamluk Qur'ans, are known in Ilkhanid manuscripts. The verses on this bifolium are separated by eight-petalled gold rosettes, with each fifth verse identified by a gold teardrop-shaped device with a long finial in the margin; the tenth verse is marked by a gold roundel with a blue border.



## Two lines from a monumental Qur'an manuscript

Exalting calligraphy over illumination, the two lines of this fragment (*Sura Saba'* [34: 44–45]) demonstrate why *muhaqqaq* was a preferred script for large-scale Qur'ans in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in the central Islamic lands as well as Mamluk Egypt. In its original arrangement each page of this elephantine manuscript would have contained seven lines of text and measured 175 x 100 cm (Blair 2008, p. 267). Although the manuscript has in the past been associated with the Timurid prince Baysunghur, recent studies suggest it should be attributed to the patronage of his grandfather Timur (r. 1370–1405). The original manuscript would have fit with Qadi Ahmad's description of a Qur'an prepared for Timur by 'Umar 'Aqta' which was so large and heavy it had to be transported by wheelbarrow (Blair 2008, p. 265). Another of Timur's grandsons, Ulugh Beg, commissioned a huge stone Qur'an stand in the courtyard of the Bibi Khanum mosque in Samarqand, which may well have been intended to hold this colossal manuscript. In keeping with the manuscript's majestic scale, the individual strokes of the letters are more than a centimetre wide, and it is the strong and confident verticals that pin the composition together. Between the tall verticals and the rather compressed lower bodies and sublinear parts of the letters, there is actually a great deal of empty space on the page, and this enhances the sense of extravagant expansiveness in this massive manuscript. Inscribed in lower right corner are the words, "For... the reviver of religion... Sultan... Husayn ibn Sultan... in the year... 23". It is thought that the original manuscript was dispersed as early as the sixteenth century, and pages from it are now in the library of the Shrine of the Imam Reza at Mashhad as well as various museums and private collections.

30

Central Asia, c. 1400  
 Ink on paper  
 47.3 x 98.5 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00491  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 39 (no. 6);  
 AKTC 2007b, p. 35 (no. 6);  
 Makariou 2007, pp. 122–23 (no. 41);  
 AKTC 2008a, pp. 50–51 (no. 5);  
 AKTC 2008b.



## 31

## Qur'an folio from Sultanate India

Delhi, India, c. 1400  
 Ink and gold on paper  
 Page: 36.9 x 28 cm; text: 30.3 x 18.8 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo242  
 Publ.: AKTC 2008a, pp. 54–55 (no. 7).

This folio comes from one of only a handful of Qur'an manuscripts to have survived from the period between Timur's invasion of northern India in 1398–99 and the advent of the Mughal dynasty in 1526. It has been a challenge to understand the general development of the arts of the book in this region during the fifteenth century due to the diversity of artistic styles practiced at the various cultural centres of the independent Muslim sultanates. Manuscript production in Sultanate India seems to have largely followed the Timurid tradition in Iran and Central Asia, but the main script shown here, known as *bihari*, is an exception to this. A strange mutation of *naskh* script with obscure origins, *bihari* script only appears in manuscripts predating the Mughals (James 1992b, p. 102). It is characterised by large spaces between words and by an exaggeration of the sublinear letter forms through a thickening of the letter's curves and the sharpening of its end points, producing a distinctive wedge-shape that can, as can be seen here, become quite scythe-like. On this page thirteen lines of *Surat al-Isra'* (17: 29–34) have been calligraphed in gold, black and milky blue, with Persian translations appearing in red *nasta'liq* between each line. Interlinear translation of this type was one solution to the problem posed by non-Arab Muslims who might not understand the Arabic text of the Qur'an, whilst simultaneously retaining the sanctity of the original Arabic words of the revelation.



**مَحْسَبًا وَأَنْتُمْ بِنَسْطِ الرِّزْقِ**

لَنْ يَشَاءَ وَيَقْدِرَ أَنَّهُ كَانَتْ

بِعِبَادِهِ خَيْرًا بِصِيْرًا وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا

أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشِيَةً إِمْلَاقٍ

لَنْ نَرْزُقَكُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ كَانُوا

خَطَاءً كَبِيرًا وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الرِّزْقَ

أَنَّهُ كَانَ فِى خَشْيَةٍ وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ

اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَمَنْ قَتَلَ

مَظْلُومًا فَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا لِوَلِيِّهِ

سُلْطَانًا فَلَا يَسْرِفُ فِي الْقَتْلِ

أَنَّهُ كَانَ مِنْصُورًا

تَقْرَبُوا آلَ الْيَتِيمِ إِلَّا بِالْقُرْبَىٰ



Handwritten marginal notes in Arabic script on the right side of the page.

Handwritten marginal note on the left side of the page.

Handwritten marginal note at the bottom left corner.

## 32

Miniature manuscript of *Juz' Four of the Qur'an*

Timurid Iran, fifteenth century  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
 on paper, with contemporary gilt  
 brown and red morocco binding  
 and lapis lazuli inlay  
 6.6 x 4.7 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo826  
 Unpublished

The unusually well preserved binding of this miniature *Juz'* volume provides a rare insight into the rich appearance of Timurid leather bindings, few of which have survived in good condition. The outer panels employ gilt and stamped designs in cartouches with foliate decoration picked out with tiny pieces of lapis lazuli inlay, while the doublures (the inner face of the binding) have been decorated with cut filigree in cherry-red morocco laid over gold and green grounds, pointing the way towards the elaborate gilt filigree creations of the sixteenth century (see cat. no. 73). Inside, the manuscript itself has been rendered in a relatively simple manner, with the text written in a black script of *naskh* type – remarkably neat and sharp in spite of its tiny scale – set into panels outlined in blue and gold, with large clear margins and small gold medallions as verse markers. Beyond the opening illuminated headpiece, which is a representative example of fine Timurid illumination, there is little in the way of decoration: the text of *Juz'* four falls almost entirely within the third Sura of the Qur'an and so provides little scope for embellishment in the way of verse headings. This volume would originally have been part of a thirty-volume set, probably stored together in a leather box: Blair has published a slightly earlier and smaller miniature thirty-volume set, complete with its case, which is now in the Islamic Museum in Tehran.





لَيْسَ لَنَا لَوْ أَنَّ الْبَرِحَةَ نَفَقُوا مِمَّا

يُحِبُّونَ وَمَا نَفَقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ

فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ كَمَا



## 33

## Tray stand

Mamluk Egypt or Syria, first half of the fourteenth century

Brass inlaid with silver and gold

Height: 19.5 cm; diameter: 18.5 cm

Inv.: AKMoo726

Unpublished

A number of Mamluk tray stands made in both beaten and cast brass survive, and it is not possible at present to say whether they were produced in Cairo or Damascus or both. Ceramic imitations of the form from Mamluk Egypt have been found, showing that the popularity of this type of stand was such that it was also imitated in less expensive forms of production, and there is even a small blue-and-white Chinese ceramic tray stand of the same type, dating from the fifteenth century. The Chinese version, now held in the British Museum (1966, 1215.1), carries a debased Arabic inscription – the work of a Chinese painter who could not read the Arabic model he was copying – and is a reminder of the vigorous sea trade that went on between the Middle and Far East during the late medieval period. The brass stand would have been used to support a large tray when serving food, and the level of craftsmanship involved makes it clear that this piece was intended for use in an elite household. The inscriptions correspond closely with those seen on other objects of this type (see Allan 1982, pp. 96–7, and cat. no. 34) in both their eulogising content and the use of a strong, elegant *thuluth* script with exaggerated thickly drawn verticals. The absolute dominance of the inscription over all other forms of decoration employed on the stand (the floral roundel with six-petalled flower at centre and the twining vegetal background decoration) is utterly characteristic of Mamluk arts.



### Bowl with calligraphic decoration

The inlaid silver inscription on this bowl reads “For the High Excellency, the Lordly, the Great Emir, the Learned, the Just, the Valiant, the Supporter, the Succour, the Sparkling, the Help, the Orderly, the Responsible, the [officer] of al-Malik al-Nasir”. This highly formulaic eulogising inscription is typical of the arts of the elite from the Mamluk period in Egypt and Syria, and similar inscriptions can be found on many metalwork objects of the period (see cat. no. 33) as well as in other media, such as the famous enamelled glass hanging lamps produced in great numbers under the Mamluks. The pruning back of figural imagery that took place on much Mamluk art was counterweighted by the dominant position given to inscriptions. Both as carriers of messages that conferred status and rank, and as key aesthetic components in the ornamentation of objects, inscriptions took centre stage on the non-religious decorative arts as never before. Although not quite as pronounced as some examples, the shafts of the letters in this *thuluth*-type script nonetheless conform to the Mamluk predilection for inscriptions ordered by ranks of strong, spear-like verticals. The entire text is set against a dynamic ground of scrolling vegetal decoration with half palmettes.

34

Mamluk Egypt or Syria, first half of the fourteenth century  
Brass inlaid with silver  
Diameter: 18 cm  
Inv.: AKM00610  
Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 182 (no. 158); AKTC 2007b, p. 185 (no. 158); Makariou 2007, pp. 188–189 (no. 68); AKTC 2008a, pp. 292–293 (no. 117); AKTC 2009a, p. 128 (no. 87); AKTC 2009b, p. 128 (no. 87); AKTC 2010a, p. 128 (no. 89).



## 35

## Beam with Qur'anic inscription

Syria, late twelfth or early thirteenth century

Carved wood

11.2 x 122 cm

Inv.: AKM00632

Publ.: Makariou 2007, pp. 118–119 (no. 39); AKTC 2008a, p. 73

(no. 17); AKTC 2009a, pp. 110–111

(no. 62); AKTC 2009b, pp. 110–111

(no. 62); AKTC 2010a, pp. 112–113

(no. 63).

This carved wooden beam may originally have belonged to the small side of a cenotaph. The inscription is a fragment of the famous “Throne Verse” (verse 255) from the second and longest Sura of the Qur’an, *Surat al-Baqara* (“The Cow”): “[His is what is in the heavens and what is in] the earth! Who is it that intercedes with Him save by His permission?” It can be assumed that the piece originally formed part of a larger arrangement of similarly carved beams, together making up the entire Throne Verse. This is one of the passages of the Qur’an most often used in a funerary context, although it has a much wider architectural application as well: it appears in the first Muslim monument, the Dome of the Rock, and is frequently used in inscriptions found on the *mihrab*, the arch-shaped niche marking the direction of prayer in a mosque. Between the two smooth ends of the beam, the raised, rounded inscription is contained within a long cartouche and set against a finely sculpted background of plant foliage punctuated by small whorls and palmettes with long, curved tips, fairly typical of the Syrian repertoire. The script itself is highly representative of the *naskh*-type script favoured during the Ayyubid period, a form of cursive marked by its elegant simplicity and compact, dynamic nature which makes it well suited for use in a relatively narrow space such as this. A fragment of an epigraphic frieze preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, (David-Weill 1931, pp. 34–35, no. 2118, pl. 21) which was discovered in the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi’i and certainly comes from a cenotaph, is very similar to this piece.

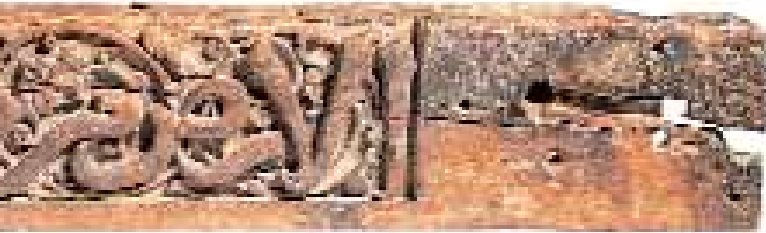


## Monumental jar

This jar is one of a small group of known examples of monumental size from thirteenth-century Iran, with comparable pieces held in various major public museums. The moulded decoration of the body, created in independent banded designs rather than an overall scheme, and the bright monochrome turquoise glaze are both characteristic of wares of this period produced in Iran and the surrounding areas. The moulded band of standardized Arabic benedictory phrases in a pleasing cursive script are of a type seen on other domestic objects and are thought to confer blessings on the owner of the jar, or its contents, or both. The appearance of a frieze including stylized sphinxes – mythical creatures with the head of a human, body of a lion and wings of an eagle – on the shoulders of the jar also suggests an apotropaic aspect to the overall design that may be linked to ancient folk practices, protecting the contents of the jar from contamination or interference. The fish-scale design on the bottom of the jar is less common, but it also appears on similar pieces in the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Museum für Islamische Kunst in Berlin.

36

Iran, thirteenth century  
Fritware with turquoise glaze  
Height: 71 cm  
Inv.: AKM00566  
Publ.: AKTC 2007a, pp. 78–79  
(no. 48); AKTC 2007b, pp. 76–77  
(no. 48); AKTC 2008a, pp. 114–115  
(no. 37); AKTC 2009a, p. 178 (no. 133);  
AKTC 2009b, p. 178 (no. 133);  
AKTC 2010a, p. 178 (no. 135).



## 37

## Lustre tile with Qur'anic inscription

Iran, possibly Kashan, early  
fourteenth century  
Fritware with lustre decoration and  
blue, brown and turquoise upon an  
opaque white glaze  
18.6 x 43 cm  
Inv.: AKMo0565  
Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 51 (no. 21);  
AKTC 2007b, p. 45 (no. 21);  
Makariou 2007, p. 120 (no. 40);  
AKTC 2009a, p. 50 (no. 20); AKTC  
2009b, p. 50 (no. 20); AKTC 2010a,  
p. 52 (no. 21).

This tile originally formed part of a long calligraphic frieze of Qur'anic inscriptions. Very similar tiles are held in several other collections, including the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and are believed to have come from the shrine of the Sufi master 'Abd al-Samad at Natanz in Iran. Medieval texts refer to Kashan as one of the major centres of ceramic production in Iran and lustre ware is particularly associated with this city. The main body of the tile boasts a striking cobalt blue *thuluth* inscription which manages to hold its own against the busy background of tiny plant designs in white and lustre, and scrolling turquoise vegetal sprays. The smaller, densely and quickly executed *naskh* inscriptions that have been painted in golden lustre along the top and bottom panels are of a type frequently met with on architectural tiles from Ilkhanid Iran. At the top is written *Surat al-Rahman* (55: 32–35) in the centre, *Surat al-Jum'a* (62: 8) and at the bottom *Sura Saba'* (34: 7–9). The overall effect is a visual polyphony of sacred texts, and yet it remains harmoniously dominated by the elegant cobalt *thuluth* of the main inscription. It has been conjectured that the lustre tilework so popular in Mongol Iran would have gained an extra dimension when viewed in lamp or candlelight, which would have caused the surface to glitter: flickering light would at the same time have created a play of light and shade upon the raised central inscription.



### Iznik tile frieze

The growth of the ceramic industry in Iznik, western Turkey, played a significant role in the codification of a distinctly Ottoman ceramic technique and style, which in turn became a major aspect of the Ottoman court aesthetic. Associations between ceramics and Ottoman imperial patronage were most clearly realized in the production of coloured architectural tiles for mosques, palaces, bathhouses and so forth, often decorated with elaborate and fantastic floral motifs and making much use of brilliant blue, turquoise, and a highly distinctive tomato-red that stands slightly proud of the surface of the tile. This frieze, although brightly coloured, is more sober in execution than some other Ottoman tile panels, as befits its sacred message, and is without adornment beyond the red outline and lobed turquoise spandrels of the inscription panel. The bright white of the inscription stands out vividly against the rich cobalt blue of the background. It may well have formed part of the decoration of a mosque or other religious institution, such as a madrasa, and quite possibly was part of a larger series of inscriptive friezes. The inscription, written in Arabic in a graceful cursive script of *naskh* type, is fully glossed and reads “God is the best guardian and He is the most merciful of the merciful” (*Sura Yusuf*, [12: 64]). This piece is exhibited with the kind permission of Princess Catherine Aga Khan.

§38

Ottoman, Iznik, mid-sixteenth century  
Fritware, polychrome underglaze painted  
15.5 x 75 x 1 cm  
Inv.: AKM00698  
Publ.: AKTC 2008a, p. 72 (no. 16);  
AKTC 2009a, p. 53 (no. 23); AKTC  
2009b, p. 53 (no. 23); AKTC 2010a,  
p. 55 (no. 24).



## 39

**Moulded bowl**

Eastern Iranian world, twelfth or thirteenth century  
 Fritware with moulded decoration, blue and purple under a transparent glaze  
 Diameter: 25 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00553  
 Publ.: AKTC 2009a, p. 176 (no. 130); AKTC 2009b, p. 176 (no. 130); AKTC 2010a, p. 176 (no. 132).

This bowl is one of a group of ceramics known as “Bamiyan” wares, after their presumed site of manufacture. The ceramic make-up of the group is characterised by a particularly fragile frit fabric that results in several cracks appearing during firing, and their decoration tends to include moulded linear designs and inscriptions in low relief under a transparent coloured or colourless glaze. Here splashes of cobalt blue and manganese have been applied at regular intervals around the rim of the bowl to provide accents to the moulded white background. The interlacing, radiating star motif seen on this bowl is entirely typical of the Bamiyan fritwares (see Watson 2004, p. 326). Less common amongst the group is the band of ornately cursive script, also part of the mould, which fills the walls of this piece. The script has clearly borrowed much from calligraphy, with exaggerated sublinear loops and marked differences between thick and thin sections of individual letters, but is rather hard to distinguish from the swirling moulded arabesque patterns that fill the background. The text has proved impossible to read, but may comprise poetic inscriptions in Persian. The three interior spur marks seen on the plain band around the star motif in the centre are a common feature of Bamiyan wares, evidence of their having been stacked in the kiln using tripods during firing. Numerous intact Bamiyan wares have appeared on the international art market in recent years and a large collection may also be found in the Nasser D. Khalili Collection, London.



### Moulded ceramic bottle with horsemen

This round-bellied bottle, with a narrow, elongated neck ending in a dome shape, presents an extraordinary moulded design. The fine, white siliceous body, which appeared in Iran at the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, has been covered with transparent glaze and cobalt blue and turquoise running glaze. On the belly is a dense decoration in relief depicting a hunt scene: several horsemen form a frieze, while footmen struggle with wild animals, and the design is completed with birds and plant motifs scattered among the various groups. Interactions between the figures, coupled with the relatively high relief of the decoration, create an impression akin to a complex interlace design. The theme of the hunt is often related to the so-called “princely cycle”, a repertoire of imagery with its roots in pre-Islamic Persia, and concerned with the depiction of activities related to pleasure and imperial prerogative, such as drinking, enthronements, polo and of course hunting. Related hunt imagery is to be found on a cup recently acquired by the Louvre Museum, and on another similar piece housed in the Reza ‘Abbasi museum in Tehran (Makariou 2007, p. 87, notes 9–10). The lively vigour of the decoration makes this vase a remarkable milestone in pre-Mongolian ceramics, although the narrative content of this hunting episode is unknown to us today.



### 40

Iran, twelfth century  
 Moulded and glazed fritware  
 Height: 35.5 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00552  
 Publ.: Tokyo 1980, no. 221; AKTC  
 2007a, p. 149 (no. 117); AKTC  
 2007b, p. 152 (no. 117); Makariou  
 2007, pp. 64–65 (no. 18); AKTC  
 2008a, pp. 234–235 (no. 91); AKTC  
 2009a, p. 177 (no. 132); AKTC  
 2009b, p. 177 (no. 132); AKTC  
 2010a, p. 177 (no. 134).



## 41

## Chinese “Swatow” dish

China, seventeenth century  
Porcelain painted in overglaze  
green and black on opaque white  
glaze

Diameter: 35.1 cm

Inv.: AKM00591

Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 46–47

(no. 16); AKTC 2007b, p. 42 (no.  
16); AKTC 2008a, p. 62–63 (no. 11);  
AKTC 2009a, p. 51 (no. 21); AKTC  
2009b, p. 51 (no. 21); AKTC 2010a,  
p. 53 (no. 22).

Coarsely potted and covered with a thick, crackled glaze, this dish belongs to a distinct group of porcelain, the so-called “Swatow wares”. Swatow is a Dutch mistranslation of Shantou, the port from which such ceramics were supposedly exported, but recent archaeological research by Chinese scholars has established that Swatow wares were actually produced in Zhangzhou prefecture between the mid sixteenth and mid seventeenth centuries for export to Europe, Japan and South East Asia. Dishes similar to this one have been found in Indonesia, and are believed to have been commissioned by the powerful seventeenth-century Shi’i sultans of Aceh in northwest Sumatra, including Sultan Iskander Muda (1607–1636) (Canepa 2006, no. 40). Muslims had traded in Indonesia and China for many centuries, and by the end of the thirteenth century Muslim communities had taken hold in northern Sumatra, which was extremely well situated for trading routes between China, India and the Middle East. The inscriptions on this dish include invocations to Allah, verses from the Qur’an, including Sura 2 (*al-Baqara*), Sura 112 (*al-Ikhlās*), Sura 114 (*al-Nas*), as well as the *Nad-e ‘Ali* prayer and the word “Allah” which is repeated along the cavetto of the dish. The inscriptions are talismanic, seeking protection and assistance for the owner, and possibly also conferring protection on whatever was to be contained within the bowl (see cat. no. 14).



## Ablutions dish

The Ming dynasty (1368–1644) marked the greatest physical expansion of China, and this huge empire, which dominated the Far East, enjoyed rich and fruitful contacts with the other great empires of the period, both in Europe and in the Muslim world. There were close commercial ties especially between the Ming Empire of China and Mughal India, Safavid Iran, and Ottoman Turkey, and one of the most active items of export from China to the empires of the west was pottery. China's porcelain had long enjoyed a stellar reputation in the Islamic world, and its blue-and-white ware, produced by thousands of kilns around Jingdezhen, was eagerly sought by Muslim and European merchants. It is quite possible that this piece was designed specifically for export, probably to Iran, where the taste for Chinese blue-and-white porcelain in this period seems to have been most pronounced. However, a related piece dating from the same period, albeit with red decoration on white and longer Arabic inscriptions, has been surmised by Watson as a commission for a highly-placed Chinese Muslim at the Ming court rather than a product of the export market, on the basis of its superlative quality, and it is possible that the present piece was also intended for Chinese consumption (Watson 2004, pp. 490–491). The Arabic word *Taharat* ("Purity") is inscribed within the central medallion; the phrase *Tuba li-ma tahara yadahu min ilha'* ("Blessed is he who purifies his hand from wrongdoing") appears within the four panels on rim, and *al-wudu' 'ala l-wudu' dau' 'ala dau'* ("Ablution upon ablution is light upon light") within the exterior panels. Judging from the implications of the textual message, it seems that the porcelain would have been used as a basin for ablutions at home before prayer. This piece is exhibited with the kind permission of Princess Catherine Aga Khan.

## 42

Jingdezhen (north-eastern Jiangxi Province), China  
 Mark of Emperor Zhengde (1506–1521)  
 Porcelain with blue and white glaze  
 Diameter 41.8 cm; height 7.5 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00722  
 Publ.: Welch 1978a, pp. 211–212; AKTC 2008b, no. 27; AKTC 2009a, p. 64 (no. 31); AKTC 2009b, p. 64 (no. 31); AKTC 2010a, p. 66 (no. 32).



## 43

Boat-shaped *kashkūl* (beggar's bowl)

Iran, second half of the sixteenth century

Engraved brass

Length: 61 cm

Inv.: AKMoo612

Publ.: Melikian-Chirvani 1991, pp. 35–37, 97–98, figs. 60–63; AKTC 2007a, p. 63 (no. 32); AKTC 2007b, p. 60 (no. 32); AKTC 2008a, pp. 88–89 (no. 24); AKTC 2009a, p. 81 (no. 42); AKTC 2009b, p. 81 (no. 42); AKTC 2010a, p. 83 (no. 43).

*Inscriptions:* Side 1:

The prince of the two worlds, the seal of messengers  
 He became the pride of the very first  
 He made his ascent to the throne and the seat, not to the sky,  
 The prophets and friends of God were in need of him  
 His existence was spent in guarding the two worlds  
 The whole surface of the earth became his mosque  
 The lord of the two worlds, the leader of mankind:  
 The moon was split by the tip of his finger.

Side 2 (in a different metre):

The one had for him the friend of the Beloved  
 While the other was the leader of the Pious bands  
 (The servant of the Shah of Najaf, Shams al-Din)  
 . . . For this reason did they become friends of God  
 The one was a fount of moral gentleness and spiritual modesty in the world  
 While the other was “The Gate of the City of Knowledge”  
 That envoy of Truth/God that was the best among humans  
 His immaculate uncle was Hamza son of ‘Abbas.  
 (Melikian-Chirvani 1991, pp. 35–36)

Melikian-Chirvani, who read and translated the *nasta‘liq* inscriptions that decorate the upper band of this *kashkul*, believes that the piece once belonged to the head of a *khanaqah* or Sufi hospice. A *kashkul* of this quality would hardly have been used by dervishes collecting alms, instead must have been amongst the treasured items of a revered Sufi. This *kashkul* is one of a group of five important Safavid examples from the late sixteenth century discussed in depth by Melikian-Chirvani. In his article he illustrated the means by which the form of these objects developed from the pre-Islamic concept of the royal wine-boat, their shape merging the idea of the crescent moon “out of which wine, seen as liquid sunlight, is poured” with the ritual function of wine-drinking at pre-Islamic festivals, and the heavily symbolic form of the dervish’s begging bowl. The mystical nature of the inscribed verses reflects the layered symbolism of the object itself, with its snarling dragons’ heads and its role as an emblem of dervish practice. The *nasta‘liq* of the inscription is dense and elegant, and is contained within cartouches of a type also seen in other media, such as bookbindings (cat. no. 73), lacquerwork (cat. no. 59) and tilework (cat. no. 38).





## 44

## Inlaid box

Ottoman Istanbul, first half of the  
sixteenth century  
Wood, ivory, gold, niello, turquoise,  
precious stones  
17.3 x 8.8 x 3.2 cm  
Inv.: AKMoo819  
Unpublished

Iranian craftsmen working at the Ottoman court in Istanbul are thought to have been responsible for the creation of this extremely fine box inlaid with ivory, precious metals and stones. The victory of the Ottoman Selim I over the Safavid Shah Isma'il at the battle of Chaldiran in 1514 led to the Ottoman occupation of Tabriz in northwestern Iran; objects and craftsmen alike were plundered from Tabriz and taken to Istanbul by the conquerors. The skill of Safavid metalworkers and inlayers was certainly well-known amongst the Ottomans both before and after the victory at Chaldiran, as Iranian goldsmiths had been active in Istanbul as early as 1480 (Rogers in Levenson 1991, p. 205) and a payroll document of 1526 records that both the damasceners' and goldsmiths' guilds were headed by Tabrizi craftsmen (Allan in Thompson–Canby 2003, p. 214). The inscription cartouches on this box, although exquisitely executed, are kept rather in the background of the overall decorative scheme, their closely packed gold cursive script on black providing a subtle echo of the panels of tightly wound gold vegetal interlace designs on black that recur throughout the geometric design of the top panel. The inscription in Persian reads "There is no touchstone (?) like these scales in the world / To measure stones light and yet precious / One tray is like the moon, the other the sun, / The conjunction of the sun and moon has fallen in its balance". It has been conjectured from the inscription that the original contents of the box were a set of scales for weighing precious stones.



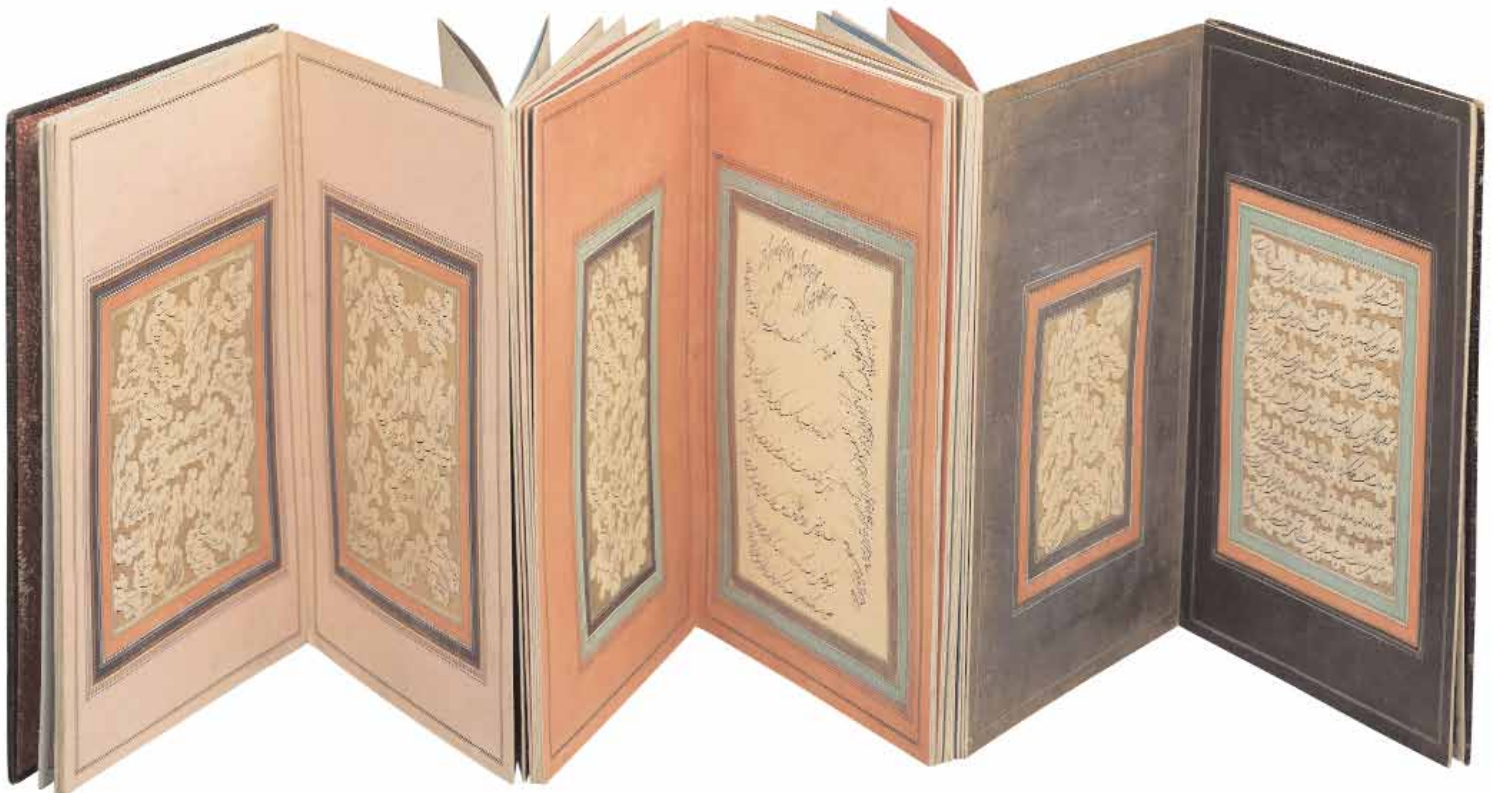


## 45

**Album of *shikasta* calligraphy**

Ink on paper with Morocco binding  
Qajar Iran, first half of the  
nineteenth century  
29.2 x 19 cm  
Inv.: AKM00360  
Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 125 (no. 92);  
AKTC 2007b, p. 128 (no. 92).

This concertina-type album of 48 pages contains examples of a cursive hanging script known as *shikasta*. The name means “broken” and is a shortening of the script’s full title, *shikasta-yi nasta’liq* (“broken *nasta’liq*”). Born out of a bureaucratic need to write faster, *shikasta* had become a major script for bureaucratic documents by the seventeenth century (Blair 2008, p. 441). Like *nasta’liq* (see cat. no. 46), *shikasta* is a so-called “hanging script” used for writing Persian, with a downward diagonal slant to individual elements and an exaggeration of certain long ligatures. The principal difference between this script and *nasta’liq* is that in *shikasta* the scribe is permitted to make more unauthorised connections between letters and can join the letters *alif*, *dal*, *dhal*, *ra’*, *za’*, *zha’* and *waw* to the next letter. This means that alone of all the scripts, each word can be written in *shikasta* with one stroke of the pen, rather than the scribe having to stop, lift his pen and start a new stroke within the same word as he would normally have to do for non-connecting letters. Words were even joined together sometimes, and vertical letters were shrunk, creating an extremely dense and rapidly written script, and scribes took pleasure in writing in different directions on the same page to create complex patterns. By the nineteenth century scribes had stylized *shikasta* to such a degree that legibility came second to aesthetic effect, and it ultimately remained the script of official documents and decrees, while *nasta’liq* continued to be the main calligraphic style.



Handwritten text in Persian script, likely a manuscript or a page from a book. The text is written in black ink on a light-colored, textured paper. The script is highly stylized and cursive, characteristic of the Shikasta style. The text is arranged in several lines, with some words appearing to be part of a larger phrase or sentence. The overall appearance is that of a historical document or a page from an old book.



## 46

## Double album page

Iran, early nineteenth century  
 Opaque watercolour and gold on  
 paper  
 33.3 x 20.5 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00531  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, pp. 106–107  
 (no. 74); AKTC 2007b, pp. 106–107  
 (no. 74); AKTC 2008a, pp. 160–161  
 (no. 58).

This double-page opening features a portrait of the Qajar ruler Fath 'Ali Shah (r. 1798–1834) and a calligraphic exercise signed by him. Even in miniature, this stylised formal portrait of Fath 'Ali Shah with his full beard and imperial regalia manages to convey some of the monumentality and power that is evident in his full-size imperial enthronement portraits (for comparison see the Hermitage portrait, vr-1107; Diba 1998, p. 183). It is known that he practiced calligraphy, but signed examples in his own hand are rare. These pages may well have belonged to a larger album similar to cat. no. 143, containing samples of various types of fine script. The calligraphy shown here is a form of *nasta'liq*: the name of this script is a contraction of the Persian *naskh-i ta'liq*, meaning a hanging or suspended form of *naskh* (Blair 2008, p. 274). However, where the letters in *nasta'liq* are typically sloped, this inscription retains a fairly flat baseline. The fluidity of late *nasta'liq* is present, though, as are the marked differentiations between thick and thin within a single stroke of the pen, and the strong emphatic square dots. *Nasta'liq* and the related hanging script *ta'liq* are particularly suitable for writing Persian and were developed in response to the different requirements of written Persian compared with Arabic. Although they use the same alphabet and share some words, Persian is linguistically entirely distinct from Arabic and does not have the direct article “al”; this means that on the page it lacks the repetitive uprights that characterise Arabic calligraphy. Persian also has a different proportion of curved and straight letters from Arabic, and therefore requires a script that can comfortably and legibly accommodate these features.

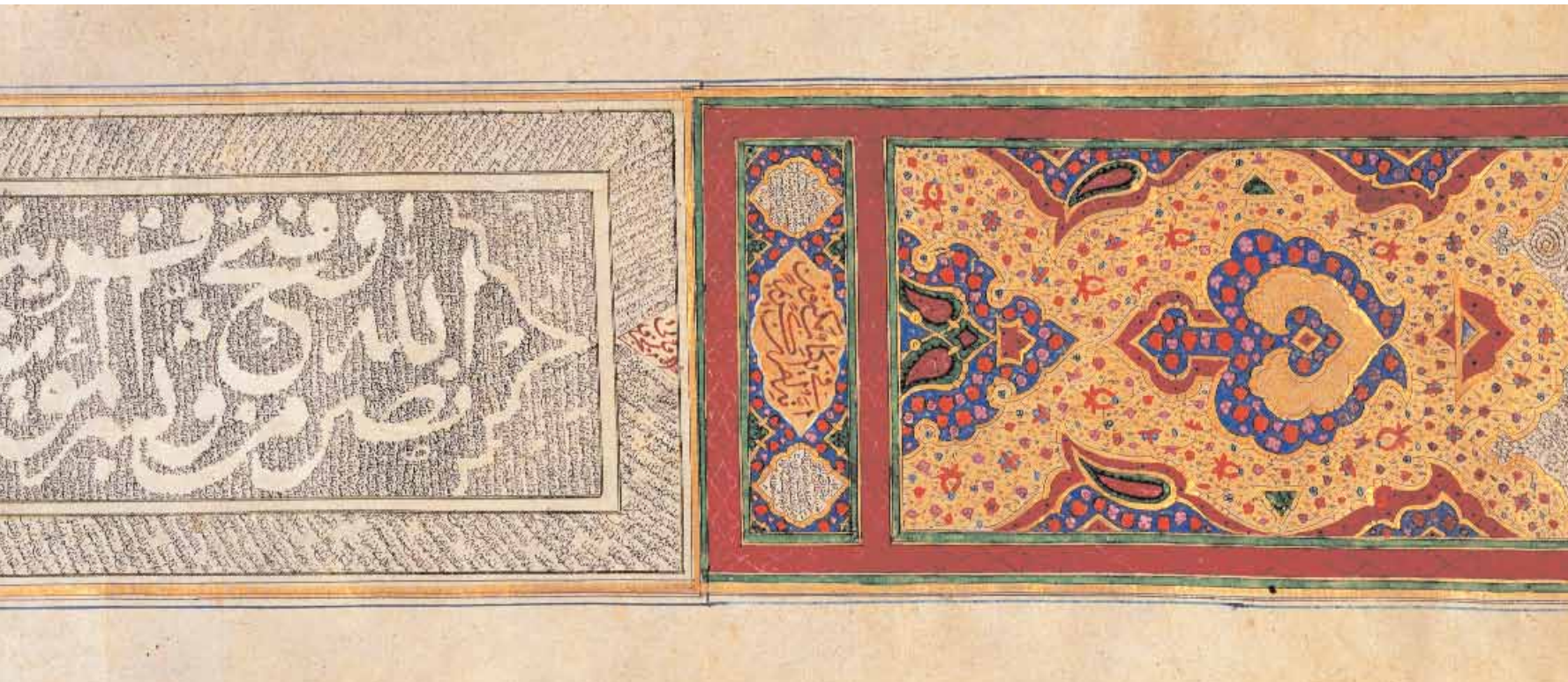


## Qur'an scroll

This scroll is the work of the calligrapher Zayn al-'Abidin, a Qajar calligraphic master and private scribe to Fath 'Ali Shah (r. 1797–1834). It is unusually well preserved, and has an extremely finely illuminated headpiece in rich colours and gold: as such it must have been made for a wealthy patron. The illumination of the headpiece, with its central medallion, ground of foliate arabesques and colour scheme of red, gold and blue with green highlights, connects the piece closely with Qajar Qur'an manuscript illumination, as well as bookbindings and medallion carpets. Much of the text has been written in the tiny *ghubari* (literally "dust") script, which is said to have begun its life as the script used for sending messages by pigeon post, later coming to be used for feats of the calligrapher's art such as this or the complete Qur'an on two pages (cat. no. 48), as well as being used for writing amulets, talismans and other texts that fit the maximum number of words into a small space (Blair 2008, pp. 259–60). In this scroll the text has been laid out to form patterns of alternating geometric and floral cartouches with selected verses of the Qur'an, including an extract from Sura 61 (*al-Saff*) and part of the famous "Light Verse" from *Surat al-Nur* (24:35), created in *thuluth* script in reserve. Close observation of the reserve panels in particular reveals this work as a *tour-de-force* of the master calligrapher. The scroll may have played a talismanic role, possibly designed for use while travelling.

47

Copied by Zayn al-'Abidin  
Qajar Iran, 1847  
Ink, opaque watercolour and gold  
on paper  
575 x 12.5 cm  
Inv.: AKM00492  
Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 42 (no. 11);  
AKTC 2007b, p. 39 (no. 11);  
Makariou 2007, p. 126 (no. 43).

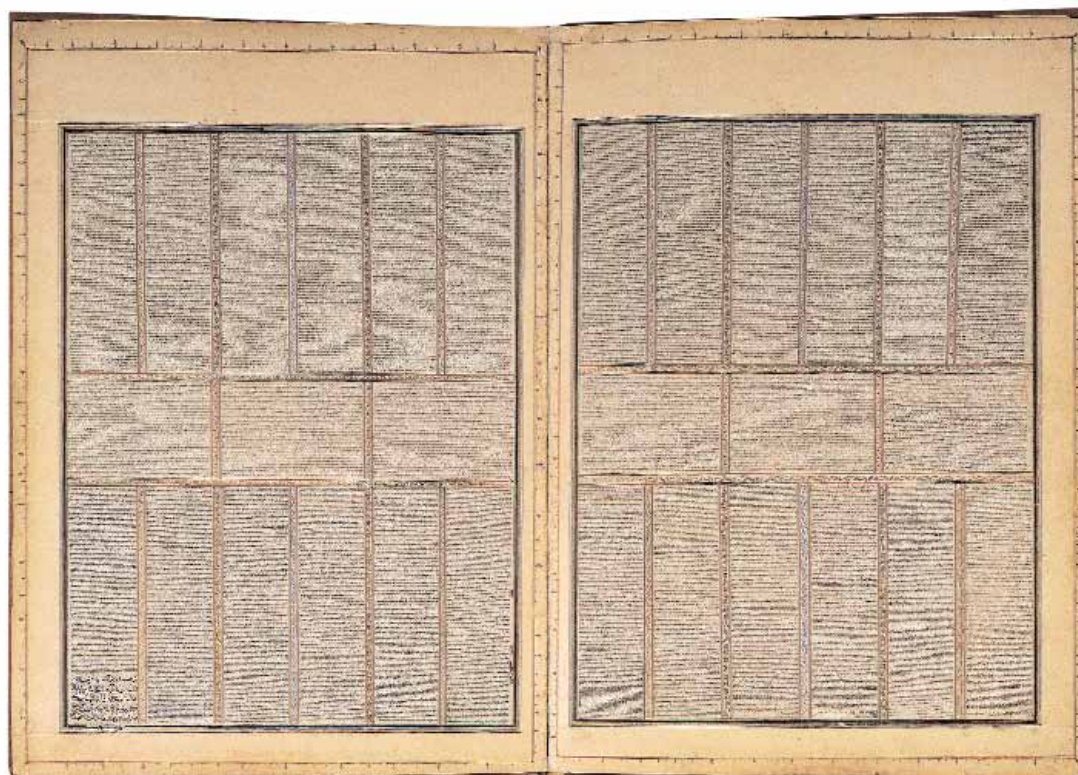


## 48

## Manuscript of the Qur'an on two pages

Qajar Iran, 1866–67  
 Ink, colours and gold on paper, with morocco binding  
 48.6 x 69 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo494  
 Publ.: Makariou 2007, pp. 128–129 (no. 44); AKTC 2008a, pp. 56–57 (no. 8).

In this manuscript the entire text of the Qur'an is copied on two pages in minute *ghubari* script. With letters measuring between 1.3 and 3 mm the script is so tiny that it is not always legible to the naked eye. The entire text has been arranged into thirty sections, each of which corresponds to a *Juz'*, one of the most commonly used divisions of the Qur'an. In manuscripts executed in standard scripts each *Juz'* would normally be contained in a separate volume (see cat. no. 12); or, in the case of other Iranian and Indian Qur'ans in miniature script, each *Juz'* might be written on the recto and verso of one sheet. This manuscript's presentation of the sacred script is by no means common; indeed this may be the only known example of its type on paper, one of its closest equivalents being a complete Qur'an on a sheet of linen, even smaller in size (54 cm x 33.8 cm) and divided into sixty compartments each containing thirty-one lines of text, produced in Turkey in the seventeenth century. The calligrapher of the present work, Sayyid 'Ali Tabatabai, has signed and dated this display of his skill at the bottom of the left page. The name of the commissioning patron, Sultan al-'Ulama', is displayed in the colophon and on the binding. Very probably this refers to 'Allamah Sayyid Muhammad ibn Sayyid Dildar 'Ali (d. 1867), who, following in the footsteps of his father Sayyid Dildar 'Ali al-Nasirabadi (1752–1819), was a prominent Shi'i author of the time.

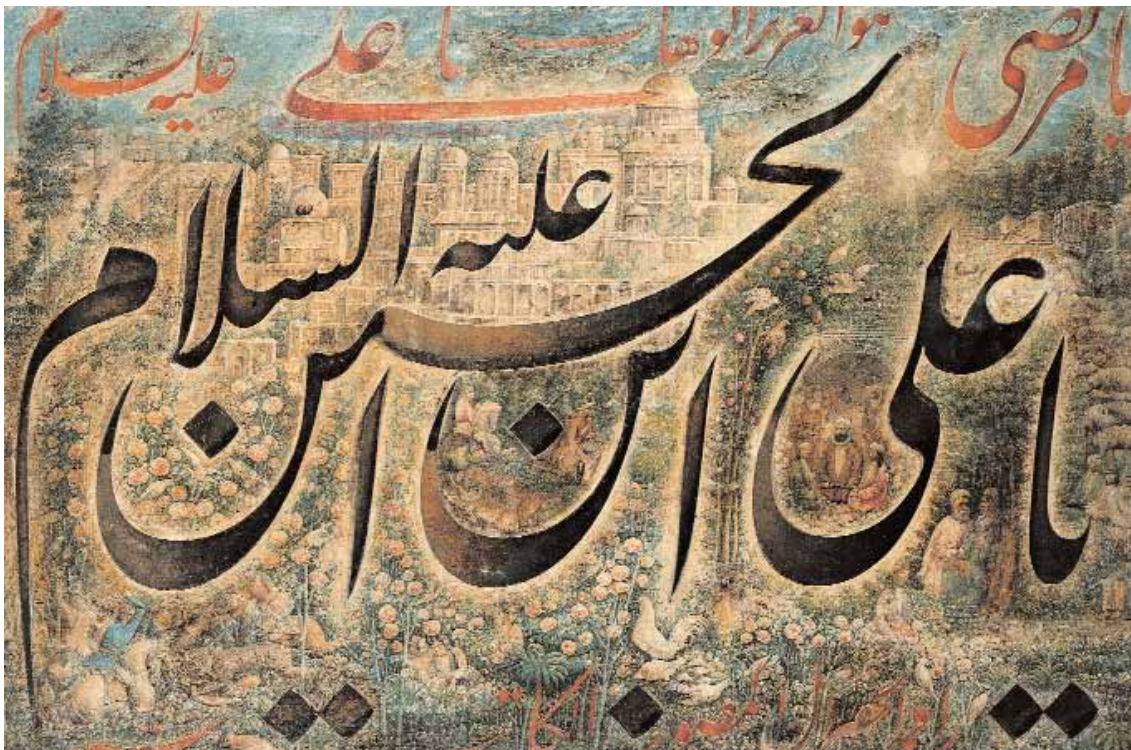


### Calligraphic painting by Ismā'īl Jalāyir

Seeming to emerge from a strange landscape bathed in ethereal light, the text is an invocation to 'Ali ibn al-Husayn, better known as Zayn al-'Abidin, the fourth Shi'i Imam. The calligrapher and artist Isma'il Jalayir trained at the Dar al-Fonun in Tehran, the first modern institution of higher education in Iran, under the calligraphic master Mirza Ghulam Riza, and was active at a time when the fledgling art of photography was being taught alongside the classical art of calligraphy. The mixture of old and new is visible in Jalayir's work through the skilful mix of calligraphy – the archetypal traditional Islamic art – and precise miniature painting, the latter executed in such a way that its rather hazy appearance resembles early photographs developed on albumin paper. The *nasta'liq* text of the inscription dominates the composition: the *ha* and the *sin* of 'Ali ibn al-Husayn's father's name, Husayn, the second Shi'i Imam, who was martyred in Karbala in 680, divide the page in two with their long diagonal. At the top of the page is an architectural fantasy, which transmutes the models of classical Western architecture: columns, domes and porticos could conjure up an ideal city or an earthly or heavenly palace. Below, cupped in the *ya* of "Ali" are 'Ali and his two sons, Hasan and Husayn, the second and third Shi'i Imams. This "spiritual investiture" scene certainly throws light on other imagery depicted: the two Sufis to the right of the word "Ali", as well as the hunting scenes, are replete with pious symbolism. In the enigmatic landscape, a sun rises directly above the letter *lam* of 'Ali. The letters appear to be basking in the glow of that light.

49

Iran, c. 1860–1870  
Ink and opaque watercolours on paper  
35 x 53 cm  
Inv.: AKM00534  
Publ.: Falk 1985 (no. 177); Makariou 2007, pp. 156–157 (no. 56); Blair 2008, pp. 454–455; AKTC 2009a, p. 226 (no. 171); AKTC 2009b, p. 226 (no. 171); AKTC 2010a, pp. 242–243 (no. 188).





## The Arts of the Book



Francis Richard

## **The *Kitābkhāna*: An Institution in the Service of Culture and the Art of the Book**

The book and writing have, as is well known, a privileged status in Islam. Due to the sacred nature of the Qur'an, its text revealed to mankind by God himself, it is important to remember that writing and calligraphy are the subject of genuine reverence. If copying the sacred text of the Qur'an is, like its recitation, a pious act that attributes its merits to those who accomplish it, then all that relates to the book, from its conservation to its decoration, has likewise acquired a growing prestige.

Arab, Persian and Turkish literatures contain a large number of treatises or poems on the art of the book or calligraphy. Some of these volumes have a technical or historical nature, but above all these works are intended to testify to the exceptional worth of the book and writing. Thus, among the arts of Islam calligraphy (*khatt*) occupies one of the premier places in the hierarchy of artistic expression. The Arabic letter is an object of contemplation, meditation, or speculation. In comparing Islamic calligraphy with Chinese calligraphy, which was sometimes used as a model, there exists one essential difference between them. Although both were brought to perfection by a class of scribes in the service of the administration of the empire, among Muslims this practice acquired a sacred nature due to the revealed text of the Qur'an.

Surrounding writing itself there rapidly developed very sophisticated decoration. Gilded titles, especially those of the Suras of the Qur'an, received decorations of geometric patterns, stylized flowers or arabesques. Marks made in the margins, or the punctuation, also allowed the illuminators to develop new styles, which first appeared in the Qur'an and later multiplied in secular books. A distinct taste for the luxurious book, an object of respect, but also a collector's item, led to the successive appearance and development of diverse forms of decoration. The title page was adorned with strips of calligraphy, illuminated rosettes or mandorlas bearing the name of the sponsor. The opening that followed enclosed the beginning of the text in a setting of

illuminated banners or reserves with floral motifs: as though the writing was placed in the heart of a garden of extreme refinement. Occasionally there were openings composed of only one decoration, a carpet of very sophisticated illumination that preceded the copied text. Titles were readily written in calligraphy in the centre of banners decorated with flowers or arabesques; illuminated strips or triangles were placed on almost every page of certain manuscripts, combined with frames of fillets of diverse colours. The margin became, in turn, the object of attention: in the sixteenth century it was gilded or made of marbled or coloured paper. The use of coloured paper from China, known by the Soghdians since the early Middle Ages, became very popular in fifteenth-century Iran and among the Ottomans. All of these decorations gave the illuminator (*mudhahhib*) a very important role, almost as important as that of the calligrapher. He shared with the binder (*mujallid, sahhāf*) and the painter (*naqqāsh*) the privilege of participating in the realization of manuscripts for the princes and great figures of the medieval and modern Muslim world, up to the nineteenth century.

Painting also found its place very early in the Islamic book. Its role was less important than that of illumination and binding. It was certainly absent from religious texts, but there existed nevertheless an iconographic tradition concerning holy places, in relation to treatises on pilgrimages. The first known illustrated books are copies of the *Suwar al-Kawākib*, an astronomical treatise in Arabic, apparently from the tenth century. Illustration concerned above all books destined for princely libraries. Scientific volumes as well as certain great literary or historical works were also readily illustrated. The lives of the Prophets accompanied by cycles of illustrations were a great success in Iran and the Ottoman world from the world history of Rashīd al-Dīn (early thirteenth century) to the Ottoman *Siyar al-Nabi* (sixteenth century), which evoked the life of Muhammad and the exploits of the Muslims. The regions where illustrated manuscripts were most numerous were the Iranian world, Egypt, Mesopotamia and Syria, the Ottoman world and Muslim India.

All of these achievements necessitated over the course of centuries the permanence of a brilliant tradition in the art of papermaking. Coming from China, it quickly replaced parchment, which it readily imitated in appearance and colour. The art of leather intended for bookbinding and the preparation of inks, those of gold and colours, were also domains where the transmission of trade secrets did not prevent invention and innovation.

### Princely Workshops

In the Iranian world the *kitābkhāna* or *kutubkhāna* (“house of the book” or “of the books”) was both a library and a workshop for the copying of manuscripts. This institution differed in its organization from medieval European scriptoria, which were religious institutions. The *kitābkhāna* was secular and existed in the courts of most of the sultans or grand governors. The book was indeed associated with power. Owning a library rich in antique books, with the major scientific and philosophical volumes and literary and historical works was the prerogative of the cultivated and enlightened sovereign. The prince protected savants and poets. He himself composed verses. Thus, alongside the volumes he gathered in his library, he reproduced new copies of these texts and the works composed under his patronage, and he received works



dedicated to him by authors seeking his protection. Princes exchanged books and seized the libraries of their enemies in war, in order to increase their collections and promote the work of savants who composed new pieces rivalling those of the past.

To list the major libraries of the Muslim world would be a difficult task, as they were numerous. Yet one must mention those of Qayrawan, Cordoba, and Fez in the Maghrib. The library of the caliphs of Baghdad, of course, was very famous and until the thirteenth century it was a centre for the translation of ancient Graeco-Roman works, and the composition of volumes on history, religious or secular sciences and Arabic literature. Those of the Samanid sovereigns, and then the Seljuqs and Ghaznavids, certainly enriched Arabic works, but also witnessed the emergence of modern Persian literature. These workshop-libraries contributed to the dissemination of new designs and styles in the art of the book at the same time that they permitted the distribution of many works, copied or composed through the generosity of princes. One could certainly include those of many other medieval sovereigns who were both collectors and patrons. Often these collections, because of the fragility of bindings and paper and the many conflicts that ravaged the Near East, no longer exist except through the testimony of chroniclers or the rare precious volumes that have survived and bear the mark of their history. Thus certain pages of ancient Kufic Qur'ans may sometimes be found from one or another of these libraries.

Occasionally, it was not the sovereigns themselves, but their viziers who were collectors and patrons. The emblematic example is that of Rashid al-Din Fadl Allāh Hamadāni, who, like Nizām al-Mulk before him, assembled a rich library for students and scholars in early fourteenth century Tabriz. In his *kitābkhāna*, Rashid al-Din ordered the reproduction of manuscripts in a specific large format, sometimes quite sumptuously illuminated, to disseminate theological, historical and scientific knowledge, in order to gain certain glory in this world and to win favour in the next. He also left his name to a widely illustrated world history of which there exist several copies.

Mongol Iran of the Ilkhanids, from the capture of Baghdad in 1258 to 1330, inherited the legacy of the Mamluks of Syria and Egypt, major sponsors and patrons, with their viziers, of illuminated manuscripts. It also inherited a certain legacy from China brought by the Mongols, at the same time as the ancient Iranian traditions in the domain of the book and the love of books. Shiraz remained relatively independent under Ilkhanid power and was governed by the Juvaynī viziers until the end of the thirteenth century. Its governors were protectors of a particularly fertile *kitābkhāna* and the considerable activity that took place in Shiraz in the production of illuminated and illustrated manuscripts continued without interruption until 1620. Though the styles changed, the city remained the centre of major production in the Iranian world, with a *kitābkhāna* and a host of workshops surrounding it, for a wealthy clientele, lovers of beautiful books.

### **The *Kitābkhāna* and its Operation**

There are scarcely any texts that describe the precise organization of the workshop-library, except perhaps from Mughal India at the end of the sixteenth century and the seventeenth century. Evidence like that of *Akbar-nāma* (composed at the end of the sixteenth century) demonstrated that the workshop was a true district of the city, near the palace, where a host of

calligraphers, bookbinders, illuminators, painters and book dealers were found. From them the sovereign ordered copies, sometimes several copies of the same text, for his own library – or his libraries – or for the purpose of making gifts to his debtors or his hosts. The library and its artists and craftsmen were under the direction of a “librarian” (*kitābdār*), appointed by the sovereign, who was actually a kind of “provost” (*kalāntar*). This *kitābdār* divided the royal commissions and oversaw their execution, as seen in certain manuscripts from Bukhara from the mid-sixteenth century where a colophon dated around 1540 records a *kitābdār*, Mīrak, next to the name of the calligrapher. Painters and illuminators occasionally signed their work. Mīrak appeared as the master or architect, without doubt responsible for the layout and choice of decorations.

A few names of the *kitābdār* are known from the Iranian world, especially during the Timurid period. Among the names that have unfortunately been lost are that of the *kitābdār* of Timur, who assembled together artists from diverse countries in Samarqand; those working under Shāhrukh, who possessed a rich library endowed with a specific stamp marking each manuscript and in which the historian Hāfiz-i Abrū was very involved; those working for Sultān Iskandar, who developed a very brilliant library-workshop up until 1415 at Isfahan; and that of the *kitābdār* of Ulugh Beg of Samarqand. It is well known, on the other hand, that the extraordinary library of Prince Bāysunghur in Herat was led in 1427 by Ja‘far Tabrīzī, a calligrapher of great talent, who left records showing that he reported to Bāysunghur on the progress of the various leading artists of the workshop. It is also known that in Shiraz, at the same time, the direction of the *kitābkhāna* of Sultān Ibrāhīm (d. 1435), sovereign of Fars and himself a talented calligrapher, was entrusted to an illuminator, Nasr (or Nāsir) al-Dīn Mudhahhib. At the end of the Timurid period, the workshop-library of Herat was famous, under the dual patronage of Sultān Husayn Mīrzā Bayqara (d. 1506) and his vizier the poet Mīr ‘Alī Shīr Navā’ī. One of the most famous artists employed there was the painter Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād. He later, with the accession of the Safavids, received the title of *kalāntar*, head of the *kitābkhāna* of Shāh Tahmāsp.

The role of these “librarians” on the hunt for the tastes expressed by their patron in calligraphy, illumination, decorative paper, binding and painting, was certainly very important. In the case of Shāh Tahmāsp, we know he ordered around 1530–1540 some manuscripts of exceptional quality, notably an edition of the *Shahnama* of Firdawsī (see cat. nos 120–124) for which he employed many painters whose names are known in part, such as Muzaffar ‘Alī. These artists worked under the supervision of the *kitābdār*, according to a given programme, in the illustration of different pages. Sometimes several artists worked on the same image or collaborated with the illuminators. Their work was done in harmony with that of the calligraphers and bookbinders.

The principal calligraphers who worked in the royal *kitābkhāna* could add to their names the sultan’s epithet, which clearly indicated their role as “calligrapher to the king”. A certain number of the great Iranian or Ottoman calligraphers have held this title during a period of their lives, as did Mīr ‘Alī Sultān in the sixteenth century.

The head of the Safavid royal workshop, when Shāh ‘Abbās came to the throne at the end of the sixteenth century, was Sādiqī Beg (cat. no. 127). A painter who signed a number of works,

he was also a theoretician who left behind treatises on aesthetics and painting. His successor who was chosen by Shāh ‘Abbās was also a painter, the famous Reza ‘Abbāsī. Very active until 1630 in Isfahan, he was the creator of an original style which left its powerful mark on seventeenth century Iranian production.

Other librarians, such as Muqīm under ‘Abbās II in the mid-seventeenth century, apparently played a less prominent role. But it is difficult to say whether the function of the *kitābdār* did not remain essential in Iran until the rise of the Qajars. The *kitābdār* were in fact the true masters of royal policy in the domain of the art of the book.

In the Mughal Empire of India, the *kitābdār* also played a role of primary importance as guardians of the imperial library, which Humāyūn began setting up in Kabul; they inventoried manuscripts, for lending or copying. As guardians of these treasures and as masters of cultural and artistic policy, their responsibility was enormous. It was again the continuation of a medieval tradition that emphasized the well-established link between the book and power. On the other hand, we know that Akbar, himself fond of painting, and then Jahāngīr, ordered a large number of illustrated manuscripts, employing for each a host of artists (one thinks of the *Hamza-nāma*, and then the *Bābur-nāma* and many other books illustrated by dozens of artists), but it is not known whether their work was performed under the direct supervision of the emperor or that of his *kitābdār*. The Indian *kitābkhāna* combined a heritage from the Sultans of Bukhara and a Safavid Iranian legacy with a strong Indian tradition, and the head of the workshop was to be a man of great competence.

### **The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial *Naqqāshkhāna***

Even though the Ottomans developed their own system of patronage after the capture of Amasya by Bayezid I at the end of the fourteenth century, influenced by the Seljuk heritage and the Mamluk style, this patronage still remains a poorly studied area of the history of the book. The Ottoman dynasty then specifically encouraged in its capitals Bursa and Edirne the development of the art of the book in the workshops serving the sultans. But it was the capture of Constantinople by Mehmed II in 1453 that truly marked the beginning of a new era in this field.

Mehmed II, who died in 1481, was a bibliophile and a lover of books. He had composed scientific volumes, of medicine and astronomy in particular, and wrote historical works. He created in Istanbul a true imperial *scriptorium* that replaced the workshops of the Byzantine scribes. Anxious to emulate the European sovereigns of the Renaissance, his curiosity for European discoveries was undeniable. Nevertheless, the *scriptorium* that he created in his new capital was profoundly influenced by the Persian and Mamluk legacies. A certain creativity emerged in the field of calligraphy and the imperial scribes seemed to have had at heart the creation or development of new specific styles, notably the imperial Ottoman script *divānī*. The style of manuscripts was sometimes marked by one of these models, sometimes by another, before emerging, especially beginning with the reign of his successor, Bayezid II (1481–1512), as a true “Ottoman style” in the domain of the book. It was also under his reign that the calligrapher Shaykh Hamd Allah developed his famous skills.

Bayezid had an extremely rich library, from which the inventory has been conserved. Contemporary of the last Timurids, he was able to collect many rare texts or of rare copies

coming from the principal medieval Muslim courts. In terms of the organization of the workshop-library, the Iranian model seems to have been widely followed. The numerous scribes, illuminators, painters and bookbinders coming from Iran, collaborated with the Ottoman and Near Eastern artists.

The accession of the Safavids in Iran and the Ottoman victory of Chāldirān in 1514, where the armies of Sultan Selim prevailed over those of Shāh Ismā'il, had a great importance in the domain of the book. Numerous manuscripts from the treasury of the Shahs of Persia were brought from Tabriz to Istanbul; painters also took the path to the Ottoman capital. The cultural impact of this event was considerable. Istanbul was considered at the time to be the heir to the civilization of the Timurids of Herat. In the literary domain the Ottoman Turks made a true development, influenced by the model of Turkish *chaghatay* formerly cultivated by the vizier Mīr 'Alī Shīr Navā'i and his sultan. There followed a very significant movement of translation into Turkish of all the Persian and Arabic classics, which made the imperial workshop extremely active. Similarly, in 1517 the Syrian and Egyptian Mamluks were integrated into the Ottoman Empire and numerous princely manuscripts arrived in Istanbul and furnished models of a completely different style for the artists of the workshop-library. The Mamluks had also begun to favour the emergence of a literature in the Turkish language.

During the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent (1520–1566), imperial patronage focused on the execution of very luxurious bindings and illuminations of great richness. The illustrations done in the *naqqāshkhāna* (or *naqqāshane*, literally “the house of the painters”) for manuscripts commissioned by the sultan were innovative in style and realism was not absent. Poetry was favoured, but history and geography occupied a very important place in the imperial commissions. It was under Murad III (1574–1595) that the *naqqāshkhāna* of the imperial palace experienced its most fruitful periods of activity, with painters who, like Osman or Lütfi 'Abd Allah, represented scenes that were religious, historical or borrowed from daily life to illustrate the major manuscripts commissioned by the sultan. Moreover, from the outset the artists of the *naqqāshkhāna*, alongside this work of illustration, participated in other enterprises making decorations for objects or buildings.

A great lover of books, bibliophile and patron, Ahmed III (1703–1730) was the last of the sultans to have ordered important illustrated manuscripts, intended in particular for the painter Levner Edirne. Through his patronage he also encouraged the activity of authors and the distribution of books and reading. But it was also Ahmed III who, moved by the same concern, created the first imperial workshop of typography, entrusting to the care of Hungarian Ibrahim Müteferriqa, the printing of Arabic and Turkish volumes. They were in both appearance and decor still very close to the Ottoman manuscripts made by the *scriptorium*.

Thus, on the eve of the introduction of modern printing technology, in Turkey as in Iran, Central Asia or India, the institution of the *kitābkhāna* remained lively enough to provide models known and admired by all, men of letters as well as politics. The publication of important texts, the composition of new texts, the production of the book itself with its decoration, calligraphy and binding were all marked by the model of the workshop-library: an institution essential to the ancient Muslim world.

### **In the Service of the *Kitābkhāna*: Artists Faithful to Tradition yet Willingly Innovative**

The image that best illustrates the activity of the *kitābkhāna* in the Akhlāq-i Nāsiri of Nāsir al-Din al-Tūsī shows a workshop in Mughal India from around 1600 (cat. no. 65). It is a perfect representation of the principal actors of a workshop-library, placed in the garden of a palace, each character working independently. A book would be assigned to one or another of these artists to be copied, illustrated or bound. The artist would work alone or in the company of students. No visible hierarchy was apparent, though each had a definite role and had to prove himself to have the honour to work for the court.

The key person in the chain of production of the manuscript was the scribe, most often a calligrapher. Calligraphers received instruction from a master and were often situated in a lineage that recalls the transmission that takes place within mystical brotherhoods.

Each workshop-library used a group of calligraphers, often distinct from the calligraphers of the chancellery who were generally trained in the drafting of documents. One knows of calligraphers that travelled or changed masters repeatedly. Certain calligraphers were also known as poets, in the Turkish world and especially in Iran. All calligraphers attached a great importance to the quality of the paper and inks that were made available to them. They copied on a tablet or a felt stand in the traditional position of the scribe, squatting. They could copy a manuscript, writing from memory or under dictation. In some cases the scribes were specialized in a particular type of text, and more often in one of the “six styles” of writing. The speed of copying was highly variable, as well as the order of copying. The scribe, after having finished his work, conducted a careful reading and added the titles of chapters, most often in red ink; he occasionally made a few small corrections. Certain great calligraphers were not necessarily the most faithful scribes and occasionally they changed and even added to the verses. A luxury manuscript, superbly illuminated and illustrated, was not necessarily a manuscript whose accuracy was indisputable.

An author could also ask a *kitābkhāna* scribe to make a luxurious copy of his work as a gift to his master. The sovereign would also have manuscripts prepared by his *kitābkhāna* to offer as presents to his visitors or for sending as gifts, reflecting the glow of his patronage and his enlightened taste.

For the scribe it was essential to have high-quality inks, and countless recipes – usually kept secret – remain as a reminder. Black smoke from lamps of the mosque, oak-galls and other ingredients were used to obtain inks suitable for the different types of reed pens. Coloured inks, red, green, yellow or blue, were used from a very early time. In the *kitābkhāna* everything was arranged so the calligraphers, like the painters, could have the best materials, sometimes imported from afar.

Parchment was scarcely found apart from copies of the first Qur’ans and from the eighth century paper became more and more common for copying books. The appearance of paper, translucent but reminiscent of parchment in its colour and thickness, was very important, especially in the large *kitābkhāna*. Thus paper was prepared, primed and smoothed with care; its price was high. Apparently it was often produced near the workshop-library. The quality of the water used, like that of the pulp, played a large role. Coloured paper was used from an early date,

but especially from the fifteenth century, as in China and Japan. The Iranian and Timurid *kitābkhāna* also used for the first time at the end of the fifteenth century papers sanded or flecked with gold. Marbled paper appeared around 1540 in Iran and India – in the *kitābkhāna* of the Deccan – then in the Ottoman Empire (cat. no. 55). European paper from the late fifteenth century appeared in the Ottoman imperial workshop, but it was prepared in the same traditional way before being used. Moreover, for copying books, the scribe first had to cut the double sheets that made up the sections of the book. He carried out his work of copying before sewing the workbooks. For the rest, certain *kitābkhānas* developed particular practices, but the differences between the workshops were quite minimal.

Many princely manuscripts contained illuminations and decorations – most often geometric – made of gold and coloured paint, using a fine brush, at the beginning or on certain pages of the volume. While always following the strict rules of layout, each reign and each capital created its own style. The Mamluks, Ilkhanids, Injus, Muzaffarids, Jalayirids, Timurids, and others all executed very specific forms of decoration that allow easy dating and location of the manuscripts. The use of gold, in leaf, or more often in the form of powder put in place with a binder, brought acclaim to the art of illumination (*tadhhib*). He who painted these fine decorations in gold was the master of a very delicate technique (*mudhahhib*); an important figure in the *kitābkhāna*. Besides, it was necessary that the goldsmiths skilled in the costly preparation of crushed gold (*zarrkūbī*) were installed in proximity to the workshop. Certain other colours, particularly minerals, also required delicate preparation; the raw materials were often very scarce. So much so that the application of these colours and their smoothing was reserved for artists who were heirs to this ancient tradition. Over the ages, and especially from the sixteenth century, illuminated decorations have proliferated, including gilded drawings in the margins.

The title page occasionally bore a dedication reading *bi-rasm-i kitābkhāna* (“for the library of”) and then the name of the sovereign or the important person sponsoring the copy. These were generally very fine examples and were in any case a testament to the importance of creating new illuminated books in the functioning of the institution of the *kitābkhāna*. There could then be double pages entirely covered with illuminated decorations, ornamental triangles or frames where chapter titles were inscribed.

The painter (*naqqāsh*) was usually distinct from the illuminator, even though the illuminators may have taken part in the realization of a painted page. He was one of the artists of the *kitābkhāna*. Certain painters were attracted to the great wealth of a sultan’s court and several changed workshops frequently. The painter was often represented working on a table, at times on a simple stand. He mastered the techniques for the preparation of the colours. These were secrets, delivered from master to disciple, which the technical treatises preserved only rarely reveal. Sometimes there were preparatory drawings outlined in red, occasionally also, to make replicas of other images, drawings were prepared with a compass; at other times the *kitābdār* or the calligrapher had written in full what the painter must represent on the page that was left white for him.

He usually worked after the scribe had done his job. It was not uncommon for the intended location for the images to remain empty, perhaps because of changes in the

*kitābkhāna*, or for reasons of cost. Many paintings were retouched; this was perhaps, as in the case of a manuscript that passed through the *kitābkhāna* of Jahāngīr, to give the characters a more Indian appearance and the king the appearance of the Mughal emperor himself. Moreover, it was often the tradition in the royal *kitābkhāna* to give the kings represented in the paintings the features of the sultan whose workshop produced the manuscript. This form of tribute was found again and again, particularly in well-kept copies.

The close relationship between painting, calligraphy and illumination is noteworthy. In the organization of the *kitābkhāna* all of the artists had to work together very closely. Besides, the illuminator and painter were also often calligraphers themselves. The desire for unity in the book dictated the choice of layout; harmony was essential between the binding and the rest of the book. No doubt the numerous successes that one sees in this domain can be accredited to the *kitābdār*.

The art of binding, which required morocco leather in a wide variety of colours, is traditionally regarded as highly developed in the world of Islam. A number of binders signed their works. The delicacy and variety of irons characterized the quality of the grand medieval *kitābkhāna*. Notably, it was in the Mamluk court that many complex decorations were invented in conjunction with illuminations, especially for Qur'ans. In the fifteenth century, grand plates began to be used, as well as decorations of perforated leather in the Timurid or Ottoman *kitābkhāna*. The inventiveness of those who designed the motifs of the bindings, and the variety of decorations that were also found on ceramics, wood or stucco, clearly show the prominent place given to the art of bookbinding within the *kitābkhāna*.

Focusing attention onto the importance of the *kitābkhāna* in the Near and Middle Eastern worlds without doubt furthers a better understanding of how literary and scientific sponsorship has developed. The role of the sovereign is essential in the process of the diffusion and glorification of knowledge. Culture, nobility and wealth are associated in the transmission of heritage and innovation in the intellectual and artistic domains. An instrument in the service of power, the *kitābkhāna* was also a convivial place because it forged the meeting of a group of carefully chosen artists and craftsmen. Object of ceremony, the book was also a working instrument for the savants and scholars who surrounded the sovereign.





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## The Qur'an of Gwalior, Kaleidoscope of the Arts of the Book

### The Arts of the Book in Sultanate India

After the brief excitement they aroused in the middle of the twentieth century, the arts of the book of pre-Mughal India seemed to have so baffled art historians and codicologists that the subject again fell into obscurity, or nearly so, for several decades. The recent upsurge of historical, literary and archaeological studies on Islamic India during the period of the Sultanates has cast a new light on the material culture of the Indian subcontinent under Muslim rule up to the sixteenth century, and has contributed to a renewed interest in this complex and misunderstood domain of Islamic art.

The production of painted manuscripts in Sultanate India poses several serious issues. Its early vestiges are extremely limited when one considers the duration of the period: more than three centuries, if the time limits are defined by the establishment of the Sultanate of Delhi in 1206, and the victory of the Mughal Emperor Bābur over the Sultan of Delhi, Ibrāhīm Lōdī, in 1526. In addition, the majority of the surviving material has suffered the ravages of time: having been cut, fragmented and dispersed, the manuscripts have subsequently become more difficult to study. Finally, no painted manuscript with a colophon bearing information on the methods and context of production is known before the late fourteenth century; thus, two hundred years of the book illumination, illustration and decoration of Muslim India have escaped us. The absence of colophons makes dating highly difficult, and localisations on the vast territory of the Indian subcontinent in the medieval period even more so. We navigate, when looking at works made prior to the fifteenth century, in grey areas where we must advance with prudence. It is essentially the appearance of the works, the “true” artistic impression, followed by the detailed analysis of the manuscripts in their stylistic and iconographic dimensions, which permits the formation of new hypotheses.

The paintings that adorn the pre-Mughal manuscripts, in both miniatures and illuminations, appear to have derived their inspiration largely from the arts of the book of other Muslim countries,

particularly the Near East and Iran, at the same time that they were striving to distinguish themselves profoundly in style. The observer is often confused by these systems of ornamentation and the patchwork of figures skilfully gathered side by side, loans from pictorial schools located far apart from one another. Despite this, and contrary to an opinion that has been widespread for too long, the art of the book of the Sultanates was in no way merely a pale reflection of its Persian and Arabic contemporaries. It was just as original and inventive, but our own ignorance of the subject has often obscured this. The study of the Qur'ans executed in India during this period reveals these qualities; these manuscripts present a dual interest for specialists through being relatively numerous and also forming a homogeneous whole that is amenable to analysis.

Among these Qur'ans is a manuscript from the Aga Khan collection presented in this exhibition, which forms the principal subject of this essay (cat. no. 77).<sup>2</sup> A masterpiece of the arts of the book during the period of the Sultanates, this volume is not only dated by a colophon text to the year 801 H / 1399 CE, but its completion is also documented as taking place in the fortress of Gwalior, a city located about 300 kilometres south of Delhi and at that time in the hands of a Rajput clan, the Tonwars.<sup>3</sup> This date and place of execution are of great interest for several reasons: in September 1398, or a few months earlier, the armies of Timur swept through northern India ending two centuries of the hegemony of the Sultanate of Delhi. Therefore, one can imagine the people of Gwalior closed within the walls of their fortress and awaiting stories of the massacres and looting that occurred in the former Sultanate of the Tughluqids, reported by refugees who fled to Gujarat or the Deccan. It was at Gwalior, in that non-Muslim city during those chaotic months, that one of the jewels of the pre-Mughal arts of the book was made, the manuscript known as the "Gwalior Qur'an" which is today preserved in the Aga Khan collection.

### **The Qur'an of Gwalior, a Masterpiece of pre-Mughal India**

Besides the date of completion (7 Dhu'l-qa'da 801 / 21 July 1399) and the place in which the manuscript was copied, the colophon also indicates the name of the scribe: Mahmūd Sha'bān. This manuscript of beautiful dimensions (29 x 22 cm) includes 550 folios. It is copied on ivory-coloured paper of very good quality; glossy, even and smooth. An elegant polychrome framework (*jadval*) composed of several fillets and a gold ribbon, carefully traced with the aid of a ruling pen, defines the space in which the Qur'anic text is inscribed. A final blue fillet, far from the *jadval*, defines a field of transition with the margins. The Qur'anic text, obviously copied in Arabic, has been translated into Persian between the lines of the Arabic. The use of such interlinear translations, helpful in Persian-speaking communities, is attested to in Iran since the tenth century. The text is divided into thirty *Juz'*, a canonical division that permits spreading out the reading of the Holy Book over a month. Each *Juz'* begins with a double page which mentions its *Juz'* number, and gives a very richly illuminated central field bearing five lines of text on each page (fig. 4). The other pages, though more restrained in their ornamentation, systematically bear thirteen lines of Arabic writing each, which attests to the particularly scrupulous care given to the creation of the copy (fig. 5).

Like the majority of Indian Qur'ans produced at the time, the body of the text of the Gwalior Qur'an is transcribed in *bihārī*, a style of cursive script of Sultanate India whose origin



Fig 1

Figure 1. The Gwalior Qur'an, ff. 40b–41a.



Fig 2

Figure 2. The Gwalior Qur'an, ff. 274b–275a.

remains controversial.<sup>4</sup> Although it could be considered quite inelegant in comparison with conventional writing styles, *bihārī* was reserved for copying religious works. The lines of text have been alternately copied in gold, red ink and blue ink, a solution that appears to not only beautify the manuscript but also to facilitate reading. The mastery of the calligrapher was such that the manuscript has only one error regarding the repetition of this model of colouring. By way of comparison, we note that this elaborate combination is unknown in Mamluk and Persian productions where only gold and black are used, alone or in turn. The chrysography – writing in gold – which had already been seen in Ilkhanid manuscripts of prestige is common in Qur'ans copied in *bihārī*, unlike the more unusual use of blue and red inks. Gold is applied in solution by the usual process of chrysography, also shared with the Mamluk and Ilkhanid manuscript productions. The interlinear Persian translation of the Gwalior Qur'an has been copied in a *naskhī* script of small size. This variety of cursive script is seen very frequently in Islamic manuscript production. Its Indo-Persian variant is characterised as *naskhī-divānī* and derives from a script of the chancellery.<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that the calligrapher was careful to utilise two different inks for the Arabic text and its Persian translation, which, combined with differences in the size of the scripts, helps to differentiate the two and maintain the supremacy of the Arabic text (fig. 6).

Certain *Juz'* markers are copied in foliated Kufic (fig. 7), a script whose usage was not common in the Indian context. Its use in this context is probably symptomatic of exchanges between Sultanate India and other regions of the Islamic world, since one finds many examples of this type of script in Syro-Egyptian productions from the 1340s under the Mamluk sultans (1250–1517), as well as in Iran and the surrounding area under the Mongol dynasty of the Ilkhanids (1258–1350).

However, most of the *Juz'* markers are written in *muhaqqaq* (fig. 8), while the titles of Suras are written in *thuluth* (fig. 6), in gold or black ink, in bands bearing more or less illumination. *Thuluth* and *muhaqqaq* are two types of cursive script, grander and more elegant than *naskhī* and *bihārī*. They were very frequently employed in copying Mamluk and Ilkhanid Qur'ans of large format and high prestige. Their presence in this manuscript, like that of foliated



Fig 3



Fig 4

Kufic, consequently reflects the circulation of motifs and of a certain aesthetic throughout the Muslim world.

### An Ornamental Puzzle

The particularly remarkable care brought to the text of the Gwalior Qur'an, evident in the variety of scripts, the richness of their colouring, and the mastery of their execution, called for an ornamental vocabulary that was both sumptuous and diversified. Once again, the artists to whom we owe this manuscript rose to the challenge brilliantly while respecting the constraints related to the divisions of the Qur'anic text. The Qur'an is always intrinsically split into 114 Suras, but other divisions may also come to punctuate a manuscript of the Qur'an. There are Qur'ans in two, four or seven parts, but also and especially in thirty *Juz'*. In the latter case, two solutions are conceivable: either the Qur'an is copied into a single volume, generally opening with a frontispiece, with the markers indicating each new *Juz'* appearing in the margins throughout the text, or the Qur'an is copied into thirty volumes, each beginning with its own frontispiece. The latter solution was used, for example, for the monumental Qur'ans copied for the Ilkhanid sovereigns Ghāzān and Öljaytu and destined for their mausoleums.<sup>6</sup> For its part, the Gwalior Qur'an has the distinction of opening with a double frontispiece (cat. no. 77), and has another double-page illumination for almost every one of its *Juz'* (figs 1 and 3). However, this model sustains some variety as well: in fact, the double-page illumination of *Juz'* 13 is missing and the opening of *Juz'* 30 is devoid of any illuminated decoration; its title is simply written in the margin. On the other hand, Suras 2 (*al-Baqara*), 7 (*al-A'rāf*), 19 (*Maryam*; fig. 2) and 38 (*Sād*) are each designated with a double-page illumination. This decorative design, resulting from the combination in a single volume of an inaugural frontispiece and of a double-page illumination for each *Juz'*, does not seem to be found in the Persian world. On the other hand, a Coptic-Arabic Pentateuch copied in Mamluk Egypt in 1353 (BnF, Arabe 12) employs a similar design to the Gwalior Qur'an, combining an initial frontispiece with five others initiating each book.<sup>7</sup> As for canonical divisions of the text, these are clearly marked in the Gwalior Qur'an: thus, the titles of the Suras are inscribed within decorative bands, verses are separated by circles or rosettes and

Figure 3. The Gwalior Qur'an, ff. 448b–449a.

Fig 4: The Gwalior Qur'an, ff. 394b–395a.



Fig 5



Fig 6

Figure 5. Page of text with title banner ('unwān), f. 48a.

Figure 6. Example of 'unwān, f. 48a.

the markers of five or ten verses appear in the margins. While the canonical divisions are well respected within this manuscript, the design of the double frontispiece imparts a remarkable character that is matched by the splendour and abundance of the overall decoration (figs 3 and 9).

The only recurring characteristic shared across the double-page illuminations of this manuscript resides in the tripartite division of the principal field through the presence of two horizontal bands placed above and below the central field. On the other hand, examination of the manuscript reveals a true inventiveness with regards to the numerous methods of construction of the double-page illuminations. Some even show a definite asymmetry, induced either by their decorative schema or by the differing dimensions of the two illuminated fields face to face. Many other factors also contribute to the uniqueness of each double-page illumination. Thus, the principal field of each page of the illumination may be accompanied, or not, by a border, which sometimes acts to combine the two halves of the double-page illumination, and sometimes to separate them. The elements employed within this border range from a simple fillet to a thick, richly illuminated band. Marginal vignettes also play their part in the richness of the decoration, as much by their variety as by their arrangement: they may take circular, semi-circular, triangular, mandorla or pyriform shapes, to name only some examples (fig. 10). Their relationship vis-à-vis the border ranges from full autonomy, to the sharing of a side, or a single point of contact. The division and ornamentation of the bands that carry the *Juz'* markers also contributes to the variations in decorative appearance. These could remain undivided, or alternatively could accommodate a cartouche containing the text, or subdivision into other decorative fields. Far from being uniform, the cartouches display a multitude of contours: for example, quadrilateral forms with arched domes, mandorlas, hexagons, or elaborate silhouettes. An example of a more elaborate outline is the cartouche on f. 98b, gilded against a red background, which possesses extremities consisting of three arches braced at right angles to each other (fig. 11).

Faced with this profusion of surfaces to decorate, the illuminator had to be able to deploy an unceasing creativity, working in both vegetal and geometric repertoires of ornamentation. The geometric mode was made to perform diverse functions: it could tile backgrounds with a red square pattern (or more unusually with a paving of circular arcs), develop linear framing devices such as the interlace dividing the main fields into three (fig. 12) or stripes fragmenting into polygons as in the frontispiece, or introduce filler elements such as medallions, small crosses or three-pointed forms.



Fig 7

Figure 7. Foliated Kufic script, f. 21b.

Figure 8. *Muhaqqaq* script, f. 395a.

Fig 8

In addition to many geometric elements, the ornament of the Gwalior Qur'an also called for an astoundingly diversified array of vegetal motifs. It is not surprising to find many arabesques throughout the manuscript (this term designates an abstract decorative form inspired by a vegetal prototype, with the possibility of infinite development in which leaves and stems are perpetually transformed from one into the other). The arabesque can provide a suitable background for text panels or central fields when it assumes the form of spiral foliage (fig. 9); in the same form it may also be used to fill certain bands or central fields; when comprised of a succession of demi-palmette medallions set in opposition to each other, it can be used to create strongly rhythmic borders. The borders may also be elaborated by an ornament of lotus petals arranged around a central circle. In this regard, it is interesting to note that arabesque and lotus petals are also found in the decorative borders of both Persian and Mamluk arts of the book. Many other constructions and motifs have also been employed throughout the Gwalior Qur'an to botanize this extraordinary garden: long sprays of leaves and flowers (fig. 13), rosettes, cotton blossoms (fig. 14) and lotus flowers (fig. 15) all appear. In the case of the latter, the illuminator again chose to express all his art in the variety of designs: some have only a few petals joining in the centre, others receive a large number of petals layered around the heart, and finally a third variety, with longer petals that are more slender in profile, closely follows Indian conventions. The vegetal repertoire of the manuscript also incorporates elements unknown in other regions of Islamic art (fig. 11); certain of these may come from Hindu or Jain decorative



Fig 9



Fig 10

Figure 9. Detail of a central field, f. 448b.

Figure 10. Marginal vignette, f. 98b.

Figure 11: Cartouche, f. 98b.

Figure 12. Two-strand interlace with filler elements, f. 290a.



Fig 11



Fig 12

traditions. This is true of some of the fine flowers with long petals, and also of the “tufts of grass” consisting of vertical stems with potbellied tips symmetrically arranged in a triangle.

### **A New Light on the Illuminated Book in the Pre-Mughal Period**

The abundant decoration which graces the pages of the Gwalior Qur'an is for the most part so singular that it remains impossible to determine direct sources of inspiration. Exhibiting a skilful blend of ornamental elements borrowed from Iran and the Near East during a period that is difficult to define accurately, but which in all probability must lie between the last quarter of the thirteenth century and the end of the following century, the illumination of the Gwalior manuscript bears the imprint of the Indian context, itself intensely complex and never neutral. This meeting of legacies, this recourse to distinct styles within a single work, is obviously not unique to the art of the pre-Mughal book: it exists elsewhere and in other artistic domains. Here, however, it is particularly marked, and the results never fail to surprise. In the combinations of motifs decorating the manuscript there figure some earlier elements, such as the borders of polychromatic petals, a form of “chinoiserie” that one finds in the ornamentation of Qur'an manuscripts executed in Baghdad more than a hundred years before the conception of our subject. It is obviously via other routes and intermediate landmarks that the manuscript has inherited the archaisms it displays. Everything suggests that the regional centres of Mongol and post-Mongol Iran maintained a close relationship with Sultanate India: the Indo-Islamic miniature painting of the first half of the fifteenth century, perhaps even a few decades earlier (in this context dates should always be advanced very cautiously), has close similarities with the production of secondary Iranian centres, such as Isfahan, which probably experienced intense



Fig 13



Fig 14



Fig 15b



Fig 15a

Figure 13. Example of a floral spray, f. 40b.

Figure 14. Cotton Blossom, f. 41a.

Figure 15a-b. Lotus flowers, f. 404b.



artistic activity at this time. It is from these same trends that pre-Mughal illumination, of which in truth we know very little, appears to have evolved, at least partially. To this may also be added other factors, like the arts of Egypt and Syria under Mamluk rule, both equally perceptible in miniature painting.

These diverse stylistic components that make up the grand puzzle of the painting of the pre-Mughal manuscript are for the most part recognisable, but it is much more difficult to decide on their exact origins. For example, the decoration of the Gwalior Qur'an contains motifs from the Mamluk repertoire alongside elements that are much older but which can also be found in Mamluk illumination; therefore, it is conceivable that the Indian manuscript inherited the oldest motifs through the intervention of Mamluk works. However, nothing can be claimed for certain, or at least the hypothesis cannot be extended to the whole of the decorative scheme, because the manuscript also includes different motifs and compositions entirely foreign to Mamluk art but widespread in Mongol Iran. Thus the manuscript is an ornamental puzzle, built from pieces assembled for the first time into an extraordinary painting.

In the richness of its decorations, the Gwalior Qur'an is an exceptional, brilliant masterpiece. The remarkable array of ornamentation that it contains offers an avenue for understanding several possible developments within Indo-Islamic illumination, and provides a fairly comprehensive range of what were most probably the sources of inspiration for the artists of pre-Mughal India. This is a rare piece, and an original one, but also very representative of the painting of this period.

It remains difficult to situate this work chronologically. If one imagines it at first as an avant-garde work, a forerunner of other pre-Mughal Qur'ans which would later be endowed with decorative schema of a similar type although less rich and inventive, then this hypothesis would merit further verification. The singular assembly of styles obviously raises many questions about the circumstances of production: who were the artists behind these paintings? Should we only see in their profoundly original character the mark of local artists encountering unfamiliar foreign models, perhaps gleaned from libraries? Or could it be a mature work, in which various heritages have been assimilated, a reinterpretation of more distant Indo-Islamic works, relatively confusing to an unaccustomed eye? And why would local artists decorate in a completely innovative, even avant-garde manner, a religious work, what is more, the Holy Book, in a Hindu fortress at the end of this deeply troubled century? Analysis of the Gwalior Qur'an always returns us to the riddle of its origins: the information provided by the colophon which ought to enlighten us, opens in reality an inquiry with vertiginous perspectives, to which only further research into the corpus of pre-Mughal Qur'ans can respond.

<sup>1</sup> This contribution is the result of collaborative research conducted under the framework of a programme directed by Éloïse Brac de la Perrière in the Laboratoire Islam médiéval – UMR 8167 (Paris, CNRS).

<sup>2</sup> For a long time, the only bibliographic references relevant to this manuscript were found in exhibition catalogues. In recent years books and articles have emerged, illuminating our understanding of this Qur'an: Arts Council of Great Britain, *The Arts of Islam* (London 1976), no. 635; Sheila Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh 2008), 386; Éloïse Brac de la Perrière, "Bihârî et naskhî-dîwânî: remarques sur deux calligraphies de l'Inde des sultanats", *Studia Islamica* 96 (2003), 81–93; *eadem*, *L'art du livre dans l'Inde des sultanats* (Paris 2008); *eadem*, "Du Caire à Mandu: transmission et circulation des modèles dans l'Inde des sultanats", in Francis Richard and Maria Szuppe (eds), *Écrits et culture en Asie centrale et dans le monde turco-iranien, Xe-XIXe siècles* (Paris 2008), 333–358; *eadem*, "Les tuniques talismaniques indiennes d'époque pré-moghole et moghole à la lumière d'un groupe de corans en écriture bihâri", *Journal Asiatique* 297/1 (2009), 57–81; Sheila Canby, *Princes, Poets and Paladins: Islamic and Indian Paintings from the Collection of Prince and Princess Sadruddin Aga Khan* (London 1999), no. 76; Saryu Doshi, *Pageant of Indian Art: Festival of India in Great Britain* (Bombay 1983), pl. 1; Toby Falk, *Treasures of Islam* (London 1985), no. 114; Jeremiah Losty, *The Art of the Book in India* (London 1982), no. 18; Sotheby's, 10 December 1974, lot 473; Anthony Welch, *Calligraphy in the Arts of the Muslim World* (Folkstone 1979), no. 75; Anthony Welch and Stuart Cary Welch, *Arts of the Islamic Book: The Collection of Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan* (Ithaca – London 1982), no. 47.

<sup>3</sup> The Tonwars were a Rajput clan of Chandravanshi Kshatriya lineage. Past Governors of Delhi, a branch of the clan settled in the region of Gwalior. During the reign of 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī (1296–1316), ruler of the Delhi Sultanate, the Rajput Bir Singh Deva declared his independence and founded the Tonwar kingdom of Gwalior, which remained rich and powerful until it was seized by the Sultan of Delhi, Ibrāhīm Lōdī in 1519.

<sup>4</sup> Brac de la Perrière, "Bihârî et naskhî-dîwânî", 81–93.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> David James, *Qur'ans of the Mamluks* (London 1988).

<sup>7</sup> Marie-Geneviève Guesdon and Annie Vernay-Nouri, *L'Art du Livre arabe, du Manuscrit au Livre d'Artiste* (Paris 2001), 205, no. 73; Mathilde Cruvelier, "Le Pentateuque de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, un manuscrit copte-arabe du VIIIème/XIVème siècle", *Annales Islamologiques* (forthcoming).



## The Arts of the Book

CATALOGUE ENTRIES 50 — 75

**We** know from historical accounts that great libraries multiplied throughout the Islamic Middle East from early times, under the dynastic patronage of the ‘Abbasids in eighth- and ninth-century Baghdad, the Buyids in tenth-century Shiraz, Rayy and other cities, the Fatimids in eleventh-century Cairo and the Spanish Umayyads in tenth-century Cordoba (among others), as well as the sponsorship of aspiring private citizens. These institutions harboured a wealth of literature on the sciences and humanities, and their widespread existence represents a consistent interest in the production, exchange and collection of fine books. Of course, collectors placed important value on the content of their books, seeking out the best possible edition or translation of an important text, with autograph copies (those written in the author’s own handwriting) accorded a very high premium. Bibliophile collectors also rated the material and craft qualities of the book itself: fine script by a renowned calligrapher, elegant binding, and the use of gold in illumination all added to value.

From the early fourteenth century, the production of luxury manuscripts was the collective endeavour of many technical and creative skills, and became the exclusive domain of a co-ordinated atelier, normally affordable only to a royal patron (cat. no. 65). The great courts of Iran, Ottoman Turkey and Mughal India hosted ateliers of painters and calligraphers, engaged in making books, and perhaps also disseminating designs to craftsmen working in other media. Paper-making, the production of pigments and inks, gold-sprinkling of folio margins, border ruling, and leather openwork binding all required the best technicians, while the calligraphers, illumination designers and figural painters were career specialists (cat. nos 50, 62). In the enclosed “hothouse” context of the royal *kitābkhāna* (“book-house”, or atelier), luxury books of poetry, history or science were sponsored by princes who also possessed extensive library collections: court artists may well have been permitted access to these holdings for inspiration and direction. Certainly, the tradition of Persian painting which runs from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century (at least) was consistently determined by a sense of its own lineage. From at least the late fourteenth century, typical princes were also poets, painters and calligraphers in their own right, trained as part of their childhood education. The reputation of a royal bibliophile therefore projects the image of a patron of great discernment, for whom artists of all media would need to stretch their skills in order to impress and succeed. To this context of competitive excellence belong virtuoso techniques, such as decoupé calligraphy (cat. no. 66), calligrams (cat. no. 69), and exquisite openwork bookbindings (cat. no. 73) as well as novelty visual effects, such as paper-marbling (cat. nos 54, 55).

## 50

## Scribal implements

Ottoman, eighteenth – nineteenth centuries  
 Thirteen pieces in various materials  
 Maximum length: 28.8 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00622  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 121 (no. 86);  
 AKTC 2007b, p. 123 (no. 86);  
 Makariou 2007, pp. 170–171  
 (no. 61); AKTC 2008a, pp. 182–183  
 (no. 66).

The primary tool of Islamic calligraphy, the *qalam* or reed pen, is also the name of one of the Suras of the Qur'an (no. 68, *Surat al-Qalam*). This Sura begins “*Nun. By the Pen, and what they write*”, underscoring the absolute primacy of writing in Islam. The reed pen is not a durable tool – it loses its point quickly and is discarded, hence the lack of surviving early examples – and each calligrapher would have had many reed pens at any one time, with different sizes and differently cut nibs used for different scripts (Blair 2008, p. 58). Although the chief criteria for a calligrapher's tools are quality and usefulness, it was sometimes felt that tools that were also beautiful objects contributing to the creation of beautiful writing. Throughout the centuries Islamic craftsmen have produced scribal implements in durable or even precious materials that are themselves works of art, including lavish wooden scribe's boxes (cat. nos. 64 and 51), inkwells and pen boxes in inlaid metal (cat. nos. 56, 57 and 58), and the well-known lacquer pen boxes of Safavid Iran (cat. nos. 64 and 75). This group of Ottoman scribal tools contains three pairs of steel scissors and a steel rule all inlaid with gold; a silver and gilt combined pen box and inkwell; two pen rests, one in ivory and the other in gold inlaid steel; a gold inlaid steel pen; a cylindrical pen holder painted with floral designs; two further inkwells, one in brass and the other in silver with a turquoise stud; and a lobed silver-gilt pot. The handles of one pair of scissors have been formed in an openwork inscription that reads as an invocation to God, “Oh Opener!”



## Scribe's cabinet

This wooden scribe's cabinet is a remarkable example of luxury woodwork production from late medieval Spain. The cabinet contains a lidded interior compartment that probably contained smaller writing implements. This piece has previously been attributed to the Nasrid era (1232–1492), but Rosser-Owen has recently argued that a similar chest in the Victoria and Albert Museum should be attributed to Mudéjar production (the name *Mudéjar* was given to Muslim communities remaining in Spain after the Christian conquest of Granada in 1492), on the basis of the characteristically Mudéjar “petalled star” motif that also figures prominently on this casket (Rosser-Owen 2010, pp. 87–88). She also suggests that the marked use of silver inlay on these caskets is characteristic of Spanish woodwork from the late fifteenth century onwards, as New World silver became available from Spain's colonies. As well as the “petalled star”, the decorative programme of this piece is dominated by large eight-pointed stars formed from interlocking squares; related motifs appear not only on other examples of Nasrid and Mudéjar woodwork, such as the smaller eight-pointed stars seen on another inlaid scribe's box recently acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, but also on earlier textiles from Islamic Spain (see Hillenbrand 1999, p. 190) and ceramics of the Nasrid era, such as the so-called “Alhambra vases” (Kenesson 1992, figs 4 and 20). Similar designs even appear on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ceramics from Morocco (Hakenjos 1988, figs 42 and 62), demonstrating the very long lifespan of this particular decorative motif in the Maghrib (Islamic West).

51

Probably Mudéjar Spain, late fifteenth or sixteenth century  
Walnut wood inlaid with bone, metal, wood and mother-of-pearl  
22 x 49 x 33 cm  
Inv.: AKMoo634  
Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 125 (no. 93); AKTC 2007b, pp. 128–129 (no. 93); AKTC 2009a, p. 94 (no. 46); AKTC 2009b, p. 94 (no. 46); AKTC 2010a, p. 96 (no. 47).



## 52

**Bronze lamp holder**

Umayyad Spain, tenth century  
 Cast bronze with openwork,  
 engraved and punched decoration  
 Height: 52.5 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00593  
 Publ.: AKTC 2008b; AKTC 2009a, p.  
 95 (no. 47); AKTC 2009b, p. 95 (no.  
 47); AKTC 2010a, p. 97 (no. 48).

This rare lamp stand, which blends architectural and animal forms with engraved vegetal and inscriptive decoration, has a remarkably similar counterpart in the David Collection (11/1987; see von Folsach 2001, p. 296). Both pieces are thought to have been produced during the reign of the Spanish Umayyads (756–1031), a dynasty that began after the 'Abbasids overthrew the reigning Umayyads in Damascus in 749–50. The only surviving prince of the deposed ruling house fled to the Iberian Peninsula, there to found a new branch of the Umayyad dynasty. The Byzantine culture that preceded Umayyad rule in Syria had already proved highly significant in the shaping of Umayyad arts, and the subsequent blending of Umayyad forms with the artistic practices of Spain as well as with later developments from elsewhere in the Islamic world makes the arts of Muslim Spain a fascinating area of study. Although thought to date from the tenth century, and thus the product of a Spanish Islamic culture that was well entrenched, this lamp holder still bears reference in its forms to Byzantine or possibly even Coptic liturgical metalwork (see for example Bénazeth 1988, fig. 11). On the other hand, the inscription on the base of the piece, which is a repetition of the Arabic word *baraka* (“blessing”) in a thickly drawn Kufic script, is a potent reminder of the Arab rule of medieval Spain.







## 53

Copied by 'Abdallāh ibn 'Abd al-Mawlā al-Nujūm  
Spain, dated 632 H / 1235 CE  
Ink and opaque watercolour on  
paper

19 x 26.5 cm

Inv.: AKM00513

Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 153 (no. 122);  
AKTC 2007b, p. 156 (no. 122); AKTC  
2009a, p. 94 (no. 45); AKTC 2009b,  
p. 94 (no. 45); AKTC 2010a, p. 96  
(no. 46).

### Manuscript of the *kitāb al-jughrāfiyya* (Book Geography) of al-Zuhri and the *Mi'a layla wa layla* (One Hundred and One Nights)

This manuscript contains the earliest extant copy of the *Book of Geography* by al-Zuhri (active in the mid-twelfth century), followed by an early version of the famous stories of the 'Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid, known in the West as the *Thousand and One Nights* and thought to have been adapted from a Persian source. Al-Zuhri was active in the mid-twelfth century, and the *Book of Geography* was written as a companion for a map of the world commissioned by the 'Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun. It provides a description of the known world at the time, including important new information about trade routes and commodities traded in the western Islamic world and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as giving information about the expansion of Islam. The second oldest copy of *The Book of Geography* is housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, and is dated to 1410. As regards the other text contained in the present volume, this early version of the *Hundred and One Nights* is incomplete – it ends at night 85 – but clearly establishes its antiquity within the larger tradition of the *Thousand and One Nights* tales. The manuscript is written in a form of the *maghribi* script used in Islamic Spain and North Africa from the late tenth century into the fourteenth century (Blair 2008, pp. 223–228; see cat. no. 27): note the prominent curving sublinear swoops so characteristic of this script. See the companion essay on this piece, written by Ulrich Marzolph.



## Verses written by Shāh Mahmūd Nishāpūri

54

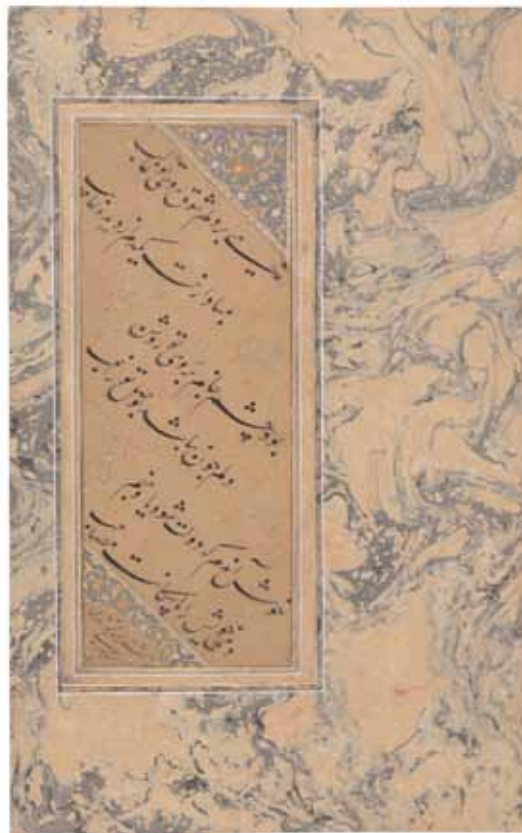
Extant album collections and dispersed album folios from the Safavid period reveal an overwhelming interest in collecting single-page drawings and paintings, designs and calligraphic samples. This example of Persian poetry was written and probably composed by Shah Mahmud Nishapuri (d. 1564/5), a well-known and respected scribe and poet. He was considered to be one of the three greatest Safavid calligraphers by the historian Qadi Ahmad, along with Sultan 'Ali Mashhadi and Mir 'Ali Shir Nava'i. Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–76) recognised Nishapuri's gift by bestowing upon him the *laqab*, or honorific title, of *Zarin Qalam* or "Golden Pen". The poet has signed his name in the left corner of this writing sample surrounded by vegetal ornament: *Mashqahu al-'abd al-khafir Shah Mahmud al-Nishapuri* ("the poor servant of the protector, Shah Mahmud al-Nishapuri, wrote it").

The text is as follows:

Oh my heart, overwhelmed by [its] yearning for you  
 May your face never be absent from the eye  
 My soul's eye becomes brightened upon [seeing] your face  
 When should my heart not wish to be joined to you?  
 Joyful would be that moment, if fortune becomes my friend, and I see,  
 For a moment, myself as a companion of your compassion!

The beautifully scripted letters are executed in black ink in an elegant and extremely clear *nasta'liq* that stands in contrast to the plain surface on which they appear; peonies and other flowers painted in ink and gold add a subtle embellishment. The poem was probably designed as a single page and may have been intended for a *muraqqa* or album of calligraphy. The blue- and gold-flecked album folio is decorated in the marbled technique described in cat. no. 55.

Safavid Mashhad, Iran, c. 1540  
 Ink, opaque watercolour and gold  
 on paper pasted on an album folio  
 of marbled paper  
 26.7 x 16.7 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00254  
 Publ.: Ackerman 1940, gallery 6, ms  
 9; Welch–Welch 1982, pp. 76–78  
 (no. 24); Falk 1985, no. 68; AKTC  
 2008a, pp. 186–7 (no. 68).





## A Portuguese doctor

The technique of marbling was a seventeenth-century Bijapur speciality, most commonly used to decorate the borders of album pages or the paper doublures of bindings, but it was also sometimes used as here, to form part of an image. In this instance the enveloping robe of the doctor and the surrounding plants are made from areas of brightly coloured marbling, while the image has been articulated by the painting in of the doctor's face, feet, hands and wide-brimmed European hat. To make marbled paper, pigments and ox gall are first set floating in a bath of water mixed with viscous size. The colours are swirled into a pattern as they lie upon the thick liquid, using a stylus or (as here) a toothed comb or raking implement. The paper is prepared by treating it with mordant (a substance used to set dye), to make the pigments stick better, and any areas of the page that the artist intends to leave blank are covered with a resistant gum. The paper is placed flat onto the oily surface and then lifted off to dry, with the marbled or feathered pattern printed onto it. Each marbled piece is a unique monotype and the technical skill required to create a miniature painting of this type is considerable. Beyond Bijapur, marbling was also widely used for creating whole sheets of patterned paper in Iran, Turkey and Mughal India.

55

Deccan Sultanate, Bijapur, India, c.  
1630  
Opaque watercolour, marbling and  
gold on paper  
Page: 26.6 x 17.3 cm; image:  
10.2 x 6.7 cm  
Inv.: AKM00196  
Unpublished



## 56

## Pen box

Northwest Iran or Anatolia, c. 1300  
 Brass inlaid with silver and gold  
 19.4 x 4.5 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00609  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 124 (no. 90);  
 AKTC 2007b, p. 127 (no. 90);  
 Makariou 2007, pp. 166–167 (no.  
 59); AKTC 2008a, p. 188 (no. 69);  
 AKTC 2009a, p. 179 (no. 134); AKTC  
 2009b, p. 179 (no. 134); AKTC  
 2010a, p. 179 (no. 136).

Elaborately decorated metalwork pen boxes and inkwells (see cat. nos. 57 and 58) are among the finest objects associated with writing in the medieval Islamic world. Pen boxes held both practical and symbolic functions at Islamic courts: they served as compact and often beautifully decorated containers for scribes' tools, but they could simultaneously represent a specific court office or the power of the state more generally (Melikian-Chirvani 1986, pp. 83–92). The Mamluk historian Qalqashandi (1355–1418), writing about his contemporaries in Mamluk Egypt, noted that “[g]overnment scribes use long [pen cases] with round ends, elegantly shaped” (Allan 1982, p. 90), and this example may well be the pen case of a government official. Profusely decorated with gold and silver inlay and engraved geometric, floral and vegetal designs, this luxury pen box is a very high-status object. This form of pen case normally has one or more small inkwells set into a compartment at the right hand end of the interior and a long pen box taking up the rest of the interior space: Allan has suggested that the origins of the form are to be found in early wooden examples, very few of which have survived because of the perishable nature of the medium (Allan 1982, p. 90).



## Inkwell

Along with the reed pen, the inkwell, called *dawat* (Baer 1981, pp. 203-4) or sometimes *mihbara*, is the quintessential attribute of the scribe and calligrapher. There is a *Hadith* that tells that the first thing Allah created was the pen, while the second thing was the *nun*, or inkwell (Taragan 2005, p. 32). In this inkwell, decorative form and function are in harmony with each other, as writing (*khatt*) is also the main ornament of this object. On the edge of the lid can be read, twice, *al-yumn wa al-baraka* (“good fortune and blessings”), and on the upper surface the inscription in Arabic, in Kufic script, reads *al-'izz wa al-iqbal wa al-dawla wa al-sa'ada wa al-salama wa al-'inaya* (“glory and prosperity and good fortune and happiness and salvation and divine grace”). Very similar phrases are arranged on the body of the inkwell over two levels in a cursive script with letters picked out in silver wire inlay. In this case, the Arabic inscriptions on the body repeat the formula beginning with *al-'izz* twice. The inscription bands of the body are arranged above and below a central frieze of figures whose silver inlaid bodies with wire arms echo the forms of the letters that surround them.

57

Khurasan, Iran, second half of the twelfth century  
 Moulded copper alloy, chased decoration inlaid with silver  
 Height: 8.5 cm; diameter 10.4 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00604  
 Publ.: Makariou 2007, pp. 162–3 (no. 57); AKTC 2008a, pp. 188–9 (no. 70); AKTC 2009a, p. 179; AKTC 2009b, p. 179 (no. 135); AKTC 2010a, p. 179 (no. 137).



## 58

## Inkwell

Khurasan, Iran, c. 1200  
 Brass inlaid with copper and silver  
 Diameter: 10.2 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00605  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 124 (no. 91);  
 AKTC 2007b, p. 127 (no. 91);  
 Makariou 2007, p. 164 (no. 58).

Like cat. no. 57, this inkwell bears several inlaid inscriptions giving repeated benedictory phrases in Arabic. On the lid and upper body the inscriptions are in a cursive script, while that on the lower body is in Kufic script. The Kufic inscription reads *b'l-yumn wa al-baraka wa al-surura wa al-dawla wa al-sa'ada wa al-salama wa al-'safiya wa al-kirama wa al-baqa lisahibihi*, “with good fortune and blessing and joy and wealth and happiness and well-being and health and generosity and long life to its owner”, and the cursive inscriptions are very similar in content. The body inscriptions have been inlaid with silver wire of a uniform thickness that matches that of the interlace design on the central panel, and subsequently the inscriptions appear almost as extensions of the complex knotted designs in silver and copper that lie between them. The inscription panels are interrupted by small roundels containing astrological symbols. Within the central panel of the body decoration, set into arch-shaped niches formed in reserve against the silver and copper interlace, are pairs of adorsed birds. The reserve niches alternate around the body with complex arch-shaped panels of the same proportions formed from interlace. There is some debate as to whether the form of this type of inkwell, with its cylindrical body and lobed domical lid, owes anything to architecture and architectural decoration: Melikian-Chirvani believes that these pieces with should be classed as “tower-shaped inkwells” and are designed to resemble a miniature domed monument (Melikian-Chirvani 1986, p. 73), but other authors have refrained from following this reading (for example Taragan 2005).



## Pen box

Unlike the later pen box of the same medium, cat. no. 75, this extremely fine Safavid lacquer pen box with sliding tray bears no figural imagery at all, and decoration is restricted to calligraphic inscriptions in *nasta'liq* and *naskh* contained within cartouches and set on a scrolling ground of flowers and leaves. The inscriptions are believed to name the artist and calligrapher Muhammad Ibrahim al-Katib al-Sultani (titles that mean he was scribe to the sultan) who worked at the court of Shah Suleyman. Another pen box held in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, is signed "Muhammad Ibrahim Qummi" and dated 1092 H / 1681–2 CE: this is believed to be the work of the same man, but without the titles he added later in his career (Ivanov 1979, p. 69). As well the artist's name, the inscription cartouches contain the *Nad-e 'Ali* prayer – a supplication to 'Ali (see cat. no. 69) – and other inscriptions praising 'Ali and the Prophet. Covering pasteboard or papier-mâché with varnish and painting to create lacquerwork had already been developed in Iran as a technique for making bookbindings under the Timurids (c. 1370–1507; see Blair–Bloom 1995, p. 66) and became increasingly popular during the Safavid period. Both high-quality bookbindings (cat. no. 131) and small decorative objects such as pen boxes were made during this period; the precise miniature painting style required for such a medium greatly suited the prevailing Safavid taste.

59

Safavid Iran, c. 1694  
 Papier-mâché with paint and  
 varnish  
 Length: 24.8 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo639  
 Unpublished





## 60

## Young man reading a book; attributed to Mirzā 'Alī

Iran, c. 1570–1574  
 Ink, opaque watercolour and gold  
 on paper  
 14.3 x 8.1 cm  
 Inv.: M191  
 Publ.: Welch–Welch 1982, pp.  
 84–88 (no. 27A).

In addition to this little painting, Mirza 'Alī (active 1520s – mid 1570s) is also thought to have been the painter of one of the pages from the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp displayed here, cat. no. 123. While that manuscript illustration was made relatively early in his career as a court painter, the present album miniature is thought to date from his last years, although the image of the elegant court dandy is one that he returned to again and again throughout his life. The elongation of limbs and torso that has taken place on many of Mirza 'Alī's later figures lends this rather foppish young man the appearance of a long-stemmed flower, an effect that is probably intentionally underscored by the poppy in his turban that droops under the weight of its own beautiful bloom. Thought by Welch to have been produced at the court of the exiled prince Sultan Ibrahim at Sabzivar, this painting has been interpreted by that author as a possible reminder of the comforts of reading poetry during the lonely period of exile, as well as providing a reassuring projection of glamour, wealth and the fashionable life (Welch–Welch 1982, p. 87). This piece is exhibited with the kind permission of Princess Catherine Aga Khan.



### Portrait of the Nawāb Mirzā Muhammad Bāqir and his young son Mirzā Husayn

The figure on the right in this painting is Mirza Muhammad Baqir, who holds a rosary in one hand and gestures to his son with the other. On the left sits the young Mirza Husayn, also gesturing, as if in conversation. On the ground in between them lie three books, a pen case with attached inkpot and a bulbous pot with flaring neck that may be an inkwell, although these objects are sometimes referred to by scholars as sand sprinklers or even spittoons. The scene is presumably one of instruction: the father may be teaching his son about the genteel arts of calligraphy. The painting is signed Mu'in Musavvir in the bottom centre and dated 1674, although there is some debate amongst scholars as to whether the whole piece can be ascribed to Mu'in Musavvir, with Kühnel (1942) suggesting that a drawing by this artist was retouched in India. Mu'in Musavvir is one of the key figures in the history of painting in seventeenth-century Iran (see also cat. no. 130); he was a student of the great court painter Reza 'Abbasi, and worked in the traditional mode of idealised portraits on single pages, as well as manuscript illustration. The international heritage of Safavid painting is evident in this painting: the finely-drawn cloud scrolls in the background of the image are a borrowing from Chinese art that first appeared in Iranian painting in the Mongol period, while the printed textiles depicted in Mirza Muhammad Baqir's robe and the cushions may well be imports from India (Canby 1998, p. 87).

61

Safavid Isfahan, Iran, dated 1674  
 Opaque watercolour and gold on paper  
 Page: 28.9 x 42.2 cm ; image: 13.4 x 24.1 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00081  
 Publ.: Welch 1972a, p. 225; Canby 1998, pp. 86–87 (no. 59); AKTC 2007a, p. 187 (no. 160); AKTC 2007b, p. 183 (no. 160).



## 62

**Artist seated with his drawing board beneath a tree**

Safavid Isfahan, Iran, c. 1600  
 Opaque watercolour and gold on  
 paper  
 Page: 35.8 x 23.4 cm;  
 image: 22.1 x 11.6 cm;  
 Inv.: AKM00192  
 Unpublished

Although this man is not holding a pen or a paintbrush, his attentive pose resembles a well-known portrait painted in 1673 by Mu'in Musavvir (see also cat. nos. 61 and 130) of the artist Reza 'Abbasi working at a portrait painting, now held in Princeton University Library (Farhad 1990, fig. 8). The current painting is characteristic of the refined style of calligraphic line drawing that gathered momentum in the second half of the sixteenth century, and was markedly different from the opaque bright colours of earlier manuscript illustrations. Single-page paintings and tinted drawings of one or two figures also came increasingly into vogue as completed works for collection in albums. The genre often took as its subject matter handsome court dandies, old dervishes or courtly figures apparently inspired by the artist's surroundings. This drawing of a fellow artist (or perhaps a calligrapher?) reminds us that the "recording observers" were also part of the court community. Genre portraits of this type were already known earlier in the sixteenth century, but this form of portrait presents a virtuoso opportunity for the artist, and the genre continued to develop through the seventeenth century with increasingly mannered and self-conscious results. As the fashion took off, high-ranking court artists were able to sell individual drawings to members of the public.





## 63

## An Ottoman official

Istanbul, Turkey, c. 1650  
 Ink, opaque watercolour and gold  
 on paper  
 Page: 29 x 17.9 cm;  
 image: 22.3 x 13 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00217  
 Publ.: Welch 1978a, p. 19;  
 Welch–Welch 1982, pp. 36–8 (no.  
 8); Falk 1985, no. 112; AKTC 2009a,  
 p. 139 (no. 97); AKTC 2009b,  
 p. 139 (no. 97); AKTC 2010a, p. 141  
 (no. 99).

This full-length portrait of a large, grey-bearded gentleman wearing a bulbous lilac Ottoman turban and fur-lined robe and carrying a manuscript bound in blue tooled and gilded leather probably represents an Ottoman court official. As well as the book he carries as a symbol of learning or possibly of office, his free hand, held up in a gesture suggesting he may be about to speak, and his stern expression and grand appearance all bespeak high rank. The setting of the image recalls earlier portraits of Ottoman sultans seated against a tiled background with a broken arch overhead framing the space. This portrait was once mounted in an album – the verso carries fourteen lines of text, including lines from the *Gulistan* of Sa'di – and may date to the reign of the Ottoman sultan Mehmed IV (r. 1648–1687). Copies of portraits of a similar type and composition were also adopted as illustrations for reports and memoirs of the Ottoman court published by Europeans in the seventeenth century, appearing amongst detailed descriptions of the Ottoman administration.





## 65

**The Kitābhāna**

Folio (195r) from the *Ākhlāq-i Nasiri* (Ethics of Nasir) by Nasir al-Din Tūsī

Mughal Lahore, India, c. 1595

Ink, opaque watercolour and gold on paper

23.9 x 14.2 cm

Inv.: AKMoo288

Publ.: (Including other folios from the same manuscript)

Welch–Welch 1982, (no. 58);

Brand–Lowry 1985, p. 59; Canby 1998, (nos 92–3); Joseph M. Dye in Ziad 2002, pp. x, 146; AKTC 2007a, pp. 122 and 168 (nos 87, 88 and 141); AKTC 2007b, pp. 124 and 167 (nos 87, 88 and 141); AKTC 2008a, pp. 184–185 (no. 67).

This painting comes from an illustrated manuscript of a text that enjoyed particular popularity at the court of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, the *Akhlāq-i Nasiri* or “Ethics of Nasir” (O’Hanlon 1999, p. 58). The text is a philosophical treatise on ethics, social justice and politics by the thirteenth-century Persian philosopher and scientist, Nasir al-Din Tusi (1201–1274), and was originally composed around 1235. This folio, which has been inscribed at the bottom with a name that may tentatively be read as Sanju, illustrates a court atelier in which scribes, artists and craftsmen are at work. The figure kneeling in the garden is engaged in papermaking, while inside the pavilion or open-fronted hall a young painter on the left hand side bends over his drawing of a horse, a scribe dips his *qalam* in the inkpot while conversing with an illuminator or painter who sits across from him on the dais, and seated above them is a young man in a patterned golden robe and an older man. These last figures have been described as a scribe taking dictation (Brand–Lowry 1985, p. 58), but his costume and the pose of the servant behind him suggest that the young man may in fact be a prince taking instruction in calligraphy from an older master. Although the young man’s page is already filled with slanted lines of calligraphy his pen seems to have returned to the first line, possibly illustrating the moment of creation of a header line in a more elaborate script. This image is a rare and valuable record of the Mughal *kitabkhana*, a library-workshop tradition from Iran that was adopted by the Mughal rulers. In the *kitabkhana* scribes, illuminators, artists, bookbinders and papermakers worked alongside each other to produce illustrated manuscripts for their imperial patron, and this rich and tranquil image reflects the social status of the artisans of the *kitabkhana* (Brand–Lowry 1985, p. 58). See the essay by Francis Richard in this catalogue.





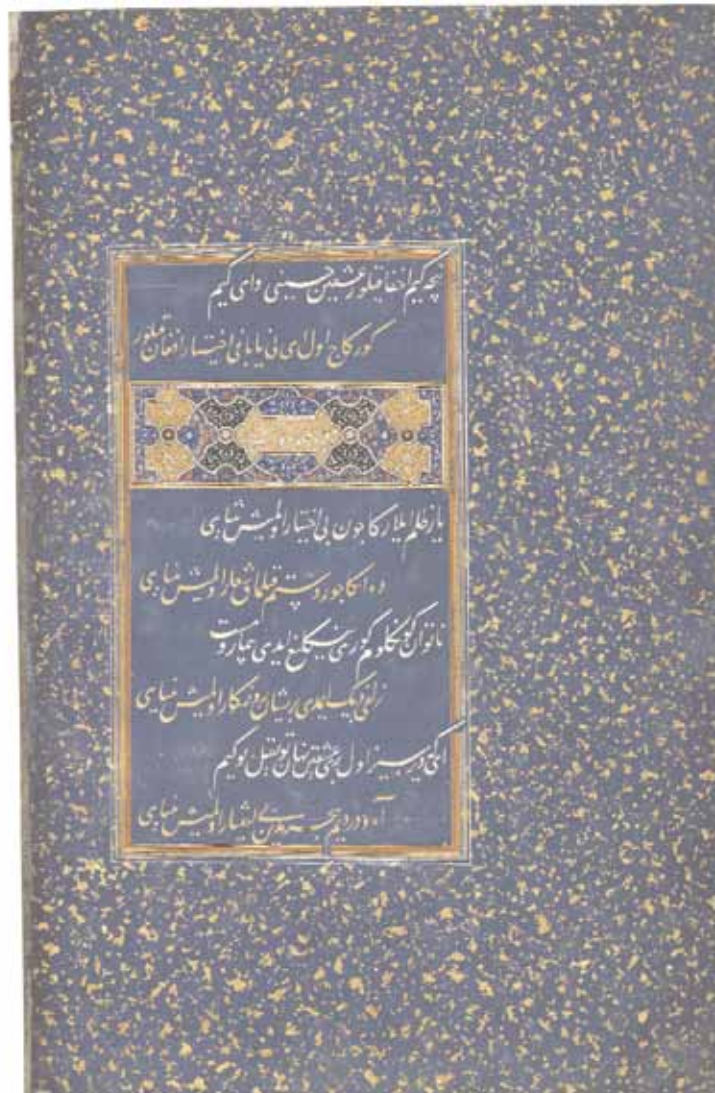


## 66

## Decoupé calligraphy

Folio from a dispersed *Diwān* of  
Sultan Husayn Bayqara  
Timurid Herat, Afghanistan  
c. 1475–1490  
Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
on paper  
page: 23.7 x 15.2 cm;  
text: 12.8 x 7 cm  
Inv.: AKMoo227  
Publ.: Welch 1972b, p. 17; Falk 1985,  
(no. 35).

The beautiful *nasta'liq* script of this folio is not written onto the page but pasted to it using the virtuoso technique of cut-work calligraphy, or *qit'a*. The letters have been individually cut from white and gold paper and glued to the indigo page, creating a dramatic and arresting composition with the light-coloured letters standing out like stars on a night sky, an effect which is echoed by the gold speckling of the surrounding dark blue leaf. Decoupé calligraphy such as this, and the related but rarer technique whereby a sheet of contrasting colour is mounted behind one from which letters have been cut out, became popular at the Timurid courts. This page comes from a dispersed manuscript of the poems of the Timurid Sultan Husayn written in Sultan Husayn's native Turkic tongue, Chaghatai. Further folios from the same manuscript are held in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (73.5.599a–f), the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul and other museums and private collections. Although this folio is unsigned, Timurid cut-work is often associated with Shaykh 'Abdallah of Herat, who was named in contemporary sources as a master of the craft (Blair 2008, p. 56), and his name appears within one of the Istanbul fragments of the manuscript (Schmitz 1993, n.p).



## Page of calligraphy with decouped borders

Like cat. no. 66, this piece demonstrates the artistic possibilities of the cutwork technique. In this case the script itself has been executed in an orthodox neat *nasta'liq* script in black ink on cream paper, but the surrounding borders have been taken over by a complex decouped pattern of flowers and cypress tree, amongst which a lion, bird, fox and crane are poised. The cream-coloured decouped paper has been glued onto a blue ground, again utilising the striking colour contrast between dark and light that was so justly beloved of workers in cut paper. Although by no means as fine as the cut letters of cat. no. 66, this example of the technique demonstrates its effective use as an all-over design, and the artist of this piece has created a pleasing border composition. The lion and bird have both been articulated by the use of tiny hatched cuts to indicate feathers on the bird's breast, and fur on the lion's neck, chest and foreleg. The technique of cut-work is sometimes suggested to derive from panels of filigree on bookbindings, with minutely cut paper patterns coming to replace leather for web-like filigree work (Schmitz 1993, n.p.): an excellent example of filigree bookbinding decoration can be seen on the Safavid binding shown in cat. no. 73.

67

Safavid Iran, c. 1550-1620  
Ink, opaque watercolours and gold on paper  
Page: 26 x 17.1 cm;  
text: 12.6 x 7.5 cm  
Inv.: AKM00330  
Unpublished



## 68

## Page of calligraphy

Safavid Iran, c. 1600  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
 on paper  
 Page: 14.7 x 21.9 cm;  
 text: 12.1 x 19.2 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo247  
 Unpublished

The juxtaposition of large and small scripts was a popular device not only in Qur'an manuscripts (see cat. no. 29) but also in calligraphic specimens such as this, designed to show off the calligrapher's proficiency and simultaneously to create new and dynamic compositions through the interaction between the scripts. The top and bottom boxes of this leaf contain inscriptions written in *thuluth*, while the smaller inscription in the middle compartment has been executed in *naskh*. This arrangement exemplifies the calligraphic principle whereby certain pairings of cursive script were considered appropriate companions for each other: *thuluth* and *naskh*, but also *muhaqqaq* and *rayhan*, and *tawqi* and *rayhan*. Here, the larger *thuluth* inscriptions stand out strongly against their backgrounds of finely-executed *saz* leaf scroll illumination – the upper panel executed purely in gold while the lower has been picked out in gold, orange, blue, green and lilac – while the central line of *naskh* has been set into a cloud-like reserve field of plain paper which keeps it from being subsumed by the heavier decoration of orange, pink and blue flowers on a gold ground which surrounds it.

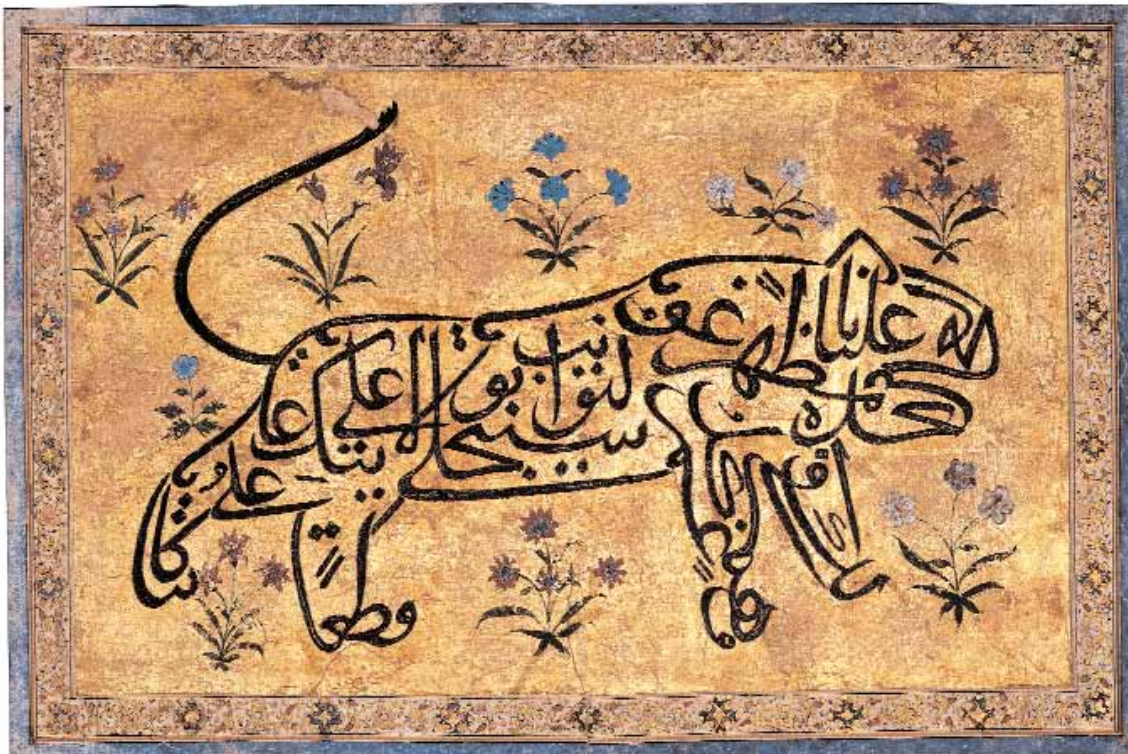


## Calligram of a lion

The technique of creating zoomorphic images using calligraphic forms was practised from at least the fifteenth century in Iran (Blair 2008, p. 449). Designed as a sort of visual and mental challenge to show off the skills of the scribe and test the skills of the reader, such pieces were normally intended for inclusion in an album. Calligrams of this type rely on well-known phrases and sacred names in order to be readable: deciphering the text is often aided by shape of the image, which may act as a prompt. Here the text reads as follows: *Nadi 'aliyyan muzhir al-'aja'ib. Tajidahu 'awnan laka fi al-nawa'ib. Kullu hamm wa ghamm sayanjali bi-wilayatika, Ya 'Ali, ya 'Ali, ya 'Ali. Qata'ahu 'Ali katib [?].* (“Call upon ‘Ali, the revealer of miracles! You will surely find him a helper to you in crisis. Every care and sorrow will pass through your companionship, Oh ‘Ali, oh ‘Ali, oh ‘Ali. ‘Ali the scribe cut it out [?]”). Here the *Nad-e 'Ali*, a famous invocation to the fourth caliph and first Imam ‘Ali, has been rendered into the shape of a lion, which is itself one of the symbols of ‘Ali, “the Lion of God”. This design closely follows a very famous example of the *Nad-e 'Ali* prayer written in the form of a lion by Mir ‘Ali Haravi in the mid-sixteenth century, mounted in the Shah Mahmud Nishapuri album (Blair 2008, pp. 449–450). That Safavid example, in which the lion form has been cut out and mounted on a separate sheet of paper, also includes the punning signature *qata'ahu 'Ali katib* (“‘Ali the scribe cut it out”). The same signature appears to have been repeated in this version (an alternative reading is given in Makariou 2007, no. 51), although the piece has not been cut out, and the signature has presumably been transposed from the celebrated earlier model. Although the piece has strong Shi'i resonances in both text and imagery there are also Sunni versions of this composition, including a Turkish version dated 1913 now in the Khalili Collection, London (Rogers 2002, pp. 278–279).

69

Mughal India, seventeenth century  
Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
on paper  
12 x 19.2 cm  
Inv.: AKM00526  
Publ.: Makariou 2007, p. 146  
(no. 51).



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي  
خَلَقَ الْمَوَدَّاتِ  
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي  
خَلَقَ الْمَوَدَّاتِ  
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي  
خَلَقَ الْمَوَدَّاتِ



## Dish with lion

Before the 1550s, the Ottoman court had relied on an eclectic court culture that drew from both the Iranians to the east and the Europeans to the west. By the mid-sixteenth century, however, these foreign artistic models were synthesized into a classical Ottoman style, which coincided with the replacement of Persian with Ottoman Turkish as the language of the court. This new artistic vocabulary was immediately recognisable in the medium of ceramics, where a selection of floral, vegetal, geometric and Chinese-inspired elements (arriving via the Timurids in fifteenth-century Iran) were painted under a transparent glaze onto a hard white frit body. While the floral designs on this dish are fairly typical of this distinctive new genre, the depiction of a lion with black-bordered blue and thick red painting is much more unusual. The dating of this dish is based on sources that attest to a move of ceramic production from Istanbul to Iznik, where potteries thrived from their close proximity to wood and other materials needed for kilns and ceramic production.

70

Ottoman, Iznik, c. 1560  
Fritware with polychrome  
decoration under a transparent  
glaze  
Diameter: 36.5 cm  
Inv.: AKMoo811  
Publ.: AKTC 2010a, p. 144 (no. 102).



## 71

Colophon from a dispersed *Shahnama* manuscript

Signed by the scribe Murshid ibn al-Din Wazzān  
 Iran, probably Shiraz, dated  
 Shawwāl 887 H / October 1482 CE  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
 on paper  
 Page: 32.5 x 21.5 cm;  
 text: 22.2 x 15.7 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00050  
 Unpublished

This colophon comes from a dispersed *Shahnama* manuscript dated 1482; the Aga Khan Museum also holds five illustrated folios from the same manuscript (see cat. nos. 116 and 117 in this catalogue; and AKM00045, 00046 and 00049). Two further leaves from the same manuscript are held in the Metropolitan Museum in New York (McAllister 1943). The colophon information is contained within the inverted triangle of text on the left hand page and gives the name of the scribe Murshid ibn al-Din Wazzan along with the date Shawwal 887 H. A colophon is a section of text normally included at the end of a manuscript that may give a statement about the author, scribe or painter, the date and place of completion, the name of the patron, and so forth: colophons are vital to the reconstruction of the history of the arts of the book. Beyond the colophon, the placement of the other text of these two pages within a network of horizontal and diagonal panels creates a trellis-like effect, emphasized by the delicate floral motifs that decorate the triangles between text panels. In some cases the device of the angled text panel, also seen in other pages from the same manuscript (cat. no. 116), may have been used as a means of moderating the pace of the story, enabling the scribe to have certain points in the text fall where he wanted them to upon the page. This was presumably necessary when the relevant text was threatening to run away from a pre-ordained space for a related image, or to create a more pleasing aesthetic effect at the end of the text run.



## Bookbinding

This piece shows the typical form of a traditional Islamic bookbinding: the pointed flap, which is an extension of the back cover (the left hand side of an open book), is tucked under the front cover when the book is closed to protect and preserve the pages, and can also have a secondary use as a bookmark. While the interior side of this binding bears gilt filigree ornament over a polychrome painted ground similar to that of cat. no. 73, the external side has gilded and painted decoration depicting a fantastic landscape of trees, birds, deer, foxes and monkeys. The composition is very similar on each of the two rectangular panels, indicating that the artist was probably working from a template of some sort. It is clear from the animal imagery that the binding was not originally part of a religious manuscript, but it may well have enclosed a poetic text: a sumptuous, much earlier copy of the *Mathnawi* of Jalal al-Din Rumi created in 1482 for Sultan Husayn (also the patron of cat. no. 66) is decorated on the doublures with similar scenes of monkeys, deer, birds and foxes amongst trees and flowers, although in the earlier binding these are executed in leather cut-outs rather than the lacquer that has been employed here.

72

Safavid Iran, c. 1750–1830  
 Leather, gilded and painted, varnish  
 19.7 x 12.4 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00392  
 Unpublished



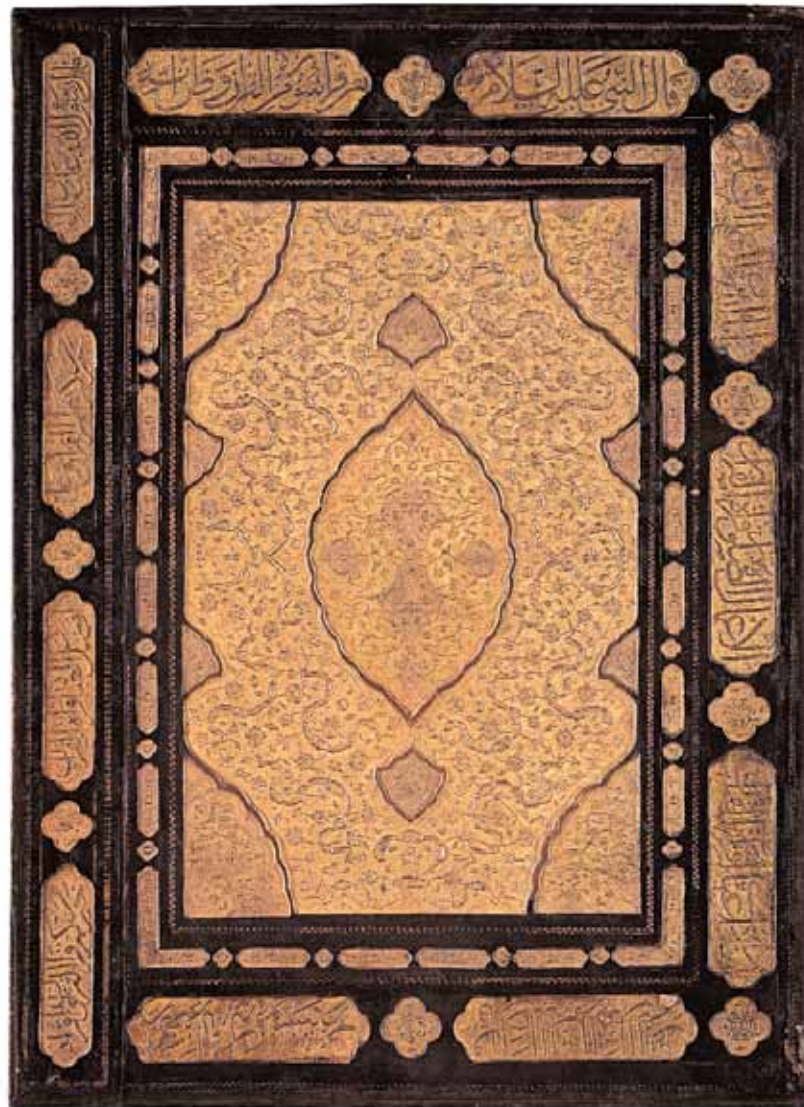


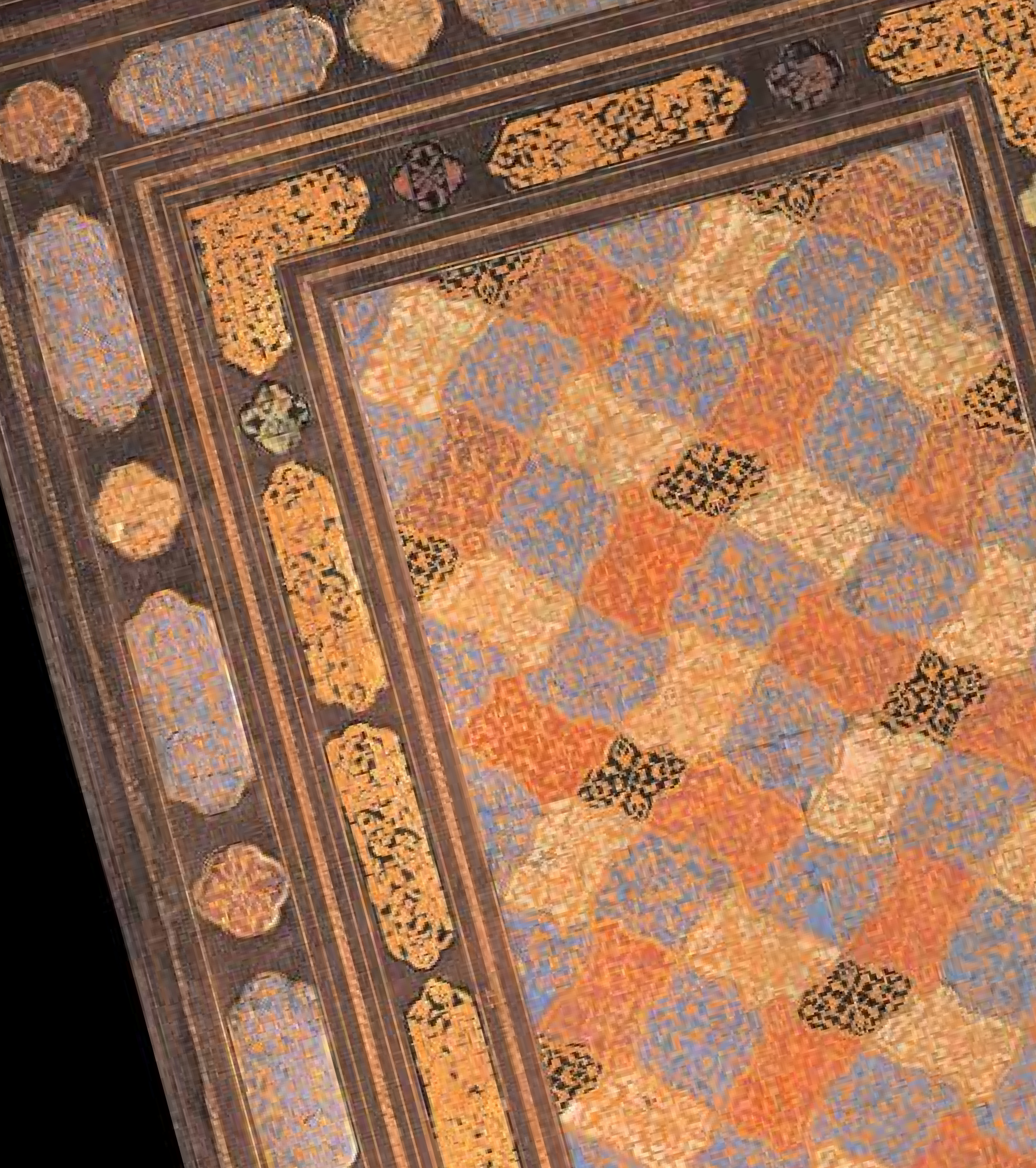
## 73

## Large bookbinding

Safavid Iran, c. 1540–1580  
 Morocco leather with gilded, painted, stamped and filigree designs  
 50.5 x 36.7 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00386  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007b, p. 40 (no. 12).

This Safavid binding is an unusually large and very luxurious example of the type. Safavid leather binding production reached a high point in the sixteenth century, partly as a response to the demand for deluxe royal and commercial manuscripts and bindings. Here, the extraordinarily fine gilded filigree ornament of the inner face that lies over a polychrome painted ground of red, white, blue and black scalloped lozenges and diamonds recalls the gilt settings of jewels and lends a rather lapidary appearance, as of inlaid precious stones, to the painted surface underneath. The borders continue with the same filigree designs, presenting cartouches of gold filigree over blue and green in the outer border and black over gold and red in the inner: the overall impression is one of richness and precious materials. Characteristic of Safavid covers from the mid sixteenth century onward, the roots of this style belong with the fifteenth-century Timurid and Turkmen bookbinders of Shiraz (Tanındı in Thompson–Canby 2003, ch. 6). The outer side of this binding bears eleven cartouches inscribed in *thuluth* script with two *Hadith* of the Prophet that discuss the importance of reading the Qur'an, leaving little doubt that this impressive binding was originally used for a large manuscript of the Qur'an.







## Manuscript of the Qur'an

This manuscript of the Qur'an, written in Arabic with interlinear Persian translation, was commissioned by Sadr A'zam Mirza Aga Khan. The calligraphy and illumination are both noteworthy, but one of the most striking aspects of this volume is the very fine lacquer binding, with delicately executed images of a rose bush and iris on gold ground. Lacquerwork was, as has already been discussed in relation to cat. no. 75, an extremely popular and highly regarded decorative medium under the Qajars, and there was a strong taste for pictorial art at the time as is evinced in these images of flowers. The style of painting shown here is meticulously observational, and yet still occupies the realms of botanical fantasy in the perfect composition and flawless blooms of each plant, to say nothing of the huge, carefully poised butterfly that perches on the rose. Although links are often made between Qajar art and the influence of European oil paintings, the style of such images also appears to owe a considerable debt to earlier Mughal botanical paintings, such as cat. no. 157, themselves thought to derive in part from European botanical illustrations.

74

Qajar Iran, 1853  
Ink, gold and opaque watercolour  
on paper; lacquer binding and  
doublures  
30.8 x 19.4 cm  
Inv.: AKM00493  
Unpublished



## 75

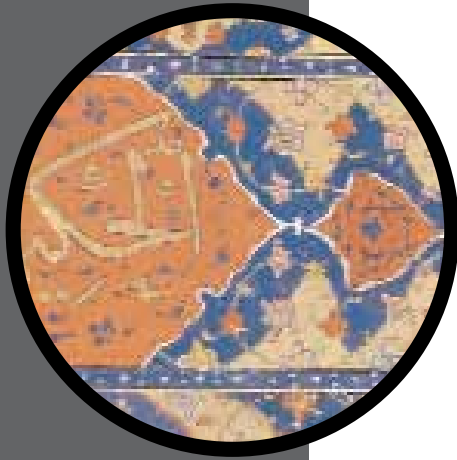
Signed "Isma'il"  
 Qajar Iran, dated 1282 H / 1865 CE  
 Papier-mâché, painted and  
 lacquered  
 Length: 26.8 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo643  
 Publ.: Robinson 1989, figs 1 and 10;  
 Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1990, vol. 1, p.  
 457; AKTC 2007a, p. 111 (no. 78);  
 AKTC 2007b, p. 112 (no. 78);  
 AKTC 2008a, pp. 166–7 (no. 61);  
 AKTC 2009a, p. 224 (no. 169);  
 AKTC 2009b, p. 224 (no. 169);  
 AKTC 2010a, p. 240 (no. 186).

## Pen box

The visual arts flourished under Qajar patronage in the nineteenth century, and lacquer painting, which had already found popularity in Safavid Iran (see cat. no. 59), became in turn a celebrated medium of the Qajar period. The scribe's pen box, which had since the medieval period been a vehicle for decoration of the highest quality (cat. no. 56), continued to be a privileged site for ornament and large numbers of highly decorated lacquer pen boxes have survived, although few are as elaborate and finely painted as this example. Unlike the medieval versions, this pen box is opened by sliding out the central section from one end like a drawer. In a central cartouche on the top of the outer body there is an image of the Qajar ruler Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848–1896) holding court; elsewhere there are images of legendary kings from the *Shahnama*, scenes from the poems of Sa'di and Nizami, and portraits of famous Sufis. This pen box was painted by the Qajar *naqqash bashi* (chief painter) Muhammad Isma'il, who was active in the mid-nineteenth century and is well known for his meticulous, minutely painted lacquerwork. On the inside of the drawer the penbox contains a miniature self-portrait of the artist wearing an astrakhan hat and holding a paintbrush, while a couplet above and below the image identifies the artist as Isma'il.







## The Illuminated Text

CATALOGUE ENTRIES 76 — 93

**The** visual embellishment of a written text may take two forms: firstly, calligraphy – that is, by writing out the text in an imposing and elegant style, suitable for the tone of the given textual content. A second means of embellishing text is to decorate it with illumination: written words can be encased within a designed panel, or surrounded by a decorative rubric, both of which use colour and pattern to indicate or celebrate the importance of the text. Used selectively, illumination therefore serves for visual impact in book design, guiding the reader’s eye towards significant or useful sections of text – such as chapter-headings (cat. no. 81), image-captions, the start of an official letter (cat. no. 91), or the opening and closing pages of a volume. This navigational aspect is beautifully expressed in Qur’an illumination, which highlights Sura-headings, *Juz’* openings (cat. no. 76), verse-markers, points of prostration, and the beginning of the Qur’an itself. Typically, the first two Suras are arranged as a spectacular double-page illumination, with the short text of *Sūrat al-Fātiha* on one side, and the start of the longer *Sūrat al-Baqara* on the other (cat. no 78).

The style and quality of illuminated designs are important indicators of a manuscript’s provenance and level of patronage, and significantly add to the value of a book as a treasured art object. A full page of illumination, containing little or no text, allowed the *mudhahhib* or illuminator to showcase the extent of his repertoire and training (cat. no 77). Sometimes known as a “carpet page”, a page of illuminated pattern also demonstrates the classic interrelationship between different media in Islamic art, where the same or similar designs may recur in wooden door-panels (cat. nos 84, 85), leather bookbinding, and indeed carpets, produced in the same cultural milieu.

A wide range of designs was available to artists, including spiralling plant scrollwork, Chinese motifs such as curling clouds and lotus-flowers, knotwork, and radiating geometric shapes forming star-polygons (cat. no. 77), interlocking circles or other complex formations. Animal subjects could also enter the repertoire of (non-Qur’anic) manuscript illumination, such as the *waqwaq* design – a scrolling plant sprouting with animal heads. These elements were usually contained and organised within an overall framework, such as oblong cartouches, interlocking geometric units or a central medallion format. Medallion designs, based around a central ellipse within a vertical rectangular frame, became more standard in Iranian book design (cat. no. 79), and consequently also Ottoman Turkey and Mughal India.



## 76

**Juz' Fifteen of a Mamluk Qur'an**

Mamluk Egypt, c. 1350, with late nineteenth-century leather binding  
 Ink, opaque watercolour and gold on paper  
 38.3 x 29 x 1.6 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00279  
 Publ.: Welch 1978b, pp. 146–149 (fols 1v–2r, 7v).

The division of the Qur'an into thirty nearly equal parts or *Juz'* has a spiritual function – the complete Qur'an can be read by reading one *Juz'* each day over the course of a month, a practice associated with the holy month of Ramadan – but it also has a practical role. With folios of this size, and with so little text per page, a single complete volume would be impossibly large to make or use, and individual *Juz'* volumes are an elegant solution to the question of creating a suitably elevated form for the sacred text. This Mamluk *Juz'* containing Sura 17 (*al-Isra'*) and Sura 18 (*al-Kahf*), verses 1–74, is written in deep black ink upon a very pale cream folio: throughout much of the manuscript the illumination is kept to a minimum, allowing the dramatic contrast between the black *muhaqqaq* script of the main text and the empty space surrounding it to come to the fore. Mamluk *muhaqqaq*, the script of choice for large luxury Qur'ans produced under the Mamluks from the 1320s, is a rather elongated script: according to Mamluk chroniclers, it should be written with a straight *alif* that should measure nine or ten rhombic dots (the smallest square that can be created with the point of the reed pen) high, making it taller than classical Iranian *muhaqqaq* (Blair 2008, p. 319). The illuminated frontispiece of this *Juz'* (fol. 1v–2r) employs a complex gold frame, gold header texts reserved on blue and margin medallions as well as green and blue palmette designs within the framed text, and yet the overall effect remains tranquil, due in part to the large amount of breathing space left around the illuminated area.

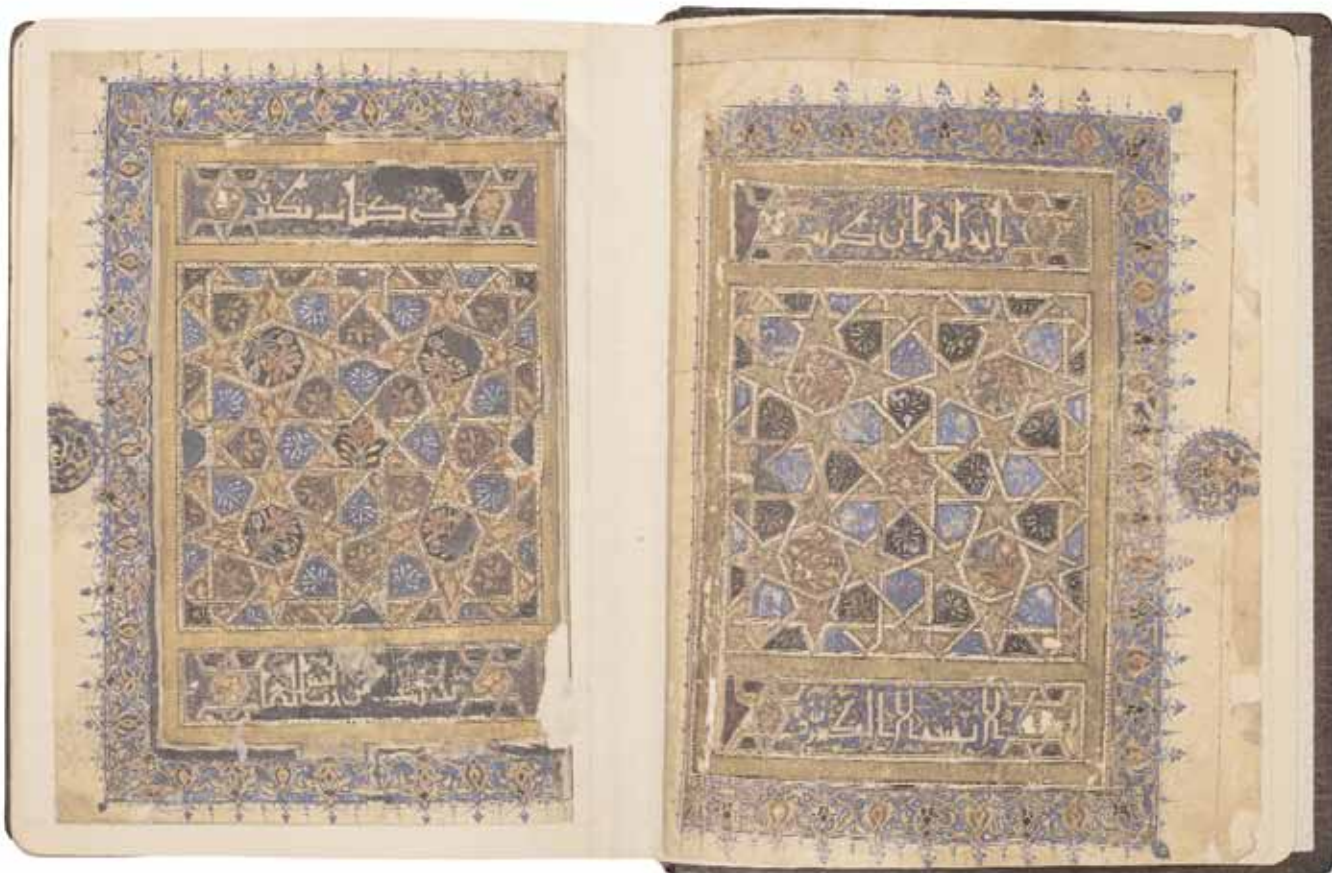


## Tughluq Qur'an manuscript

Work on this magnificent manuscript was most likely started in the Tughluqid capital at Delhi and interrupted by the invasion of Timur in 1398–1399; the Tughluq court then fled to Gwalior Fort, south of Agra, where the manuscript's colophon was completed. The Tughluqs ruled a vast stretch of India during the fourteenth century and have been described as "the strongest and most creative state in the history of the Delhi Sultanate" (Welch–Crane 1983, p. 123), particularly in light of their architectural achievements, although they are often overlooked because of the longstanding dominance of the Mughals in art histories of Islamic India. Like cat. no. 31, this manuscript has been written in *bihari* script, a script form unique to pre-Mughal India, and bears interlinear translations in Persian as an aid to non-Arab Muslims who could not read the original Arabic text. This extremely rich and colourful manuscript contains not only a large number of double-page illuminated *Juz'* markers and Sura headings, but also a spectacular double frontispiece of interlace strapwork designs decorated with jewel-like colours and gold, and text boxes with white Kufic inscriptions on a blue ground. It is a rare and important example of Tughluq luxury manuscript production, and is one of the first documented manuscripts to use *bihari* script (Blair–Bloom 1995, p. 161). See the essay written by Eloise Brac de la Perrière, Frantz Chaigne and Mathilde Cruvelier in this catalogue.

77

Completed by Mahmūd Sha'bān  
 India, Gwalior Fort, dated 7 Dhu'l-  
 Qa'da 801 H/ 21 July 1399 CE  
 Ink, opaque watercolour and gold  
 on paper with twentieth-century  
 leather binding  
 29.8 x 23.5 x 6.6 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00281  
 Publ.: London 1976, no. 635 (fols  
 40v–41r); Welch 1979a, no. 75 (fols  
 40v–41r); Welch–Welch 1982, no.  
 47 (fols 1v–2r); Blair and Bloom  
 1995, p. 161 (fols 1v–2r); Canby  
 1998, no. 76 (fols 189v–190r).



## 78

Copied by Shaykh Hamdallāh ibn Mustafā

Ottoman, c. 1500

Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper

39.2. x 26.5 cm

Inv.: AKM00263

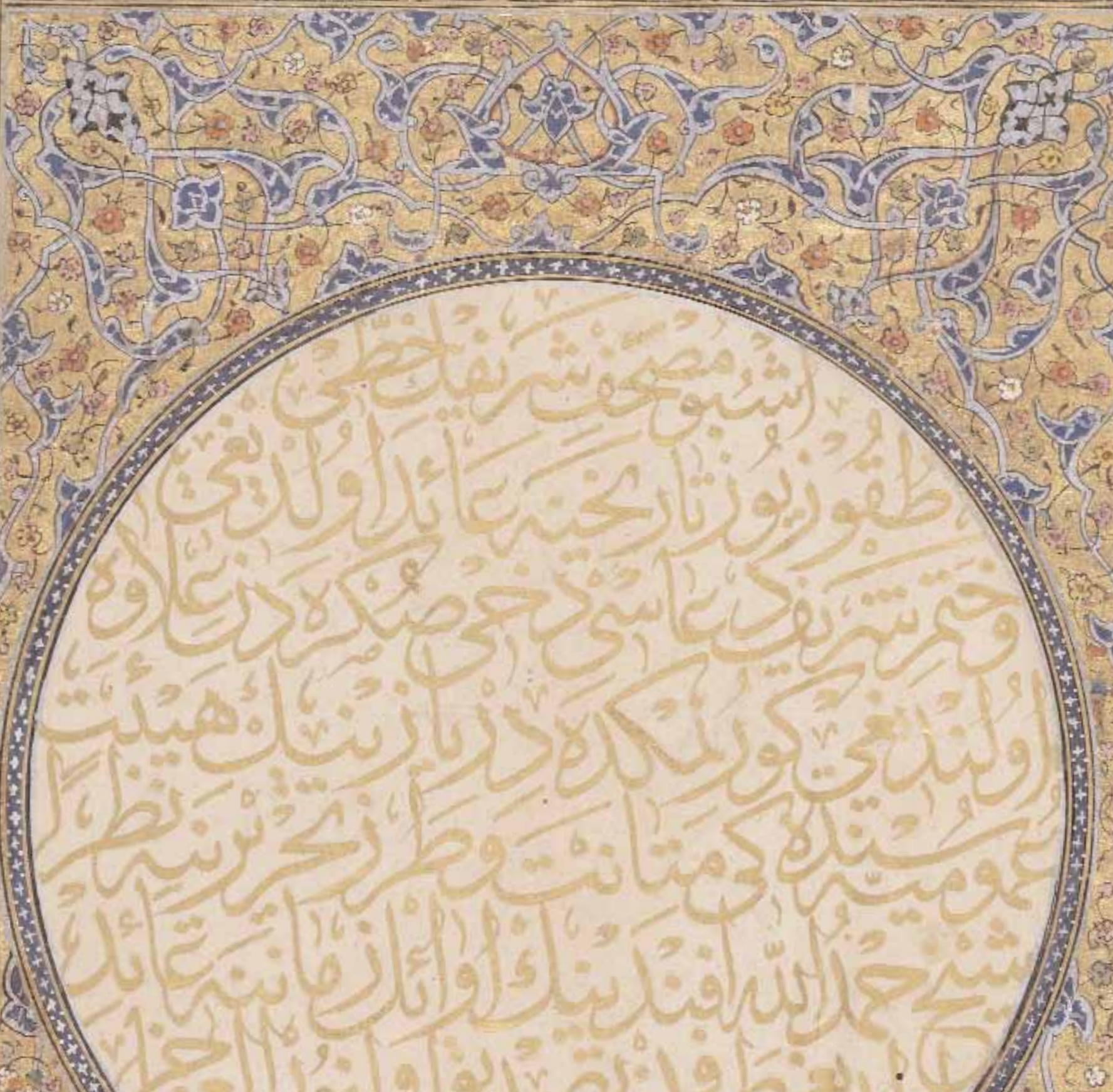
Publ.: Welch 1972b, p. 43; Lings and Safadi 1976, no. 129; Welch 1979a, pp. 92–93; Welch–Welch 1982, pp. 27–29 (no. 4); Falk 1985, p. 133 (no. 105); Geneva 1988, no. 37; AKTC 2007a, p. 45 (no. 15); AKTC 2007b, p. 42 (no. 15); AKTC 2009a, p. 42 (n. 11); AKTC 2009b, p. 42 (no. 11).

### Manuscript of an Ottoman Qur'an

This manuscript, one of the greatest of the early Ottoman Qur'ans, bears a colophon in Ottoman Turkish on folio 278r that identifies the scribe as Shaykh Hamdallah ibn Mustafah (see facing page). Shaykh Hamdallah (c. 1436–1520), a native of Amasya, was a calligraphy tutor to the future Ottoman sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512), accompanying the new sultan to Istanbul upon his accession. Although the patron of this manuscript is not named, it is entirely possible that a work of this quality was produced for Bayezid II himself. A renowned calligrapher, Shaykh Hamdallah revised the six canonical scripts of Yaqut (*naskh*, *rayhan*, *muhaqqaq*, *thuluth*, *tawqi* and *riqa'*), and nearly fifty manuscripts of the Qur'an, numerous books of prayers and single sheets of religious texts are credited to his hand. This elaborate double frontispiece includes *Surat al-Fatiha* and *Surat al-Baqara* verses 1–4, written in *naskh* script, a speciality of Shaykh Hamdallah and a standard script for Ottoman Qur'ans. The decorated text panels and complex frame of this frontispiece are a spectacular demonstration of Ottoman Qur'an illumination: in a palette dominated by gold and blue, twining vegetal motifs picked out in various colours, geometric patterns and cartouches are set against a highly elaborate outer frame of margin medallions with pendentive palmettes and projecting linear decoration.



سَلَامِينَ آمِينَ يَا رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ بِرَحْمَتِكَ يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ

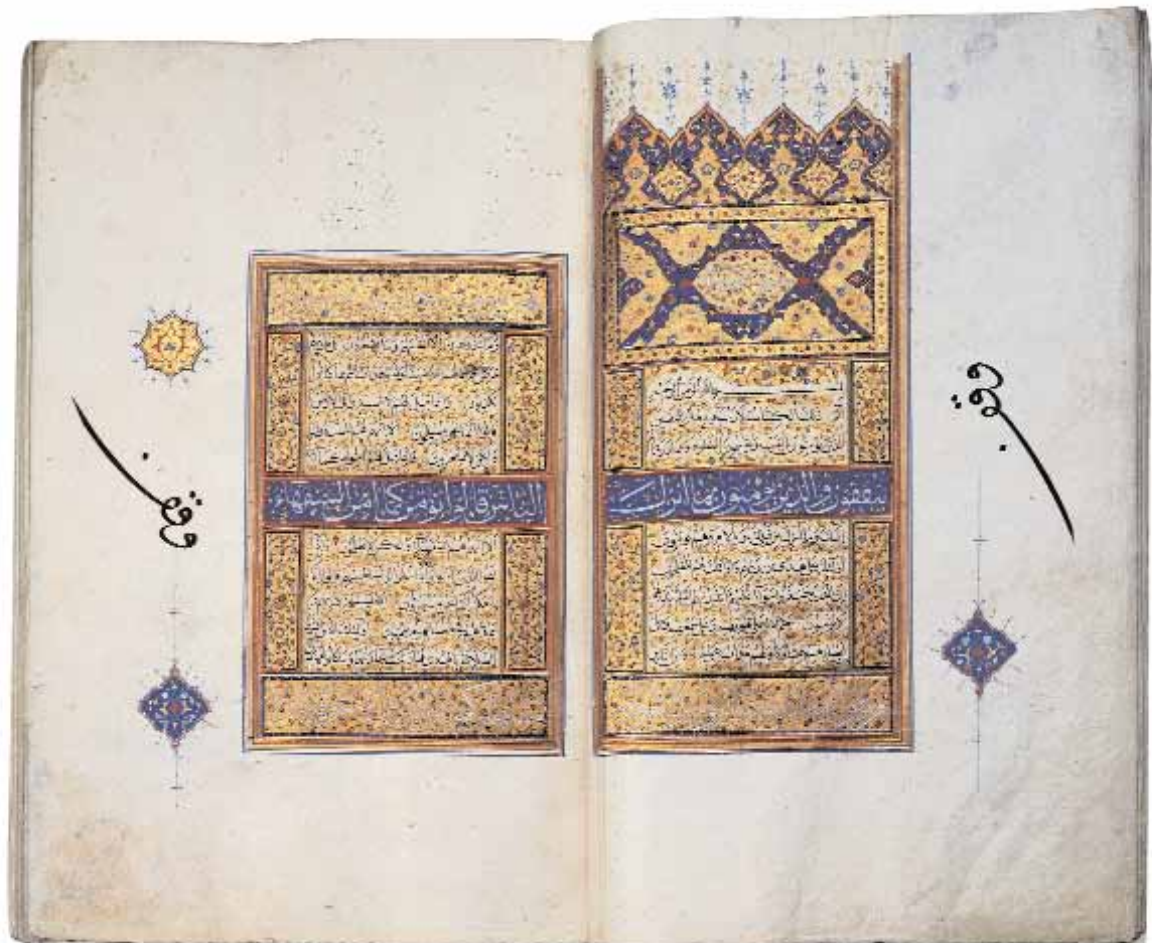


## 79

## Manuscript of a Safavid Qur'an

Copied by 'Abdallāh Shirāzi  
Safavid Iran, Qazvin or Mashhad, c.  
1550–1565  
Ink, opaque watercolours and gold  
on paper  
Pages: 37.4 x 24.4 cm; binding: 38 x  
25 x 6.5 cm  
Inv.: AKM00485  
Publ.: Makariou 2007, pp. 124–5  
(no. 42); AKTC 2009a, pp. 42–43  
(no. 12); AKTC 2009b, p. 42 (no.  
12); AKTC 2010a, pp. 44–45 (no.  
13).

As with many sixteenth-century Qur'ans we do not know the exact date of this copy, but the calligrapher, or perhaps more likely the illuminator, 'Abdallah Shirazi, has signed his name at the end of the last Sura. There are two sixteenth-century miniaturists known to us with this name; one of these worked in the scriptorium of Shah Tahmasp in Qazvin around 1550–1560, and the other in the scriptorium of Sultan Ibrahim Mirza (c. 1540–1577). The latter painter died at Mashhad, and it is entirely possible that this manuscript was copied and illustrated in the royal workshops of either Qazvin or Mashhad. In addition to a large and ornate double-page illumination of the first Sura, *al-Fatiha*, this manuscript bears a smaller but perhaps even more striking pair of illuminated pages marking the first verses of the second Sura, *al-Baqara* (2: 1–17), shown here. Dominated by gold but also exploiting the dramatic potential of white and gold on dark blue, the glittering richness of this illumination is enhanced rather than overbalanced by the heading panel on the right hand page, with its four vertically projecting cartouches shaped like fantastic arches. In the margins the word *waqafa* has been written twice in black ink, signalling that the manuscript was eventually a charitable gift (*waqf*) given by the Ottoman sultan Selim II (r. 1566–1574) to the mosque he founded in Edirne.

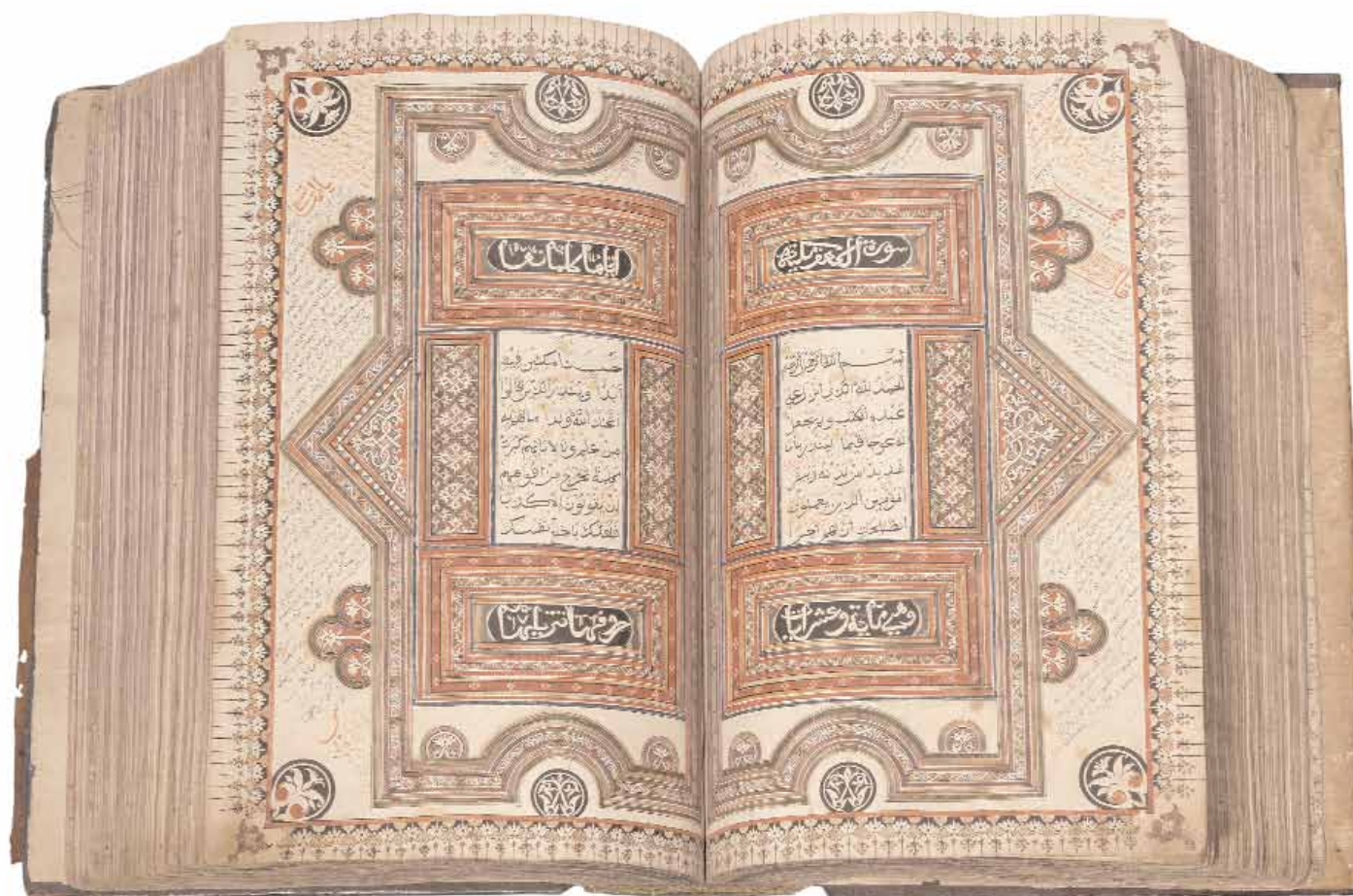


## Manuscript of a Sulawesi Qur'an

Although the spread of Islam reached the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia as early as the thirteenth century, the earliest surviving manuscripts of the Qur'an from the region date to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Blair 2008, p. 559). The present example has been identified as one of only three core exemplars in a group of eighteen Qur'ans illuminated in the so-called "Sulawesi geometric style". The extraordinary amount of artistic variation among these manuscripts and the fact that they reflect far-flung provenances has led some scholars to propose the existence of a diasporic artistic idiom rather than one restricted to south Sulawesi, a small part of the Indonesian island chain. Qur'ans of this group are characterized by double-pages of illumination with frames formed from geometric shapes, which mark the beginning, end and middle of the text, as well as by a bold colour palette dominated by red, black and yellow. The Aga Khan Museum's Qur'an is one of the most impressive of this group; it survives in its complete form and contains a full and illuminated colophon identifying its scribe and attesting to a production in south Sulawesi. It was written in a script of *thuluth* type with explicatory glosses added in *naskh*. In addition to three double-pages of illumination marking the beginning, middle and end of the Qur'anic text, the volume contains a variety of verse markers, roundels and illuminated frames marking various divisions of the text, making it particularly fine example of nineteenth-century Indonesian manuscript production. On this double-page illumination, marking the start of *Surat al-Kahf* (18: 1–6), the Sura heading appears in an oval cartouche painted in white on black, set amongst a larger, rather architectonic framework of expertly illuminated panels. See Annabel Teh Gallop's essay in this catalogue.

80

Copied by Ismā'il ibn 'Abdallāh of Makassar  
Indonesia, Sulawesi Island, Laiyaka (probably Laikang), dated 25 Ramadan 1219 H / 28 December 1804 CE  
Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on European paper, with leather binding  
35.5 x 20 cm  
Inv.: AKM00488  
Publ.: AKTC 2007b, p. 38 (no. 10); AKTC 2008b; AKTC 2009a, p. 46 (no. 15); AKTC 2009b, p. 46 (no. 15); AKTC 2010a, pp. 48–49 (no. 16).



## 81

**Illustrated and illuminated manuscript of the *Khamsa* of Nizāmi**

Qajar Iran, c. 1820–1860  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
 on paper  
 29.9 x 18.5 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo38o  
 Unpublished

Magnificent illumination was not restricted to religious texts. This manuscript of the *Khamsa* of Nizami, a collection of five stories written in Persian in the twelfth-century by the poet Nizami, shows the high regard in which this classical Persian text was still held in the Qajar period, and indeed is still held today. As well as twenty-one miniature paintings illustrating such well-known episodes as Khusraw spying Shirin as she bathes in a stream, and Majnun seated with animals in the wilderness, the manuscript has been decorated with three double-pages of illumination including this frontispiece. The header decoration of the frontispiece clearly harks back to the highly formalized cartouche compositions of Safavid manuscript illumination, themselves related to designs seen in both carpets and bookbindings. However, the irregularities and asymmetry seen in certain elements of this late example (compare for example the respective shapes and positions of the two quatrefoil medallions in the boxes projecting from the lower edge of the main illuminated panel) bespeak a tradition that is losing ground, as well as a manuscript made for the open market rather than for a royal patron. The earlier dominance of blue and gold has here started to give way to reds and pinks, the frequent use of pink in Qajar art marking a departure from earlier Iranian palettes.



## Chinese Qur'an Anthology

The history of Islam in China begins in the early Islamic era, but the earliest surviving dated Qur'an manuscript produced in China is considerably later, dating from 1401. The earliest Chinese Qur'ans can be shown, through details of script type, layout and materials, to be closely related to and presumably derived from manuscripts made in Iran and Iraq around the same time, and mistakes in the texts of these first manuscripts suggest that the copyists were not entirely proficient at writing in Arabic (Blair 2008, p. 373). By the time the Qur'an anthology exhibited here was made, a form of Arabic script unique to China had been developed, known as *Sini*, which simply means "Chinese". Although this word can be used to describe any distinctly Chinese forms of Arabic script, Chinese calligraphers argue that it properly refers to a rounded, flowing script, often with great variation between thick and thin strokes, which is ultimately descended from *thuluth*. As a script it is often used for striking set pieces, such as the calligraphic phrase *Subhan Allah* ("Glorious is God") seen on the right hand page of this finispiece, rather than for long texts. The round Chinese good luck symbol embedded into the middle of the star illumination on the opposite page is a further reminder of the long relationship between China and Islam.

82

China, late eighteenth or early nineteenth century  
Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper  
27.5 x 20 cm  
Inv.: AKMoo824  
Unpublished





## 83

**Carved marble capital**

Spain, Umayyad period, c. 950–970  
Marble

Diameter: 28 cm

Inv.: AKM00663

Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 177 (no. 153);

AKTC 2007b, p. 177 (no. 153);

Makariou 2007, pp. 90–91 (no. 28);

AKTC 2009a, p. 93 (no. 44); AKTC

2009b, p. 93 (no. 44); AKTC 2010a,

p. 95 (no. 45).

This composite capital is similar to those made for the reception room of ‘Abd al-Rahman III in the royal palace at Madinat al-Zahra, six kilometres from Cordoba, which date from between 342 and 345 H (952–953 and 956–957 CE). However, Makariou suggests that this example appears to have been carved from a cubic piece of marble, 28 cm on each side, while the Madinat al-Zahra capitals are not quite cubic (Makariou 2007, pp. 90–91). The basic form of the Corinthian capital, which can be found in numerous Roman ruins in Spain, still holds firm in this capital, but the dissolution of the surface into a lacy network of deeply carved vegetal interlace shifts the aesthetic into a new “Islamic” realm and demonstrates a new conception of the decorative potential of marble: monumentality has given way to a penetrable surface. During the events of 1010 and the plundering of Madinat al-Zahra the same year, and later during the collapse of the caliphate of al-Andalus in 1031, objects were disseminated. Even architectural elements were affected; for this reason, many Andalusian capitals were reused elsewhere, even in Italy.



### Pair of carved doors with geometric and floral motifs

One of the finest examples of its kind, this pair of doors bears many of the characteristic features of Timurid woodcarving: deep, intricately carved floral designs inherited from the preceding Ilkhanid period and strongly reminiscent of Chinese lacquer wares; geometric patterns formed by the tongue-and-groove technique; plaited borders; and panels inscribed with prayers and information about patrons, craftsmen, and dates of production. The inscription (in Persian) reads '*Amal-i Ustad ibn' Hajji Najjar ba ... Darvish 'Ala'uddin, kar dar sana-yi 892*' ("The work of Ustad ibn Hajji Najjar with the ... of Darvish Ala'uddin, work [completed] in the year 892"). This has been written on the cross bars between the main panels in a deeply carved and well-measured cursive script of the *thuluth* type, which was widely used for architectural inscriptions in the Timurid period. Mazandaran in northern Iran is known for its dense forests and sweetly scented *khalarj* wood, and several examples of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century woodcarvings have been found in that region (Bronstein 1938, p. 2622). This pair of doors is unusually well preserved, to the extent that traces of the original paint that would have decorated the carved surface can still be seen in places.

### 84

Timurid Iran, possibly Mazandaran,  
dated 892 H / 1487 CE  
Carved wood  
189 x 106 cm  
Inv.: AKM00707  
Publ.: AKTC 2008b, no. 16;  
AKTC 2009a, p. 188 (no. 144);  
AKTC 2009b, p. 188 (no. 144);  
AKTC 2010a, pp. 188–189 (no. 149).



## 85

## Polychrome doors with Sufi inscription

Safavid Iran, seventeenth or eighteenth century  
 Carved and painted wood  
 161 x 84.5 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00704  
 Publ.: AKTC 2008a, pp. 148–149 (no. 53); AKTC 2009a, p. 210 (no. 159); AKTC 2009b, p. 210 (no. 159); AKTC 2010a, pp. 226–227 (no. 171).

These well-preserved polychrome painted doors are carved with floral and foliate motifs in high relief, enclosed within a strapwork design of oblong star-shaped frames and bordered by narrow and shallow-carved bands of vegetal scrolls and rosettes. Their floral ornamentation is typical of the dynamic vegetal designs of the Safavid period and may have originated in manuscript illustration and bookbinding: the external cover of AKM00386 shows a different but related style of fine, tightly packed floral decoration. Two frames located above the star-shaped panels on each door include an inscription in Persian, carved against a background painted in green and surrounded by a stylized vine scroll painted in red. The script is a complex and unusual cursive type with certain letters intercalated into the elongated vertical shafts of others. The text, which speaks on behalf of the person who would stand on the outer side of the doors, plays on the symbolic and ambiguous role of the doorway as both pragmatic point of entry to a room and as the emblem of a more spiritual portal, endowing the doors with a significance characteristic of the Sufi-inspired aspects of Safavid culture. The inscription in Persian reads *Dar-i shadi bi-sahib-i in bab / bighushay muffatih al-abwab*, “Doorman, open the door of happiness for the owner of this door.” While their original context remains unknown, these doors might have once opened into a Sufi hospice or a palatial retreat.

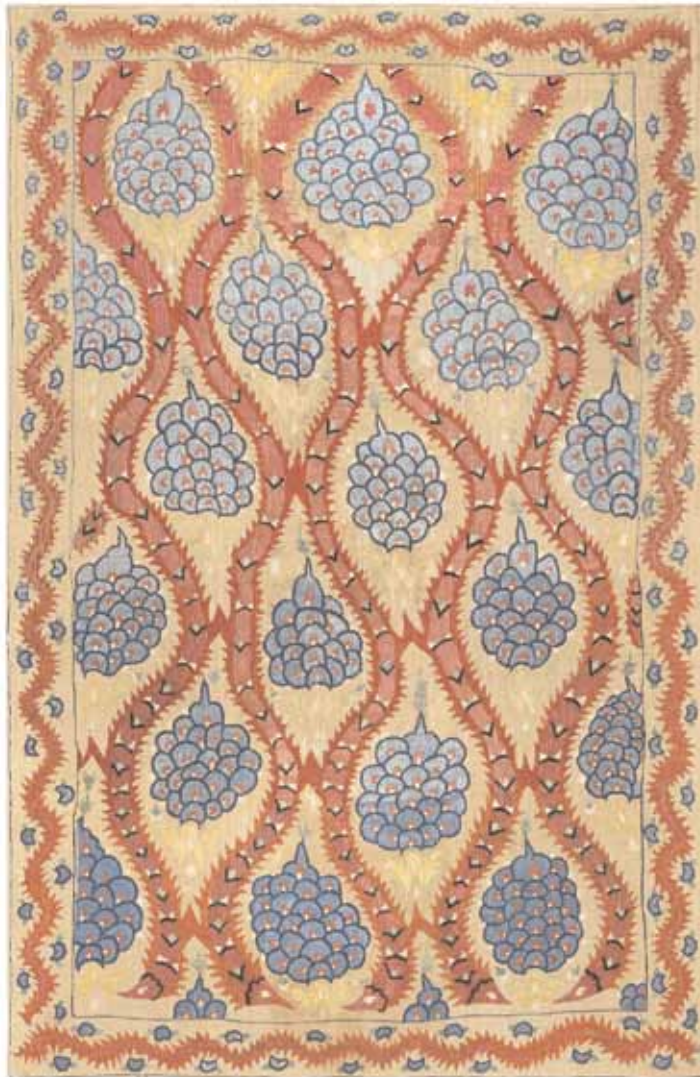


### ***Yorgan yüzü* (quilt cover)**

The pattern on this *yorgan yüzü* (quilt cover) recalls typical seventeenth-century Ottoman designs on silk and velvet textiles. Whereas earlier patterns include lattice designs enclosing floral motifs, later ones such as this panel show wavy parallel stems or vines, some of which form ogival frames around grape clusters or tulips. The designs may also reflect Florentine tastes resulting from cultural exchanges with Italy. Unlike carpets, which traded almost exclusively from East to West, the commercial flow of textile goods appears to have taken place in both directions between Italy and the Islamic Middle East by the sixteenth century, with large quantities of both low-quality and fine cloth being exported from Italy, particularly Venice, to the Islamic world (Denny 2007, p. 183). The duration and scale of the commercial exchange of textiles between the Ottoman world and the port city of Venice has led to an interpenetration of motifs that makes it at times difficult to place textiles from this period, with Venetian luxury fabrics executed to Ottoman taste, while Islamic silks were sold as luxuries in Europe.

**86**

Ottoman, late seventeenth century  
Embroidered linen  
209 x 137 cm  
Inv.: AKM 00706  
Publ.: AKTC 2008b, no. 7; AKTC  
2009a, pp. 144–145 (no. 104); AKTC  
2009b, pp. 144–145 (no. 104); AKTC  
2010a, p. 143 (no. 101).

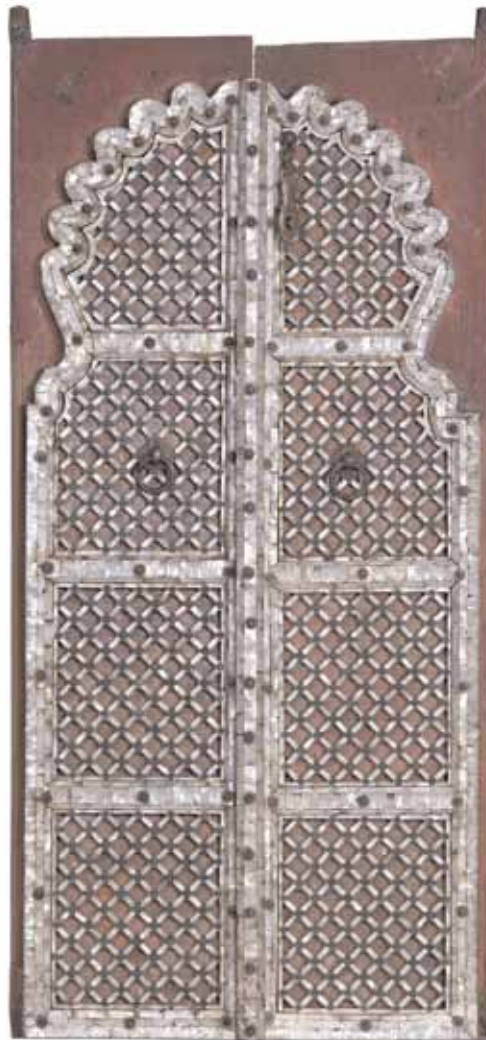


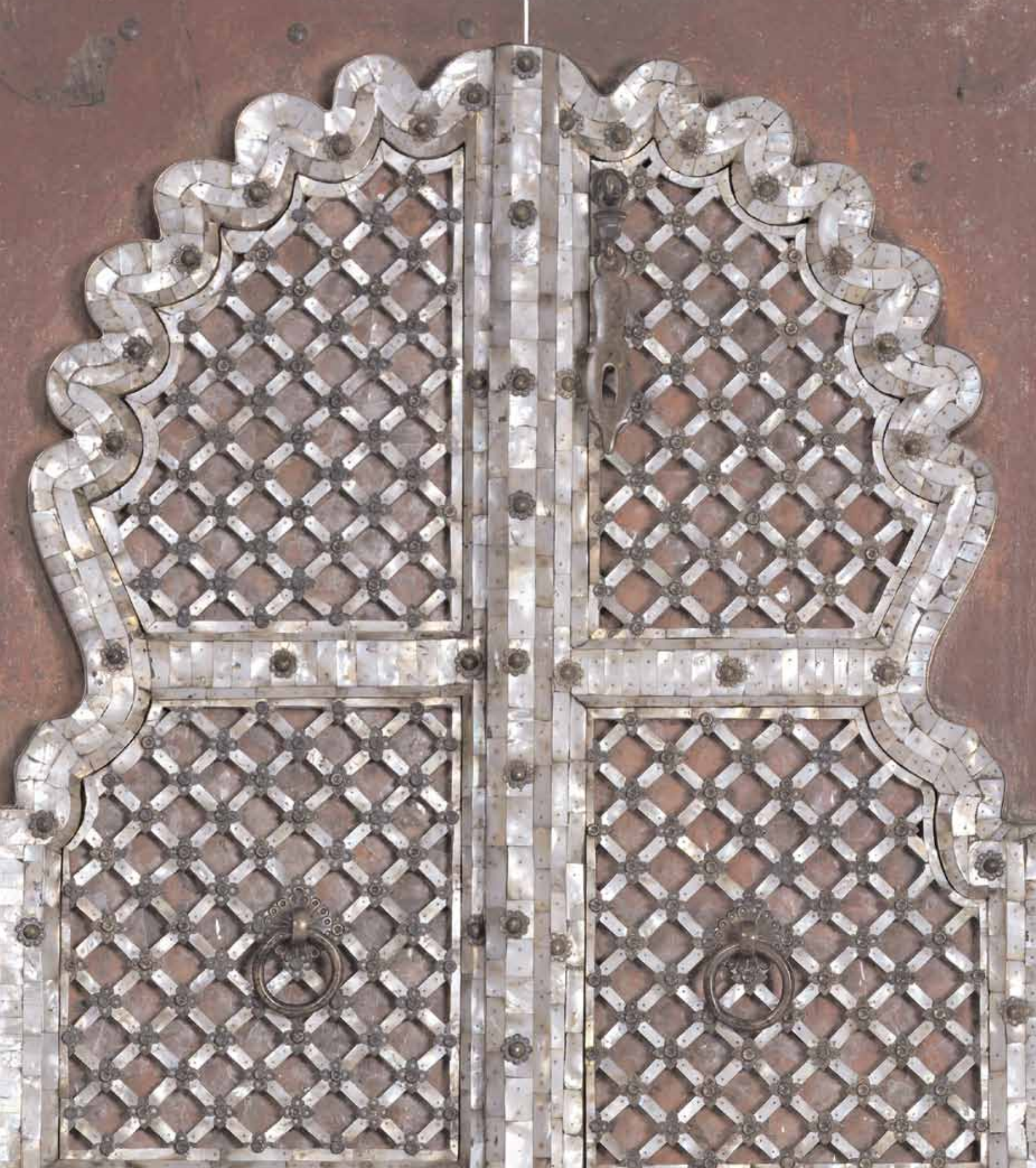
## 87

**Pair of mother-of-pearl inlaid doors**

Gujarat, possibly Ahmedabad,  
eighteenth century  
Wood and mother-of-pearl  
187 x 49.5 cm  
Inv.: AKM00705  
Publ.: AKTC 2009a, p. 246 (no.  
182); AKTC 2009b, p. 246 (no. 182);  
AKTC 2010a, p. 261 (no. 199).

The combination of mother-of-pearl and wood, as well as the forms of the cusped arch with reverse-curved shoulders and the reticulated fretwork, strongly suggest that this door was a product of Gujarat. The area was recognized as the centre of mother-of-pearl production from the early sixteenth century, with mother-of-pearl products both small and large gaining international fame (see also cat. no. 88). Abu'l-Fazl's *Ain-i Akbari* (c. 1595) mentions the province of Ahmedabad (i.e. Gujarat) as a centre of production: "Designers, wood-inlayers and countless other craftsmen so set mother-of-pearl that it appears a fine line, and make pen-boxes and coffers and the like of these" (Jaffer 2002, p. 24). The doors may have once adorned a wealthy home or public structure, such as a temple or tomb: mother-of-pearl decoration survives in other sacred architectural contexts, such as the early-seventeenth century tomb canopy of Shah Alam at Rasulabad, near Ahmedabad. The chain suspended from the top of the right door suggests the door would have been situated in an interior, attaching to a hook within the doorframe to keep the door closed; a door with access to the exterior, on the other hand, would have received a stronger lock for greater security.





## 88

India or Iran, eighteenth century  
Mother-of-pearl with incised  
decoration

Maximum width: 14.5 cm

Inv.: AKMoo665

Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 47 (no. 17);

AKTC 2007b, p. 43 (no. 17);

Makariou 2007, pp. 132–133 (no.  
46); AKTC 2008a, pp. 20 and 64–65

(no. 12); AKTC 2009a, p. 47 (no.

16); AKTC 2009b, p. 47 (no. 16);

AKTC 2010a, pp. 48–49 (no. 17).

### Shell with inscriptions

Using the natural shape of the shell and its lustrous mother-of-pearl lining, the artist has created a decorative programme of eight concentric circles engraved with verses from the Qur'an. Very few other examples of this type of object exist, and it is hard to suggest an exact provenance: the delicate floral vinescrolls in the widest circle recall Deccani painting as well as the cobalt blue decoration of early sixteenth-century Ottoman ceramics. The style of *nasta'liq*, however, would suggest an Indian or Iranian hand, while Gujarat was a major centre for the manufacture of mother-of-pearl objects. The structure of the decoration on the inside is intriguingly reminiscent of so-called magical vessels, with tiny Qur'anic inscriptions written in bands and medallions: among those which have been deciphered on this piece are Suras 109, 112, 113, 114, 17:81, 68:51–52 and the beginning of Sura 48, all of which also appear on magical vessels created in more common media such as metalwork or ceramic. If this shell were also intended for use as a magical vessel, liquid would be poured into the shell and thereby come into contact with the protective inscriptions inside, after which the liquid could be drunk or applied to the body for protection or healing.



### Ceramic bowl

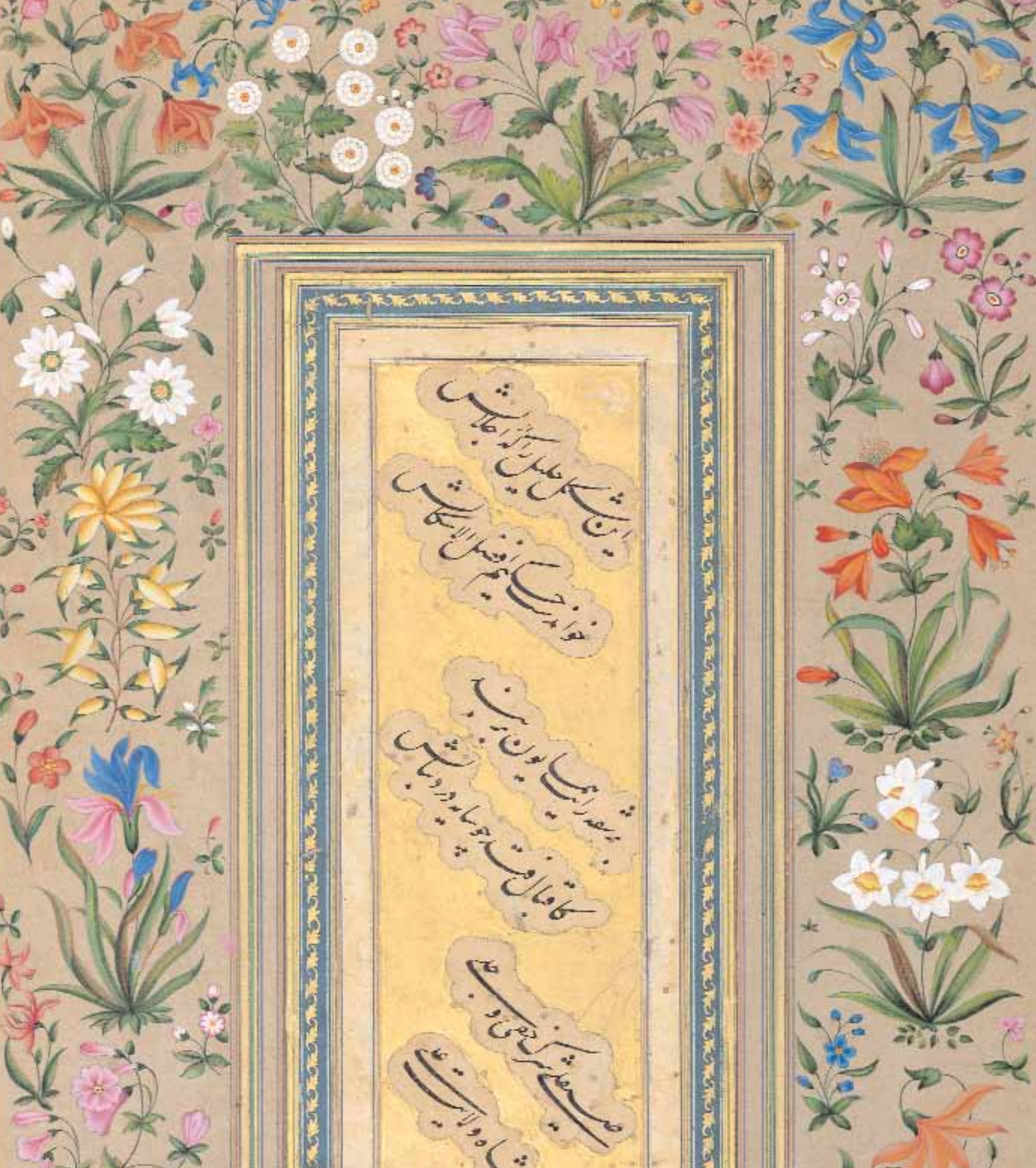
Prior to the adoption of fully developed underglaze painting in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iran, wares were decorated in a variety of techniques, including the slip-carving which was employed on the so-called “silhouette wares” of the twelfth century. Slip-carving involves painting the vessel body with a thick coating of dark slip which is then carved out with a knife, removing the slip entirely from the background of the motifs and leaving them slightly raised in silhouette against a light ground: it produces a very clean line and dramatic effects but is labour-intensive and tends to be rather rigid in appearance. In contrast, underglaze painting executed with a brush, which was in full flower in Iran by the early years of the thirteenth century, allowed the artist far greater freedom of movement, and permitted the easy creation of fluid and dynamic lines of varying thickness. Nowhere is the sense of enjoyment taken by painters in this new painterly medium more obvious than in the so-called “waterweed” dishes, of which this is an excellent example: the design is almost completely made up of curving sinuous lines. These wares were produced for export as well as for the domestic market and rather similar designs appear at the Raqqa potteries of Northern Syria.

89

Iran, early thirteenth century  
Fritware with white body and black  
painting under a transparent glaze  
Diameter: 16.3 cm  
Inv.: AKM00564  
Unpublished







این شک گلستان را از اجلاس  
خواندند حکیم افضل الکاش

بیتار میسایون بر لب  
کافال فرستد چو سایه در دستان

مستطی که در حقی و قلب  
پناه و لایب

### Album page of calligraphy by Prince Dārā Shikoh

As part of their education, the young Mughal princes were taught calligraphy and painting by the masters of the court atelier. Once proficient, the pupil would write out a number of showpiece calligraphy specimens, demonstrating his newly acquired skill. The classical education of the Mughal princes prepared them for their futures as lords of a highly cultured court world, and the training was probably also intended to improve their judgement as future patrons of art. The Persian verses on this page were written by the Mughal prince Muhammad Dara Shikoh (1615–1659), the son of Shah Jahan. The sample is dated 1041 H and was executed at Burhanpur in the Deccan, where Dara Shikoh lived with his mother Mumtaz Mahal during a Mughal campaign. A further page of calligraphy inscribed with the same date and place is thought, like this piece, to come from a dispersed manuscript of calligraphy by Dara Shikoh: that piece is now held in the British Museum (inv. no. 1921-1011-o.4b). After the dispersal of the manuscript the present calligraphic sample was mounted into an eighteenth-century album page decorated with flowering plants in the margins.

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Mughal India, Burhanpur, dated 1041 H / 1631–2 CE  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper  
 Page: 42.3 x 28.8 cm;  
 text: 21.9 x 6.3 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00249  
 Publ.: Falk 1985, p. 167 (no. 145);  
 AKTC 2007a, p. 124 (no. 89);  
 AKTC 2007b, p. 126 (no. 89);  
 AKTC 2009a, p. 250 (no. 185);  
 AKTC 2009b, p. 250 (no. 185);  
 AKTC 2010a, pp. 264–265 (no. 204).



## 91

## Letter from crown prince 'Abbās Mirzā to Napoleon I

Iran, dated 1808

Ink, opaque watercolour and gold  
on paper

120 x 58 cm

Inv.: AKM00251

Publ.: Falk 1985, pp. 193–194 (no. 182); Diba 1998, no. 3; AKTC 2007a, p. 113 (no. 80); AKTC 2007b, p. 114 (no. 80); AKTC 2009a, p. 222 (no. 167); AKTC 2009b, p. 222 (no. 167); AKTC 2010a, p. 238 (no. 184).

Diplomatic relations between the Qajars and the West began to open up again during the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah (r. 1798–1834). The period between 1805, when Napoleon inaugurated exchange with the Qajars, and 1808 – the date of this letter – saw intense diplomatic activity conducted between the Qajars and the French and British, as loyalties shifted in the context of the Perso-Russian wars. Crown prince 'Abbās Mirzā (1789–1833), son and heir apparent of Fath 'Ali Shah, was governor of Azerbaijan and based at Tabriz, where he organised military campaigns for the control of Georgia and Tabriz, supported by the latest French military technology and training. This letter, which arrived in Paris on 17 February 1809 according to an inscription on the reverse, was written by the nineteen-year-old prince to Emperor Napoleon I. The prince remarks upon the emperor's two-year silence, describes how the Russians have broken the terms of their treaty, and asks Napoleon what he plans to do about this, as the prince's own troops are ready for battle (Falk 1985). The huge, finely illuminated heading of the letter makes the importance and royal status of this communication immediately apparent even to a non-Persian speaker, which was presumably the intention.





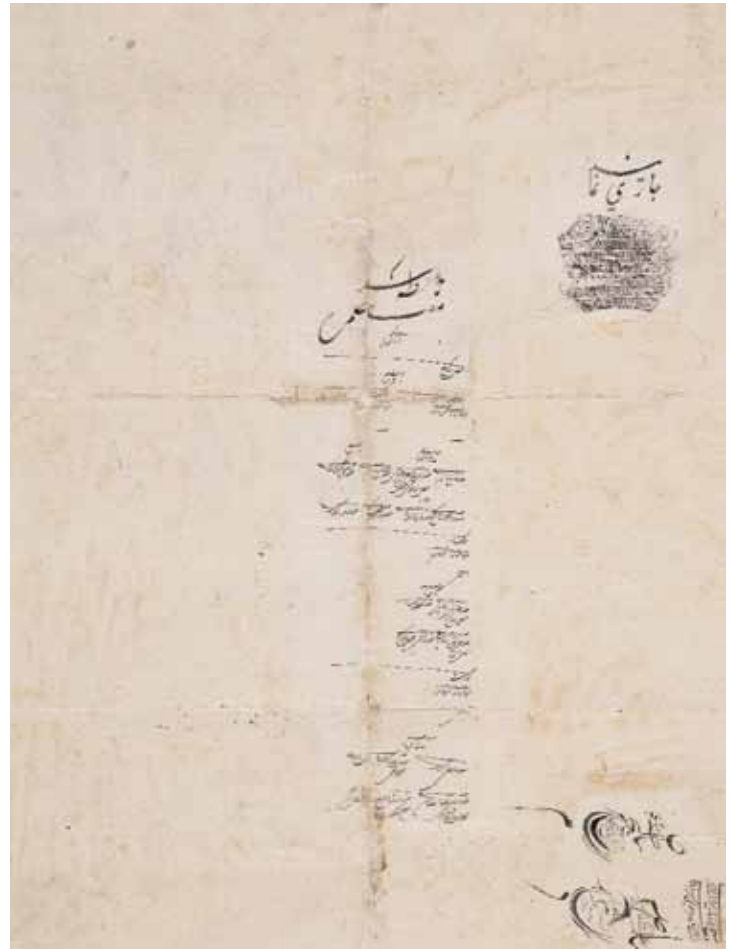
عزال سیاه چشم سنگین خال خال ششمن بلبله نازک و رخساری تنهایی آینه آغاکس پاس خداوند مهربان است و مهربان گشته ز تن و جان سرازار گران در پنداره و دلنما او سوز  
 از بوناد و شهر بان آگاه در آبرخت و کاه مایه آرام جان کرده و جانان را آسوده آسوده روان در میان جانان پرورده بهر فرقی طریقی داده و بهر کوی در  
 فرستاده که با اختره مسیح پوشیدگان را در آسوده بوده و کاه از فر و جو و صاحب تمام محمود در آسوده نگاری نموده بود و بود آنچه بلند است پوش  
 نیز نباشد که است کیت درین در که ویر برای کولین الهک زنده جز خدای پس با خدای دلنور نباشد عقل و یکب و صحرای و کشای شمای خسرو ملک قزاقه بر ملک

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**Firman of Wājid ‘Ali Shāh of Awdh**

Lucknow, India, dated 24 Ramadan  
1265 H/ 14 August 1849  
Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
on paper  
86.6 x 66 cm  
Inv.: AKMoo822  
Unpublished

The *firman* is a royal decree or mandate written on a long scroll-shaped sheet of paper with illuminated headings and royal insignia. This *firman* is written in a measured *nasta‘liq* script and deals with the awarding of various pieces of land to an individual named Khanazad Khan Bahadur Dilavar Jang, and bears various chancellery notes and official stamps on the verso. Wajid ‘Ali Shah, whose official seal is impressed in red at the top between two boxes containing, on the right, verses from the Qur’an, and his *tughra* (a highly stylised way of writing the ruler’s name) on the left, was the last ruler of Awdh from 1847 until it was annexed by the British in 1856. The official seal of Wajid ‘Ali Shah is surmounted by his personal emblem and decorated with scrolling leaves and flowers and reads (in the middle circle): “Abu’l-Mansur Nasir al-Din, the one who has the grandeur of Alexander, the Just King, the Caesar of the time, the Sultan of the World, Muhammad Wajid ‘Ali Shah, the King of Awdh. May God make his kingdom eternal. 1263 [1846–7]”. The official stamps, seals and signatures that characterized administrative documents of the early modern Islamic world typically employ a wealth of eulogizing titles of this type. Pious verses run around the outer edge. The verso of the document has chancellery notes and is dated there “on the 24th of the blessed month of Ramadan, the year 1265, corresponding to [regnal year] 3”, which corresponds to 14th August 1849.



## Standard ('alam)

Both form and inscriptive content of this steel standard are heavily symbolic and create a complex layering of allusions to 'Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet and first Imam of Shi'i Islam. The pear-shaped form of the standard ends in two divergent outgrowths alluding to the two tips of the *Dhu'l-fiqar*, the famous twin-pronged sword of 'Ali. The large openworked area presents a mirror inscription that can be read from different angles. The following text can be read from top to bottom: "Ya Allah, ya Muhammad, ya 'Ali" ("Oh God, Oh Muhammad, Oh Ali"). The two invocations of 'Ali meet on the axis to form a stylised face, perhaps of a lion, which is symbolic of the first Imam (see cat. no. 69). Here, the *lam* and the *ya* of 'Ali outline the contours, the *'ayns* (the name of the letter, which also means "eye" in Arabic) form the eyes and the two vocative particles *ya* are joined to form a muzzle. The dragon's head motif seen projecting at four points from the standard, which in this context is presumably apotropaic, was often used on metal objects in the Islamic world. During the Safavid period in Iran and in Mughal India, it would decorate the stern and prow of boat-shaped bowls or *kashkuls* (see cat. no. 43). The practice of taking out these standards during processions associated with Shi'i religious calendar celebrations – a practice which is still observed today – was confirmed by European travellers from the seventeenth century and later, but it does not seem to have been represented in sixteenth-century manuscripts, where such standards are normally depicted in battle scenes or else within sanctuaries (Makariou 2007, p. 159, n. 15).

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Iran, late sixteenth century  
Pierced steel plate with moulded iron adjuncts  
Height: 81.5 cm; width 32.5 cm  
Inv.: AKM00679  
Publ.: Thompson–Canby 2003, p. 222; AKTC 2007a, pp. 178–179 (no. 154b); AKTC 2007b, pp. 180–181 (no. 154b); Makariou 2007, pp. 148–149 (no. 52); AKTC 2008a, pp. 282–283 (no. 112); AKTC 2009a, p. 192 (no. 145); AKTC 2009b, p. 192 (no. 145); AKTC 2010a, pp. 192–193 (no. 150).





## Science and Learning

فردوسی بیاد  
کوه

بیت بهر بزم بلبلان بی جای

بیت بهر بزم بلبلان بی جای  
بیت نشود اسبک کس پیش  
آنکه در لطافت گلگونش  
نشانیست دریاغ لاله  
شست خارچینس زین  
ه پسین زینار درو  
فناج مکران نکوی  
کردن پیمانست  
ز بچار نیک مردان  
در سپار اقلیمش که  
ست زاید گوشت  
نعمت خور در اند  
بلاو پیدا بود  
کار شمشیر بی  
بستار مکنند  
اسلطان که



بیت بهر بزم بلبلان بی جای  
بیت نشود اسبک کس پیش  
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کار شمشیر بی  
بستار مکنند  
اسلطان که



Djamil Aïssani

## Scientific Manuscripts of the Islamic World

In the world today there are several million Islamic manuscripts, not all of which have yet been analysed or made the subject of a bibliographic inventory. Among the available manuscripts, close to five percent of them are considered “scientific manuscripts”, related to intellectual activities conducted in the domain of the rational sciences. One must consider the ensuing developments in terms of comparisons with the classical disciplines of the Greek tradition (mathematics, physics, philosophy). This is the case for mathematics, algebra, trigonometry, combinatorial analysis and the physical sciences, as it is for the life sciences of medicine and its different branches – anatomy, pharmacology – as well as botany, chemistry, alchemy and zoology. In this context Arabic, the sacred language of Islam, played an essential role as a tool and vehicle for what was not merely the transmission of Greek thought, for it included many innovations.

The foundation and expansion of the Islamic world from the seventh through the fifteenth centuries encompassed a geographical area ranging from India to Spain and including all of North Africa and Sicily. It is clear that from the middle of the eighth century all of the favourable conditions necessary for the development of scientific activity were coming together within this milieu. In particular, the privileged geographical position of the Islamic empire, enabling direct contact with the heirs of the ancient scientific traditions, was vital for the transmission of knowledge in which Islamic cultures played a decisive role. One thinks of course of the Greek, Persian, and Syriac scientific traditions but equally one should not forget Indian, Chinese and other traditions, which are also extremely significant.

Some Muslim cities emerged as true scientific centres. This was the case first in the caliphal capital of Damascus under the last Umayyads, and was especially true of Baghdad under the early ‘Abbasids. The “House of Wisdom” (*Bayt al-Hikma*) in Baghdad was one of the principal cultural and scientific centres of the ninth century. Although there is very little surviving textual evidence regarding this palace library, it has often been characterised as a type of academy or university in which various scholarly activities, including the translation of pre-

Islamic texts into Arabic, took place. The *Bayt al-Hikma* seems to have developed particularly under the 'Abassid caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 812–833). In this library many Greek, Persian and Indian works were collected, preserved and presumably translated. The high regard shown for these texts from various pre-Islamic traditions may have helped to create a culture that was integrated amongst the diverse populations under Arab rule, acting to legitimise the 'Abbasid caliphate as the successor to the Sasanians. That hugely influential pre-Islamic Persian dynasty had famously built their own palace libraries known as *ganj* ("treasury"), a word equivalent to the Arabic *khizāna*, by which last term the *Bayt al-Hikma* was sometimes also known.

Important men of science and culture succeeded one another in the *Bayt al-Hikma*. Arguably one of the most exceptional, "the father of algebra", Al-Khwārazmī (c. 783–850), was a mathematician, geographer, astronomer and astrologer. From this scholar we have derived the modern English terms "algorithm" (the Latinization of his name being *algoritmi*) and "algebra" (from the title of one of his works, *Kitāb al-jabr wa-l-muqābala*). He is also credited with spreading so-called "Arabic" numerals (originally derived from Indian traditions) throughout Europe and the Middle East.

### **The Translations of *De Materia Medica* of Dioscorides**

The development of scientific activities relied upon multiple translations. One of the oldest scientific manuscripts translated from Greek into Arabic was the treatise *De Materia Medica* (cat. nos 96 and 97) by the Greek physician Dioscorides. Born around 40 CE in Anazarbus in Cilicia (now in Turkey), Dioscorides died some fifty years later. His work exerted a great influence throughout the Middle Ages up to the sixteenth century. The book was first translated into Syriac and the earliest Arabic translation was made in the mid-ninth century in Baghdad, under the reign of the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861), by Istafān Ibn Basil and by Hunayn Ibn Ishāq (c. 809–873). The latter was a physician and Arab scientist, and a Nestorian Christian, known as the "master of translators", who was active in the *Bayt al-Hikma* in the mid-ninth century. In addition to his translations, he wrote several treatises on medicine and the diverse subjects that relate to it, such as the *Kitāb al-masā'il fi'l-tibb* (Book of Questions on Medicine), an important reference book in the medical world of the Middle Ages.

In 948, the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII offered as a gift a Greek copy of the text of Dioscorides to the Umayyad caliph of Cordoba, 'Abd al-Rahmān III, leading to a revision of the text. A famous copy made in the first quarter of the thirteenth century was widely recopied and distributed and is now dispersed throughout many public and private collections. These pages illustrate one of the most frequent modes of transmission of medical knowledge in the Muslim world before the modern era. In the absence of teaching establishments, knowledge passed most often from master to disciple, supported by reading and interpretation of the works of the great authors.

### **The Diffusion of Scientific Knowledge**

The testimony of the first Muslim historian of science, Sāid al-Andalusī (al-Tulaytulī), active in the eleventh century, demonstrates the importance of the Greek legacy:

When the caliphate passed to al-Ma'mun, and when driven by his own genius, this prince wanted to learn philosophy, when the savants of his era became aware of the *Almagest* [a fundamental work of Ptolemy], when they understood the mechanism of the instruments of observation described in this book, al-Ma'mun was moved to assemble before him from all points of his empire, the remarkable men of his time.<sup>1</sup>

Very rapidly, this knowledge was disseminated throughout the Muslim world. Thus, it was at Qayrawan from the end of the eighth century that the beginning of scientific activities took place in the Maghrib. For a long time, Kairouan attracted to *Ifriqiya* (modern Tunisia) a great number of scholars who brought with them the first copies of Euclid's *Elements*, the *Almagest* of Ptolemy and the first Muslim works of mathematics.

The earliest scientific works of the Islamic world containing original features emerged from the beginning of the ninth century, even before the end of the period of translation. These contributions were decisive in several domains, including mathematics, medicine, botany and pharmacology, and in particular astronomy.

### **Astronomy**

Astronomy is without doubt the oldest of the sciences and also one of those which has most powerfully contributed to the evolution of human thought. Born from the needs of daily life (the measurement of time, agriculture, navigation, and so forth), and the fears of primitive man when confronted with the great natural phenomena, it remained closely associated with astrological superstitions until the beginning of modern times.

In the Muslim world, astronomy primarily served a religious function: to fix dates (for example the beginning of Ramadan, or the start of 'Īd) by the visibility of the crescent moon; to determine times for prayer; to ascertain the direction of Mecca (and therefore the orientation of places of worship) regardless of the location; and similar needs. To this end, many portable observation instruments such as astrolabes and dials were fabricated, and treaties explaining how to use these were drafted.

The astrolabe consisted of a bronze disc that could be held from the thumb by means of a ring. This type of analogue calculator, already known in Greek antiquity, was perfected in the Islamic world. It permitted not only the determination of time, but also solved problems of spherical astronomy and geodesy (the science of the measurement and representation of the earth). The astrolabe represented the sky on a flat surface, with the points of the rete – the top disc of the astrolabe – indicating the position of the stars. But more than just an instrument of observation and calculation, it was also intended to as a tool for training future astronomers.

The penetration of the astrolabe into Europe followed the conquest of Spain by the Muslims around the year 711. As early as the tenth century al-Hākīm II, Caliph of Cordoba, had established a school of astronomy that became an important centre for the fabrication of instruments (see the astrolabe in cat. no. 103). The production of astrolabes declined from the seventeenth century, but experienced a revival in the Persian world under the Safavid and then the Qajar dynasties; this reflects an revived interest in astrology and astronomical research (cat. no. 104).

It seems that the Muslim astronomical corpus is one of the best-preserved components of medieval scientific literature. Despite their bibliographical shortcomings, the texts studied to date provide a fascinating picture of this scientific activity.

In this way, the treatise *Suwar Kitāb al-Kawākib al-Thābita* (Description of the Fixed Stars) provides an example. The text was written by ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn ‘Umar al-Sūfī (903–986), known in the West by the name of Azophus: this renowned astronomer officiated at the court of Isfahan under the Buyid Sultan ‘Adud al-Dawla. The latter commanded the treatise on fixed stars, which was a catalogue of one thousand and seventeen fixed stars mentioned by the famous Greek astronomer Ptolemy in his *Almagest* in the second century, the text of which al-Sūfī significantly improved. Al-Sūfī was the first to attempt to consolidate the traditional Arab and Greek names of the stars and constellations that did not overlap. For each star observed, he designed both the constellation as imagined from the exterior of the celestial globe, then the same view from the interior of the celestial globe, as it would be observed from the surface of the earth. In his book, al-Sūfī described forty-eight constellations according to both the Greek system and Arab tradition, specifying the exact coordinates of each star, their dimensions and their positions in their respective constellations. There exist numerous copies of this text dating from periods up to the eighteenth century (cat. no. 106). In addition, al-Sūfī found many innovative uses for the astrolabe.

### Medicine and Anatomy

Baghdad in the ninth century attracted scholars from throughout the Muslim world, notably the famous al-Rāzī (c. 854–925; known in the West as Rhazes), regarded by chroniclers as “the Galen of the Muslims”. Versed in chemistry, philosophy and the medical sciences, his work was impressive: al-Bīrūnī in the eleventh century attributed 184 titles to him. An alchemist turned doctor, he vigorously defended the scientific approach in diagnosis and therapy, and greatly influenced the conception of hospital organization in connection with the training of future physicians. Nevertheless, the teaching of medicine in European universities relied more on the work of Ibn Sīnā, preferred without doubt for his theoretical character.

Written between 1012 and 1024, successively in Gurgān, Ray and Hamadān, the *Qānūn fi’l-Tibb* (Canon of Medicine) was the most important medical work of Ibn Sīnā (known as Avicenna in the West; 980–1037). In his preface, he stated that he wanted to write a book that contained both general and specific rules of medical knowledge. Thus he wrote: “I say that medicine is a science that permits the knowledge of the states of the human body in relation to that which promotes health and that which drives its loss, with the purpose of preserving it in full and restoring it when it is lost”.<sup>2</sup>

The Canon contains five books, treating successively the generalities of medicine, simple medications, diseases affecting a specific part of the body, diseases affecting the entire body and surgery, and lastly compound medicines, i.e. drugs and pharmacology (cat. no. 94). Regarding anatomy and dissection, it has rarely been the subject of religious or legal condemnation in the Muslim world. Anatomical knowledge was inspired by the work of the famous Greek physician of the second century, Galen, translated into Arabic under the reign of the ‘Abbasid caliph al-

Ma'mūn (813–833) and his successors. Ibn Sīnā emphasized the importance of direct observation of human bodies because “it is necessary that they be approached through observation (*hiss*) and dissection (*tashriḥ*), while those things that must be conjectured and demonstrated by reason are diseases and their particular causes and their symptoms and how disease can be abated and health maintained”.<sup>3</sup>

His text became a great success, and ultimately eclipsed the earlier works of al-Rāzī, ‘Alī ibn al-‘Abbās al-Majūsī (known in the West as Haly-Abbas), and Abu al-Qāsim al-Zahrāwī (Latinized as Albucasis). Many times copied, commented on and translated, Ibn Sīnā’s Canon was for centuries the most important medical textbook in both the East and the West. In time it was supplemented with certain works of al-Rāzī and later the *Kulliyāt*, which represented the medical art of Ibn Rushd (also known as Averroes; b. Cordoba, 1126 – d. Marrakesh, 1198), philosopher, theologian, jurist, mathematician and Muslim Andalusian physician of the twelfth century. Much of Ibn Rushd’s medical writing remained largely unknown in his lifetime because his philosophical works were judged at one point to be heretical, but it was of considerable significance for the later development of medicine.

The *Tashriḥ* (Anatomy) of Mansūr ibn Ilyās was the first text of the Muslim world that showed the anatomy of the entire human body (cat. no. 98). A physician and scholar of the late fourteenth century, Mansūr ibn Ilyās was a native of Shiraz and came from a family of scholars and physicians who practiced for several generations. His two principal works were an encyclopaedia of general medicine and a study of anatomy. Dedicated to the Timurid prince of Fars, Pīr Muhammad Bahādur Khān, his treatise on anatomy was one of the most widely disseminated medical volumes written in Persian. It was most famous for the six illustrations that appeared in the manuscripts. Five chapters – each illustrated by an anatomical chart – respectively addressed the bones, nerves, veins, arteries and muscles. The last chapter (*khātima*) was devoted to the complex organs like the heart and the brain, and to the development of the foetus, usually illustrated by a diagram of a pregnant woman.

### **Cosmology and Zoology**

The *‘Ajā’ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā’ib al-maujūdāt* (Wonders of Creation and Oddities of Existence) was the first systematic presentation of cosmography in Islamic literature. For its composition, al-Qazwīnī largely relied upon the work of his predecessors. The polymath Zakariyā’ ibn Muhammad ibn Mahmud al-Qazwīnī (1203–1283) was born in Iran and worked in several cities, particularly Damascus. He was Qadi in Iraq at the time of the capture of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258.

His cosmography is a type of encyclopaedia divided into two parts dedicated respectively to the superterrestrial world – celestial phenomena, the inhabitants of the heavens, chronology and so forth – and the terrestrial world: the four elements, meteors, winds, the seven climates, the known rivers and seas, the mineral and plant kingdoms, and living creatures from man to the animals, passing by the jinn. The popularity of the cosmography genre is evidenced by the large number of copies of the *Wonders of Creation* that survive in Arabic and in the Persian and Turkish translations. These are usually illustrated (cat. nos 99 and 105).

In the same literary genre one finds the treatise *Manāfi' al-hayawān* (cat. no. 95) composed by the doctor Abū Sa'īd 'Ubayd Allāh Ibn Bakhtīshū'. He lived in Mayyāfāriqīn (currently Silvan in Turkey) and died in 1058. A Persian translation was created in 1295/1300 by 'Abd al-Hādī of Maragha, following a commission from the Ilkhanid ruler Mahmūd Ghāzān (r. 1295–1304). The work, usually widely illustrated, successively examines men, domestic animals, wild animals, birds and fish, ending with insects. Along with physical and behavioural descriptions the text describes the medicinal properties of the organs and secretions of the animals in question.

### Botany, Pharmacology and Alchemy

In medieval times, botany was closely bound to medicine and generally limited to a practical role within the creation of medicines. If the “recipes” from the medieval epoch were essentially borrowed from Greek works, or inherited from Indian medicine, they were enriched by the oral traditions of many populations of the Islamic world and by the experiences of Arabic-speaking doctors or pharmacists. The *Khawāss al-Ashjār* (cat. nos 96 and 97), as we have already mentioned above, is a translation of the *De Materia Medica* of Dioscorides. It is a treatise on the fabrication of medicines from some five hundred plants that serve as the basis for pharmacology in Islamic countries.

Alchemy was also an important scientific discipline in the Muslim world. This science was linked to both the physical domain of matter and to the spiritual world as well. Indeed, there existed a physical chemistry of scientists or practitioners concerned with the properties of substances (including metals and their transmutation) and from another side, a spiritual alchemy that examined the transformation of the soul (cat. no. 107). From the early centuries of Islamic civilization, alchemy had its supporters and its detractors. However, it had the merit of leading to the discovery of new chemicals through multiple experimental investigations in the “laboratories” of the alchemists.

1 Sāid al-Tulaytūli, *Tabaqāt al-umam*, French trans. R. Blachère: *Catégories des nations* (Paris 1935); English trans. from French by Shannon de Viviés.

2 Ibn Sīnā, *Qānūn fi'l-Tibb*, cited in D. Jacquart and F. Micheau, *L'ombre d'Avicenne: Le médecine au temps des califes* (Paris, 1996); English trans. from French by Shannon de Viviés.

3 Ibn Sīnā, *Qānūn fi'l-Tibb*, cited in Emilie Savage-Smith, 'Attitudes Toward Dissection in Medieval Islam', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 50/1 (1995), 67–110, this quote pp. 92–93.

Ulrich Marzolph

## **The *Hundred and One Nights*: A Recently Acquired Old Manuscript**

The Book of the *Stories of the Hundred and One Nights*, in Arabic (*Hadith*) *Mi'at layla wa-layla*, is a sibling to the Book of the *Stories of the Thousand and One Nights*, commonly referred to as *Alf layla wa-layla*. The *Thousand and One Nights*, better known in English as the *Arabian Nights*, were “discovered” and subsequently translated by the French scholar Antoine Galland at the beginning of the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Since then, they have become part of world literature. In fact, the monumental impact of the *Thousand and One Nights* on world culture can hardly be overestimated. First, the work has decisively shaped French literature of the eighteenth century and onwards, in particular the French genre of *conte de fées* and novels “in the Oriental mode”; second, it has contributed to the Western perception of “the Orient” and related concepts, in particular the notion of “Orientalism” as a preconceived and biased notion of the Muslim world; and third, while originating from the “simple” effort of translation, Galland’s *Mille et une Nuits* has introduced to world literature a collection of tales that in terms of its international repercussion in imagination and creativity is second only to the Bible (which, notably, is also a work of Near Eastern origin). Besides inspiring innumerable translations into dozens of world languages as well as literary adaptations and imitations, the *Thousand and One Nights* have left their imprint in painting, theatre, opera, ballet, film, and many other areas. Even while Galland’s translation was still being published in France at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the work’s fame had already spread to other European cultures, in particular England and Germany. Since the nineteenth century, the *Thousand and One Nights* have become a truly international phenomenon, branching out over all continents and linking to cultures as different as Japan and East Africa.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to its famous sibling, the text of the *Hundred and One Nights* remains little known even today. In fact, besides Belgian bibliographer Victor Chauvin and a few other scholars, predominantly nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French specialists of Arabic

literature and folklore,<sup>3</sup> not many have ever taken notice of the *Hundred and One Nights*. And yet, the book offers entertaining reading to the general public in its own right. At the same time, from a scholarly perspective – that has been propagated above all by Aboubakr Chraïbi<sup>4</sup> – it suggests valuable insights into the history of the collection of stories of which both works, the *Hundred and One Nights* and the *Thousand and One Nights*, are but two different versions.

Both works overlap in that they introduce a specific narrative frame that is germane to these two collections only. The main trait of the narrative frame is defined by presenting a king who, after the traumatic experience of witnessing his wife's debauchery, decides to marry a virgin every day, only to kill her right after the wedding night. The king is only cured from his cruel habit by the vizier's daughter Shahrazād. The young woman manages to win the king's attention by telling stories whose sequel she promises for the following night – should the king permit her to live on. In the end, after having told her stories for a certain length of time, Shahrazād manages to win the king's affection, and the action dissolves in a happy ending. This frame applies more or less to both collections, yet the individual versions of the frame also differ in a number of points. These points concern details of the framing narrative as well as the number and the nature of the embedded tales.

First and foremost, the *Thousand and One Nights* covers a much longer period, i.e. almost three years, while the *Hundred and One Nights* lasts for a period of little more than three months. In terms of practical consequences, Shahrazād at the end of some versions of the *Thousand and One Nights* has given birth to three children,<sup>5</sup> while in the *Hundred and One Nights* her pregnancy is just becoming obvious; in both versions the development serves to win her the king's pardon, since she is about to give birth to his own offspring. Another practical result of the varying length of the two collections is the differing number of tales embedded within the narrative frame. The *Thousand and One Nights* contains hundreds of narratives of various genres, such as tales of magic and sorcery, long epics, and a large number of short fables, religious legends and anecdotes alluding to the lives of historical or pseudo-historical characters.<sup>6</sup> The *Hundred and One Nights*, to the contrary, in most versions contains just less than a mere twenty tales.

Second, the nature of the tales contained in both collections differs. The original kernel of the *Thousand and One Nights* consists of a fairly small number of narratives that appear to be consciously designed so as to mirror the precarious condition of the storyteller herself.<sup>7</sup> After all, Shahrazād tells stories in order to save her life (and, by extension, the lives of all females the king would otherwise marry and eventually kill). The first narratives embedded in the frame of the *Thousand and One Nights* – such as the stories of *The Merchant and the Jinni*, *The Fisherman and the 'Ifrit*, *The Porter and the Three Ladies*, and several more – mirror the storyteller's dilemma in that the lives of their characters are also threatened and the stories are told to enable the characters' survival. The specific relation between the embedding frame narrative and the early embedded tales suggests the conscious design of an author. It is abandoned in the later stories of the *Thousand and One Nights*, notably those that were later added in the numerous manuscripts of the *Thousand and One Nights* compiled in an attempt to produce a “complete” version of the work in order to satisfy the growing demand for such a version after the publication of Galland's translation. A similar relation between the frame tale and the embedded



narratives does not occur in the *Hundred and One Nights*, where Shahrazād simply tells attractive and instructive stories in order to entertain the king and arouse his curiosity so that she may live on to the following night. In this manner, the frame of the *Hundred and One Nights* appears as less intricately designed and more straightforward than that of the *Thousand and One Nights*. This apparent simplicity may or may not bespeak an earlier stage of development in contrast to a later stage as witnessed in the *Thousand and One Nights*. Several of the stories contained in the *Hundred and One Nights* share a self-reflective, almost mystical tendency, in that they allude to the inevitable end of human life by illustrating the admonition to consider one's deeds in this world in preparation for the consequences in the hereafter. This characteristic, best illustrated by the literary trope known as *ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere?* ("Where are those who were before us in this world?"), is particularly evident in the lengthy tale of *The City of Brass*, an originally independent narrative that is included in several manuscripts of the *Hundred and One Nights* and forms a standard constituent of the *Thousand and One Nights*.<sup>8</sup>

A third point of difference relates to the regional origin of the collections as well as to the period in which they were compiled. The earliest known information about the existence of the *Thousand and One Nights* is included in two Arabic works dating to the tenth century CE. Both the historian al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956) and the Baghdad bookseller Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 995) testify to the existence of a book of Persian origin whose frame tale more or less corresponds to that of the work's extant manuscripts.<sup>9</sup> Virtually all of the manuscripts of the *Thousand and One Nights* preserved today have been produced in the eastern heartlands of the Islamic world, i.e. in Syria or Egypt. The oldest known manuscript of the *Thousand and One Nights* is a Syrian manuscript dating from the second half of the fifteenth century. While less than a dozen manuscripts of the *Thousand and One Nights* are known to date from the period before Galland's translation,<sup>10</sup> numerous manuscripts were produced in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, above all in Egypt. Moreover, many of the tales presented in the *Thousand and One Nights* allude to historical circumstances of the Eastern parts of the Islamic world, notably the 'Abbasid period with the eighth-century caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd residing in the city of Baghdad, and the Mamluk period (1250–1517) in Cairo. In contrast, the existing manuscripts of the *Hundred and One Nights* without any exception were produced in the Maghrib or the western periphery of the Islamic world, i.e. Muslim Spain and the western regions of North Africa.<sup>11</sup> This fact is evident from the particular style of calligraphy these manuscripts are written in, a style known as *maghribī*. The calligraphy alone serves as a justification to regard the *Hundred and One Nights* as the shorter "western" sibling of the *Thousand and One Nights*. Moreover, several tales of the *Hundred and One Nights* mention members of the Umayyad family such as Sulaymān ibn 'Abd al-Malik (r. 715–717), Maslama ibn 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān, or 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān (r. 685–705), a feature that in view of the reign of the Spanish Umayyads (756–1031) might serve as a further indication of the work's origin in the Muslim West.<sup>12</sup>

As for the period in which the shorter collection was supposedly compiled, research has so far been at a loss to come up with any reasonably argued theses. While the *Thousand and One Nights* have been mentioned in Arabic sources at various intervals even before the date of the earliest extant manuscript, so far only a single mention of the *Hundred and One Nights* in an

Arabic source has been identified. This mention is found in the catalogue of books compiled by seventeenth-century Turkish scholar Hājji Khalifa (d. 1657).<sup>13</sup> Hājji Khalifa attributes the compilation of the *Hundred and One Nights* to a certain “philosopher” (*faylasūf*) Fahrās (or Fahdās) who incidentally is mentioned in the Tarshūna edition<sup>14</sup> as the narrator of the *Hundred and One Nights*, in a manner reminiscent of the ancient philosopher Bidpay who is said to have narrated the tales of the famous collection of fables, *Kalila wa Dimna*, to king Dabshalim.<sup>15</sup> Hājji Khalifa either saw a different book from the one known today or only referred to the book without actually having read it, since he says that the *Hundred and One Nights* contain a hundred stories. However short and possibly even erroneous his mention of the book might be, it firmly establishes the existence of the *Hundred and One Nights* more than a century before the oldest dated manuscripts identified so far.

In comparison to the *Thousand and One Nights*, the number of manuscripts of the *Hundred and One Nights* is considerably smaller than that of its eastern sibling. Until recently, a mere eight manuscripts of the *Hundred and One Nights* were known to researchers.<sup>16</sup> Two manuscripts mentioned in earlier studies on the *Hundred and One Nights* as belonging to French Orientalist scholars René Basset and M. Sainte Croix de Pajot are not available any more.<sup>17</sup> Three manuscripts are preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (nos. 3660, 3661, 3662), two in the Tunisian National Library (nos. 04576, 18260), and one in an Algerian private collection. While the majority of these manuscripts do not bear a clear indication of period of origin, three of them are dated. These are in chronological order: (1) the Paris manuscript 3662 dated 1190 H/1776 CE; this manuscript has been edited by Mahmūd Tarshūna in 1979; (2) the Algerian manuscript compiled by a certain al-Hājji al-Bāhi al-Būnī dated 1257 H/1841 CE; this manuscript has been edited by Shuraybit Ahmad Shuraybit in 2005; (3) the Tunis manuscript 04576 dated 1268 H/1852 CE. The manuscript Paris 3660 served as the basis of the French translation published by M. Gaudefroy Demombynes in 1911, while the translator’s learned notes refer to the other two manuscripts preserved in Paris as well as to the one owned by Basset. Previous research agrees that the original compilation of the *Hundred and One Nights* was probably achieved much earlier than any one of the preserved manuscripts, and the Russian scholar Ignatij Krachkovskij has even proposed to date the collection’s origin as early as the second half of the fourteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

A final point linking the *Hundred and One Nights* to its eastern sibling, the *Thousand and One Nights*, has so far only been mentioned in passing and needs to be discussed in some more detail. This point will also shed light on the genesis of the frame tale of both works as well as its reception in European literatures.<sup>19</sup> In short, the frame tale ultimately derives from ancient Indian literature. In the frame tale of both works the king of a certain country invites another person living in a distant country to his court. The initial invitation produces the dynamics that then accelerate dramatically. As the invited person sets out for travel, he returns back home shortly after his departure since he has forgotten an item of some importance. Coming home unexpectedly, he witnesses his wife’s infidelity, a fact that makes him disillusioned and depressed. Notably, his psychological state of mind also shows in his physical appearance. After several days in his host’s presence, he witnesses the even greater debauchery



of the king's wife (who often acts in a sexual orgy involving a considerable group of people). Only then do his good spirits return. Once the king notices this development, he requests to be informed, and once informed, he eventually decides to adopt his murderous ways of marrying a virgin every day and having her executed after the wedding night, so that no woman would ever again be able to betray him. In the *Thousand and One Nights*, the other person is the king's brother whom the king invites to come to his court since they have not seen each other for quite some time. In the *Hundred and One Nights*, however, the king follows a specific incentive to invite the other person to his court. Here, the king considers himself to be the most beautiful person on earth. Every year, he displays his beauty during a large festivity and, much like the evil stepmother in the European fairy tale of Snow-white, admires his beauty in a mirror challenging his followers to say whether there is any other person as beautiful as himself. This goes on until one day somebody informs the king of the existence of another person in a distant land who is supposed to be even more beautiful than the king. The king orders this person to be brought to his presence, but when the person arrives, his beauty has vanished due to the fact that when leaving he had witnessed his wife's infidelity. Moreover, the husband's trauma in the *Hundred and One Nights* is further motivated by the fact that when requested to visit the king, the husband had at first asked leave for a whole year so as not to leave his newly-wed wife whom he loved dearly.

The element of the beauty contest and the related events as told in the frame tale of the *Hundred and One Nights* are already encountered in the tale's oldest version, dated to the year 251 CE, that is contained in the *Tripitaka*, a Chinese translation of Indian Buddhist tales.<sup>20</sup> The frame tale of the *Hundred and One Nights* thus mirrors a version older than the one in the frame tale of the *Thousand and One Nights*. In the *Thousand and One Nights*, instead of the strong motivation of the beauty contest we find the considerably weaker motivation of a family reunion. Moreover, the frame tale of the *Thousand and One Nights* has apparently been reworked and enlarged by integrating various other, originally independent tales, such as the tale of the woman who has been abducted by a demon but that, even though the demon keeps her in a basket, manages to seduce numerous men. The beauty contest also features in the introduction to the tale of Astolfo in Italian Renaissance author Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, compiled in 1516–1532.<sup>21</sup> While Ariosto's tale has so far usually been taken as constituting an early European analogue to the frame tale of the *Thousand and One Nights*, it should in fact rather be considered as a close analogue to the frame tale of the *Hundred and One Nights*. Consequently, Ariosto's tale serves as an argument that the specific form of the frame tale involving the beauty contest was already known in the (western?) Mediterranean in the latter half of the fifteenth century. Arabic literature would suggest itself as the logical intermediary between the ancient Buddhist tale and its more recent analogues in the West. Even though previous research has not succeeded in documenting older written versions of the element of the beauty contest, evidence from oral tradition has been added to substantiate the claim for transmission. It is highly interesting to see the element of the beauty contest in nineteenth-century Hungarian folk-tales<sup>22</sup> as well as in recent folk-tales from Belorussia<sup>23</sup> and Syria.<sup>24</sup> Considering the very specific and highly detailed corresponding sequences of events in

(Facing page)  
Colophon of the  
*Kitāb al-jughrāfiyya*  
(cat. no. 53).

these tales, it appears likely that the different attestations of the element of the beauty contest are in some way related to each other.

Considering the above facts, the discovery of the manuscript now held by the Aga Khan Museum (cat. no. 53, AKM 00513) does not fall short of being truly sensational.<sup>25</sup> This recently discovered manuscript of the *Hundred and One Nights*, acquired at a Sotheby's auction in 2005, is bound together with a copy of the *Book of Geography* (*Kitāb al-Jughrāfiyya*) compiled by Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr al-Zuhri, an author who is known to have lived in the Spanish city of Granada, then under Muslim domination, at the beginning of the twelfth century. The calligrapher's colophon dates the completion of his copy of the *Book of Geography* to the month Rabi' II of the year 632, a month that commenced on December 24, 1234. The manuscript is thus more than a century older than the book's oldest copy known so far, a Paris manuscript dated 1410. While the *Book of Geography* finishes on the *verso* side of the folio, the copy of the *Hundred and One Nights* only begins after an inserted sheet on the *verso* side of the following folio. Both books are written in a fairly similar clear *maghribi* hand and might or might not have been prepared by the very same calligrapher. Moreover, the paper of both books appears to be the same.

There are, however, various indications that serve as a *caveat* not to rush to the tempting conclusion that the dating of the first book would also be valid for the second one. Unfortunately, the newly acquired manuscript of the *Hundred and One Nights* is fragmentary, breaking off on the *verso* side of a folio numbered as 39; consequently, it does not have a colophon that could unambiguously document its dating. Since the work begins on fol. 1v, the text of this manuscript of the *Hundred and One Nights* comprises a total of 77 pages. Notably, only the folios of the *Hundred and One Nights* bear numbers that have been added in a European hand. Highly important is the fact that the pages holding the text of the *Hundred and One Nights* – contrary to that of the *Book of Geography* whose pages remain in a fragile condition – have been restored in the margins. Considering the modern techniques applied, the restoration has been reliably dated to later than the year 1970.<sup>26</sup> For restoration, the pages of the book obviously had to be separated from the binding, which in the manuscript's present state is a well preserved and probably fairly recent red leather cover. The restored pages of the *Hundred and One Nights* were bound together with the unrestored pages of the *Book of Geography* only after restoration was completed. Whatever might have prompted the manuscript's previous owner to conduct such a procedure is not clear, yet it creates some doubt as to whether the authentic dating of the first book can also be applied to the second book.

In terms of content, the Aga Khan manuscript (henceforth AKM) corresponds closely to the ones edited by Tarshūna (henceforth T) and Shuraybit (henceforth SH), thus containing the following tales:

No	Title	AKM	Night	T	Night	SH	Night
1	<i>The Merchant's Son</i>	3v/-1	1	92	1	195	2
2	<i>Najm al-Diyā'</i>	7v/-3	7	107	6	205	7
3	<i>The Camphor Island</i>	9v/3	12	128	13	217	13
4	<i>Zāfir ibn Lāhiq</i>	11v/7	17	137	17	223	17
5	<i>The Vizier (and His Son)</i>	14r/6	23	152	23	230	23
6	<i>Sulaymān ibn 'Abd al-Malik</i>	16r/10	28	164	28	236	28
7	<i>Maslama ibn 'Abd al-Malik</i>	20r/-2	38	187	38	250	38
8	<i>Gharibat al-Husn</i>	21v/3	40	192	40	254	40
9	<i>The Young Man and His Cousin</i>	23r/-7	44	201	44	261	44
10	<i>The King and His Three Sons</i>	24v/8	47	208	47	264	47
11	<i>The Bracelet</i>	25v/-5	50	215	50	268	51
12	<i>The Four Companions</i>	27r/-6	53	223	53	271	54
13	<i>The Seven Viziers</i>	28v/15	56	231	56	274	57
14	<i>The King and the Snake</i>	36r/-4	75	277	75	299	80
15	<i>The Ebony Horse</i>	39r/1	83	293	82	310	88

AKM breaks off at fol. 39v just after the beginning of night 84. While the tale of *The Ebony Horse* is the final one in SH, T (as well as two of the other manuscripts) has two more tales, the tales of *The King and the Gazelle* (begins p. 320, Night 95) and *The Vizier Ibn Abi l-Qamar and 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān* (begins p. 335, Nights 100). Since the distribution of the nights in AKM is closer to T (and related manuscripts) than to SH, AKM might well have contained these two tales as well.

Out of the tales the *Hundred and One Nights* have in common with the *Thousand and One Nights*, the tale of the *Seven Viziers* deserves particular attention.<sup>27</sup> This tale, better known in western tradition as the *Seven Sages (of Rome)*, is itself an originally independent frame tale containing a varying number of embedded short tales that serve as arguments in the discussion between the king's favourite and his viziers. About half of the tales embedded in the version of the *Hundred and One Nights* are also contained in the version of the *Thousand and One Nights* (nos. 13.2–13.12, 13.15, 13.19). The other embedded tales derive from a variety of sources. The first tale (no. 13.1) is only known from the early Persian version of the *Seven Viziers*,<sup>28</sup> and a total of four tales (nos. 13.13, 13.14, 13.16, 13.18) are documented from the Syrian version of the *Seven Viziers*. A number of the embedded tales have over the centuries become so popular that they were eventually recorded as folktales from oral tradition, such as *The Drop of Honey* (no. 13.8), *The Dog That Shed Tears* (no. 13.12), *The Snake and the Dog* (no. 13.14), and *The Three Wishes* (no. 13.19).<sup>29</sup>

Considering the above evaluation, the recently acquired manuscript offers fascinating new insights into the history of the *Hundred and One Nights* as well as into the relation of the smaller collection with the larger tradition of the *Thousand and One Nights*. Further scrutiny will have to supply reliable data for the dating of the manuscript's physical components, in particular the paper and ink. Moreover, a close reading of the text should bring to light clues for dating the manuscript in terms of language and wording. Whatever the results of any such future scrutiny will prove to be, until then it appears fairly safe to regard the manuscript in the Aga Khan

No	Title	AKM	T	SH	AN <sup>30</sup>	Chauvin 8 <sup>31</sup>
13.1	<i>The Trained Elephant</i>	29r/4	233	276	–	35, no. 2
13.2	<i>The Lion's Trace</i>	30r/6	239	279	x	35, no. 3
13.3	<i>The Parrot</i>	30r/-9	241	280	x	36, no. 4
13.4	<i>The Fuller and His Son</i>	30v/11	242	281	x	37, no. 5
13.5	<i>The Miser and the Loaves of Bread</i>	30v/16	243	282	x	38, no. 6
13.6	<i>The Lady and Her Two Lovers</i>	31r/5	244	282	x	38, no. 7
13.7	<i>The King's Son and the Ogress</i>	31r/-4	246	284	x	39, no. 8
13.8	<i>The Drop of Honey</i>	31v/-5	249	285	x	41, no. 9
13.9	<i>The Woman Who Made Her Husband Sift Dust</i>	32r/5	250	285	x	42, no. 10
13.10	<i>The Enchanted Spring</i>	32r/-7	251	286	x	43, no. 11
13.11	<i>The King's Son and the Hammam-keeper's Wife</i>	32v/11	253	286	x	44, no. 12
13.12	<i>The Dog That Shed Tears</i>	32v/-7	255	288	x	45, no. 13
13.13	<i>The Monkey and the Wild Boar</i>	33r/-3	258	290	x	66, no. 30
13.14	<i>The Snake and the Dog</i>	33v/3	259	290	–	66, no. 31
13.15	<i>The Burned Clothes</i>	33v/16	260	291	x	57, no. 23
13.16	<i>The Lion and the Thief</i>	34r/-6	264	292	–	67, no. 32
13.17	<i>The Fisherman and the King</i>	34v/-13	266	294	–	– <sup>32</sup>
13.18	<i>The Elephant Statue</i>	34v/-1	267	295	–	68, no. 33
13.19	<i>The Three Wishes</i>	35r/13	269	295	x	51, no. 19
13.20	<i>The Man Who Wrote A Book about the Wiles of Women</i>	35/-5	270	296	–	69, no. 34

Museum as an early example, and probably even the oldest manuscript of the *Hundred and One Nights* that has so far become known.

### Editions

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### Translation

Gaudefroy-Demombynes, Maurice: *Les Cent et Une Nuits*. Présentées et traduites de l'arabe. Paris: Guilmoto, 1911 (new edition Paris: Sindbad, 1982).

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- 3 Victor Chauvin, 1901–1903, *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes ou relatifs aux arabes*, vol. 4 (Liège 1901–1903), 121–122, nos. 307–311; Maurice Godefroy-Demombynes, 'Notes sur les "Mille et une Nuits" (1)', *Revue des Traditions Populaires* 22 (1907), 193–198; Emmanuel Cosquin, 'Le Prologue cadre des Mille et une nuits, les légendes perses et le livre d'Esther', *Revue Biblique* 6 (1909), 7–49; Gabriel Ferrand, 'Note sur le livre des 101 Nuits', *Journal asiatique* 17 (1911), 309–318.
- 4 Chraïbi, *Les Mille et une nuits*, 90–92 and *passim*; Aboubakr Chraïbi, 'Des hommes dans le harem', in Frédéric Bauden, Aboubakr Chraïbi and Antonella Ghersetti (eds), *Le Répertoire narratif arabe médiéval: Transmission et ouverture* (Genève 2008), 37–46; see also Claude Bremond, 'En deça et au-delà d'un conte: le devenir des thèmes', in Jamel Eddine Bencheikh, Claude Bremond and André Miquel (eds), *Mille et un contes de la nuit* (Paris 1991), 79–258, esp. 112–123, 153–155.
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- 6 See the detailed classification in Chraïbi, *Les Mille et une nuits*.
- 7 Chraïbi, *Les Mille et une nuits*, 89–116.
- 8 David Pinault, *Story-Telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights* (Leiden 1992), 152–157, 226–227.
- 9 Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, *Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, 597–580, 640–641.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 635–637.
- 11 For previously known manuscripts of the *Hundred and One Nights* see the French trans. by Maurice Godefroy-Demombynes, *Les Cent et Une Nuits* (Paris 1911, new ed. Paris 1982), and the Arabic editions of Mahmūd Tarshūna (ed.), *Mi'at layla wa-layla* (Tunis 1984), 7–13, and Shuraybit Ahmad Shuraybit (ed.), al-Hājj al-Bāhi al-Būni, *Mi'at layla wa-layla ... wa-hikāyāt ukhrā* (Algiers 2005), 13–27.
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- 14 Tarshūna, *Mi'at layla wa-layla*, 67.
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- 16 See above, note 9.
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- 21 Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, *Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, 483–484.
- 22 Alexander Solymossy, 'A szép ember meséje' (The Tale of the Beautiful Man), *Ethnographia* 27 (1916), 257–275; Linda Dégh, *Märchen, Erzähler und Erzählgemeinschaft* (Berlin 1962), 298–299, no. 66; Agnes Kovács, *Ungarische Volksmärchen* (Düsseldorf 1982), 87–90, 337, no. 18.
- 23 Lev G. Barag, *Belorussische Volksmärchen* (Berlin 1968), 392–297, no. 62.
- 24 Grotzfeld, *Erzählungen*, 139–143.
- 25 I would like to thank Mr. Benoît Junod, Director of the Aga Khan Museum collection, for making the newly acquired manuscript available to me in a most cordial manner.
- 26 See the detailed evaluation by the Atelier de Restauration Florence Dabre, prepared at the order of Mr. Benoît Junod, in summer 2010.
- 27 For the following discussion see Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, *Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, 160–161; vol. 2, 703–704; Chraïbi, *Les Mille et une nuits*, 170–191.
- 28 Clouston 1884, pp. 17–21.
- 29 See Uther 2004, nos. 2036, 1515, 178 A, and 750 A.
- 30 AN = Arabian Nights; see Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, *Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, 160–161, no. 181.
- 31 Chauvin 8 = Victor Chauvin, *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes ou relatifs aux arabes*, vol. 8 (Liège 1904).
- 32 Ulrich Marzolph, *Arabia ridens: Die humoristische Kurzprosa der frühen adab-Literatur im internationalen Traditionsgeflecht* (Frankfurt 1992), vol. 2, 117–118, no. 468.





## **Science and Learning**

CATALOGUE ENTRIES 94 — 107

A key aspect of court life in the Islamic world was the princely patronage of intellectual culture. Hosting outstanding poets and scholars enhanced a ruler's royal profile as much as military success, guaranteeing greatness and a place in history. Fitness to rule was also defined by a prince's own intellectual capacity and knowledge: royal libraries could be extensive, and scholarly presence at court provided excellent academic education for an interested patron. Courtiers and the civilian elite followed suit. An early example of this engagement of court patronage with learning was the so-called "translation movement", which took place in 'Abbasid Baghdad over the eighth to tenth centuries: Caliphs and senior civil servants alike sponsored the systematic translation and analysis of ancient works of science into Arabic, drawing polyglot scientists from across Western Asia to great opportunities in Iraq. The political elite also founded great personal libraries accessible to all scholars, and built important research institutions such as observatories and hospitals, supporting science and learning almost as a matter of personal socio-cultural prestige.

The result of this sustained patronage was a remarkable productivity in scientific research and its resultant literature, in astronomy, medicine (cat. no. 98), pharmacology and mathematics. Copies of important new works or classic old texts were greatly sought after, and autograph manuscripts (or copies made within or close to the author's lifetime) were very valuable (cat. no. 94). Scientific instruments, such as the celestial globe and the astrolabe (cat. nos 103, 104), were inherited from the late classical world, and developed further by scientists in the Islamic period. Luxury manuscripts of scientific treatises demonstrate that learning was pursued among the wealthy elite, as well as within a specialist milieu of scholars. While the illustration of manuscripts may often be associated with expensive luxury production, in a didactic context the inclusion of diagrams, maps and paintings is indispensable to a reading of the text. This may explain why so many of the earliest known, non-royal, illustrated Islamic-world books are scientific works, but the quality of many of these early illustrations suggests high status as well as didactic necessity. Luxury illustrated copies of classic texts, such as al-Sūfī's *Book of the Constellations* (cat. no. 106), Qazwīnī's *Wonders of Creation* (cat. nos 99, 105), Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica* (cat. nos 96, 97), and the medical-zoological *On the Uses of Animals* (a compendium of Aristotle and Ibn Bakhtishū', cat. no. 95), all demonstrate the value and respect placed in the pursuit, support and preservation of scientific knowledge.

## 94

Manuscript of the fifth book of the *Qānūn fi'l-tibb* (Canon of Medicine) of Ibn Sīnā

Iran or Iraq, dated 444 H / 1052 CE  
Opaque watercolour and ink on  
paper

21.2 x 16.4 cm

Inv.: AKM00510

Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 128 (no. 96);

AKTC 2007b, pp. 122 and 131 (no.

96); AKTC 2008a, pp. 194–195 (no.

73); AKTC 2009a, p. 158 (no. 109);

AKTC 2009b, p. 158 (no. 109);

2010a, pp. 158–159 (no. 111).

The *Qanun fi l-tibb* (Canon of Medicine) of Ibn Sina, the author known in the West as Avicenna, is the most important encyclopaedic corpus of medieval medical knowledge in the Islamic world. Born near Bukhara in 980 to a Samanid government official, Ibn Sina was, at eighteen, a talented physician who had mastered all the sciences, and he went on to make a great number of medical discoveries and observations that remain relevant today. With the transfer of knowledge to the Latin west in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the *Qanun* became the most used of all medieval references in the medical schools of Europe, almost until the beginning of modern times. The *Qanun* is organised into five books: the present manuscript is a copy of the fifth book, on compound drugs and pharmacopoeia. Copied only fifteen years after the death of Ibn Sina, it is certainly one of the earliest copies of the text, if not the earliest manuscript of this work. The page shown here is the title page, which announces in large *thuluth* script that the manuscript contains the fifth book of the *Qanun*. It is followed immediately by Ibn Sina's full name, *al-Shaykh al-Ra'is Abi 'Ali ibn Sina*, written in *naskh*. Names of previous owners of the codex appear in *naskh* and *nasta'liq* scripts around the page (translation provided by Abdullah Ghouchani).



المعروف و ملائقتهم بالانسان

تصنيف الشيخ الرئيس ابو علي بن سينا في كتابه في الطبيعه

و ملائقتهم بالانسان

و ملائقتهم بالانسان

و ملائقتهم بالانسان

و ملائقتهم بالانسان

و ملائقتهم بالانسان

و ملائقتهم بالانسان

و ملائقتهم بالانسان



## 95

Folio from a dispersed copy of the *Manāfi' al-hayawān* (Usefulness of Animals) of Ibn Bakhtishū'

Northwest Ilkhanid Iran, possibly Maragha, c. 1300  
 Opaque watercolour and ink on paper  
 40.1 x 32.2 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00083  
 Publ.: Welch 1978a, p. 34; Falk 1985, no. 16; Makariou 2007, pp. 44–45 (no. 11); AKTC 2008a, pp. 192–193 (no. 72).

Ibn Bakhtishū' (d. c. 1085) composed his bestiary, the *Manafi' al-hayawān* (Usefulness of Animals) around the middle of the eleventh century. In it he describes a range of species – from humans to insects – and their defining characteristics and medicinal or folkloric properties. The original Arabic text was then translated into Persian by 'Abd al-Hadi ibn Muhammad ibn Mahmud ibn Ibrahim al-Maraghi by order of the Ilkhanid ruler Ghazan Khan (r. 1295–1304). This folio belongs to a Persian translation of the bestiary, although its headings are written in Arabic in an eastern form of Kufic script (see cat. no. 12). The illustration on this folio depicts the diver (*ghawwas*, a type of long-necked waterbird) in a rather stylised manner that owes much to the influence of Chinese painting in Ilkhanid Iran: note the Chinese manner of depicting waves, and the resemblance between the flying *ghawwas* and Chinese images of cranes. The text states that this bird is found in streams near Baghdad, and tells the story of a *ghawwas* who was repeatedly attacked by a raven which would steal its newly-caught fish, until eventually the *ghawwas* retaliated and killed the raven.



# منافع از خزانگی مرغ

غواص مرغیست که بر شطریان بغداد نشیند و برای زنده کردن زیر شود و لایهای شده



لایهای بگیرد و بر آورد و بر شط نشند

و هر که در می گرداند با آنکه که سرش را

بگیرد و بخواند زود برود و همچنان با سر شود

گویند یک یا از غواصی ای بگیرد و بر شط

نشست و بمنظاری که قایم تا بخورد

کلاغی سار و از ویستند دیگر باره کذاب رفت و دیگر بی آورد کلاغ باز آمد و از ویستند دیگر باره

ماهی بر آورد کلاغ باز آمد و ماهی است از غواصی ای سینه سخت و جان کلاغ

# منافع از خزانگی مرغ

96

### The *Fūniqas* plant

Folio from a dispersed manuscript of *Khawāss al-ashjār (De Materia Medica)* by Pedanius Dioscorides Iraq, c. 1200  
 Opaque watercolour and ink on paper  
 Page: 29.8 x 20.3 cm;  
 image: 10 x 12 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00006  
 Publ.: Welch 1972a, p. 27

Between the eighth and the tenth centuries in 'Abbasid Baghdad a wealth of classical scientific texts was systematically translated and incorporated into the canon of Islamic astronomy, astrology, botany, medicine and so forth. One of the earliest scientific texts to be translated in this way was Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica*, as it is called in Latin. Pedanius Dioscorides, a Greek physician, wrote his treatise on the medicinal uses of plants in the first century CE. The manuscript was initially translated into Syriac before being translated again into Arabic in ninth-century Baghdad (Gueston–Vernay-Nouri 2001, p. 118). It became the foundation for Arabic pharmacology and was widely copied, most frequently with illustrations of each plant type to enable identification and extraction of the relevant parts. The text explains the various names given to this plant – *dush*, *kunufash* or *kubufash* – and also states that a drink made with this plant can be used to treat diarrhoea and excessive urine.



## The poppy (al-khashkhāsh)

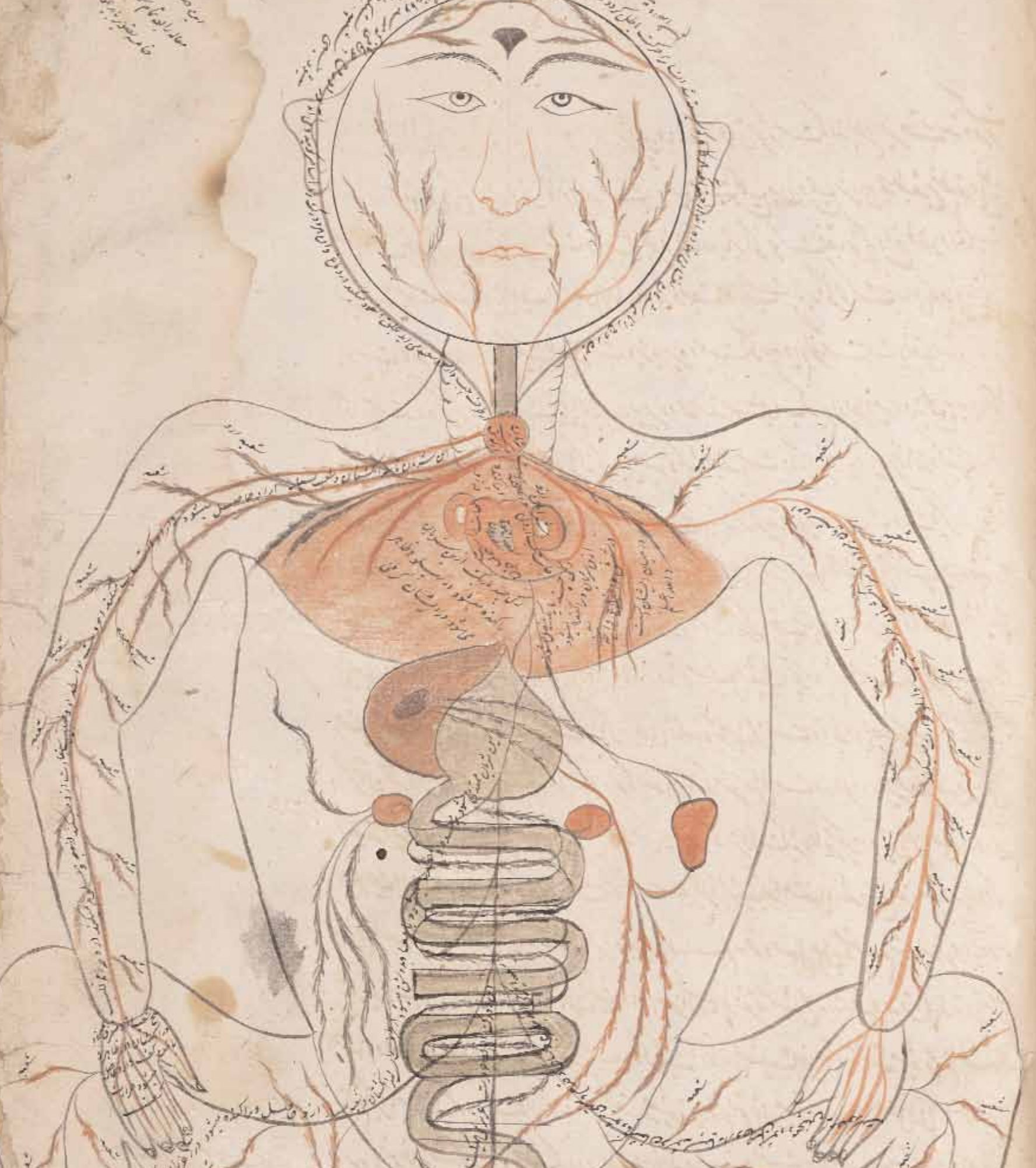
This folio comes from the same dispersed manuscript of *De Materia Medica* as cat. no. 96. Both folios show plant illustrations that are in part imitative of Late Classical or Byzantine models: the emphasis lies on the accurate depiction of all the working parts of the plant, from root system to blossom, so that all characteristic features can be demonstrated in one image. Here, the thin serrated leaves of the poppy are just as important within the image as the orange and red four-petaled flowers shown at the top. This relatively technical approach to the illustration of a scientific text is not found in all thirteenth-century illustrated Arabic copies of *De Materia Medica*: in some other manuscripts the botanical illustrations develop more narrative images, coming to show physicians collecting herbs, preparing medicine and treating patients, as well as a broader representation of the habitat where individual plants were to be collected. The text for this section describes how to cultivate the poppy and how to obtain opium from it, and also mentions that honey may be added to the opium.

97

Folio from a dispersed manuscript of *Khawāss al-ashjār* (*De Materia Medica*) by Pedanius Dioscorides Iraq, c. 1200  
Opaque watercolour and ink on paper  
Page: 29.8 x 20.5 cm;  
image: 14 x 14 cm  
Inv.: AKM00009  
Publ.: Welch 1972a, p. 28  
Makariou 2007, p. 24 (no. 1).







**Manuscript of the *Tashrih* of Mansūr ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Yūsuf ibn Ilyās**

98

“Mansur’s anatomy” (*Tashrih-i Mansuri*) is the name often used to refer to the fourteenth-century treatise on the anatomy of the human body, *Tashrih-i badan-i insane*, written by Mansur ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Yusuf ibn Ilyas, who came from a family of scholars and physicians in Shiraz. This treatise was probably completed by the end of the fourteenth century for Pir Muhammad, ruler of Fars (1393–1409) and a grandson of Timur: the earliest dated copy (894 H/1488 CE) known today is in the collection of the National Library of Medicine of the USA, Maryland (MS P 18). The text is organised into five chapters on the systems of the body – skeleton, nervous system, muscles, veins and arteries – with a full-page diagram of the human body illustrating each chapter, and in some cases further supplementary illustrations. The source of the full-page illustrations is not clear, but the form they take – the squatting posture, exaggerated head and so forth – remains very consistent over much of the history of this text (Wujastyk 2007, pp. 237–239). The present manuscript lacks a colophon but there is a note on the final page containing a date in the latter part of the seventeenth century.

Iran, mid seventeenth century  
 Opaque watercolour and ink on  
 watermarked paper  
 28.8 x 19.5 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00525  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 127 (no. 95);  
 AKTC 2007b, p. 130 (no. 95).



99

### Manuscript of the *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt* (Wonders of Creation and Oddities of Existence)

Author: Zakariyā' ibn Muhammad  
ibn Mahmūd al-Qazwīnī  
Safavid Iran, probably Shiraz, dated  
on a replacement colophon to 899  
H / 1492 CE

Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
on paper

26.8 x 16.6 cm

Inv.: AKM00367

Publ.: Welch 1978b, p. 32

Originally written in Arabic in Ilkhanid Iran, the title of the cosmography of al-Qazwini (c. 1203–1283) is commonly shortened to *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt* (Wonders of Creation). The first part of the text deals with “things above”: the structure of the heavens, the constellations, heavenly beings and time. The second part describes “things below”: the four elements, geological phenomena, and the inhabitants of the sea and earth, notably a number of fantastic creatures. In its original context the cosmography was in many senses a religious text, “with each wonder presented as a sign pointing to the greatness of its Creator” (Berlekamp 2006, p. 653), but later versions of the text shifted its character somewhat. As Badiie has noted, “Qazwini’s manuscript added little to the field of Islamic science. Its popularity as a subject for book illustration, however, cannot be disputed” (Badiie 1984, p. 97). Large numbers of illustrated versions exist, with a large degree of variation in the quality of the illustrations, suggesting that the text was popular at several levels of society. The obvious appeal of the text for the artist, with its descriptions of awe-inspiring natural phenomena as well as fantastic species, is exemplified in this group of images. The four pictures show unusual or fantastic creatures of the sea, each watched by human onlookers who gawp from a safe distance.



## Albarello

This type of high, narrow cylindrical jar seems to have appeared in Iran in the eleventh or twelfth century, subsequently spreading in popularity throughout the Near East. The elegant, rather hourglass-shaped profile was adopted in Syria from the end of the twelfth century. It is generally thought that these albarelli were used to store pharmaceutical substances or perfumes and were often exported with their contents to Europe, especially France. Various French, Spanish and Italian inventories of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries mention ceramic items “from Damascus”, such as the *albaregli damaschini* recorded in the Medici archives in Florence. The elegant black inscription of this albarello, with its exaggeratedly long downstrokes, is remarkably similar to a comparable inscription on a similar albarello in the Musée National de la Céramique de Sèvres (France). The inscriptions on the Sèvres albarello have been read as referring to impotence, presumably meaning that the pharmaceutical contents of the vessel had some role in the treatment of erectile dysfunction. It is entirely likely that in the case of this albarello the inscription also refers to the original contents, but at present the nature of the inscription and hence of the jar’s contents remains unknown.



## 100

Syria, fifteenth century  
 Fritware with underglaze decoration  
 in blue and black  
 Height: 31.7 cm; diameter 15.4 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00569  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 133  
 (no. 101c); AKTC 2007b, p. 136  
 (no. 101c); Makariou 2007, p. 190  
 (no. 69); AKTC 2008a, pp. 204–205  
 (no. 78); AKTC 2008b; AKTC 2009a,  
 pp. 134–135 (no. 95); AKTC 2009b,  
 pp. 134–135 (no. 95); AKTC 2010a,  
 pp. 136–137 (no. 97).

## 101

Syria, fifteenth century  
 Fritware with underglaze blue  
 decoration  
 Height: 30.7 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00567  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 133  
 (no. 101); AKTC 2007b, p. 136  
 (no. 101); Makariou 2007,  
 pp. 26–27 (no. 2); AKTC 2009a,  
 pp. 134–135 (no. 93); AKTC 2009b,  
 pp. 134–135 (no. 93); AKTC 2010a,  
 pp. 136–137 (no. 95).

## Albarelo

Like cat. no. 100, this albarello and its pair cat. no. 102 may have been exported to Europe as containers of pharmaceutical products. This example and cat. no. 102 obviously come from the same workshop: they have the same size and profile, with a horizontal shoulder and wide tronconical neck ending in a thick mouth, while their painted decoration is also very similar. Painted in cobalt blue under a transparent glaze, both have registers of foliage, although this example has large-petalled flowers in the central register where cat. no. 102 has cranes in flight. Most striking of all however is the blazon that adorns the central register of both this example and cat. no. 102: a shield shape bearing the heraldic device known as a *fleur-de-lys*, with the addition of two further outgrowths ending in trefoil palmettes which occupy the upper corners of the shield. Two further albarelli bearing this design were recently sold in London, and another example housed in the Musée des Arts décoratifs in Paris bears a similar coat of arms.



## Albarelo

The heraldic motif of the *fleur-de-lys* within a shield that decorates both this albarello and cat. no. 101 poses interesting possibilities: can it be linked to any particular city or personage? The *fleur-de-lys* of these albarelli, with its two flowery outgrowths in the upper corners, has been associated with the coat of arms of the city of Florence. Italian merchants – and those from Florence, in particular – were present in Cairo, Damascus and Beirut and it is possible that one of them could have ordered these vases for a Florentine apothecary, or perhaps even for medicinal use in his own home. On the other hand, the *fleur de-lys* also formed part of the Islamic repertoire, notably as the blazon of several Mamluk sultans and emirs until the fifteenth century. However, the shield-like shape of the blazon is not frequently found among the coats of arms of the Mamluks, who used a medallion that was either circular or almond-shaped. The shield-shaped field can be seen, however, on Mamluk inlaid metal objects intended for the European market, where it was sometimes left blank in order for the purchaser to engrave his own coat of arms onto it. At this stage it is not possible to say for whom these albarelli were made, but the possibilities are extremely intriguing.



## 102

Syria, fifteenth century  
Fritware with cobalt blue under a transparent glaze  
Height: 30.7 cm  
Inv.: AKM00568  
Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 133 (no. 101b); AKTC 2007b, p. 136 (no. 101b); Makariou 2007, pp. 26–27 (no. 2); AKTC 2009a, pp. 134–135 (no. 134); AKTC 2009b, pp. 134–135 (no. 134); AKTC 2010a, pp. 136–137 (no. 96).

## 103

## Planispheric astrolabe

Spain, probably Toledo, fourteenth century

Engraved copper alloy inlaid with silver

Diameter: 13,5 cm

Inv.: AKMoo611

Publ.: King 2005, pp. 831–914;

Makariou 2007, pp. 28–29 (no. 3);

AKTC 2008a, pp. 200–201 (no. 76);

AKTC 2008b; AKTC 2009a, p. 92

(no. 43); AKTC 2009b, p. 92 (no.

43); AKTC 2010 p. 94 (no. 44).

The astrolabe is an early form of computational instrument, used widely in Europe and the Islamic world until the mid-seventeenth century. At its simplest, the astrolabe works by presenting an image of the sky drawn on the circular face of the astrolabe, over which lie movable components that can be adjusted to show a specific date and time, and thus give an image of the sky at that point. Amongst other uses, it can be employed to find the time of celestial events such as sunrise or sunset and to locate celestial bodies, and hence had a wide application in astrology and astronomy in the pre-modern world. While many astrolabes made in Islamic Spain during the eleventh through fifteenth centuries have been preserved, only five astrolabes from pre-fifteenth century Christian Spain are extant, four of which come from Catalonia. This one does not come from Catalonia, and furthermore is the only one with inscriptions in Arabic, Latin and Hebrew: the latter are in the form of scratches, rather than true engravings, on one of the tympani. On the circumference of the back are the signs of the zodiac (to the outside) and the names of the solar months (to the inside), inscribed in Arabic within inlaid silver cartouches that are unique on a western astrolabe.



### Astrolabe by Hājji 'Ali

Although the manufacture of astrolabes across Europe and the Islamic world had waned following the advent of new technologies from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, a significant revival of the form took place in early Qajar Isfahan under the craftsman Hajji 'Ali. Other than his signature we have little evidence about who Hajji 'Ali was or the circumstances in which he worked, but a group of more than twenty diminutive astrolabes, all of them virtually identical to this example, are known to have been manufactured by him: examples are held in the National Maritime Museum in London (AST 0544) as well as various private collections. On this example the mater (the circular frame into which the plates are fitted) is engraved with a gazetteer giving longitude, latitude and *qibla* values for thirty-four cities, mainly in Greater Iran, while the back bears a sine quadrant in the upper left and a solar quadrant in the upper right, with curves for Shiraz, Baghdad, Isfahan and Tus.

104

Qajar Isfahan, dated 1212 H / 1797-98 CE  
 Cast and engraved brass  
 Diameter: 9 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00724  
 Unpublished





105

## The constellations Leo, Cancer, Libra and Virgo

Leaf from a dispersed manuscript of the *'Aja'ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt* (Wonders of Creation and Oddities of Existence) of Zakariyā' ibn Muhammad ibn Mahmūd al-Qazwīnī

Probably Yemen, seventeenth century

Opaque watercolour and ink on watermarked paper

29 x 20.7 cm

Inv.: AKM00397

Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 131 (no. 97); AKTC 2007b, p. 128 (no. 97).

Like cat. no. 99, this leaf from al-Qazwīnī's *'Aja'ib al-makhlūqāt* demonstrates the enjoyment artists took in illustrating this particular text. The illustrations of the astrological symbols *Sunbulat* (Virgo), *al-Mizan* (Libra), *al-Saratan* (Cancer) and *al-Asad* (Leo) appear in the section of the text dealing with the arrangement of the celestial sphere. Al-Qazwīnī's thirteenth-century writings on the constellations constitute a direct quote from the earlier *Book of the Fixed Stars* by al-Sufī (see cat. no. 106); such recycling of earlier material was practised by artists as well as authors, and the style of the paintings in the present folio suggests that they may be based loosely on thirteenth- or fourteenth-century Arab book painting. The provincial manner of the paintings, as well as their rather anachronistic appearance, makes the suggestion that this is a Yemeni manuscript dating from the period of occupation by the Ottomans quite plausible. This provenance was originally based on an attribution written in English on another page from the same manuscript (Sotheby's London, 20 November 1986, lot 195), but is bolstered by the presence on the paper of the manuscript of a watermark made up of three crescents, which was in use within the Ottoman Empire from the end of the sixteenth century.



**Manuscript of the *Kitāb Suwar al-Kawāhib al-Thābita* (Book of the Fixed Stars) by 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn 'Umar al-Sūfi**

Al-Sufi's treatise on the constellations was composed in Buyid Shiraz for 'Adud al-Dawla (d. 983). It is a handbook outlining the basic layout of the constellations, with each chapter discussing the size, location and associated folklore of one constellation, and giving two illustrations of each constellation shown in mirror image to each other. In each case one illustration shows the formation as it appears in the sky, while the other shows it in reverse as it was laid out on a celestial globe, which offered a model of the celestial sphere seen from an imagined external viewpoint. The artist has played a little within the confines of this layout, and has created in this mirror image of the constellation Auriga ("the Charioteer") two slightly differing figures who watch each other, the left figure distinguished by greater height, red lacing on the chest and red shoes against the bare feet of the right figure. Over fifty copies of al-Sufi's treatise have survived, testifying to its great popularity, and identified manuscripts were owned by renowned astronomers of the medieval period and later.

106

Safavid Iran, c. 1650  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper  
 31.5 x 18.2 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00266  
 Publ.: (Including other folios from this manuscript): Welch 1978a, pp. 71–73 (fols 7v, 155v–156r); Falk 1985, no. 93 (fol. 156r); Ritschard 2000, no. 229 (fol. 156r).



## 107

## Illustrated leaf from an unidentified manuscript

Possibly Central Asia, c. 1650–1800  
 Opaque watercolour and ink on buff  
 paper  
 23 x 17.5 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo400  
 Publ.: Pal 1973, pp. 98–99;  
 Welch 1978a, p. 24.

This remarkable and troubling page is one of a group of six leaves from a dispersed manuscript that are held in this collection, bearing twelve illustrations in all. The provenance and even the nature of this manuscript have proved persistently enigmatic: Binney tentatively suggested an eleventh- or twelfth-century Egyptian origin (Pal 1973, pp. 98–99), but this can certainly be discounted in view of (amongst many other things) an image of two men in Central Asian costume on another leaf (AKMoo402, verso). Welch has proposed that the imagery may relate to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Tibetan depictions of the tortures of hell, which might well explain this image of a man, woman and child led in chains by a red-faced demon, as well as the other images found within this group, including several illustrations of human figures bound in chains and attacked by serpents and animal-headed demons (see detail opposite of another page from the same manuscript, AKMoo404 recto) and one depiction of a chained man apparently pierced by many pegs or possibly pegged to the ground (AKMoo403 recto). It has also been suggested that the disturbing imagery of this group may relate to the mystical aspects of alchemy, a possibility that needs to be further explored. This fascinating manuscript stands as an enigmatic reminder of the vast spectrum of largely undocumented folk traditions from Central Asia that may have continued to operate until relatively recently.



یالغان کوزلا کوچی

نیل پاشا قوروش  
عزرا بشاقوروش





## The Illustrated Text





Michael Barry

## The Islamic Book and its Illustration

### The Myth of Mani and Islamic Art

Illustrated manuscripts with pictures of living creatures, commissioned by royalty, stand out among the glories of Islamic art – however allegedly such figuration may have been forbidden by stricter theologians in the culture. Masterpieces abound with images of birds, horses, dragons, or heroic princes that are often portraits of the living rulers. Generous princely patronage of the figurative arts – in fresco, mosaic, metalware, stone or stucco – may easily be traced back to the early caliphate of Damascus.

Yet in Islamic cultural perceptions, the illustration of manuscripts in particular, when filled with pictures of sentient beings, stood perilously associated with what were thought to have been the deceptive practices, and diabolic creed, of Mani, the arch-heretic or *zindiq* in the eyes of Muslim authors. According to Muslim chroniclers writing even as late as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Mani had supposedly been a marvellous painter himself, superbly illustrating his own lying scriptures to entice and delude converts.

The Mani or “Manes” of history preached his faith in third-century Sasanian Mesopotamia, claiming to blend the universal messages of Zoroaster, Jesus and the Buddha in teaching that this visible world of impure matter is ruled by an Evil God of Darkness, therein to entrap our souls that are shining particles of the good God of Light. Souls may be set free through mystical knowledge. Mani’s spiritual dualism split the universe between Good and Evil as distinct, equally potent rival forces. Mani was executed in 277 by the imperial Sasanian authorities, but his missionaries zealously spread their creed throughout both Persian and Roman empires, despite harsh persecution by orthodox Zoroastrian and Christian clergies alike. The Roman Church stamped out Western Europe’s last Manichaeans, the “Cathari” of southern France, only in the thirteenth century.

Manichaeans suffered no less under Islamic rule. Medieval Arabic still used the old official derogatory Zoroastrian word for a Manichaean, *zindiq*, “one who offers [unlawful] comment”, to

designate any follower of Mani or similar miscreant crossing impermissible religious bounds. With the advent of more tolerant Islamic rule in the seventh century, Manichaeans in the Near East briefly flourished. Then caliphal repression from the eighth to tenth centuries fell heavily upon the sect's partisans who, in the frightened eyes of the authorities, were seducing even high-ranking members of society: famous poets, eminent ministers. For unlike the empire's other tributary religions – Jews, Christians, even Zoroastrians – Manichaeans worried the 'Abbasid caliphate with their enduring, dangerous missionary vitality and intellectually appealing separation of the principles of Evil and Good, threatening the elite's fundamental beliefs regarding one Omnipotent God's creation of the entire visible world.

So Mani's name, in caliphal times, came to stand as an archetype for idolatry's most perilous decoy, the snare of false brilliance and lying beauty. By his deceptive paintings, according to Muslim writers, Mani lured unwary souls away from worship of the one true God, sole creator of the universe. Rivulets of gold and silver streamed from the bonfire of fourteen sackfuls of illustrated Manichaean books condemned as heretical by caliph al-Muqtadir in Baghdad in 923.<sup>1</sup> Beauty alone could not save these precious volumes stacked before the palace gate. Objects burnt to ashes included Mani's portrait, once displayed on its altar, and perhaps also copies of his *Ardahang* or *Artang*, the religion's "Picture-Book" – now vanished. The Iraqi librarian Ibn al-Nadīm noted that in his youth there had still been many Manichaeans in Baghdad (hiding under Arabic-sounding names), but by the time of writing in the year 987 devotees of the sect had almost disappeared from Islam's capital. Most had retreated deep into Central Asia, where Uighur Turkish kings embraced their faith and protected them from 763 to 840.<sup>2</sup>

### ***The Manichaean Illuminated Codex***

Yet the sect was still famous and admired – even by Muslims – for magnificent illustrated manuscripts coloured in lapis lazuli for blue, malachite for green, orpiment for yellow, cinnabar for red. Exquisite fragments have survived in the Uighur oases, recovered by German archaeologists at the turn of the twentieth century (now in Berlin's Museum für Asiatische Kunst). For Manichaean artists, human souls fallen from the higher world of the good god of light might behold reflections of heavenly realities through visionary paintings bright with gold and silver, mingling the pure light of the good god with the necessarily grosser minerals of the evil god of matter,<sup>3</sup> upon delicate pages illuminated with haloed angels, demons and musicians, animals and plants, to adorn the sect's scriptures now going up in flames. Manichaean artists had set the highest possible aesthetic standard for books in the environment of tenth-century Islamic civilization. Muslim artists were challenged to emulate, and surpass, what the hated Mani had wrought.

Manichaeans in their missionary work had outstandingly exploited the revolution in making books that occurred in the Roman and neighbouring Persian empires around 300 CE, when the clumsy scroll or *volumen* was replaced by the compact, easily portable *codex* of folios bound between twin hinged boards: the prototype of the modern book with its table of chapters and separable pages, which Islam inherited and developed.



The *codex* has indeed been seen to coincide both with the rise of Manichaeism and the historic triumph of Christianity, conferring worldwide sacred status upon the material book-object itself with choice bindings, abstract marginal illuminations in pigments ground from precious minerals, and bands or whole pages reserved for figurative illustration.<sup>4</sup> Muslims as of the seventh century naturally poured such care upon their own multiplied copies of the Qur'an in *codex* form – purged of illustration, of course, but soon illuminated for royal patrons in gold leaf and oil-rinsed powdered lapis lazuli, as most fitting twin pigments for holy writ.

What is certain is that the Manichaeans invested highly skilled craftsmanship and wondrous pictures in their own beautiful *codices* – and that these books deeply impressed Christians and then Muslims even though they consigned them to the flames. A surviving late fourth- or early fifth-century Greek-language “Mani Codex” from Egypt displays an astounding minuteness on parchment: “The height of the individual letters never exceeded 1 mm and the text is hardly readable with the naked eye. A glass bottle filled with water was the most likely enlarging tool used by the ancient scribes to execute such delicate calligraphy”.<sup>5</sup> Later Muslim illuminators working in similarly painstaking detail probably used water bottles too, in the days before seventeenth-century Europe’s invention of magnifying lenses. Judging from the surviving eighth- and ninth-century fragments found in the Uighur oases, the Manichaean illustrations that burned in the Baghdad bonfire of 923 were probably already painted upon paper – the Chinese invention first seen by the conquering Muslims in eighth-century Central Asia, and which they spread to Spain.

### ***Islam and Images***

Muslim book-artists saw and appreciated other illustrations than Manichaean, of course. They disapproved of the theology, but deeply respected the holy intent conveyed by the iconography of Byzantine Christian Scriptures. Arabic translations of practical Byzantine Greek books on medicinal plants, astronomy or automata were faithfully copied for the caliphs and their indispensable pictures reproduced and stylized. Royal heraldry from Sasanian Persia was also adapted in coinage, metalwork, ivory and manuscript frontispieces to depict the Muslim ruler with the halo, magic cup, lion-throne, or winged crown topped by crescent and star of the ancient shahs – the ultimate origin of the Ottoman standard.

Moreover, similar iconoclastic tensions, and ambivalent attitudes towards images generally, pervaded religious thought in both Byzantine Christendom and the neighbouring Umayyad caliphate. Eighth-century monarchs in both Constantinople and Damascus fundamentally made the same choice which Islamic civilization, historically, retained: to ban images from shrines, but preserve them in the service of the prince represented as world-ruler, mighty hunter, all-conquering warrior, Solomon-like judge. Al-Bukhārī’s ninth-century collection of “Sayings” attributed to the Prophet parallel eighth-century Byzantine iconoclastic strictures against artists similarly accused of incurring damnation for failing “to breathe the breath of life” into their handiwork as blaspheming usurpers of God’s prerogative.

But the Neoplatonic trend in Byzantine thought – defended by Saint John of Damascus (paradoxically living under Umayyad protection in Syria while the Iconoclast emperors held

power in Constantinople) – argued that man was God’s mirrored Image. The iconophiles carried the day when images were restored to Byzantine churches in 786. Images certainly never hung in mosques. But Islamic mysticism too, equally steeped in Neoplatonic thought, has insisted that prototypical or perfect man – from Adam through Christ to Muhammad and the Imams – visibly mirrors an invisible God. Later Islamic illuminators of Sufi allegorical romances of mystical love (like Nizāmi’s *Laylā ū Majnūn*) bore in mind the spiritual idea of *tajalli*, the Arabic equivalent of Greek *theophánia* or “God-made-manifest” through the heart and upon the countenance of idealized human figures, male or female. Moreover the caliphs, and then sultans, as reflections of Divine Majesty, manifested a visible “shadow of God on earth” (*Zillu-llāhi ‘alā-l-ard*), and so might be shown Solomonically enthroned. Nor did theological reservations prevent rulers from enjoying spirited pictures of everyday life like the thirteenth-century Iraqi illustrations to the rhetorical “sessions” or *Maqāmāt* of the early twelfth-century prosodist al-Harīrī, filled with scenes of camels, ships, cavalcades, and waterwheels.

But it was Mani’s iconographical challenge, his religiously unsettling claim to have pierced the secret of Evil in an alternate vision to God’s universe, that lodged as a central metaphysical worry to Muslim writers concerned with painting and book illustrations.

### ***The Fable-Book and the Book of Kings***

Yet two mid-eighth century eminent literary works, possibly tinged with Manichaean influence, left the profoundest mark upon the arts of the Islamic book, in form and content, for centuries to come. These were adaptations into splendid Arabic prose by caliph al-Mansūr’s learned Iranian minister Rōzbih, surnamed Ibn al-Muqaffa’ (“son of the maimed one”), from texts in Middle Persian singled out as the two most important written legacies in the treasury of the former Sasanian kings.

One of these was the originally Sanskrit collection of animal fables told by the twin jackals Karataka and Damanaka to the Lion King of Beasts, tales regarded as fraught with so much practical worldly wisdom for princes that they were rendered into Middle Persian by the sixth century, then dressed as *Kalila wa Dimna* by Ibn al-Muqaffa’ in Arabic garb so elegant that they have loomed as models of the language’s classical prose ever since, whence their prestige and retranslation into Latin in twelfth-century Spain.

Ibn al-Muqaffa’’s other great Arabic adaptation from Middle Persian, the “Book of Kings”, an epic chronicle of ancient Iran’s mythic heroes and monarchs now proposed as role-models for Islam’s caliphs, has not survived as such, but its matter was fully incorporated into the ninth-century classical Arabic history by the learned al-Tabarī (also revered as the most prestigious commentator of the Qur’an), then reset into majestic neo-Persian verse in the *Shahnama* begun by Daqīqī in the late tenth century and amplified and magnificently completed by Firdawsī in the early eleventh. The purport of the epic – to portray through Muslim eyes the ancient Persian Empire as just and willed by God to prepare the world for the Muhammadan message – arrestingly reflects earlier, very similar, retro-justifications of the Roman Empire by Christian clerics. In Firdawsī’s literary wake, the late twelfth-century Persian

poet Nizāmī reworked three major themes from his predecessor’s *Shahnama* – the intertwined fates of Alexander and Darius, and the feats of the Sasanian kings Bahrām V and Khusraw II – into stories charged with Islamic mystical symbolism, including far-reaching meditations upon the diabolic meaning of Mani’s art in Nizāmī’s *Iskandar-nāma* or “Book of Alexander”.

Countless royal courts commissioned illuminated copies of one version or other of these two major narrative cycles as necessary “mirrors for princes”. Yet Ibn al-Muqaffa’ himself in 757 was atrociously executed – limbs hacked off, the rest of him thrown alive into quicklime – as an unmasked Manichaean or *zindīq*. The charge may have been trumped up, but Manichaean ideas do pervade his sombre preface to *Kalila wa Dimna*, allegorically portraying this lower world as a pit with the dragon of death coiled at the bottom, awaiting our human souls with open jaws. Nevertheless, all the animal-book’s themes and stories, and those of the Epic of Kings, were fully absorbed into classical Islamic traditions from high poetry to folklore – whatever their original Arabic transmitter’s fate. “This world which you see all red and yellow is a lying enfolded carpet, the world is a Dragon whose name is Belovéd: if in lust of it, no soul can rise lust-free” (*jahān-rā kih binī chunīn surkh-ō zard, / bisātē faribandeh shud dar navard; / jahān azhdahā’i-st ma’shūq nām, / az ān kām nē jān bar āyad zi kām*), the Persian poet Nizāmī’s “Plato” tells “Alexander” in his literary elaboration of the *Shahnama*’s themes.

Most significant for our understanding of Islamic art, these twin narrative cycles appear since ‘Abbasid times to have been always illustrated. The stories, regarded as practical and even utilitarian wisdom-literature for young heirs to the throne, were deemed especially appropriate for pictures destined for princely eyes. The earliest known surviving Arabic manuscripts of *Kalila wa Dimna*, from thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Syria and Egypt, are illustrated. Ibn al-Muqaffa’ himself seems to have presented his rendition complete with pictures to the ‘Abbasid court in eighth-century Iraq.<sup>6</sup> one advantage to his story-book (“although only philosophers might grasp the deeper meaning”; *wa dhālika yakhussu l-faylasūfu khāsat-an*), lay in “the depiction of animal scenes in a variety of colours and pigments, so that they delight the hearts of kings; and their enjoyment is increased by the pleasure to be had from these illustrations [*suwar*]”.<sup>7</sup>

Whatever pictures Ibn al-Muqaffa’ submitted to his caliph, as Julian Raby points out, would have mirrored long-time favourite motifs in the storybook, like “the lion and the bull” or “the monkey and the carpenter”, already found depicted on pottery or in frescoes in pre-Islamic India and Central Asia. Subjects were retained for illustration and stubbornly transmitted down the centuries despite shifts in style, written language, even religion. Seventh- and early eighth-century pre-Islamic wall-paintings from Pianjikent in what is now Tajikistan suggest not only what manuscript renditions of the *Kalila wa Dimna* in Late Sasanian and hence Early Islamic style might have resembled, but also already offer stirring scenes from the Epic of Kings with dragon-slaying princely heroes. Whether or not Ibn al-Muqaffa’ was Manichaean as accused, his illuminators drew upon a rich tradition of illustrated book-craft bequeathed to nascent Islamic civilization by a Late Antique Mesopotamian and Iranian world saturated with Manichaean, Byzantine, Zoroastrian, and even Buddhist spiritual, cultural and aesthetic strains.

## Sixteenth-Century Culmination: Bihzād's Triumph over Mani

### *Bihzād, Hātifi and Dūst-Muhammad the Scribe*

A tiny but lovely painting in this exhibition, orpiment-yellow on a lapis-lazuli background, helps disclose the civilization's worldview when Islamic book illustration reached its sixteenth-century zenith (cat. no. 137; fig. 1).

It depicts the poet Hātifi, a member of the intellectual elite of Herat, a wealthy oasis (now in western Afghanistan) which fifteenth-century caravan prosperity turned into the creative hearth and idealized cultural model of the entire Eastern Islamic world from Istanbul to Delhi for the finest architecture, subtlest erudition, loveliest poetry in Persian or Turkish and most admired school of manuscript painting. Prince Bābur of Kabul wrote in 1506 in his memoirs that whatever talented people in Herat set out to do, they carried to perfection.<sup>8</sup>

Herat's kingdom collapsed in 1507, but the city retained cultural prestige as Sunni Uzbeks and Shi'i Safavids warred for its possession. The Safavids prevailed. When young Shāh Ismā'il, founder of Iran's new Safavid dynasty in 1501, entered the oasis in triumph in 1510, city notables donned the Shi'i turban wrapped around a tall red skullcap in sign of allegiance. The painting emphasizes such fealty by a nephew of the famous Jāmi himself (1414–1492), once the most eminent Sunni theologian and Persian poet of his day. Shāh Ismā'il visited the younger poet in the latter's garden in the winter of 1511.

A telltale sign in the picture indicates how important this interview was regarded by the Shah. The poet sports not only the "redhead" or *qizilbāş* turban of Safavid allegiance, but also a kerchief tucked into his belt: no frivolous detail, but an iconographic motif adopted in Islamic art to mark a royal wearer, harking back to Roman and Byzantine imperial symbolism where the *mappa* or cloth gripped by officials was brandished to signal the start of the games and to display legitimate power – and thus is still seen clutched, or hanging from a sash, in pictures of Ottoman and other princes. The painting, in effect, recognized Hātifi as heir to his uncle's literary and spiritual glory and so symbolically a "poet of kings and king of poets"<sup>9</sup> – now in Shāh Ismā'il's service.

Ismā'il commissioned Hātifi, who had long tried his hand at emulating Nizāmi's narratives, to write an epic in Firdawsi's vein in the shah's own praise. Hātifi, who died in 1521, never secured the same literary niche – "not so nice as reputed to be", according to Prince Bābur;<sup>10</sup> "he did not successfully reach completion", in the words of the Safavid chronicler Khwāndamīr.<sup>11</sup> The painting of Hātifi is in a sense more important than the poet Hātifi.

For it is by Bihzād, the most famous manuscript-illuminator of late fifteenth-century Herat, who pledged homage to the Shah in 1510, and in 1522 was appointed guild-master of all artists of the book throughout the Safavid empire. Bihzād until his death in 1535 presided at least hierarchically (for his eyesight may have been failing) over the skilled illuminators who worked between 1522 and 1540 in the Safavid capital of Tabriz on the superb copy of Firdawsi's *Shahnama*, made first for Shāh Ismā'il (who died in 1524), then for Shāh Tahmāsp (r. 1524–1574), who ultimately presented the work as a diplomatic gift to his fellow-ruler, Ottoman sultan Selim II, in 1568. Bihzād's portrait shows the psychological penetration of his art: his soft

shading that rounds a lifelike face and furrows a brow, possibly a distant but real reflection of Venetian influences that seeped into Ottoman painting in the late 1470s and travelled farther east. Indeed a sensitive copy, after a “Portrait of a Turkish Artist” drawn by Gentile Bellini in Istanbul, came to be attributed to Bihzād himself, and was even believed to be his self-portrait.<sup>12</sup>

The Persian inscription in gold “suspended cursive” or *nasta’liq* affirms attribution of the Hātifi portrait to Bihzād – “a portrait [*sūrat*] of the Reverend [*mawlānā* = *mevlānā*] ‘Abdullāh Hātifi, a work by Master Bihzād” – and was written by the scribe Dūst-Muhammad of Herat, who included this picture in an album of paintings and calligraphies compiled for the Safavid prince Bahrām Mīrzā in 1544. Dūst-Muhammad’s preface to the album significantly focuses on the disquieting achievement of Mani – in contrast to the legitimate painting of Christian Byzantines and then of Muslim masters culminating in Bihzād. The scribe himself never saw any authentic Manichaean manuscript illuminations, but their distant splendour still glimmers in his writings as a potent, even defining myth:

Mani began to pretend to prophesy and made this claim acceptable in the eyes of the people by cloaking it in portraiture [*libās-i sūratgarī*]. Since the people expected a miracle of him, he took a span of silk, went into a cave and ordered the entrance closed. When one year had passed from the time of his withdrawal, he emerged and showed the silk. On it he had painted and portrayed the likenesses of humans, animals, trees, birds and various shapes that occur only in the mirror of the mind through the eye of imagination and that sit on the page of possibility in the visible world only with fantastic shapes. The short-sighted ones whose turbid hearts could not reflect the light of Islam, duped by his game, took his painted silk, which was known as the Artangī Tablet, as their copybook for disbelief.<sup>13</sup>

Dūst-Muhammad chose his words with symbolic care to portray Mani as humanity’s supreme Anti-Prophet, to the point of diabolically caricaturing in advance Muhammad’s own spiritual retreat into a cave, representing him as an arch-adversary because he was a genius skilled in figurative art, the better to ensnare our souls. In a curious twist, Dūst-Muhammad makes his Mani play the role of the evil god of the Manichaean scriptures themselves. But in line with the main tenets of his Neoplatonising Sufi thought, Dūst-Muhammad posits a visible world which is God’s own mirrored icon or image (*sūrat*) – provided our purified human souls are capable of recognizing the divine One underlying, and reflected in, the visible mirror of the Many.

The Devil, however, in his guise as Mani, distracts human souls from perceiving the One in the multiplicity of mirrored images on earth. Hence Mani’s diabolic idolatry turns mirroring icons (*suwar*) into opaque idols (*asnām*). Such idols “mask” or “cloak” the One from duped human eyes like the silken curtain or screen of Mani’s *Artang*. The “cloaking of portraiture” [*libās-i sūratgarī*] that Mani wove is the scribe’s direct allusion to the Devil’s very name in Arabic, *Iblis*: believed by Muslim commentators since the tenth-century Sufi master al-Hallāj to derive from the Arabic root-consonants *l-b-s*, implying the notion of “cloaking”, “clothing”, “veiling” (the name in fact is an Arabization of Greek *diabolos*). Dūst-Muhammad’s Mani stands for all idolatrous art.



Fig.1 Portrait of the poet Hātifī, with inscriptions naming Bihzād as the artist, c. 1511 (cat. no. 137).

Christian icons, however, if correctly perceived as partial mirrors of the One, do enjoy holy value even for Muslims. Dūst-Muhammad is only one of many traditional Sufi writers to show considerable appreciation for Christian art – believed by him to have originated with the visions of the Biblical worthy Daniel – and its portraits of the prophets as visible mirrorings of divine archetypes, an artistic tradition valid in its time until superseded by Islam:

From that time forward the continuity of portraiture [*taswīr*] has continued beneath the azure dome of the sky, and the likeness [of the prophets from Adam to Muhammad] that was painted by the Prophet Daniel was meticulously preserved by the ruler of Byzantium in his treasury until the death of the Best of Mankind [Muhammad]. Therefore, portraiture is not without justification, and the portraitist’s conscience need not be pricked by the thorn of despair.<sup>14</sup>

The challenge, for a Muslim artist, lay in learning to refract the divine archetypes upon the shining mirror of his own spotless heart, so as always to direct the gaze of his viewers towards the One lying beyond all images – and not away from the One, as Mani had. A Muslim painter needed thus to surpass Mani not only in artistic skill, but also in an eternal triumph of mystical perception of the underlying One, over the dazzling but illusory Manichaeic idolatry of the “cloaking” Many.

Such triumph over Mani, according to the sixteenth-century Muslim chroniclers of the arts, had finally been won by Bihzād: as peerless artist of Islam, even as a spiritual archetype.

Writing in 1587 in Istanbul, the Turkish chronicler ‘Ālī Efendi repeats a literary convention already accepted by his entire civilization – from the Ottoman Empire through Safavid Persia to Mughal India – in pairing the twinned names of Mani and Bihzād as polar opposites of artistic supremacy, one in blasphemy, the other for true faith: *Mānī yaradılışlı ve Bihzād qalemli bir sanatçıdır*, “such-a-one’s art was like Mani’s creations and Bihzād’s pen”.<sup>15</sup> ‘Ālī Efendi begins his own list of named artists with Bihzād, as if none before him were worthy of note – except his Satanic counterpart, Mani. Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal chancery scribes alike busily collected works of Bihzād (or forgeries thereof) in albums for their royal patrons. In the words of Dūst-Muhammad introducing his own portfolio: “The most excellent of the moderns in depiction, pride of the ancients in illumination and outlining, the rarity of the age, Master Kamāluddīn Bihzād is beyond all description. In this album [his work] is much in evidence”.<sup>16</sup>

Dūst-Muhammad’s preface retraces the type of Islamic book-painting appreciated in his own age to the patronage of the converted Mongol emperors of the Near East (at the turn of the fourteenth century), when new Chinese influences combined with earlier Byzantine and Sasanian prototypes “and Master Ahmad Mūsā ...lifted the veil from the face of depiction [*taswīr*], and the style of depiction that is now current was invented by him”.<sup>17</sup> Individual Muslim artists’ names in Dūst-Muhammad’s chronicle thus interestingly emerge from anonymity much in the same late medieval period, ca. 1300–1335, as the Italian painters in Vasari’s chronicle. But however vigorously renewed their style, the two preferred illustrated books of the Persianized Mongol rulers in Tabriz endured tenaciously the same, as Dūst-Muhammad tells us: the Epic of Kings or *Shahnama*, and the *Kalila wa Dimna*.<sup>18</sup>

Yet Dūst-Muhammad's text remains perhaps less valuable for his stylistic critiques, although the scribe had a sharp eye,<sup>19</sup> than for his Sufi perceptions regarding his culture's art which he shares with his fellow Safavid chronicler, Khwāndamīr.

Khwāndamīr, like Dūst-Muhammad a scion of the cultural elite of Herat, also prefaced a royal album of Bihzād's pictures and composed the edict of 1522 by which Shāh Ismā'īl appointed Bihzād as guild-master of all book-artists in his realm. Khwāndamīr's language draws heavily on mystical terminology influenced by the greatest of Herat's theologians, Jāmī, and beyond, Ibn 'Arabī.<sup>20</sup> In virtue of the Qur'anic verse 40:64 (*wa-sawwarakum fā-ahsana suwarakum*, "He wrought your figure and made your figures most beautiful") stressing God's creation of the supremely beautiful human "figure" or "icon" [*sūra*], Khwāndamīr makes Bihzād conquer Mani in an archetypal mental tableau – like Christ vanquishing the Devil in a Byzantine fresco (Eusebius of Caesarea too called "Manes" the Devil himself) – frozen in glory for all eternity:

*...Ustād Kamāluddīn Bihzād-rā kih az qalam-i chihreh-gushā-yash jān-i Māni khajal shudeh-ō az kilik-i sūrat-ārā-yash Lawh-i Artang munfa'il gashteh...*

... Master Kamāluddīn Bihzād, through his portrait-painting stylus, put Mani's soul to shame, and by his icon-adorning brush, humiliated the Tablet of the Artang....<sup>21</sup>

*Bihzād yagāneh-yi zamāneh, Māni ba-zamān-i ū afsāneh!  
Mū-yi qalam-ash, zi ustādī, jān dādeh ba-sūrat-i jamādi.*

Bihzād is one and alone in his day!  
Mani? A fable in Bihzād's own day!  
A hair from his brush, through sheer mastery,  
Might quicken with soul  
Even mineral form  
In an icon!<sup>22</sup>

*Mū-yi qalam-at, tā ba-jahān chihreh gushād,  
Bar chihreh-yi Māni raqm-i naskh nihād.*

When a hair of your brush showed its face to the world,  
Mani's face did it cancel across with a stroke!<sup>23</sup>

Khwāndamīr's other charged mystical allusions – all traceable to Jāmī's references to art – include deliberate use of the same words to designate a "brush" and a "pen", implying full equivalence between the sanctified stylus of calligraphers, and the tool used by a figurative painter like Bihzād. Bolder still is his evocation of Christ's miracle told by the Qur'an (and in Apocryphal traditions), whereby the child Jesus moulds a clay bird and blows life or "spirit" into it "with My permission" (*bi-idhni*) (Qur'an 5:113).



Khwāndamīr's allusion to the Qur'anic Christ recognisably paraphrases lines from Jāmī's celebrated allegorical romance of mystical love dated 1483, *Yūsuf-ō Zulaykhā* (Joseph and Potiphar's wife), wherein the great poet of Herat had described a mysterious magician-artist who wrought the Lady Zulaykhā's castle:

*Ba-sang ar sūrat-i murghē kashidē,  
Subuk! Sang-i girān az jā paridē!*

And if, upon a stone, a bird's image he drew,  
This heavy stone turned light, and whence it lay, took flight!

Bihzād introduced quotations from this same poem of Jāmī into his own wonderful illustration of the story as told by the poet Sa'dī, in the manuscript of the *Būstān* dated 1488 (now in the National Library in Cairo) – undoubtedly with Jāmī's permission. Did Jāmī then imply Bihzād himself? Khwāndamīr, certainly, took Jāmī's hint specifically to apply to Bihzād. Yet another Safavid scribe, Mīr Sayyid Ahmad, offers a stylized variation of both Jāmī's and Khwāndamīr's verses, in still another preface for a picture album dated 1564–1565 (now preserved in Istanbul): verses that circulated so widely that they were repeated *verbatim* (without credit) by Qāzī Ahmad Qummī, in his own chronicle of the arts dated 1596, making the Christlike allusion to Bihzād – as a Muslim artist blessed by God as if a new child Jesus – both limpid and irrefutable:

*Būd sūrat-i murgh-i ū dil-pazīr,  
Chū murgh-i Masīhā shudeh rūh-gīr!*

The very bird he painted – an icon dear to hearts! –  
Like to the very bird of Christ took soul!<sup>24</sup>

Their meaning in the cultural context is clear: Bihzād's art, in contrast to Mani's, is sanctified through God's permission, both because it directs our eyes towards the Creator, and because, like Christ, the artist receives from God that "spirit" which quickened the moulded bird of inert matter. As guild-master of the book-craftsmen, Bihzād corresponds to the Sufi *shaykh* of a holy Order, who spiritually guides his disciples through his crystalline mental refraction of the divine archetypes. In light of the Sufi language of these sixteenth-century scribes, it becomes difficult to dismiss the great paintings of the age which illuminated the *Shahnama* and *Kalīla wa Dimna* – and their many variants – as frivolous adornment of mere anecdotal import. Instead, the paintings become allegorically translucent meditations upon the texts they accompany or – if isolated in an album – to which they allude.

### ***The Portrait of Sultan Selīm II***

Even a court portrait, like the Ottoman artist Ra'īs Haydar Nigāri's depiction of Sultan Selim II made c. 1570, sparkles with the visual symbols of a devout and erudite civilization (cat. no. 134).

The painting, for all the massive strength of its stout sultan packed in layers of gold, vermilion and lapis-lazuli robes, may lack the subtlety of Bihzād's *Hātijfi*, but the Ottoman world-ruler grips the princely kerchief inherited from Byzantine emperors, and also the world-mirroring cup of ancient Persian heraldry, assimilated in Eastern Islamic tradition with Solomon's cup, held tight against his heart because it symbolizes his own pure heart. The sultan's caftan patterned like a tiger-pelt recalls yet another mythic Persian hero: Rustam (*Rüstəm*), the Iranian lion-, panther- or tiger-clad Heracles, slayer of dragons and other embodiments of evil.<sup>25</sup> The whole painting, in fact, alludes to the Epic of Kings: turning the Ottoman sultan into a *Shahnama* hero himself. Selim II was not only presented with Shāh Tahmāsp's great copy of the epic in 1568, but became the subject of an illustrated Ottoman Persian-language epic of his own rule and conquests, modelled directly on Firdawsī's poem: the *Shāh-Nāmeḥ-yi Selim Khān*, completed by the court poet Luqmān in 1581 (some seven years after the sultan's death in 1574).

### ***Shāh Tahmāsp's Book of Kings: the Sky-Hero and the Dragon***

In Tabriz, capital of neighbouring Safavid Iran, Shāh Tahmāsp's gifted and highly literate artists, at first under the spiritual directorship of Bihzād, laboured through the 1520s to 1530s on the world's most celebrated copy of the *Shahnama*. Assisted by his disciple Mīr Sayyid 'Alī, Master Sultān-Muhammad probed the symbolism of the story of "Prince Farīdūn chains the Dragon-King Zahhāk in a cave" (cat. no. 121) through dizzy layers of meaning that plunge to the roots of Iranian mythology.

No detail introduced by Sultān-Muhammad in visual comment to the text is gratuitous. Prince Farīdūn wields the bull-headed mace that in Avestic lore symbolised the fertilising thunderbolt with which the Celestial Hero *Thraētaona* (the ancient form of the name), on Spring's "New Day" of 21 March, smote and tore asunder the Dragon-Cloud of Winter – rendered visible by the artist in the contorted vapour above the cave, in clear allusion to the Dragon-King chained below – and so bestowed life-giving rain.

But Firdawsī's epic, written in Islamic times, subtly implied symbolic Islamic parallels to cherished Iranian myths. In Avestic tradition, the Dragon-Cloud of winter had been a three-headed monster called the *Verethra* (the "Withholder" of rain) and also the *Azhi-Dahāka* (the "Snakelike Man"), smitten and slain by the lightning-mace of the celestial hero *Thraētaona* (the Iranian counterpart to the sky-gods Thor, Zeus and Indra). Yet in the texts of Muslim authors as early as Tabarī, and very much including Firdawsī, the Dragon-King's name in pseudo-Arabized form became derogatory *D'ah'h'āk* or *Zahhāk*, a pun on "buffoon" in Arabic script. Firdawsī, like Tabarī, describes the monster as an evil three-headed human king with a man's face between two serpents sprouting on his shoulders (fed with human brains). But Firdawsī keeps his "Zahhāk" alive after "Farīdūn" smites him, so that, once vanquished, the Dragon-King is chained inside a hollowed rock: both in the poem, and in Sultān-Muhammad's painting, this imagery is used deliberately to suggest an analogy to the famous demon *Sakhr* ("the stone-devil") of Islamic lore – who once usurped Solomon's throne, and then was incarcerated by Solomon in a prison of rock. Sultān-Muhammad's mountainscape bristles with demon-faces lurking in the rocks: a visual gloss, and recurrent convention, of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century

Islamic illustrations, to stress the eternal parallel triumphs of “Farīdūn” and “Solomon” over the demons.

In fact the successive heroes of the *Shahnama* symbolize the recurrent sky-force of divine victorious light under many names – from Farīdūn to Kay-Khusraw to Rustam to Bahrām – whose thunder-bolts and solar rays, depicted as mace, sword, lance or arrows, pierce and rend the dragons of night, chaos and stormclouds. The eloquent illumination by Mīrzā ‘Alī (cat. no. 123), Sultān-Muhammad’s gifted son and pupil, significantly links a sunburst over the horizon, *chū khurshīd bar zad sinān az firāz* (“just as the sun shot down darts from on high”), with Prince Gushtāsp’s archetypal victory over the Night-Dragon: transfixed with sun-arrows, then lacerated by the solar hero’s blade.

Since the thirteenth-century Mongol conquests dragon designs in Islamic art had been derived from Chinese silks and porcelains, but absorbed these models with vigorous draftsmanship and bold pigments because of the abiding significance of the dragon in Near Eastern thought. The creature also symbolizes the rain-giving stormcloud in Chinese culture, yet it remains ambivalent, even beneficent in Chinese eyes – but was vividly associated with Evil in the poetic mythologies of the Near East. The Arabic for “dragon”, *tinnīn*, simply means “snake”. But the neo-Persian *azhdahā* – whence Turkish *ejderhā* – derives from ancient *Azhi-Dahāka*, the Dragon-King of the Epic.

In Mīrzā ‘Alī’s painting, Prince Gushtāsp’s triumph over the dragon of Mount Saqīlā repeats his forebear Farīdūn’s victories over Zāhhāk, and also announces those of his dragon-slaying descendant King Bahrām: for *Bahrām* itself is the late Persian form of Avestic *Verethragna*, the “Slayer of the *Verethra* [Rain-Withholding Dragon]”, and name of so many Sasanian rulers. Christendom’s Saint George of Cappadocia, too, absorbed elements of this multi-faced Zoroastrian god *Bahrām* or *Verethragna*, worshipped in Hellenized Anatolia as *Heracles Artagnes*.

### **Sādiqī Beg, from the Book of Kings to the Fable-Book**

Shāh Tahmāsp’s brief-reigned successor in the new Safavid capital Qazvīn, Shāh Ismā‘il II (r. 1576–1577), commissioned his own illustrated copy of the Epic of Kings as an indispensable emblem of his rule. Leading artists of the new generation for this *Shahnama* included Sādiqī Beg, himself trained by Muzaffar ‘Alī, Bihzād’s great-nephew and replacement as the head of the guild of book-artists.

A boldly temperamental master with an energetic calligraphic line, Sādiqī Beg (Bey), though not a direct descendant of Bihzād, was appointed guild-master or *Kitābdār*, “Keeper of the Books”, shortly after 1587, by Shāh ‘Abbās: for talent, unlike hereditary Grand Mastership in other Sufi Orders, did not necessarily run in the bloodline. But Sādiqī Beg emphasized his own duly received transmission of the “Bihzādiān holy zeal”, *himmat-i Bihzādi*, as in a Sufi-type succession, in his valuable written manual for guild-members, the *Qānūn al-Suwar* or “Canon of Icons”.<sup>26</sup>

Sādiqī Beg’s other artistic testament was his personally owned manuscript, apparently copied for him in 1593 by a hired scribe for the guild-master’s private enjoyment (or rather as a model for his guild?), of the enduring fable-book of Ibn al-Muqaffa’ in the lovely though highly elaborate

Fig. 2 (facing page)  
“The ducks carry the tortoise over a village”. Fol. 89v of the *Anwār-i Suhaylī* manuscript of Sādiqī Beg, 1593 (cat. no. 127).

من عرض جوار هیچ آفریده نخواهم شد **تظلم** به پیرو رسیدم در اقصای یونان  
 بدو گفتم ای آنکه با عقل و هوشی ز مردم چه هنر نظر حال کن تا خوشی خوشی خوشی خوشی  
 ایشان چو بی بیایند و ندوسنگ پشت میان آن محکم بزدان گرفت و بجان در هر  
 دو جانب برداشته او را میردند چون به اوج هوا رسیدند که از ایشان بر بالای  
 دیهی افتاد مردم دیه بخبردار شده از حال



ایشان متوجکشته بنفرج پرور آمدن  
 از نجب و راست فریاد برخواست که منجر به آنکه بجان سنگ پشت را میردند چون مثل آن صورت

neo-Persian rendition entitled *Anwār-i Suhaylī*, “The Lights of Canopus”, by still another of Herat’s leading literati, Vā’iz-i Kāshifī (d. 1504).<sup>27</sup> Sādiqī thought highly enough of the book to illustrate the manuscript himself (cat. no. 127). His scribe Muhammad al-Husaynī of Tabriz remarks in the colophon: “It is written as is ordered by the rare man of the time, the second Mani and the Bihzād of the age, Sādiqī-i Musavvir [the painter]”.<sup>28</sup> Thus the Safavid guild-master, in his scribe’s highest possible praise, fulfilled his culture’s twin archetypes: skilled as a new Mani, sanctified as a new Bihzād.

Most subjects in the fable-book rendered by Sādiqī, in his expressive style rich in atmospheric and shaded effects through sensitively applied light washes of pigment, can be traced back to the earliest known illustrations of the *Kalīla wa Dimna* tradition. The motif of “The tale of the tortoise carried aloft by clamping on a stick borne by two ducks”, on his folio 89 verso (fig. 2), has been found carved upon a stone pillar at Bodh-Gaya in India dating from the sixth century.<sup>29</sup> A tortoise begs her twin friends the ducks, when a drought dries their home pond and forces them to migrate, not to abandon her; the birds contrive an ingenious conveyance, but warn the turtle to observe silence whatever amazed people might say. However, when the trio fly over an amazed and yelling crowd, the impatient tortoise cannot refrain from crying out, according to Ibn al-Muqaffa’: “May God blind your eyes!” *Faqā’a Allāhu a’yunakum!* (“may the jealous become blind to the world!” *Hāsīd ba-jahān kūr bād!*, in Jāmī’s version, or “may those who cannot see for themselves go blind!” *Tā kūr shavad har ān-kih natavānad did!* in Kāshifī’s). As soon as she opens her maw, the tortoise – mentally blind herself – falls to her doom.

Although the obvious moral of the fable is the simple message “silence is golden”, Ibn al-Muqaffa’ wrapped his tale within the darker frame-story of a dangerous ocean ruled by an evil genie (originally a Hindu god) whose waves engulf any eggs left to hatch on its beach by unwary nesting birds as foolish as the tortoise. Manichaeic-type pessimism suffuses this fable-book whose moral message, fully shared by classical Sufi thought, warns souls (pictured as birds and beasts) not to fall through the mirrors of illusion and the traps of haste, lust, wrath, into this lower world of spiritual death: “that you not plunge through the terrifying sphere from the skies onto the earth” (*tā kih dar in dāyireh-yi hōlnāk / az sar-i aflāk nayuftī ba-khāk*), as Jāmī phrases his stern rendition of the “tortoise and the ducks”. Kāshifī, on the tortoise’s fall, quotes the Qur’an (24:54) to drive the grim point home: human souls must heed the Prophet’s message, if they fail their doom is their own: *wa lā ‘alā r-Rasūli illā l-balāghu l-mubin!* “What pertains unto the Prophet is only the clear message!”

Sādiqī the painter coaxes his own message from the story. He retains the idea of confining birds and tortoise to the upper right, emphasizing rather the human spectators below like the skilled illuminator of Jāmī’s version of the tale in the 1556–1565 “Freer Jāmī” from Mashhad.<sup>30</sup> But the earlier rendition was bright with richly dressed courtiers gazing up from around a splendid royal tent. Instead, Sādiqī transports the scene to a humble village, and his watching peasants belong, each one, to a different category of age, for the story should be pondered by all humans: an elderly man bites a perplexed finger; a grizzled middle-aged man peeks between the brick-domed houses signifying this lower earth, one of which emits smoke (a common Sufi image opposing this lower world to the brighter heavenly one as in “Hermes’ discourse unto

Alexander”, *ba-bālā-yi dūdē chunīn hōlnāk / furūzandeh nūrī-st sāfi-ō pāk*, “above this dreadful smoke shines a clean pure light” and “Alexander’s last letter to his mother” in Nizāmī’s Alexander romance: *ba-zindāniyān-i zamīn zēr-i khisht*, “unto the prisoners of this earth, under brick”; or in ‘Attār’s and Amīr Khusraw’s repeated comparisons of this lower world to a domed brick bathhouse or *garmābeh*, as in Amīr Khusraw’s *Tale of the Violet Pavilion*); a spade-carrying young adult and his wife point skywards at the marvel; an adolescent also points, for his grandmother’s instruction; a small child gapes too. Some of the village’s animals ignore the wonder and look downwards to feed their beastly natures, others look up: a rooster, hen and chick (three soulbirds), and the dog (a probable allusion to the saved dog of the Companions of the Cave in Sura 18 of the Qur’an, much represented in sixteenth-century Iranian painting).

Trees and bushes line the village’s horizon: one flourishes as a saved soul, the others twist in sterile agony as withered growths that symbolize damned souls incapable of perceiving a divine manifestation: an image familiar to Christianity and made famous in Sufism in Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Shajarat al-Kawn* or “Tree of Life”, often rendered in stark allegorical contrast between a great living tree trembling in the verdant or multicoloured joy of its foliage and branches (*wa-hazzat tarab-an shajaratu l-akwāni wa taharraka mā fihā min al-alwāni wa-l-‘idān*) and lovingly inclined towards God’s revelation (*fa-māla ilayhā muta’attif-an*), and an opposite rockscape of dead despairing stumps (*yābis-an wa wajhu sa’ādatihi ‘ābis-an*) – as in Bihzād’s art.<sup>31</sup>

Allegory, in the traditional literary and pictorial arts of the Islamic and Christian worlds, needed not turn its back on mordant depictions of the living world: to the contrary, it might invite pungent, earthly realism in sixteenth-century Persian and Flemish painting alike, in Sādiqī or Breughel. Sādiqī’s verve, sense of allegory, psychological penetration, and hints of shading and modelling were appreciated in Mughal India where this very manuscript, as specified on its own flyleaf, was presented as a gift in 1618 by the wealthy Persian-born officer Mīr Jumla to the emperor Jahāngīr.

### **‘Abd al-Samad’s Prince and Hermit**

Just how much Indian painting at the court of the Great Mughals, by the later sixteenth century, owed to Timurid and Safavid Persian influences – combined with atmospheric effects learned with increasing skill from European oils presented by the Portuguese Jesuit missions – is clearly shown in this exhibition’s wonderful “Prince and Hermit”, finished between 1585 and 1590 in India by the expatriate Iranian artist ‘Abd al-Samad (cat. no. 141). The painting summarizes the aesthetic accomplishments of a century, and the symbolic language evolved by a civilization over a millennium.

‘Abd al-Samad beautifully adapts a major symbolic composition created in Herat by Bihzād in 1494 to illustrate Nizāmī’s *Iskandar-nāma* or “Alexander romance”, in a precious manuscript which the Iranian-born artist saw in the Mughal collections (now in the British Library, Or. 6810, f. 273r). With overlapping layers of pigment to raise up a modelled feel, ‘Abd al-Samad softens his Herati master’s hard, jewel-like desert sparkle, with a hint of damp Indian mist delicately shrouding distant palm-trees. The “Alexander” who kneels before this Sage is no longer a portrait of Herat’s Sultan Husayn as in Bihzād’s picture, but the young heir-apparent of

the Mughal throne, Prince Salīm, the future Emperor Jahāngīr. But much of the allegorical language is still Bihzād's.

The theme of the Prince, richest man in his kingdom, dismounting to show reverence to a cave-dwelling dervish, the poorest of men but spiritually free by voluntarily renouncing all worldly wealth, is a central motif of royal Islamic illustrations. The fourteenth-century Indo-Persian poet Amīr Khusraw, venerated as a holy patron by the Mughal dynasty much as Rūmī was by the Ottomans in the West, drew upon both Firdawsī's and Nizāmī's epics to call his Prince "Alexander" and the Sage "Plato", standing for all royalty, for all wisdom – and this painting may in fact illustrate Amīr Khusraw's rendition of the romance.

The archetype goes back to the Hellenistic story of Alexander and Diogenes; this has been blended with traditions of the Macedonian conqueror's meeting with the naked Indian Brahmins, and Islamicized not only in poetry and art, but also in court etiquette. As a new "Alexander", the Mughal ruler, once a week, visited a hermit, turning his back ostentatiously upon his nobles, and knelt and listened to saintly advice. In a similar manner, his contemporary, the Ottoman sultan, with due modesty received his sword of office, and legitimate investiture, from the hereditary master of the Mevlevī Dervish Order, direct descendant of Rūmī.

The Tree of Life rising from the Spring of Life to bow over the saint is only one of many profound symbolic motifs borrowed by 'Abd al-Samad from Bihzād and so ultimately from the mystics, Jāmī and Rūmī, Ibn 'Arabī and even al-Hallāj. From one of the stones, moulded like a blind demon-mask, juts up a dry stump, the mark of Satan – who sits to the far right, like an anguished dervish, dressed in the blue of mourning like a despairing Mani, incapable of seeing the face of the Perfect Man, who turns his back upon him to receive the properly submissive Prince and the homage of the Tree. The archetypal triumph is, in a sense, Bihzād's, and beyond, that of the rich, profoundly significant tradition of Islamic illustrative art.

- 1 Ibn al-Jawzī (twelfth century), quoted in Adam Mez, *Die Renaissance des Islams* (Heidelberg 1922, Hildesheim 1968), 167; whence citation in Thomas Arnold, *Painting in Islam* (Oxford 1928, New York 1965), 61.
- 2 Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 995) on “al-Mānawiyya”, in *al-Fihrist*: Gustav Flügel ed. (Leipzig 1871), 337, 21–26; R. Tajaddud ed. (Beirut 1971), 400–401.
- 3 Ibn al-Nadīm’s account of the “mingling” of pure light and gross matter in gold and silver according to the Manichaeans (*Fihrist*, Flügel ed. 330, Tajaddud ed. 393).
- 4 See, *inter alia*, Carl Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Book-Painting* (New York 1977), 7ff; and perceptive comments on Manichaean missionaries and the spread of the codex in Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (Oxford 2003), 82:
- Manichaeism, like Christianity, was very much a religion of the book. Manichaean manuscripts from as far apart as Middle Egypt and the Turfan Oasis of western Sinkiang show the unmistakable power of the codex as the bearer of a universal religious law. A Manichaean Psalm book from Egypt even has a five-page index of contents at the back; and a recent, astonishing discovery, a Life of Mani, was exquisitely produced in a miniature format, so as to fit, discreetly, into the robes of a traveller.
- 5 See Iain Gairdner and Samuel Lieu on the Mani Codex now in the University Library of Cologne, *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire* (Cambridge 2004), 40.
- 6 Julian Raby, ‘The Earliest Illustrations to *Kalilah wa Dimnah*’ in Grube (ed.), *A Mirror for Princes From India* (Bombay 1991), 16–31.
- 7 Raby’s translation (*ibid.*, 18) renders from the Arabic of the Beirut 1905 and 1923 Cheikho eds. of the *Kalila wa Dimna* (52), now difficult to procure: ... *iz’ hāru khayālāti l-haywānāti bi-sunūfi l-alwāni wa-l-asbāghī li-yakūna uns-an li-qulūbi l-mulūki wa yakūna hirsuhum ashadd-un li-n-nuzhātī fi tilka s-suwar.*
- 8 *Bāburnāma*, W.H. Thackston ed. (Cambridge MA 1993), vol. II, 368–369 [177 b]: *Sultān-Husayn Mirzāning zamāni ‘ajab zamāni edi. Ahl-i fazl u benazir eldin Xurāsān, bi-taxis Hari šahrī, mamlū edi. Har kišining kim bir iškā mašūlluqī bar edi, himmatī u ġarazī ol edi kim ol isni kamālga yetkūrgāy.*
- 9 *Shā’ir-i shahān-ō shah-i shā’irān*: Persian chronicle by Khwāndamīr (sixteenth century), *Tārikh-i Habib-us-Siyar* (Tehran ed. 1955), vol. IV, 355.
- 10 Thackston, *Bāburnāma* Vol II, 376–377: *agarcī litāfatī šuhratica yoqtur.*
- 11 Khwāndamīr, *Tārikh-i Habib-us-Siyar: ammā tawfiq-i itmām nayāft.*
- 12 Latest research in Caroline Campbell and Alan Chong (eds), *Bellini and the East* (New Haven – London 2006).
- 13 ‘Preface to the Bahrām Mirzā Album’ (Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi H. 2154), Persian text ed. with English trans. by Wheeler M. Thackston, *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painters* (Leiden 2000), 12 [Istanbul ms. 14 recto]; Bihzād’s portrait of Hātīf was most probably extracted from this album, on which see especially Anthony Welch and Stuart Cary Welch, *Arts of the Islamic Book* (London 1982), 67–69.
- 14 Düst-Muhammad trans. Thackston, *Album Prefaces*.
- 15 Mustafā ‘Alī Efendi, *Menāqib-i Hünernerān* (“*Virtues of the Artists*”; 1587), Mahmūd Kemāl Bey ed. (Istanbul 1926); Müjgan Cunbur ed. in Latin characters *Hattatların ve Kitap Sanatçılarının Destanları* (“*Tales of Calligraphers and Artists of the Book*”) (Ankara 1982), 118–125. ‘Alī Efendi too stresses Mani’s diabolic skill and idolatrous influence from Iraq to China.
- 16 Düst-Muhammad, trans. Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, 14–15.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 11–12.
- 18 *Ibid.* Düst-Muhammad refers to what are probably the “Demotte” *Shahnama* pages (from the name of the early twentieth-century Paris dealer who dismembered the manuscript), now in numerous collections, and to a volume close to or actually identical with the mid-fourteenth century Persian *Kalila wa Dimna* now in Istanbul University Library, Yıldız Album F. 1422.
- 19 Martin Dickson and Stuart Cary Welch (*The Houghton Shahnameh* [Cambridge MA 1981], 118–128) consider Düst-Muhammad the scribe and the Düst-Muhammad who contributed paintings to Shāh Tahmāsp’s famous *Shahnama* before joining the Mughal court in Kabul in 1545 to be the same individual (see also Welch and Welch, *Arts of the Islamic Book*, 146–148); Chahryar Adle distinguishes them (“*Les artistes nommés Dust-Mohammad au XVIe siècle*”, *Studia Iranica* 22 (1993), 219–296).
- 20 Khwāndamīr, *Nāmeḥ-yi Nāmī* (“*Book of Renown*”; 1522), collection of texts preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, edict and album preface published in the original with French trans. by Mirza Muhammad Qazwini and L. Bouvat, ‘*Deux documents inédits relatifs à Behzād*’, *Revue du monde musulman* 26 (1914), 146–161; preface published anew with English trans. in Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, 41–42. Jāmi’s influence on sixteenth-century perceptions of Bihzād is a main theme of Michael Barry, *Figurative Art in Medieval Islam and the Riddle of Bihzād of Herāt (1465-1535)* (New York 2005).
- 21 Bouvat and Qazwini, ‘*Deux documents*’, Persian text, 160; French text, 153; translation mine.
- 22 Bouvat and Qazwini, ‘*Deux documents*’, Persian text, 157; French text, 149; also Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, 42; translation mine.
- 23 Bouvat and Qazwini, ‘*Deux documents*’, Persian text, 158; French text, 150; also Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, 42; translation mine.
- 24 Mir Sayyid Ahmad Mashhadī, preface to the *Amir Ghayb Beg Album* (1564–1565), Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi H.2161, folio 13 verso, Persian text Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, 27, translation mine; Qāzi Ahmad Qummi, *Gulistān-i Hunar* (“*Rose bower of the Arts*”; 1596), A. S. Khwānsāri ed. (Tehran 1974), 134; English trans. V. Minorsky, *Calligraphers and Painters* (Washington D.C. 1959).
- 25 On the image of Heracles with club and lion-pelt in the Hellenized Near East, and its formative influence on the myth and depiction of Persian Rustam, see A. S. Melikian-Chirvani’s fundamental ‘*Rostam and Herakles, a Family Resemblance*’, *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 12 (1998), 171–199.
- 26 Persian text given by A. Y. Kaziev (Baku 1963); M. T. Dānesh-Pazhūh in *Hunar-ō Mardom* 90 (Tehran 1970); Persian text with French trans. in Yves Porter, *Peinture et arts du livre: Essai sur la Littérature Technique Indo-Persane* (Paris – Tehran 1992); English trans. in Welch and Dickson, *The Houghton Shahnameh*.
- 27 Welch and Welch, *Arts of the Islamic Book*, 104; since E. G. Browne hated this version (*A Literary History of Persia* [Cambridge 1920], vol. III, 504), twentieth-century commentators have tended to follow suit.
- 28 Welch and Welch, *Arts of the Islamic Book*, 104.
- 29 See Ernst J. Grube, ‘*The Early Illustrated Manuscripts of Kalilah wa Dimnah*’, Eleanor Sims, ‘*16th-Century Persian and Turkish Manuscripts of Animal Fables in Persia*’, and Manijeh Bayani, ‘*Kalilah wa Dimnah Themes in Persian Literature*’, all in Grube (ed.), *Mirror for Princes*; Bodh-Gaya illustration, 34, fig. 22, after A. Foucher, ‘*Les représentations de Jataka dans l’art bouddhique*’, *Mémoires concernant l’Asie orientale* III (1919), 1–52.
- 30 See Sims ‘*16th-Century Persian and Turkish Manuscripts*’, 108. The “*Freer Jāmi*” is the illuminated manuscript of Jāmi’s collected *Haft Awrang* or “*Seven Thrones*”, copied for the Safavid prince Ibrāhīm Mirzā in Mashhad in 1556–1565, Freer Gallery 46.12; the “*tortoise and ducks*” illustrated story, folio 215v, attributed to the artist ‘Abd al-‘Aziz by the late Stuart Cary Welch (personal communication), is in Jāmi’s *Tuhfat-ul-Ahrār* (“*Gifts for the Pious*”), chapter IX: “*Silence is salvation’s treasure*”; a beautiful reproduction is found in Marianna Shreve Simpson, *Persian Poetry, Painting and Patronage: Illustrations in a Sixteenth-Century Masterpiece* (New Haven – London 1998), 60–61.
- 31 Ibn ‘Arabī, *Shajarat al-Kawn* (Cairo ed. 1941), 5; English trans. by Arthur Jeffery in ‘*Ibn Al-Arabi’s Shajarat al-Kawn*’, *Studia Islamica* 10 (1959), 76. On its imagery reflected in Rūmī, Bihzād, and sixteenth-century Islamic art, see Barry, *Figurative Art*, 331–338.



Lâle Uluç

## The *Shahnama* of Firdawsî as an Illustrated Text

Abu'l-Qāsim Firdawsî (c. 940–1020) completed his *Shahnama* a thousand years ago in the year 1010, and presented it to Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (999–1020). The *Shahnama* is a long epic poem consisting of anything between 40,000 and 60,000 verses and narrates the legendary history of the ancient rulers of Iran. It ends with the fall of the Sasanian dynasty, before the Arab invasion in the middle of the seventh century which marked the beginning of the Islamic period.

It is generally accepted that Firdawsî used both written and oral sources in compiling his work.<sup>1</sup> Stories about *Shahnama* heroes were recited orally from the earliest Islamic times.<sup>2</sup> It is known that Firdawsî's patron, Sultān Mahmūd of Ghazna, also had professional storytellers at his court, who recounted him stories from the *Shahnama*.<sup>3</sup> During the Safavid period (1502–1779) storytelling in coffee- and tea-houses appears to have become very popular.<sup>4</sup> This seems to have continued, since as late as Qajar times (1796–1925) stories from the *Shahnama* were illustrated, read and listened to, with their heroes constituting the principal role models for rulers.<sup>5</sup>

The exact version of the *Shahnama* as Firdawsî completed it in the year 1010 is not known. The earliest known copy of Firdawsî's text is an incomplete manuscript dated 614 H (1217), which is more than two hundred years after the poet's death.<sup>6</sup> The innumerable later copies show that the *Shahnama* became an immensely popular text and was copied constantly. Its later copyists both interpolated and suppressed sections, altering the text over the centuries so much that no two extant copies of the text are exactly the same.<sup>7</sup>

The earliest known illustrated copies of the *Shahnama* are dated to c. 1300, almost a hundred years after the earliest known dated copy of 1217.<sup>8</sup> When it began to be produced as an illustrated text, painters also altered the narratives of the *Shahnama* episodes in the process of illustrating them, injecting their own perceptions of the story.<sup>9</sup> Even though earlier scenes often served as models for individual compositions, no two illustrated copies of the text share a common illustrative cycle, as well as carrying textual differences. As a result, each manuscript is a unique creation.<sup>10</sup>

The earliest written sources about Firdawsī date from a century after his death.<sup>11</sup> What is known about the poet is gleaned through the *Shahnama* itself, in which Firdawsī has included some autobiographical references.<sup>12</sup> These indicate that he was born near Tūs in Khurasan, probably around 935–40, and that he completed the *Shahnama* in 1010 and died around 1020–25.

Two often repeated legendary incidents concerning Firdawsī and the *Shahnama* were illustrated in the front matter of later copies of his work, since they were both referred to in the two prose prefaces composed for the *Shahnama*.<sup>13</sup> A scholarly recension of the text with a new preface was undertaken for the Timurid prince Bāysunghur ibn Shāh Rukh ibn Tīmūr (d. 1433),<sup>14</sup> to be used for the royal copy of the *Shahnama* dated 833 H (1430) produced for the prince at Herat (Tehran, Gulistan Palace Library MS 61).<sup>15</sup> The “Bāysunghur preface”, so named because Bāysunghur himself was said to have been involved in its revision, replaced an earlier one, the so-called “old preface” written for the ruler of Tūs, Abū Mansūr Muhammad (d. 962) even before the compilation of the *Shahnama* by Firdawsī. An extended version of this former preface was added to manuscripts of the *Shahnama* before the composition of the Bāysunghur preface,<sup>16</sup> but *Shahnama* copies subsequent to Bāysunghur’s copy usually include the later Timurid preface.

The illustration of the first incident shows Firdawsī with the court poets of Ghazna. The earliest known depiction of this episode is from a copy of the *Shahnama* dated 741 H (1341).<sup>17</sup> Later copies also include this scene often enough.<sup>18</sup> It refers to Firdawsī’s arrival at Ghazna, where he met three of Sultān Mahmūd’s court poets, and asked to join their conversation. They informed Firdawsī that none but a poet could enter their company, and put him to test, demanding that he should complete a quatrain with a rhyme that was almost impossible, by improvising the last line. Firdawsī supplied the last line, surpassing each in poetic improvisation. As a result, the poets recommended him to Sultān Mahmūd (see fig. 1).<sup>19</sup>

The second incident is depicted only in a few Safavid Shiraz copies of the *Shahnama* from the last quarter of the sixteenth century, and shows Firdawsī’s reception of the payment he received from Sultān Mahmūd of Ghazna for the completion of the *Shahnama*.<sup>20</sup> According to legend, Firdawsī was in a bathhouse when a court attendant brought him his remuneration, which was in silver instead of gold. Firdawsī was furious and rejected the payment by giving it away in equal amounts to a bathhouse attendant, a drink-seller who happened to be there, and the court attendant who had brought him the money. The sultan sent him the right amount in gold after some time, but the poet had died by then and his body was being carried out from one of the city gates at the moment that the attendant who was sent with the just reward entered the city from another gate.<sup>21</sup> The illustration of the incident mostly appears in the preface of the manuscripts, but in one example dated 982 H (1574) a double-page composition, showing Firdawsī at the tepidarium of a bathhouse on one page and Sultān Mahmūd of Ghazna sitting on his throne on the facing page, was used for the finispiece (TSMK H.1497). Bags of money are especially noticeable in both of the compositions.<sup>22</sup>

Firdawsī’s *Shahnama* was the first work of Persian literature to be enriched with paintings.<sup>23</sup> The earliest known illustrated copies are a group of four small manuscripts, collectively known as the “Small *Shahnamas*”. None of them are dated, and all four were cut up

and dispersed into collections in various parts of the world.<sup>24</sup> It is not known where or for whom they were made, although the accepted view is that they were produced in western Iran or Baghdad during the Ilkhanid period (1256–1353), around 1300.<sup>25</sup> The present exhibition has three examples from this group (cat. nos 108, 109, and 110). Marianna Shreve Simpson, who studied these manuscripts and exhaustively classified the illustrations of three Small *Shahnamas*, could not find any material evidence of the same type of illustrated text prior to the Mongol period.<sup>26</sup> This does not mean to say that *Shahnama* episodes were never illustrated prior to this period, since scholars think that some scenes may have been represented in other media such as metalwork and ceramics from the pre-Mongol era onwards.<sup>27</sup>

One of the most celebrated copies of the Ilkhanid Mongol period, and the arts of the Persian book in general, is the so-called “Great Mongol *Shahnama*”: this is unanimously agreed to be the most luxurious and monumental work of all Mongol painting. This sumptuous manuscript was unfortunately also cut up and its folios were sold separately.<sup>28</sup> It is thought to have been produced in the 1330s, during the reign of the Mongol ruler Abū Sa’id (1305–1335), and to have comprised about three hundred folios with around 190 illustrations. Fifty-eight of its illustrations and some of its text pages are today preserved in several public and private collections.<sup>29</sup> A group of four dated illustrated *Shahnama* manuscripts follow: these are attributed to Shiraz under the local Inju dynasty (1325–1357), governors under the Ilkhanid sultans and after 1347 autonomous rulers of the area.<sup>30</sup> Two more *Shahnamas* dated 791 H (1370) and 796 H (1393) survive from fourteenth-century Shiraz under the Muzaffarid dynasty (1357–1393), who ousted the Injuids from the city.<sup>31</sup>

Amazingly, a third of the illustrated manuscripts surviving from the decades between c. 1280 and the early 1350s are copies of the *Shahnama*.<sup>32</sup> These comprise the so-called Small *Shahnamas*, the Great Mongol *Shahnama* and the group of four Injuid *Shahnamas* from Shiraz. These earlier manuscripts are all heavily illustrated,<sup>33</sup> while the rate of illustration drops dramatically with the *Shahnamas* of the Muzaffarid period.<sup>34</sup>

In the first half of the fifteenth century, the Timurids ruled in the area known as Greater Iran (comprising present day Iran, Iraq, and parts of Afghanistan and Transoxiana) under Shāh Rukh ibn Tīmūr (d. 1447). Three royal copies of the *Shahnama* produced for three of Shāh Rukh’s sons – Bāysunghur (d. 1433),<sup>35</sup> Ibrāhīm Sultān (d. 1435)<sup>36</sup> and Muhammad Jūkī (d. 1444–45)<sup>37</sup> – stand apart from most of the other fifteenth-century copies of the epic. These Timurid princely *Shahnamas*, completed at Herat for Bāysunghur in 1433 and Muhammad Jūkī in 1444, and at Shiraz for Ibrāhīm Sultān around 1430–35, do not have large illustrative cycles either,<sup>38</sup> but they are richly produced and personalised royal copies of the epic. Scholars analysing these manuscripts agree that they reflect the personal choices of their patrons, and that the images of royal personages seen in some of their illustrations – especially those found in the front matter of the manuscripts – are idealised portraits of the princes.<sup>39</sup>

The death of Shāh Rukh in 1447 caused internecine fighting among the Timurid princes for succession rights, and the Timurids lost western Iran to the Qaraqoyunlu and Aqqoyunlu Turkmans. During the Turkman period, the city of Shiraz in western Iran gradually became the most prolific centre of manuscript production. Between the *Shahnama* of Ibrāhīm Sultān and the

Fig.1 (Facing page)  
“Firdawsī encounters the court  
poets of Ghazna”. Fol. 7r from  
the *Shahnama* of Shāh Tahmāsp  
(AKM00156).

در جواب گفت اگر تو انم بگویم و الا رحمت بمرم

چون عارض تو ما نباشد روشن  
ماند زخمت کل نبود بکوشن  
مرگانت همی گذر کند از چوشتن  
ماند پیمان کیو در جنگ پش



ایشان کینت جنگ کیو و پیشن پرسیدند تقریری خوش کرد و چنانچه مجموع فضل او را پسند داشتند بمصاحبت و مباحثت با این طایفه  
مستأنس شد و شعرا و را امتحانات میگرداند و سرخطه بدیده و لطیفه دیگر در میان می آوردند و فردوسی در مقام بدیده نجات حاکم پور بود

جوشتی با سب بدیده سوار بر آوری از خیل فکرت دما  
برج چمن و صفت ارتحال  
سپکتی بیک حلقه قلب حال

و چون شعری غزین ارتقای ابوالعاسم بر مدارج فنون نسر معلوم کردند راه مداخلت مجلس سلطان و طرق معرفت او با حجاب آستان  
مسدود میداشتند تا او را با ماک که از ندمای مجلس سلطان بود ملاقات افتاد و جلالت ورشته مودت بمرم و محکم کرد انیس

Aqqoyunlu Turkman takeover of the city in 1467, a considerable number of *Shahnama* manuscripts were produced, presumably at Shiraz, illustrated in a style based on that of the manuscripts associated with Ibrāhīm Sultān's patronage.<sup>40</sup>

A large number of illustrated *Shahnamas* survive from the Aqqoyunlu Turkman period, many of which were produced at Shiraz. Most are often referred to as “commercial” manuscripts.<sup>41</sup> This designation is justified, since the absence of patrons' names, combined with their large numbers, implies that they were produced for sale on the open market. The present exhibition has three examples from this group (cat. nos. 116, 117, and 118). Eleanor Sims lists forty-seven extant illustrated fifteenth-century copies of the *Shahnama* from western Iran in her preliminary list, “representing only the most accessible (or accessibly published) manuscripts”.<sup>42</sup> Twenty-seven of those are from the second half of the century, and nine more can be added to the list from the holdings of the Topkapı Palace Museum Library in Istanbul.<sup>43</sup>

Although there are no royal copies of the epic that carry the name of a Turkman ruler (neither Qaraqoyunlu nor Aqqoyunlu), two outstanding copies survive from the Turkman period. The first is presently among the holdings of the University of Michigan Museum of Art. Priscilla Soucek, who has studied the manuscript, associates it with the patronage of the Qaraqoyunlu prince Pīr Budaq ibn Shāh Jahān (d. 1467) and dates it to the years of the prince's residence in Baghdad in the 1460s.<sup>44</sup> The second is dated 899 H (1493–94) and is one of the most ambitious *Shahnama* copies surviving from the Aqqoyunlu period, with more than three hundred paintings. It is an exceptional two-volume manuscript with its volumes divided between two Istanbul institutions (TIEM 1978 and IUK F.1406). It was produced for a Sultān 'Alī Mirzā, who is probably identifiable with a local ruler of Gīlān, but whose patronage is otherwise unknown.<sup>45</sup>

In the second half of the fifteenth century, in addition to the total lack of a royal Aqqoyunlu *Shahnama* from Tabriz,<sup>46</sup> there is presently no known royal copy of the *Shahnama* prepared at Herat under the rule of the last important Timurid sultan, Husayn Bayqara (1470–1506).<sup>47</sup> This has been interpreted to imply that the commissioning of illustrated copies of Firdawsī's epic lost its appeal for royal patrons in the late 1400s. However, in the early 1500s the situation appears to have changed, and a much celebrated *Shahnama* of Firdawsī with a dedicatory page bearing the name of, and extolations to, the second Safavid shah Tahmāsp ibn Ismā'il (r. 1524–1576) was produced: this was one of the most magnificent royal copies of Firdawsī's epic ever made. Many artists in the Safavid royal *kitābkhāna* had come from the *kitābkhānas* of the two major dynasties that the Safavids had supplanted – namely the Timurid atelier at Herat and the Aqqoyunlu at Tabriz – and must have worked on Shah Tahmāsp's *Shahnama*, also known as the *Shāhnāma-i Shāhi*.<sup>48</sup> It is generally agreed that it was commissioned during the latter part of the reign of Shah Ismā'il I, and was finished sometime in the mid 1530s.<sup>49</sup> It is a large book (47 x 31.8 cm) with 258 illustrations,<sup>50</sup> an illustrative cycle that is much richer than any of the other manuscripts associated with the patronage of Shāh Tahmāsp or other royal patrons of the period.<sup>51</sup> It is represented in the present exhibition by five of its folios (cat. nos. 120–124).

Scholars attribute the remains of two fragmentary *Shahnama* manuscripts to the patronage of the Safavid shahs Ismā'il II (1576–1577), who ruled for a short period after Shah

Tahmāsp, and Shah ‘Abbās I (1587–1629). The first of these, yet another manuscript that was dismembered and dispersed into various collections, is dated to c. 1576–77, the reign of Shah Ismā‘il II.<sup>52</sup> The second, of which sixteen pages are preserved in Dublin (Chester Beatty Library, ms. 277), is dated to c. 1587–97, the early years of the reign of Shāh ‘Abbās. They are assumed to have been produced in the Safavid court studios: the c. 1576–77 *Shahnama* in Qazvin, and the c. 1587–97 manuscript in Isfahan, the successive capitals of these two Safavid reigns.<sup>53</sup> The present exhibition includes a page from the c. 1576–77 *Shahnama* (cat. no. 126).

Throughout the sixteenth century the main source of *Shahnama* manuscripts continued to be the city of Shiraz. The Tahmāsp *Shahnama* became a model for the luxury copies of the work produced at this provincial centre, where the production of illustrated manuscripts continued the Aqqoyunlu-era tradition of commercial production into Safavid times. Luxury Shiraz manuscripts were not, however, of indifferent quality, even though they were produced for sale to unknown patrons. They are represented in the present exhibition by a single page from a Shiraz *Shahnama* from the first half of the sixteenth century (cat. no. 119).

In the second half of the sixteenth century deluxe Shiraz manuscripts – especially copies of the *Shahnama* – were deliberately made to resemble the royal manuscripts produced during the reign of Shāh Tahmāsp, and were intended for courtly consumption.<sup>54</sup> These splendidly produced *Shahnama* manuscripts occupy a key position within the prolific production of Shiraz, since they were often the precursors for stylistic and physical developments in the arts of the book of that city. When the overall ostentation of Shiraz manuscripts increased considerably – from around 1565 onwards – copies of the *Shahnama* were the first to be produced in larger sizes using increasingly rich materials.

When, from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards, and especially in the 1580s, the illustrative cycles of Shiraz manuscripts were expanded to include newly created compositions, this was naturally reflected in *Shahnama* manuscripts as well. Compositions depicting aspects of contemporary life and the architectural environment, both reflecting the urban setting and evoking the court milieu, began to appear in some copies of the *Shahnama*. Several representations of sixteenth-century courtly pavilions from large Shiraz *Shahnamas* are especially important, since these full-page architectural depictions represent the only contemporary visual evidence of a type of structure of which the surviving examples date from later periods.<sup>55</sup>

When the quality of luxury Shiraz manuscripts began to decline in the 1590s this was manifested in a number of subtle changes, the most noticeable of which was a decrease in the dimensions of the manuscripts. Although large luxury manuscripts continued to be produced in these years, they appear to have been exclusively copies of the *Shahnama*, pointing once again to the special status of this text. It is thus possible to trace the growth in the splendour of sixteenth-century luxury Shiraz manuscripts, and its end, by studying only the copies of the *Shahnama*, but impossible to understand this development if they are excluded from the study.

The production of large-scale and lavish-looking *Shahnamas* continued in Iran in the seventeenth century. There were far fewer, but these were produced both in Shiraz and elsewhere in what is commonly called the “Isfahan style”. The present exhibition includes a page extracted

from such an example (cat. no. 130). These later *Shahnamas* appear to be a continuation of the luxury Shiraz production, and were produced to satisfy the continuing demand for luxuriously created *Shahnamas*, even though equally luxurious copies of other texts appear to not have been in such demand.

As a result of the continuous popularity of illustrated *Shahnamas*, these volumes invariably play a major role in any survey of illustrated Persian manuscripts. Firdawsī's epic appears to have been the highest ranking of all the Persian classics. It was the first work of Persian literature to be illustrated, and the production of luxury copies continued almost up to the present day. Its importance meant that it was constantly appropriated and manipulated, especially by princely patrons. Being almost by definition a royal book, illustrated copies were regularly produced for members of the Islamic dynasties that ruled Iran over the centuries. Scholars have explored the ways in which these royal *Shahnama* manuscripts might have been reflective of contemporary dynastic aspirations and the political realities of their patrons, in order to serve a propagandistic function.<sup>56</sup>

The importance of the *Shahnama* is also implied by the relative size and richness of the illustrated copies of the text, which are often the grandest and most ambitious of the manuscripts produced within any given period. This is especially striking in the cases of the Great Mongol *Shahnama* (the most magnificent manuscript of the fourteenth century),<sup>57</sup> the Tahmāsp *Shahnama* (of which the same could be said for the sixteenth century), the provincial luxury *Shahnamas* of Shiraz from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (which comprised the largest volumes produced in the city and had the longest production history), as well as the seventeenth-century *Shahnama* copies in the so-called Isfahan style.

The celebrated Tahmāsp *Shahnama*, completed sometime in the mid-1530s, by itself constitutes an excellent example through which to demonstrate the elevated status of Firdawsī's epic. No other book produced for the Safavid shahs had so much attention bestowed on it. Two other manuscripts, which carry the name or titles of Shah Tahmāsp, survive today, as well as several others which are accepted to have been produced either for him or his close relatives.<sup>58</sup> None of these manuscripts appear to have been as magnificent as the *Shahnama* of the shah himself – in other words the *Shāhnāma-i Shāh'* – even though they were also sumptuous court productions of the highest order.

The preferred rank of the *Shahnama* is also implied in Ottoman sources and collections. The Ottoman imperial treasury must have held a large collection of luxury copies of the *Shahnama* of Firdawsī that had been illustrated in Greater Iran under various dynasties. Today, more than fifty still remain at the Topkapı Palace Museum Library, while others from the Imperial treasury have been deposited in the collections of two other institutions in Istanbul founded after 1928 during the Turkish republican period, namely the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum and the Istanbul University Library.

The *Shahnama* of Firdawsī was found in multiple copies in some of the private Ottoman libraries as well, although it was not the only Persian book that the Ottomans collected in multiple copies. Just like the imperial treasury, which had many copies of all the Persian classics that were produced in illustrated copies such as the *Khamsas* of Nizāmī and Dihlavī or

the works of Sa'dī, Jāmī and Qazwīnī, private libraries also contained multiple versions of the same work.

Although all the illustrated classics of Persian literature were collected in the Ottoman lands, a difference exists between the *Shahnama* and the rest: Ottoman archival lists containing book titles systematically list it before all other titles and mention it more than any other Persian text. This is even more noticeable in Ottoman sources that mention diplomatic gifts sent by the Safavids during the sixteenth century. Books were habitually used as diplomatic gifts, but specific titles are rarely recorded in Ottoman sources even though gifts are often mentioned. If the sources cite book names they are always at the top of a gift list, with the copies of the Qur'an listed first, but the next title is invariably that of the *Shāhnāma-i Firdawsī*. When only a single title was mentioned, this was almost always the *Shahnama*.

When Shāh Tahmāsp sent his magnificent *Shahnama* as an accession gift to the Ottoman Sultan Selim II in 1568, it was the only book mentioned by the Ottoman historian Ahmed Feridun Paşa in his chronicle of the time.<sup>59</sup> Although at first it might appear that this was due to the fact that this particular copy of the *Shahnama* was a unique manuscript and an exceptionally prestigious gift, the study of other Ottoman gift lists makes it clear that copies of the *Shahnama* were consistently listed more frequently than any other titles in the Ottoman gift registers. For example, the Ottoman chronicler Seyyid Lokman, in his record of the reception of the Safavid ambassador Toqmaq Khān, who reached Istanbul in 1576 to celebrate the accession of Selim II's son Murad III, mentions a copy of the *Shahnama* of Firdawsī and then groups together more than "sixty volumes of *divans* of Persian poets" as the rest of the books.

An earlier chronicle from c. 1525, which records the transfer of the Timurid prince Badi' al-Zamān from Safavid to Ottoman territory after Selim I's conquest of Tabriz in 1514, mentions only one gift that the prince presented to the Sultan, which was a copy of the *Shahnama* of Firdawsī.<sup>60</sup>

The Safavid prince Alqās Mīrzā, a brother of Shah Tahmāsp, defected to the Ottomans. He then went back into Safavid territory with Ottoman support, conducted successful raids, and sent some of the Safavid treasures he had accumulated to Sultan Süleyman. The Ottoman sources mention books, but they only specify Qur'ans, and an illustrated *Shahnama* of Firdawsī. They also mention a *divan*, a history and some other books, but without giving the name of their authors.<sup>61</sup>

In his account of the 1582 circumcision festival of Şehzade Mehmed, Ottoman historian Mustafa 'Ali records the presents sent by the shah, the crown prince, various princes, princesses, and those presented by the Safavid ambassador Ibrāhīm Khān himself.<sup>62</sup> He says that eighteen books were sent by Shāh Muhammad Khudābanda and the crown prince Hamza Mīrzā, and gives the titles of some of them, among which he also mentions that the Ottoman sultan Murad III and his son were each presented with a copy of the *Shahnama*.<sup>63</sup>

The gifts presented by the Safavid delegation negotiating the second Ottoman-Safavid peace treaty in 1590 are recorded by the Ottoman historian Ibrahim Çavuş, who gives the names of eighteen books at the beginning of his list in his chronicle of Ferhad Paşa's eastern campaign.<sup>64</sup> A copy of the *Shahnama* is listed directly after the Qur'an manuscripts, followed by the titles of the rest of the books.



Copies of the *Shahnama* of Firdawsī were also chosen as desirable gifts by Ottoman officials, for presentation to their sultan. Mustafa 'Ali devotes the third chapter (*bab*) of his account of the circumcision festival of Şehzade Mehmed in 1582 to the imperial presents received from the Ottoman and foreign dignitaries, mentioning that the third vizier, Siyavuş Paşa, presented the sultan and the prince each with a copy of the Qur'an and an illustrated copy of the *Shahnama* of Firdawsī.<sup>65</sup>

The *Shahnama* also contributed to Ottoman discourse.<sup>66</sup> At first it was translated into Turkish several times, and illustrated copies were produced in the Ottoman court studio (*nakkaşhane*).<sup>67</sup> Its second and more significant contribution was to the Ottoman dynastic histories written by the sultan's official court historiographer: this person was called the *şehnameci* (*shahnama* writer) and the texts he wrote were also called *şehnames* after Firdawsī's great epic. The post of the court *şehnameci* was established by Sultan Süleyman I in the 1550s and existed for the rest of the sixteenth century, until it was abolished in the early seventeenth century. At least fifteen works are known to have been produced by the five consecutive holders of the title *şehnameci*.<sup>68</sup> The outputs of the earlier *şehnamecis* were in Persian verse, following Firdawsī's style and using the same metre as his *Shahnama*. This gradually changed and they were later written either in verse or prose, but in Turkish. The fourth holder of the post, Ta'likizade (d. c. 1599–1600), all of whose known works are in Turkish, remarks that he "wrote in Ottoman Turkish rather than in Persian, in compliance with the wishes of the sultan".<sup>69</sup>

As Cemal Kafadar has explained: "A good *Rumi* (Ottoman) intellectual or artist may have boasted that the *Rumis* had outdone the 'Acems (Persians) and Arabs, but would never doubt the need to be steeped in Arabic and Persian classics ... which he or she would consider her own".<sup>70</sup> Indeed, in his *Counsel for Sultans* (*Nushatü's-selatin*) completed in 1581, the Ottoman historian Mustafa 'Ali counts Firdawsī, Sa'dī, Hāfiz and Jāmi among his host of spiritual teachers.<sup>71</sup> Ottoman authors also frequently referred to the protagonists of the *Shahnama* for comparison purposes. For example, the third Ottoman *şehnameci*, Seyyid Lokman, compared Sokollu Mehmed Paşa to one of the rulers from the *Shahnama*, Khusraw, in his work *Tatimme-i Ahval-i Sultan Süleyman*.<sup>72</sup> When the Ottoman Sultan Selim I wrote a menacing letter to the Safavid Shāh Ismā'īl I a few months before the battle of Chāldirān in 1514, he compared himself to the victorious Iranian kings Farīdūn and Iskandar from the *Shahnama*, who won the crown of Iran after a battle, and Ismā'īl I to Zāhhāk and Dārā, who lost the crown to Farīdūn and Iskandar respectively.<sup>73</sup>

Although the most common modern description of Firdawsī's *Shahnama* terms it a legendary Iranian epic, in the pre-modern period it was considered by both Persian- and Turkish-speaking inhabitants to be part of the common Turko-Persian heritage of Western, Central and Southern Asia, in an area that extended from the Balkans to India. Turkic rulers of the Iranian cultural area were avid patrons and collectors of Persian and Persianate literature, and the *Shahnama* was always one of the most favoured works. In Anatolia, Turkish-speaking polities regarded the pre-modern geographic region of Greater Iran as a trilingual community of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish speaking peoples. It was thus a Turko-Persian world of mixed ethnicities with Iranian, Mongolian, Turkish, and Arabic populations, which was ruled from the tenth

century onwards by various Turko-Mongol dynasties originating in Central Asia.<sup>74</sup>

This Turko-Persian Islamicate culture was carried into the neighbouring lands of the Mughal dynasty (1526–1707), whose founder Bābur was a grandson of Timūr himself. The Mughal emperors also compared themselves to the heroes of the *Shahnama*,<sup>75</sup> and collected illustrated copies of the Persian classics, including the *Shahnama* of Firdawsī. In addition they had Firdawsī's epic produced in their own court studios as well.<sup>76</sup>

In conclusion, Firdawsī's text can thus be considered an internationally celebrated masterpiece in the pre-modern Islamic world, which never lost its appeal for the Persian-speaking community. The celebrated status of the *Shahnama* is reflected in modern studies of classical Persian literature and its illustrated texts as well, since it is the most studied narrative in the group. Through the Cambridge-Edinburgh *Shahnama* Project (<http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk>), with its emphasis on individual manuscripts,<sup>77</sup> an extensive database of *Shahnama* images under development, and workshops and conferences being organised under its auspices, there is no doubt that “another quantum leap forward”<sup>78</sup> in *Shahnama* studies is about to be achieved in the near future.

## APPENDIX

### Chronological list of the *Shahnama* copies discussed above:

#### First dated copy of 1217:

1 – Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale MS C1.III.24, dated 614 (1217), not illustrated and incomplete.

#### Ilkhanid Mongol Period (1256–1353)

- 2 – The first Small *Shahnama*, dispersed, no date, c. 1300, west Iran or Baghdad  
 3 – The second Small *Shahnama*, dispersed, no date, c. 1300, west Iran or Baghdad  
 4 – The Freer Small *Shahnama*, dispersed, no date, c. 1300, west Iran or Baghdad  
 5 – The Metropolitan Museum of Art Small *Shahnama*, dispersed, no date, c. 1300, west Iran or Baghdad.  
 6 – The Great Mongol *Shahnama*, dispersed, no date, c. 1330, associated with the patronage of the Mongol ruler Abū Saʿīd (1305–1335) and the city of Tabriz.

#### Shiraz Injuīd period (1325–1357)

- 7 – TSMK H.1479, dated 731 H (1330), Shiraz.  
 8 – St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia Dorn 329, dated 733 H (1333), Shiraz  
 9 – *Shahnama* dated 741 H (1341), dispersed, Shiraz.  
 10 – *Shahnama* dated 752 H (1352–53) (sometimes referred to as the Stephens *Shahnama* after its owner at the time of the 1931 London exhibition), dispersed, Shiraz.

#### Shiraz Muzaffarid period (1357–1393)

- 11 – TSMK H. 1511, dated 791 H (1370), Shiraz.  
 12 – Cairo, Dar al-Kutub Ms. Taʾrikh Farisi 73, dated 796 H (1393), Shiraz.

#### Princely *Shahnamas* of the Timurid period (1396–1510)

- 13 – Tehran, Gulistan Palace Library, MS 61, dated 833 H (1430), made for Bāysunghur (d. 1433) at the Timurid capital Herat.  
 14 – Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Ouseley Add. 176, no date, c. 1430–35, made for Ibrāhīm Sultān (d. 1435) at Shiraz.  
 15 – London, Royal Asiatic Society, Morley 239, no date, c. 1440, made for Muhammad Jūkī (d. 1444–45) at the Timurid capital Herat.

#### Qaraqoyunlu Turkman period (1447–1467)

- 16 – University of Michigan Museum of Art, no date, c. 1460s, associated with the patronage of the

Qaraqoyunlu prince Pīr Budaq ibn Shāh Jahān (d. 1467), and Baghdad.

#### Aqqoyunlu Turkman period (1467–1510)

17 – TIEM 1978, IUK F.1406 and dispersed, dated 899 (1493–94), made for a Sultān ʿAlī Mirzā, who is probably identifiable with a local ruler of Gilān.

#### Royal *Shahnama* of the Safavid period (1501–1722)

- 16 – The Tahmāsp *Shahnama*, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, and dispersed (nine folios are held in the Aga Khan Museum Collection), c. 1530s, made for the second Safavid shah Tahmāsp ibn Ismāʿīl (r. 1524–1576) at the Safavid capital of the period, Tabriz.  
 17 – The 1576–77 *Shahnama*, dispersed and undated, associated with the patronage of Shāh Ismāʿīl II (1576–77) and the Safavid capital of the period, Qazvin.  
 18 – The 1587–97 *Shahnama*, Dublin Chester Beatty Library, ms. 277 (sixteen pages) and dispersed, undated, associated with the patronage of Shāh ʿAbbās I (1587–1629) and the Safavid capital of the period, Isfahan.

- 1 Basil Robinson, 'Chapter One', in Basil W. Robinson and Eleanor Sims, *The Windsor Shahnama of 1648* (London 2007), 15.
- 2 Mahmoud Omidasalar, 'Storytellers in Classical Persian Texts', *Journal of American Folklore* 97/384 (1984), 204–212; Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge MA – London 2002), 185; Kumiko Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry* (Leiden 2003), xix. According to Omidasalar (204), a maternal cousin of the Prophet Muhammad used to tell stories about Rustam and Isfandiyār in the seventh century.
- 3 Abu al-Fadl-i Bayhaqi, *Tarikh-i Bayhaqi*, cited in Omidasalar, 'Storytellers', 205.
- 4 Omidasalar, 'Storytellers', 206, 210, n. 13; Yamamoto, *Oral Background*, 20–21. Iskandar Munshi mentions storytellers (*qissakhwān*) and *Shahnama* reciters (*shāhnāmakhwān*): see *Tarikh-i Alam-ara-yi 'Abbasi* (History of Shah Abbas the Great), trans. Roger Savory (Boulder CO 1979), vol. 1, 282.
- 5 Abbas Amanat, 'Divided Patrimony, Tree of Royal Power, and Fruit of Vengeance', in Charles Melville (ed.), *Shahnama Studies I* (Cambridge 2006), 49; Ulrich Marzolph, *Narrative Illustration in Persian Lithographed Books* (Leiden 2001), 261–262; *idem*, 'The Last Qajar *Shahnama*: The *Shahnama-yi Bahaduri* (1319–26/1901–8)', in Melville (ed.), *Shahnama Studies I*, 259–276.
- 6 Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale MS C.I.111.24; see A. M. Piemontese, 'Nuova luce su Firdawsi: Uno Sahnāma datato 614 H/1217 a Firenze', *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 40 (1980), 1–38, 189–242.
- 7 Karin Rührdanz, 'About a Group of Truncated *Shahnamas*: A Case Study in the Commercial Production of Illustrated Manuscripts in the Second Part of the Sixteenth Century', *Muqarnas* 14 (1997), 118–134; Jerome W. Clinton, 'Ferdowsi and the Illustration of the *Shahnameh*', in Oleg Grabar and Cynthia Robinson (eds), *Islamic Art and Literature* (Princeton 2001), 58; Marianna Shreve Simpson, 'A Reconstruction and Preliminary Account of the 1341 *Shahnama*', in Robert Hillenbrand (ed.), *Persian Painting from the Mongols to the Qajars* (London – New York 2000), 16; Firuza Abdullaeva and Charles Melville, *The Persian Book of Kings: Ibrahim Sultan's Shahnama* (Oxford 2008), 32–34.
- 8 Marianna Shreve Simpson, *The Illustration of an Epic: The Earliest "Shahnama" Manuscripts* (New York – London 1979); Robinson, 'Chapter One', 15.
- 9 Clinton, 'Ferdowsi and the Illustration'.
- 10 Simpson, *Illustration of an Epic*, 227–332; Adel T. Adamova, 'The St. Petersburg Illustrated *Shahnama* of 733 Hijra (1333 AD) and the Injuid School of Painting', in Robert Hillenbrand (ed.), *Shahnama: The Visual Language of the Persian Book of Kings* (Edinburgh 2004), 53. Both authors argue that in a *Shahnama* manuscript some scenes would always follow traditional/typological schemes, while others would be original scenes that were never before illustrated, and that the whole cycle would always be unique.
- 11 The earliest is the *Chahār Maqāla* of Nizāmī 'Arūdi Samarqandi, who visited Firdawsi's grave at Nīshāpūr within a century of the poet's death (see note 21 below).
- 12 Reviewed by Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, 'Ferdowsi, Abu'l-Qasem, i. Life', *Encyclopædia Iranica Online* (15 December 1999), www.iranicaonline.org.
- 13 The sources of the legends about Firdawsi are most recently summarized in Abdullaeva and Melville, *Persian Book of Kings*, 13–18. For the usage of the term "front matter", see Marianna Shreve Simpson, 'In the Beginning: Frontispieces and Front Matter in Ilkhanid and Injuid Manuscripts', in Linda Komaroff (ed.), *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan* (Leiden 2006), 213–247.
- 14 For a review of literature on the Bāysunghur preface, see Eleanor Sims, 'Illustrated Manuscripts of Firdausi's *Shahnama* commissioned by Princes of the House of Timur', *Ars Orientalis* 22 (1992), 59, n. 11.
- 15 M.A. Riyahi, 'Metn-i Muqaddima-i Baisunghuri', in *Ser Cheshmehai Firdausi Shenasi* (Tehran, 1372), 398; Thomas Lentz and Glenn Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision* (Los Angeles 1989), 126.
- 16 Vladimir Minorsky, 'The Older Preface to the *Shah-nama*', in *Iranica: Publications of the University of Tehran* 775 (1964), 260–273; Abdullaeva and Melville, *Persian Book of Kings*, 126.
- 17 This is a dispersed manuscript, folios of which have been included both in exhibitions and in all studies of fourteenth century manuscripts. Simpson, 'Reconstruction and Preliminary Account', 223–224, pl. 10.
- 18 All three of the royal Timurid *Shahnamas* from the first half of the fifteenth century, as well as the celebrated *Shahnama* made for the Safavid Shāh Tahmāsp in the first half of the sixteenth century, include this scene. See Basil Gray (ed.), *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia* (London 1979), 173, fig. 100; Sims 'Illustrated Manuscripts of Firdausi's *Shahnama*', 49; Robert Hillenbrand, 'Exploring a Neglected Masterpiece: The Gulistan *Shahnama* of Baysunghur', *Iranian Studies* 43/1 (2010), 105; Abdullaeva and Melville, *Persian Book of Kings*, 50; Stuart Cary Welch, *A King's Book of Kings: The *Shahnameh* of Shah Tahmasp* (New York 1976), 80, 83; *idem*, *Wonders of the Age: Masterpieces of Early Safavid Painting* (Cambridge MA 1979), 80; Martin B. Dickson and Stuart Cary Welch, *The Houghton *Shahnameh** (Cambridge MA 1979), vol. 1, colour pl. 1.
- 19 Welch, *King's Book of Kings*, 81; Dickson and Welch, *Houghton *Shahnameh**, vol. 2, pl. 2; Robinson, 'Chapter One', 14.
- 20 In this study the Istanbul institutions Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Istanbul University Library and The Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum are respectively abbreviated as TSMK, IUK and TIEM. This episode is illustrated in IUK F.1405, fol. 11r; St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia Dorn 334, fol. 11r; London, British Library Ethé 2992, fol. 10r; TSMK H.1476 dated 1000 H (1591–92), fol. 10v; TSMK H.1497 dated 982 H (1574), fols. 518v–519r. See Lâle Uluç, *Turkman Governors, Shiraz Artisans and Ottoman Collectors: Arts of the Book in 16th Century Shiraz* (Istanbul 2006), figs 219–225.
- 21 The earliest surviving account of this incident is found in the *Chahār Maqāla* of Nizāmī 'Arūdi Samarqandi, who visited Firdawsi's grave in 1116–17. Both Ritter and Browne, drawing from this version, say that Firdawsi gave half the coins to a drink-seller and the other half to a bath attendant (H. Ritter, "Firdevsi," s.v. *İslam Ansiklopedisi*; Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* [Cambridge 1902–24], 135). Another version says that Ayāz brought Firdawsi the money and that Firdawsi gave him back a third, handed another third to a bath attendant, and the last third to a vendor to pay for a glass of *sherbet* (a fruit drink) (Necati Lugal, 'Önsöz' ['foreword'], in Firdevsi, *Şehname*, trans. Necati Lugal [Istanbul 1992], vol. 1, 25).
- 22 Uluç, *Turkman Governors*, figs 224–226.
- 23 Clinton, 'Ferdowsi and the Illustration', 57; Oleg Grabar, 'Why was the *Shahnama* illustrated?', *Iranian Studies* 43/1 (2010), 91.
- 24 These so-called Small *Shahnamas* are individually known as the first, the second, the Freer and the Metropolitan (formerly called the Schulz or Gutman) Small *Shahnamas*. It is not possible to understand the exact size of their folios, since they have been tampered with and altered, but the written surface is on average 15–16 x 12 cm: see Simpson, *Illustration of an Epic*, 2–3, 92–93; *eadem*, 'Shahnama as Text and Shahnama as Image: A Brief Overview of Recent Studies, 1975–2000', in Hillenbrand (ed.), *Shahnama: The Visual Language of the Persian Book of Kings*, 11.
- 25 Simpson, *Illustration of an Epic*.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 27 See, among others, Esin Atıl, *Ceramics from the World of Islam* (Washington D.C. 1973), 100–101; Marianna Shreve Simpson, 'The Narrative Structure of a Medieval Iranian Beaker', *Ars Orientalis* 12 (1981), 15–24; *eadem*, 'Narrative Allusion and Metaphor in the Decoration of Medieval Islamic Objects', in Herbert Kessler and Marianna Shreve Simpson (eds), *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Washington D.C. 1985), 131–149; *eadem*, 'Shahnama

- as Text', 11; Barbara Schmitz, 'A Fragmentary Mina'i Bowl with Scenes from the *Shahnama*', in Robert Hillenbrand (ed.), *The Art of the Saljuqs in Iran and Anatolia* (Costa Mesa CA 1994), 156–164; Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, 'Le livre des rois, miroir du destin: II – Takht-e Soleyman et la symbolique du *Shah-name*', *Studia Iranica* 20/i (1991), 33–148; *idem*, *Les frises du Shah Name dans l'Architecture Iranienne sous les Ilkhans* (Paris 1996); Robert Hillenbrand, 'The Relationship between Book Painting and Luxury Ceramics in 13th-Century Iran', in Hillenbrand (ed.), *The Art of the Saljuqs in Iran and Anatolia*, 134–145.
- 28 The written surface of its pages measures 41 x 29 cm.
- 29 Formerly referred to as the Demotte *Shahnama*, after the dealer responsible for its dismemberment. See Oleg Grabar and Sheila Blair, *Epic Images and Contemporary History* (Chicago – London 1980); Sheila Blair, 'On the Track of the "Demotte" *Shahnama* Manuscript', in François Déroche (ed.), *Les Manuscrits du Moyen-Orient: Essais de Codicologie et de Paléographie* (Istanbul – Paris 1989), 125–131; *eadem*, 'Rewriting the History of the Great Mongol *Shahnama*', in Hillenbrand (ed.), *Shahnama: The Visual Language of the Persian Book of Kings*, 36–50; Linda Komaroff and Stefano Carboni (eds), *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1276–1353* (New Haven – London 2003), 155–167 and cat. nos. 36–61.
- 30 TSMK H.1479 dated 731 H (1330): see Filiz Çağman and Zeren Tanındı, *The Topkapı Saray Museum: The Albums and Illustrated Manuscripts*, trans. and ed. J. M. Rogers (London 1986), 51. St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Dorn 329, dated 733 H (1333): see Adel T. Adamova and Leon T. Giuzalian, *Miniatury rukopisi poemu "Shakhname"*, 1333 goda (Leningrad 1985), and Adamova, 'The St. Petersburg Illustrated *Shahnama*'. The dispersed *Shahnama* dated 741 H (1341): see Simpson, 'Reconstruction and Preliminary Account'. The *Shahnama* dated 752 H (1352–53) (sometimes referred to as the Stephens *Shahnama* after its owner at the time of the 1931 London exhibition): see Simpson, *Illustration of an Epic*, 12; *eadem*, '*Shahnama* as Text', 11. For the details of all four see Eleanor Sims, 'Thoughts on a *Shahnama* Legacy of the Fourteenth Century: Four Inju Manuscripts and the Great Mongol *Shahnama*', in Komaroff (ed.), *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, 286. See also Elaine Wright, 'The Arts of the Book under the Injuids of Shiraz', in Komaroff (ed.), *Beyond the Legacy of Genghis Khan*, 249–268, and Simpson, 'In the Beginning', 213–247.
- 31 TSMK H. 1511 and Cairo, Dar al-Kutub Ms. Ta'rikh Farisi 73. See Gray, *Arts of the Book*, 132, figs 72–73; Çağman and Tanındı, *Topkapı Saray Museum*, cat. no. 54; Bernard O'Kane, 'The Iconography of the *Shahnama*, MS. Ta'rikh Farisi 73, Dar al-Kutub, Cairo (796/1393-4)', in Melville (ed.), *Shahnama Studies* 1, 171–189.
- 32 Simpson, '*Shahnama* as Text', 11.
- 33 Simpson thinks that in the Small *Shahnamas* miniatures were distributed evenly throughout the manuscripts with an illustration on at least every second or third page: see Simpson, *Illustration of an Epic*, 1–16 and 105–109. Blair posits around 190 illustrations for the Great Mongol *Shahnama*: see Blair, 'On the Track'. Of the four Inju *Shahnamas*, the intact manuscripts in Istanbul, dated 1330 (TSMK H.1479), and St. Petersburg, dated 1333 (National Library of Russia, Dorn 329), have ninety-three and forty-nine illustrations respectively. The dispersed *Shahnama* of 1341 and the second dispersed *Shahnama* of 1352–53 are thought to have had around 140 and 110 illustrations respectively: see Simpson, 'Reconstruction and Preliminary Account', 226; Jonathan M. Bloom, 'Epic Images Revisited: An Ilkhanid Legacy in Early Safavid Painting', in Andrew Newman (ed.), *Society and Culture in the Early Modern Middle East* (Leiden 2003), 244, n. 24.
- 34 The earlier Istanbul copy has twelve paintings while the Cairo copy, completed at the outset of the Timurid conquest of Shiraz, has sixty-seven: see O'Kane, 'Iconography of the *Shahnama*', 172, 175.
- 35 Hillenbrand, 'Exploring a Neglected Masterpiece'.
- 36 Eleanor Sims, 'The Hundred and One Paintings of Ibrahim-Sultan', in Hillenbrand (ed.), *Persian Painting from the Mongols to the Qajars*, 119–129; Abdullaeva and Melville, *Persian Book of Kings*.
- 37 Basil W. Robinson, 'The *Shahnama* of Muhammad Juki', in Stuart Simmonds and Simon Digby (eds), *The Royal Asiatic Society: Its History and Treasures* (Leiden 1979), 83–102; Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, cat. no. 43.
- 38 The copy made for Bāysunghur (Tehran, Culistan Palace Library, MS 61) has twenty-one illustrations; that made for Ibrāhīm Sultān (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Ouseley Add. 176) has forty-seven; and that made for Muhammad Jūki (London, Royal Asiatic Society, Morley 239) has thirty-one.
- 39 Lentz and Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision*, 90, 124, 132, 109–110, figs 33, 40, 42, and cat. no. 21; Abdullaeva and Melville, *Persian Book of Kings*, 20–21, 23, figs 7–9.
- 40 Sims, 'Illustrated Manuscripts of Firdausi's *Shahnama*', 54; Basil W. Robinson, 'The Vicissitudes of Rustam', in Bernard O'Kane (ed.), *The Iconography of Islamic Art* (Edinburgh 2005), 260; see also the preliminary list of Timurid *Shahnamas* prepared by Sims, 'Illustrated Manuscripts of Firdausi's *Shahnama*', 67–68.
- 41 The term was first coined by Basil W. Robinson: see *Persian Miniature Painting from Collections in the British Isles* (London 1967), 91. For the arts of the book during the Turkman period, see Robinson, 'The Turkman School to 1503', in Gray (ed.), *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia*, 215–247.
- 42 Sims, 'Illustrated Manuscripts of Firdausi's *Shahnama*', 67–68.
- 43 TSMK H.1496 dated 868 H (1464); H.1515 dated 883 H (1478); H. 1489 dated 887 H (1482–83); H.1506 dated 891 H (1486); R.1542 dated 900 H (1495); H.1478 from c. 1490–95; H.1507 dated 900 H (1494–95); H.1491 dated 900 H (1495); H.1508 dated 902 H (1496). Fehmi Edhem Karatay, *Topkapı Sarayı kütüphanesi Farsça Yazmalar Kataloğu* (Istanbul 1961), nos. 336, 334, 337, 338, 342, 343, 344, 345, 347. I would like to express my thanks to Filiz Çağman and Zeren Tanındı, who kindly allowed me to use their unpublished catalogue of the illustrated manuscripts in the Topkapı Palace Museum Library.
- 44 Priscilla Soucek, 'The Ann Arbor *Shahnama* and its Importance', in Hillenbrand (ed.), *Persian Painting from the Mongols to the Qajars* (London – New York 2000), 267–283.
- 45 The first volume from TIEM has 202 paintings and the second from IUK has 109. About forty other images were removed from the first volume and some are now in diverse museums throughout the world. A group of paintings in the manuscript show figures with big heads, which is the reason scholars now commonly refer to it as the "Big Head *Shahnama*". See Kemal Çiğ, *Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesindeki Minyatürlü Kitapların Kataloğu* (Catalogue of the Illustrated Manuscripts in [Istanbul's] Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum) (Istanbul 1959), cat. no. 22; Fehmi Edhem and Ivan Stchoukine, *Les manuscrits orientaux illustrés de la bibliothèque de l'université de Stamboul* (Paris 1933), 52–54; Basil Robinson et al., *The Keir Collection: Islamic Painting and the Arts of the Book* (London 1976), 160–162; Gray (ed.), *The Arts of the Book*, figs LXVIII and LXIX; Robert Hillenbrand, 'The Iconography of the *Shahnama-yi Shahi*', in Charles Melville (ed.), *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society* (London – New York 1996), 56; Bloom, 'Epic Images Revisited', 245.
- 46 Hillenbrand, '*Shahnama-yi Shahi*', 59.
- 47 Although some authors think that an illustrated copy of the *Shahnama* was not produced for Sultān Husayn Bayqara, others maintain that "absence of evidence does not necessarily mean evidence of absence": Bloom, 'Epic Images Revisited', 245. See also Hillenbrand, '*Shahnama-yi Shahi*', 54–57; Robinson, 'Vicissitudes of Rustam', 258; Sims, 'Illustrated Manuscripts of Firdausi's *Shahnama*', 43.
- 48 Welch, *King's Book of Kings*, 33; Dickson and Welch, *Houghton Shahnameh*, vol. 1, 27–51; Hillenbrand, '*Shahnama-yi Shahi*', 59. The manuscript was intact until 1970 when its owner, Arthur A.

Houghton Jr, dismembered it. The book, which still retains 118 of its illustrations, is today preserved at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. Seventy-eight of its illustrations are held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the rest are dispersed.

49 Dickson and Welch, *Houghton Shahnameh*, vol. 1, 3–8.

50 Ahmed Feridun Paşa in *Nūzhetü'l-Ahbar der sefer-i Sigetvar*, dated 976 H (1568) (TSMK H.1339, fol. 246v), describes the *Shahnama* presented by the Safavid ambassador Shah Quli Khān to Selim II at Edirne in 1568 as containing Shāh Tahmāsp's name and 259 illustrations. The Tahmāsp *Shahnama* presently has a gilt leather binding and 258 illustrations, but the binding was probably replaced at a later date since Ahmed Feridun Paşa refers to it as a jewelled (*murassa*) cover and one of the illustrations may have been lost later. It is impossible to determine exactly what *murassa* meant in this context.

51 Stuart Cary Welch, *Persian Painting: Five Royal Safavid Manuscripts of the Sixteenth Century* (New York 1976); *idem*, *Wonders of the Age*.

52 Basil W. Robinson, 'Isma'il II's Copy of the *Shahnama*', *Iran* 14 (1976), 1–8; P. & D. Colnaghi (eds), *Persian and Mughal Art* (London 1976), 11, 32–47; Anthony Welch, *Artists for the Shah* (New Haven – London 1976), 20, figs 58–66, colour pl. 1–2, 4–5; Asadullah Sourén Melikian-Chirvani, *Le Chant du monde: L'Art de l'Iran Safavide, 1501–1736* (Paris 2007), cat. nos. 71–75. Fifty-two of the miniatures of the manuscript, which was exhibited intact at the Paris Musée des Arts Décoratifs in 1912, are known. All are from the first half of the book.

53 A. Welch, *Artists for the Shah*, 66, colour pl. 8–11; Sheila R. Canby, *The Rebellious Reformer: The Drawings and paintings of Riza-yi 'Abbasi of Isfahan* (London 1996), 181, cat. nos 9–12.

54 Lâle Uluç, 'Selling to the Court: Late Sixteenth Century Shiraz Manuscripts', *Muqarnas* 17 (2000), 73–97; Uluç, *Turkman Governors*.

55 Sussan Babaie utilises an illustration from a Shiraz copy of the *Shahnama* (TSMK R.1548, fol. 489r) in her discussion of sixteenth-century Safavid architecture: see 'Building on the Past: the Shaping of Safavid Architecture, 1501–76', in Jon Thompson and Sheila R. Canby (eds), *Hunt for Paradise: Court Arts of Safavid Iran 1501–1576* (Milan – New York), 26–27.

56 Grabar and Blair, *Epic Images*, 13–28; Hillenbrand, '*Shahnama-yi Shahi*', 69. The most extreme case of the illustrations of a copy of Firdawsi's epic reflecting contemporary private and public events is presented by Abolola Soudavar ('The Saga of Abu Sa'id Bahador Khan: The *Abu Sa'idname*'), in Julian Raby and Teresa Fitzherbert (eds), *The Court of the Il-khans, 1290–1340* [Oxford 1996], 98–215), who has hypothesized that the so-called Great Mongol *Shahnama* was the book of Abū Sa'id, the *Abū Sa'idnāma*, made for the Mongol Sultān Abū Sa'id Bahādūr Khān (r. 1317–1335). That manuscript was mentioned in a sixteenth-century text, the preface to the Bahrām Mirzā Album, written by the album's compiler, Dūst Muhammad (TSMK H.2154). For various views on this proposal, see Simpson, '*Shahnama* as Text', 13–14; Blair, 'Rewriting the History', 47; Sims, 'Thoughts on a *Shahnama* Legacy', 274–277.

57 Sims, 'Thoughts on a *Shahnama* Legacy', 274.

58 Welch, *Five Royal Safavid Manuscripts*. An additional Tahmāsp manuscript that was not studied by Welch is a copy of the *Gulistān and Bustān* of Sa'di dated 961 H (1554), bearing the name and titles of Shāh Tahmāsp (TSMK H.673): see Uluç, *Turkman Governors*, 68–79, figs 29–34, 36.

59 Ahmed Feridun Paşa, *Nūzhetü'l-Ahbār der sefer-i Sigetvār*, dated 976 H (1569) (TSMK H.1339, fol. 246v).

60 Seyyid Lokman, *Zūbde'tü'l-Tevārih*, dated 991 H (1583) (TIEM 1973, fol. 91v).

61 Şükrü, *Selīmname* of c. 1525 (TSMK H.1597–98, fol. 140r): see Lâle Uluç, 'Ottoman Book Collectors and Illustrated Sixteenth Century Shiraz Manuscripts', *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la*

*Méditerranée* 87–88 (1999), fig. 6; *eadem*, 'The Ottoman Contribution to 16th-Century Shiraz Manuscript Production', in *Art Turc/Turkish Art: 10e Congrès international d'art Turc/10th International Congress of Turkish Art*, (Geneva 1999), fig. 8; *eadem*, *Turkman Governors*, 491, fig. 364.

62 Peçevî İbrahim Efendi, *Peçevî Tarihi*, ed. Bekir Baykal (Ankara 1992), vol. 1, 199; İsmail H. Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi* (Istanbul 1947), vol. 2, 259; Fethullah Ali Çelebi (Arifi), *Süleymānnāme*, dated 965 H (1558) (TSMK H.1517, fol. 498r).

63 Mustafa 'Ali, *Cami'u'l-buhur der Mecalis-i Sur*, 994 H (1585–86) (TSMK B.203, fols. 24v–36v); the same text, edited by A. Öztekin (Ankara 1996), 23–36, 127–150; Orhan Şaik Gökyay, 'Bir Saltanat Düğünü', *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi* 1 (1986), 31–39. The gifts listed by Mustafa 'Ali are very close to the official register of gifts from the same occasion, preserved in the Topkapı Palace Museum Archives (TSMA D.9614).

64 Gökyay, 'Bir Saltanat Düğünü', 31–39.

65 İbrahim Çavuş, *Kitab-ı Gencine-i Feth-i Gence* (TSMK R.1296, fols 46r, 48v, 53r); Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi*, vol. 3, 100–102; B. Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı-Iran Siyasi Münasebetleri* (Istanbul 1962), 187–195; Iskandar Munshi, *Tarikh-i Alam-ara-yi 'Abbasi* (History of Shah 'Abbas the Great), trans. Roger Savory (Boulder CO 1979), vol. 1, 479–483; vol. 2, 587, 612; Uluç *Turkman Governors*, 490–441, figs 361–363.

66 Gökyay, 'Bir Saltanat Düğünü', 31–39.

67 Lâle Uluç, 'The *Shahnama* of Firdausi in the Lands of Rum', in Charles Melville (ed.), proceedings of the *Shahnama* symposium at Pembroke College, Cambridge University (forthcoming).

68 Serpil Bağcı, 'From Translated Word to Translated Image: The Illustrated *Şehname-i Turki* Copies', *Muqarnas* 17 (2000), 162–175; *eadem*, 'Old Images for New Texts and Contexts: Wandering Images in Islamic Book Painting', *Muqarnas* 21 (2004), 22–31; Serpil Bağcı *et al.*, *Osmanlı Resim Sanatı* (Ankara 2006), 94–97, 114–115.

69 Christine Woodhead, 'An Experiment in Official Historiography: The Post of Şehnameci in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1555–1605', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 75 (1983), 157–182; Bağcı *et al.*, *Osmanlı Resim Sanatı*, 97–114, 119–129.

70 Talikzade, *Şehname-i Hümayun* (TIEM no. 1965, fol. 12v); cited and translated by Christine Woodhead, *Ta'likzāde's Şehname-i Hümayūn: A history of the Ottoman campaign into Hungary 1593–94* (Berlin 1983), 19.

71 *Ibid.*, 15.

72 Andreas Tietze, trans. and ed., *Mustafā 'Alī's Counsel for Sultans of 1581* (Vienna 1979), 23; transliterated Turkish text, 98–99.

73 Dublin, Chester Beatty Library Ms 413, fol. 92v, line 28, cited by István Nyitrai, 'Rendering history topical: One aspect of a 16th-century Persian historical epic in the Ottoman Empire', *Acta Orientalia* 48 (1995), 115.

74 Melikian-Chirvani, *Chant du monde*, 37.

75 Robert L. Canfield, 'Introduction: The Turko-Persian Tradition', in Robert L. Canfield (ed.), *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge 1991), 1–35.

76 Milo Cleveland Beach and Ebba Koch, *King of the World: The Padshahnama* (London 1997), 188.

77 Colnaghi, *Persian and Mughal Art*, cat. no. 88.

78 Charles Melville, 'Introduction', in Melville (ed.), *Shahnama Studies* I, xxiv.

79 Robert Hillenbrand, 'New Perspectives in *Shahnama* Iconography', in Hillenbrand (ed.), *Shahnama: The Visual Language of the Persian Book of Kings*, 7.



## The Illustrated Text

CATALOGUE ENTRIES 108 — 133

**Book** illustration serves to explain or amplify the book's text, and in so doing, provides another important function – to give pleasure to the reader. The visual impact fixes the reader's experience more firmly in the memory, and also expands the emotional and cultural value of literary works. To enjoy reading a book was and is usually a private pleasure, and enjoyment of the arts of the book is similarly personal: while absorbing the intellectual content of word and image, the reader rests the "artwork" in his or her hands, turns the pages with the forefinger, and holds the book within a comfortable reading distance. The delicacy of openwork designs on a leather bookbinding gives pleasure not only to the eye, but also to the fingertips of the privileged reader. The arts of the book are all responsive to this sensory context of proximity and intimacy: fine script is admirable for minute perfection, the refined details of complex illumination pattern always reward closer study, and manuscript paintings deliver scenes on a scale which demands and delights ever closer examination – sometimes to the point of astonishment. Similarly, the lustre and *minai* ceramic tableware of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries are inscribed and illustrated on a miniature scale which implies the handheld proximity of the viewer (cat. nos. 111 – 115). This is a different mode of art consumption to that practiced in modern times, where groups of viewers admire art objects on high plinths or hanging on gallery walls, and are told specifically "do not touch".

The range of illustrated manuscripts in this exhibition show the long historical tradition in the arts of the book in the Islamic Middle East, wherein works of science and literature were accompanied by diagrams, drawings and paintings to expand on the message of the text. The earliest examples surviving today date from the early eleventh century, but older historical accounts remind us that books were known to be illustrated long before this date. Like expensive illumination or fine bindings, the addition of paintings was certainly a luxury not available to all bookbuyers: from the fourteenth century onwards, the most refined traditions of painting have been associated with court patronage and the driving passion of bibliophile princes in the courts of Iran, Turkey and India. Persian painting at the Mongol court in Tabriz (early fourteenth century) marks the commencement of a stylistic tradition which endured in court circles for many centuries, in Jalayirid Iraq, Timurid, Turkman and Safavid Iran, then extending to the ateliers of Ottoman Turkey (cat. no. 128) and Mughal India (cat. no. 129), which both admired and followed Iranian culture. Commercial workshops responded to this royal taste, producing illustrated



manuscripts in aspirational court styles, such as the sustained production in fifteenth-century Shiraz (cat. nos. 116 – 118).

Court production of illustrated versions of Firdawsī's epic Persian poem, the *Shahnama*, also began in the early fourteenth century under Mongol rule, and continued over the centuries – as this exhibition amply shows (cat. nos. 108 – 110, 116 – 118, 120 – 124, 126, 130). Firdawsī's masterpiece is of monumental length, covering as it does the reigns of fifty Iranian monarchs in approximately 50,000 verses: the text is packed with the adventures, intrigues and tragedies of generations of ancient Iranian kings and heroes, including always the great Rostam, and his trusty steed Rakhsh. The great variety of episodes available for illustration, and the consistent elevation of the *Shahnama* as an illustrated book truly worthy of kings, are both beautifully evidenced by the range of scenes which follows here.

### Bahrām Gūr at the house of Mahiyar the jeweller

Legends of the pre-Islamic kings of the Iranian plateau were retained in the Islamic period through oral traditions, and in the medieval period these were written into the Iranian national epic, the *Shahnama* or *Book of Kings*, by Abu'l-Qasim Firdawsi. This enormous rhyming poem, completed in the early eleventh century CE, was written in New Persian and became a cornerstone of what has been described as a “renaissance” of Persian language and culture in the medieval period. Although the Iranian lands had been under Arab occupation since the early Islamic period, and the Arabic script had been universally adopted for writing New Persian, in both metre and vocabulary – to say nothing of subject matter – the text of the *Shahnama* owes little to Arabic. The subject of the poem is the history of the Iranian world from creation to the downfall of the Sasanians prior to the coming of Islam, as shown through the personal histories and exploits of a sequence of rulers. In the episode illustrated here, the Sasanian king Bahram Gur has arrived incognito at the house of Mahiyar the jeweller and sits on cushions, holding a wine-cup and listening to Mahiyar’s beautiful daughter playing the harp. The horizontal format of the image, appearing like a framed window set into the width of the text, is typical of early Ilkhanid manuscript illustration, as is the frontal emphasis and the placement of the figures along a single baseline.

108

Folio from the dispersed “Second Small *Shahnama*”  
 Ilkhanid western Iran or Baghdad,  
 c. 1300  
 Opaque watercolour, gold and ink  
 on paper  
 24 x 19.2 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00016  
 Publ.: Pope 1945, pl. 121; Welch  
 1972a, p. 45; Simpson 1979, fig. 51;  
 Welch–Welch 1982, no. 13; Falk  
 1985, (no. 17).



## 109

Folio from a dispersed “Small *Shahnama*” manuscript  
 Ilkhanid western Iran or Baghdad,  
 c. 1300  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
 on paper  
 26.7 x 19.2 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00019  
 Publ.: Welch 1972a, p. 51; Canby  
 1998, pp. 21–22 (no. 1).

### The sons of Faridūn at the court of King Sarv of Yemen

The group of four so-called “Small *Shahnama*” manuscripts from which this painting and cat. nos 108 and 110 have been taken, are among the earliest known illustrated manuscripts of the *Shahnama*. The four manuscripts are clearly very closely related and must have been produced in the same centre around the same time, although scholars are not in full agreement about whether that centre was in Western Iran – possibly Tabriz – or in Baghdad. Each page is laid out with six text columns of *naskh* script framed with red lines, and from the reconstruction of the dispersed manuscripts undertaken by Simpson (1979) it has been shown that each of the Small *Shahnama* manuscripts probably had a painted illustration every two or three pages. The painted images are frequently either four or six columns wide, and strongly framed. The solidity of their formal placement within the text is matched by the close integration of text and image within their narrative role: the images normally illustrate the text located directly around the picture space. Although relying heavily on balanced, frontal illustrations of figures with little spatial recession away from the picture frame, depth has been suggested in this image by the overlapping of the three princes and their ambassador on the right, and by the partly perspectival throne of the princesses on the left. In this scene, King Sarv of Yemen (the largest and most important figure, in the centre) has asked Salm, Tur and Iraj, the sons of the Iranian king Faridun, to guess the order of his daughters’ ages. They manage this correctly and are eventually rewarded with permission to marry the three princesses. According to Simpson (1979, pp. 64–65) this episode is an addition to the original text.



### Kay Khusraw swears vengeance on Afrāsiyāb

The lack of a well-established tradition of *Shahnama* manuscript illustration at the beginning of the fourteenth century, coupled with the decision to create a dense illustrative cycle within each of the Small *Shahnama* manuscripts, presented a considerable challenge to the painters of these manuscripts. Although a dependency on rather hieratic interior scenes can be observed within the Small *Shahnama* group, the painters also appear to have enjoyed creating more inventive compositions that nudged at the boundaries of the medium. In this painting, which appears to show the king Kay Kavus embracing the young Kay Khusraw, future king of Persia and great hero of the *Shahnama*, the space of the picture plane has been extended through two devices. First, a relatively vertical arrangement of figures permits the impression of steep recession into a space behind the page, emphasised by the large throne – a very direct emblem of kingship – that fills the space behind the embracing figures. Secondly, the action of the scene has started to spread beyond the margins of the picture space. In addition to the bows, staff and throne finial that have broken through the upper picture frame, the feet of the two main figures and the red-bearded man to their left have all stepped over the bottom of the frame and are invading the space of the text. With one foot of each of these figures aligning with a break between text columns, the device also anchors the composition squarely within the physical format of the text. This type of margin invasion was greatly developed in later Persian miniature painting, and came to characterise the ambiguous and sometimes playful spatial relationships with the text block so often found in this type of painting.

110

Folio from the dispersed Freer  
"Small *Shahnama*" manuscript  
Ilkhanid western Iran or Baghdad,  
c. 1300  
Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
on paper  
30.3 x 22 cm  
Inv.: AKM00022  
Pub.: Welch 1972a, p. 57.



111

**Lustre-decorated jug**

Iran, late twelfth century  
 Fritware painted in lustre on an  
 opaque white glaze  
 Height: 10.3 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00555  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 148 (no. 116);  
 AKTC 2007b, p. 151 (no. 116).

Like the technology of fritware, which produces a fine, strong white ceramic body enabling the production of delicate vessels such as this cup, the technique of painting ceramics in lustre glaze is also thought to have been fully developed in Egypt before travelling eastward to Syria, Anatolia and Iran during the decline of the Fatimid caliphate in Egypt in the twelfth century. In the decades before the Mongol invasion lustre ceramics came to be produced in Iran on an unprecedented scale, with the potters of Kashan gaining a particularly good reputation (Watson 1973–5, pp. 3–4), although the current lack of evidence for lustre painting in other parts of Iran should not necessarily be taken to mean that Kashan was the only centre of production. The rapidly painted motifs of this jug are typical of the style classified by Watson as “miniature style”: diagnostic aspects of the design include the chequerboard trees (see also cat. no. 112 and cat. no. 113) and plants with dotted stems.



### Lustre-decorated bowl with horseman and camels

Lustre decoration involves painting the surface of the vessel, which has already been glazed with white glaze and fired once, with solutions of metal compounds and then firing it for a second time while reducing the oxygen content of the kiln, resulting in a metallic veneer that adheres to the glaze surface. Although it is a relatively costly and difficult ceramic technique, it has often been postulated that this decorative technique was developed to provide a ceramic (and therefore cheaper) alternative to precious metalwork, and possibly also a means of circumventing the Prophetic injunction against eating from vessels made from precious metals. However, the technique of lustre painting was in fact first used in the decoration of pre-Islamic glassware in Syria and Egypt, and this glassware probably served as a direct inspiration for the development of lustre ceramics (Pancaroglu 2007, p. 18). On this impressive bowl the central figure of a mounted rider – a characteristic motif of Iranian lusterware of the pre-Mongol era, and seen also on cat. no. 111 and cat. no. 113 – is surrounded by a very unusual frieze of camels punctuated by chequerboard trees and one standing human figure; the whole frieze is presumably intended to represent a caravan.

112

Iran, late twelfth century  
Fritware painted in lustre on an opaque white glaze  
Diameter: 17 cm  
Inv.: AKM0057  
Publ.: AKTC 2008a, pp. 232–233 (no. 90); AKTC 2009a, p. 182 (no. 137); AKTC 2009b, p. 182 (no. 137); AKTC 2010a, p. 182 (no. 140).



## 113

## Lustre-decorated bowl with horsemen

Iran, late twelfth century  
 Fritware painted in lustre on an  
 opaque white glaze  
 Diameter: 17 cm  
 Inv.: AKMo0558  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 148 (no. 115);  
 AKTC 2007b, p. 151 (no. 115); AKTC  
 2010a, p. 182 (no. 141).

Like cat. no. 111 and cat. no. 112, this bowl is decorated in the style of lustre painting termed the “miniature style” by Watson. The similarity between the image of the central horseman on this bowl and that of cat. no. 112 is very striking: note the near-identical poses of the horses, with their white-banded forelegs and curved inner front legs, a pose which is also repeated in the frieze of mounted horsemen on this example. Furthermore, within the central roundels of the two bowls the panel of “scroll and dot” decoration on the horses’ saddles and the dotted robe of the two central horsemen (with the elaboration of a *tiraz* band on this example) are very closely matched, while the dotted line motif to show scrolling vegetation and the chequerboard trees are similarly executed on this example, cat. no. 111 and cat. no. 112. The art of pre-Mongol Iran saw an intense proliferation of figural art in almost all media and particularly in the field of ceramics, with a burgeoning iconography of pleasant pursuits that often resemble the stock figures and compositions of manuscript illustrations.



### Lustre-decorated dish with seated figure

Although this vessel is similar in dimensions to cat. no. 112 and cat. no. 113, the figures have here been painted on a larger scale, allowing more details of face and costume to be shown. The very rounded, heavy faces of the figures painted on Iranian lustre and *minai* wares (see cat. no. 115) of this time, which also appear in manuscript painting, have frequently been linked to a distinctly eastern ideal of beauty. The round moon-face (*mahrui* in Persian) with almond-shaped eyes, thin arched eyebrows, a slender nose and a tiny rosebud mouth appears as the standard of beauty in both the visual and poetic arts of medieval Iran, and the term *bot* which is sometimes used in medieval Persian poetry to describe a person of outstanding looks has been suggested by Melikian-Chirvani to refer specifically to the image of Buddha and Buddhist statuary as an ideal of beauty (Melikian-Chirvani 1971, p. 60). The costume of the central seated figure on this dish is also interesting, as the robe appears to sport both *tiraz* bands on the upper arms (see cat. no. 22) and what seems to be a crossed opening at the front of the robe, to some extent comparable with that seen on cat. no. 21. The scene depicted here, with a large central figure seated behind a small body of water and holding something to his chest, while two smaller figures stand to either side, can be linked to earlier, more hieratic images of the enthroned ruler with attendants current in Iranian art from pre-Islamic times onwards.

114

Iran, late twelfth or early thirteenth century  
Fritware painted in lustre on an opaque white glaze  
Diameter: 17 cm  
Inv.: AKM00559  
Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 182 (no. 159);  
AKTC 2007b, p. 186 (no. 159);  
Makariou 2007, pp. 66–67 (no. 19);  
AKTC 2008a, pp. 294–295 (no. 118);  
AKTC 2010a, pp. 182–183, no. 142.





## 115

**Minai bowl with steep sides**

Iran, c. 1200  
 Fritware (?) with opaque white glaze  
 with blue and turquoise in-glaze  
 painting and lustre and *minai*  
 enamel overglaze decoration  
 Height: 13.3 cm; diameter: 29.2 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00773  
 Publ.: Welch 1972b, p. 147.

*Minai* is the name given by collectors to a type of enamelled ware made in pre-Mongol Iran: the earliest dated piece is from 579 H/ 1180 CE, and the latest from 616 H/ 1219 CE, so it would appear to have been a relatively short-lived practice. As Watson has observed, *minai* wares appear to have been made by the same potters who produced lustreware (see cat. no. 111 to cat. no. 114 in this catalogue), and sometimes both techniques are met with on one piece. Like lustre, *minai* requires a second firing to fix the colours that are applied over the glaze: the dominant enamelled colours are black and red, with the latter being particularly difficult to work with (Watson 2004, p. 363). The strong polychromy and fine drawing enabled by the *minai* technique allowed potters to create detailed images on their wares, and the predilection for figural subjects that was current at this point in Iranian art is amply demonstrated by the teeming surface of this bowl. While each figure sits in an individual roundel or niche, some appear from their poses to be interacting with each other across the blue interlace that separates them. Very little manuscript painting survives from this period, and the strongly illustrative tendencies evinced in *minai* ceramic decoration remain an important source for understanding the development of illustrative techniques in the pre-Mongol era. This piece is exhibited with the kind permission of Princess Catherine Aga Khan.





## 116

## Gushtasp working as a smith in Rum

Folio from a dispersed *Shahnama* manuscript  
 Signed by the scribe Murshid ibn al-Dīn Wazzān  
 Iran, probably Shiraz, dated Shawwāl 887 H/ October 1482 CE  
 Opaque watercolour, gold, silver and ink on paper  
 Page: 32.5 x 21.3 cm;  
 image: 8.5 x 15.8 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00048  
 Publ.: Falk 1985, (no. 14C).

The Turkman style of manuscript illustration that can be observed in the manuscripts of western Iran during this period (see cat. no. 117, from this manuscript, and cat. no. 118) is distinguished from contemporary Timurid painting by its richer palette, dominated by yellows and dark greens rather than the pastels of Timurid painting. Additionally, the figures of Turkman illustrations are generally shorter, with larger heads, than the very long and slim Timurid figures. In this scene Prince Gushtasp, wearing a turban and leather apron and standing in the dead centre of the foreground above the central division between the text columns, is working incognito in Rum (Byzantium) as a smith. He raises his hammer to strike the piece of metal being held on the anvil by another apron-wearing man: in the next instant Gushtasp will bring down his first stroke, his mighty strength smashing the anvil to bits with one blow. While the two men engaged in working the bellows behind the forge and hammering out a sword behind Gushtasp can be regarded as part of the story, inasmuch as they belong to the smithy, the additional inclusion of figures that observe the action without participating in the story is not an uncommon feature of manuscript illustration of the fifteenth century and later. Here, one man to the left bites his finger in astonishment, while three on the right discuss the scene amongst themselves. Through the inclusion of such figures from “the watching world” an enhanced sense of theatricality is lent to the narrative spectacle presented in these fantastic, jewel-like little paintings.



## Kay Khusraw and the Iranians crossing the sea in pursuit of Afrāsiyāb

Like cat. no. 71 and cat. no. 116, this leaf comes from a dispersed manuscript of the *Shahnama* dated on the colophon to 887 H/ 1482 CE. The refinement of miniature painting that took place in greater Iran during the fifteenth century resulted in a spectacularly colourful, meticulous idiom distinguished by several different schools. This manuscript is one of a sizeable body illustrated in the so-called “Turkman School” style developed in western Iran and Iranian Iraq during the second half of the fifteenth century. In this image King Afrasiyab occupies the left-hand boat: the crowned king, wearing blue, sits in the prow, while three men advise him. In the horse-headed boat that pursues them sits Kay Khusraw dressed in green, also with three turbaned companions. After defeating him in battle Kay Khusraw pursued the fleeing Afrasiyab across the sea for seven months to avenge his father’s murder. The blackened surface of the sea is caused by the oxidation of the silver that originally provided a glittering surface. In this image the reduction of certain components of the illustration to entirely decorative forms can be seen in the arrangement of the flowers along the bank, as formally set out as if they were a pattern on a textile, and the rather implausible boats, which in both form and decoration look more like *kashkūls* (see cat. no. 43) than seafaring craft.

117

Folio from a dispersed *Shahnama* manuscript  
Signed by the scribe Murshid ibn al-Din Wazzān  
Iran, probably Shiraz, dated Shawwāl 887 H / October 1482 CE  
Opaque watercolour, gold, silver and ink on paper  
Page: 32.5 x 21.4 cm;  
image: 8.4 x 15.9 cm  
Inv.: AKM00047  
Publ.: Canby 1998, (no. 14).





## Afrāsiyāb flees across the sea

The forty-three illustrations of this manuscript are typical of Turkman Shiraz style (see also cat. no. 116 and cat. no. 117). Both Turkman and Timurid styles were to have a profound influence on Safavid painting of the sixteenth century, as artists trained in the distinct styles of Turkman Tabriz and Bihzad's Herat were brought together in one atelier. The calligrapher of this manuscript, Na'im al-Din Shirazi ibn Sadr al-Din Mudhahhib, is known to have copied several other extant manuscripts, dating from the 1480s to the 1500s, so this *Shahnama* comes midway through a long career. The patron's name, written in gold in a colophon at the end of the manuscript, is Sultan Abu 'l-Nasr Qasim Khan: he has not been identified further. In this image of Afrasiyab taking to the seas to escape Kay Khusraw – the same episode is illustrated in cat. no. 117 – Afrasiyab's boat sails past a jumbled group of sea-creatures worthy of al-Qazwini's cosmography, including a narwhal, sea serpents, animal-headed fish and a mermaid. Although this painting is rather more complex in compositional terms than cat. no. 117, the formal similarities between the horse-headed boat of this image, with its gold filigree decoration on black, and the boats depicted in cat. no. 117, demonstrate the standardisation of motifs across Turkman book painting in the late fifteenth century. A further image from the same manuscript is illustrated opposite: this shows Rustam rescuing Bizhan from the pit (fol. 218v).

118

Folio 278r from a manuscript of the *Shahnama* produced for Sultān Abū 'l-Nasr Qāsim Khān, copied by Na'im al-Din Shirāzī ibn Sadr al-Din Mudhahhib. Shiraz, Iran, dated 898 H / 1492–3 CE

Opaque watercolour, ink, silver and gold on paper

Page: 29.2 x 18.3 cm,

image: 17.2 x 9.7 cm

Inv.: AKM00269

Publ.: (Including other folios from this manuscript): Welch 1978b, pp. 23–31 (fol. 218v); AKTC 2007a, p. 156 (no. 125); AKTC 2007b, p. 158 (no. 125); AKTC 2010a, p. 208 (no. 159; fol. 218v).

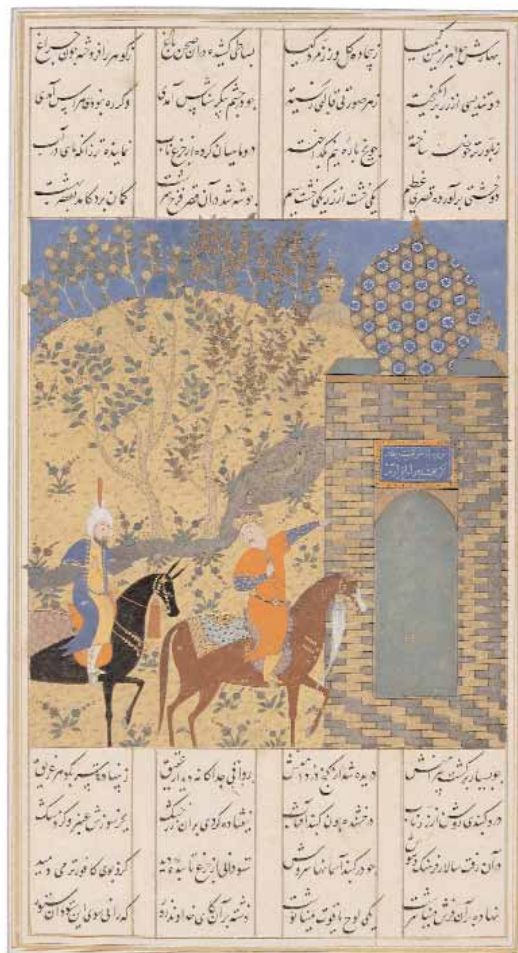


119

## Iskandar reaches the garden of Iram

Folio 382v from a manuscript of the *Khamsa* (Quintet) of Nizāmī, copied by Pir Husayn ibn Pir Hasan al-Kātib al-Shirāzī, illustrated by Ghiyāth al-Mudhabbib Shiraz, Iran, dated 20–30 Rabi' al-Āwwal 933 H/ 25 December 1526 – 4 January 1527 CE  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper with contemporary gilt leather binding  
 33.5 x 20.2 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00270  
 Publ.: (Including other folios from same manuscript) Welch 1978b (ms. 15); Welch–Welch 1982, pp. 74–76 (no. 22); AKTC 2009a, pp. 194–195 (no. 148); AKTC 2009b, pp. 194–195 (no. 148); AKTC 2010a, pp. 194–195 (no. 153).

The *Khamsa* (Quintet) is a posthumous collection of five long poems in Persian composed by Nizami of Ganja (in present-day Azerbaijan), who died in 1209. The poems of the *Khamsa* are the *Makhzan al-Asrar* or “Treasury of Mysteries” (a compendium of moral discourses, each illustrated with an exemplary story); the romance *Khusraw u Shirin*; the tragic love story of *Layla u Majnun*; the *Haft Paykar* or “Seven Beauties” (a romanticized biography of the Sasanian king Bahram Gur); and the *Iskandar-nama*, the life and fantastic exploits of Alexander the Great, from which last poem comes this painting. In this illustrated version of the text, all twenty-seven miniatures appear to be by the same artist, Ghiyath al-Mudhabhib (“Ghiyath the gilder”), who has signed this, the last miniature in the book: his name appears directly below the dome of the fortress. Although the colophon names a scribe, Pir Husayn ibn Pir Hasan al-Katib al-Shirazi, it does not identify a patron. Anthony Welch has suggested that this book may have been produced for a wealthy individual of high standing or perhaps for the governor of Shiraz, as no Safavid prince lived in Shiraz during the period of production for the manuscript (Welch–Welch 1982, p. 76). In the present image Iskandar and his companion have come upon the entrance to the mythical garden of Iram; they are observed from behind the hill by sinister watching figures.



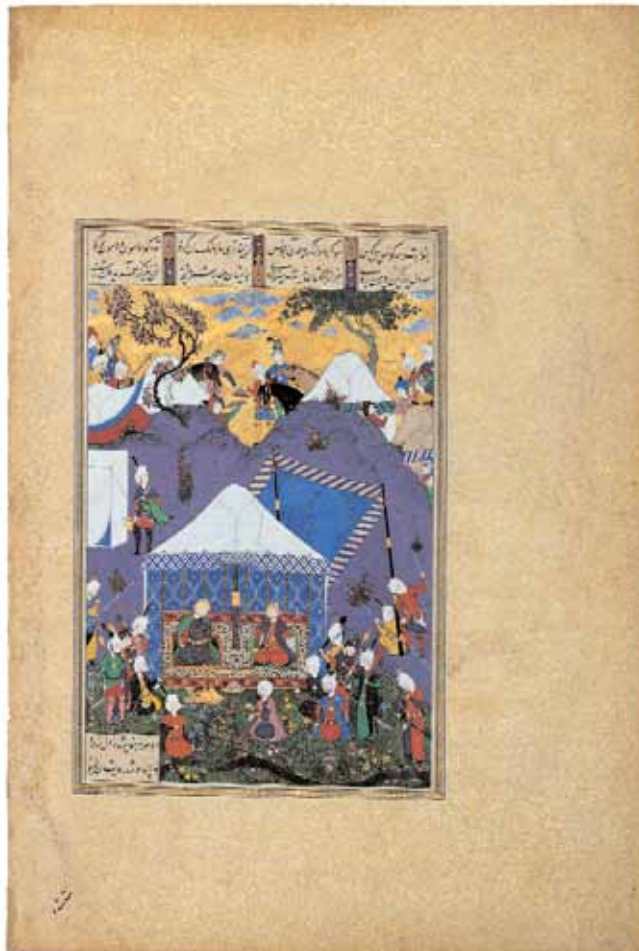
Folio 53v from the *Shahnama* of Shāh Tahmāsp

### Salm and Tūr receive the reply of Faridūn and Manūchihr

This is one of five illustrations from Shah Tahmasp's extraordinary manuscript of the *Shahnama* displayed in this exhibition (see also cat. no. 121, cat. no. 122, cat. no. 123 and cat. no. 124). The manuscript was initiated by Shah Isma'il (r. 1501–1524) and completed by his son Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–1576). Over a dozen painters, as well as calligraphers, illuminators, bookbinders, and others expert in polishing, ruling and gold stippling, along with a whole team of assistants, worked for almost twenty years to create one of the most sumptuous manuscripts ever produced. In the twentieth century the manuscript lost its colophon and a large part of the research done by art historians has focused on the identification of the workshop chiefs and painters. Before it was dismantled in the 1970s, the complete manuscript consisted of 759 folios, including 258 miniatures. In this painting the good king Faridun and his grandson Manuchihr have sent a messenger with a warning of vengeance to Faridun's treacherous sons Salm and Tur, who killed their brother Iraj (Manuchihr's father and Faridun's most favoured son). Salm and Tur, here depicted surrounded by courtiers and guards in a luxurious encampment, are visibly horrified: "The envoy having further told the message/Of Faridun, those tyrants' hearts grew sore/ Their faces blue as lapis lazuli". The painter of this image, which is attributed to 'Abd al-'Aziz, took advantage of the "twin" courts of Salm and Tur to create a symmetrical image, with the two princes on double thrones, flanked by their retinue to right and left, and echoed by the two hills in the background and the two tents shaded by two trees under the golden sky.

120

Iran, Tabriz, c. 1520–1530  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
 on paper  
 47.1 x 32 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00495  
 Publ.: Makariou 2007,  
 p. 76 (no. 23).





## 121

Iran, Tabriz, c. 1535  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
 on paper  
 47 x 31.8 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00155  
 Publ.: Welch 1976b, pp. 44–47;  
 Dickson–Welch 1981, col. pl. 6 and  
 pl. 24; Falk 1985, no. 45; Canby  
 1998, p. 50 (no. 26); AKTC 2010a,  
 pp. 216–217 (no. 164).

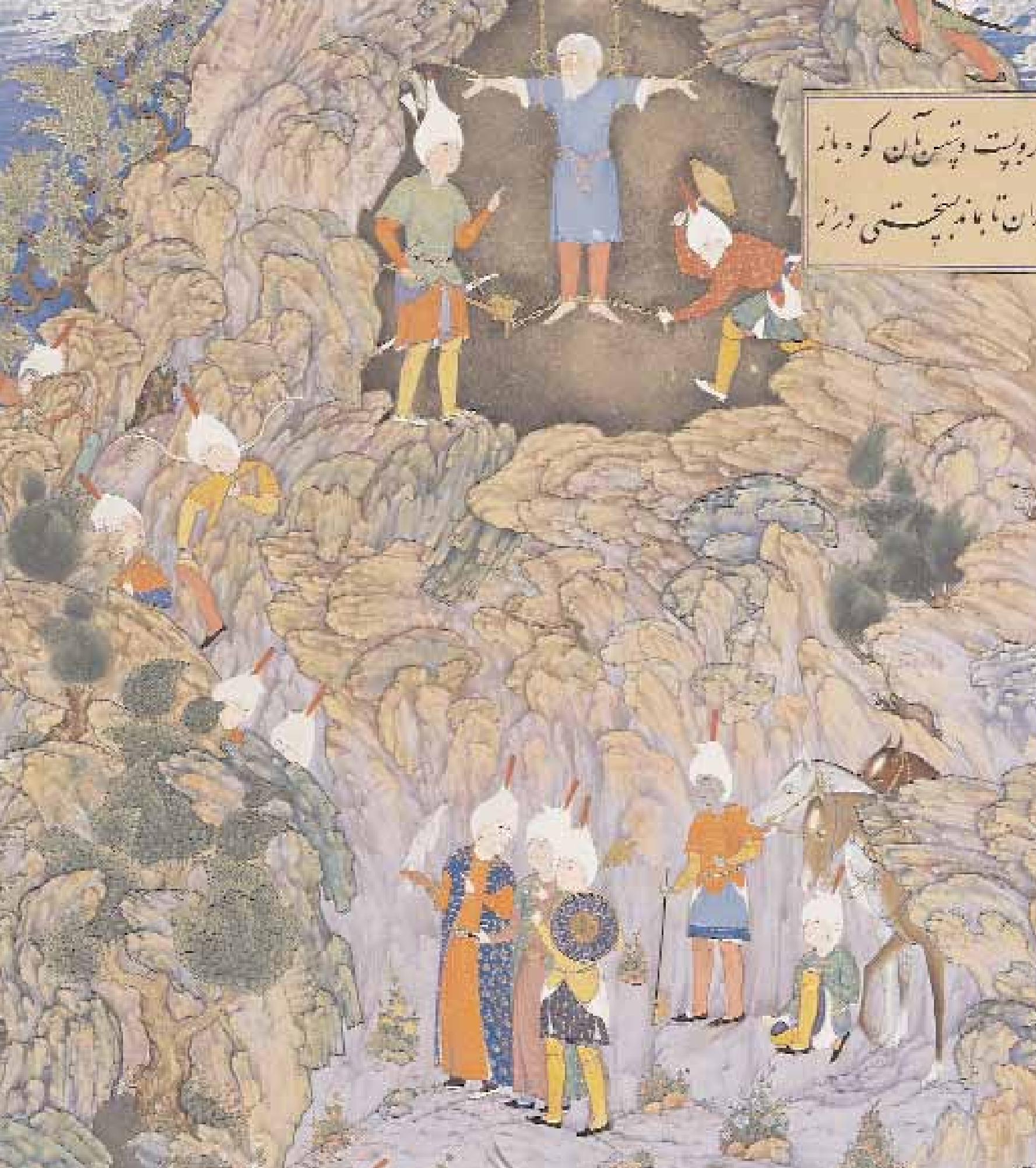
Folio 37v from the *Shahnama* of Shāh Tahmāsp

## The death of Zāhhāk

This painting concludes the cycle of King Zāhhāk, who had gained his throne by making a pact with the devil Iblis. Early in Zāhhāk's reign, Iblis arrives at the court disguised as a cook and contrives to kiss Zāhhāk's shoulders. Two serpents sprout from the spots kissed by Iblis, and to maintain his life Zāhhāk is required daily to feed human brains to the serpents. A tyrannical rule ensues and the only hope for justice rests with the hero Faridun. Despite Zāhhāk's efforts, Faridun eludes capture, rises up against the king, and overthrows him. "The death of Zāhhāk" depicts the moment when Zāhhāk has been brought to Mount Damavand and is suspended in a cave, as per the advice of the angel Surush, where he will suffer until death. Though one cannot fail to see the primary content – a frail, white-haired Zāhhāk chained to the walls of the cave, a dark, terrifying hole – the pictorial narrative is treated with a complexity equal to other paintings in Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnama*. "The death of Zāhhāk," a story concerned with the execution of justice and the inauguration of Faridun's enlightened reign, has been expanded into a scene of *al fresco* courtly life, highlighting some of the Iranian ruler's prerogatives. Faridun and his courtiers have dismounted from their horses and explore the landscape, while the presence of a musician emphasizes the courtly ambience. The tranquility of the lower half of the painting is contrasted with the upper half, where one finds Zāhhāk imprisoned in the cave and swirling clouds, some assuming biomorphic forms as dragons, encircling the bare and rocky mountain.



رویت و پسن آن کو داند  
آن تا با ندر پستی دراز



## 122

Iran, Tabriz, c. 1522–1535  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
 on paper  
 46.5 x 31.2 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo496  
 Publ.: Makariou 2007,  
 p. 76 (no. 24).

Folio 84v from the *Shahnama* of Shāh Tahmāsp**Sindukht brings gifts to the court of Sām**

The paintings of *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp, as well as showcasing several artists at the peak of their skills, plunge us into Safavid court life. Indeed, although the *Shahnama* depicts the legendary and pre-Islamic history of Iran, the artists represented the characters in clothing from the period of Shah Tahmasp. In the story cycle to which this folio relates, Zal, the son of the great paladin Sam, and Rudaba, a blameless descendent of the evil king Zahhak (see cat. no. 121), have fallen in love with each other. Because of the historic rivalry between their families, their love meets with near-universal disapproval: the only person favourably disposed towards Zal and Rudaba is Sindukht, Rudaba's mother, who succeeds firstly in calming the anger of Rudaba's father and then in persuading Sam, Zal's father, to accept the union. The story has a happy ending: the union of Zal and Rudaba results in the birth of a son, Rostam, who will become one of the greatest heroes of the Iranian world. To succeed in her diplomatic mission and secure the great paladin's agreement for the marriage of Rudaba and Zal, Sindukht empties Kabul's royal treasury and travels to Sam's court, laden with magnificent gifts. Sindukht herself is dressed in gold brocade and wears pearls and rubies in her hair. She pours forth 300,000 gold coins at Sam's feet, and offers him horses, camels and mules, all laden with gold, jewels, musk, camphor, rich fabrics and other treasures in such abundance that her retinue stretches over nearly four kilometres from the gates of Sam's palace. In this painting part of her vast escort, including three elephants and their Indian mahouts, is visible on the right-hand side, but the artist has decided to capture the moment when Sam receives the very remarkable ambassador from Kabul in his chambers. Their discussion is private; gestures and looks eloquently express the queen's powers of persuasion.



Folio 402r from the *Shahnama* of Shāh Tahmāsp

### Gushtasp slays the dragon on Mount Saqilā

This painting from the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp shows Gushtasp, the son of Shah Luhrasp, who travelled to the court of the *Qaysar* (Caesar) in Constantinople. Upon seeing him the eldest daughter of the *Qaysar* fell wildly in love with him and would not consider betrothal to any other man, much to her father's displeasure. The *Qaysar* then decreed that only suitors capable of accomplishing heroic feats would be accepted as suitable matches for his younger daughters, leading the suitors of the other daughters (perhaps the men seen hiding behind the hill) to ask Gushtasp to perform their heroic deeds for them: this painting shows Gushtasp's second test, defeating the dragon of Mount Saqila. Gushtasp shot the dragon with arrows, here shown gruesomely sticking through the beast's neck, before sticking his arm into its maw, stabbing it in the throat with a poisoned dagger and finally decapitating it. After dispatching the monster he returned to Constantinople, where the *Qaysar*, recognising his heroism, restored to him and his fiancée the favours of the court of Rum. The painting is attributable to Mirza 'Ali, son of Sultan Muhammad, who was one of the artists of the younger generation who worked on the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp. The art of book illustration in Iran was one that prized copying and refining as well as innovation: like all paintings in this tradition, individual elements in this image can be connected to earlier miniature paintings. The pastel-coloured, coral-like rocks, the uniformly sprigged ground, and the rather East Asian appearance of the dragon are all familiar tropes, but the delicacy of the painting and dynamism of the composition, with its margin-invading landscape which also acts as a *repoussoir*, underscore the important place of this painting in the history of the fantastic combat scene.

123

Iran, Tabriz, c. 1530–1535

Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper

47 x 31.8 cm

Inv.: AKM00163

Publ.: Dickson–Welch 1981, col. pl.

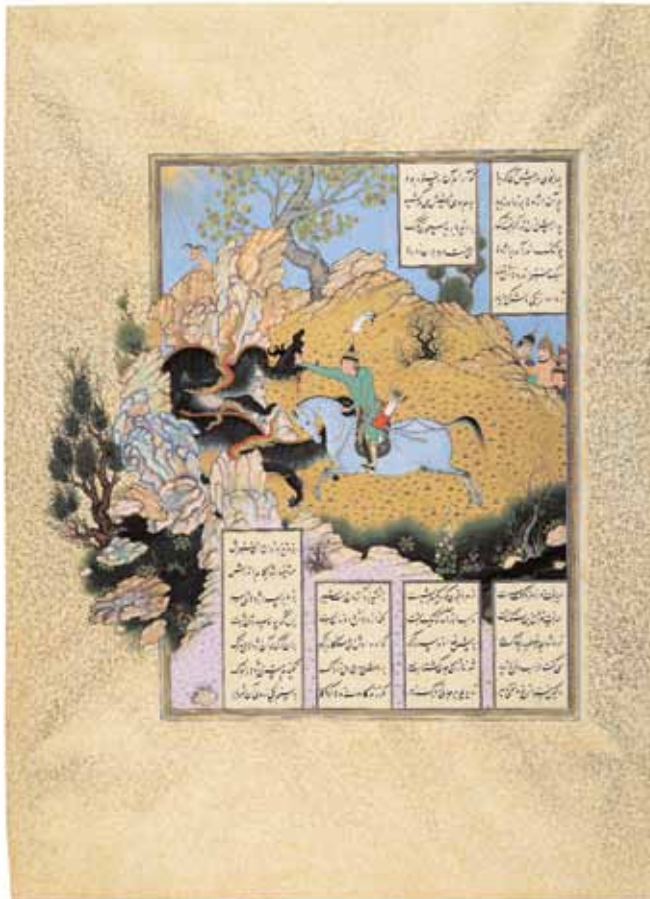
16, pl. 191; Falk 1985, (no. 56);

Canby 1998, p. 52 (no. 28);

Makariou 2007, p. 84 (no. 27);

AKTC 2009a, p. 202 (no. 153);

AKTC 2009b, p. 202 (no. 153).



## 124

Iran, Tabriz, c. 1540  
 Opaque watercolour, ink, gold and silver on paper  
 47.2 x 32 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo497  
 Publ.: Makariou 2007, p. 82 (no. 26); AKTC 2008b.

Folio 341v from the *Shahnama* of Shāh Tahmāsp  
**The joust of Fariburz and Kalbād**

This is the only painting in the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp that was produced by Shaykh Muhammad, one of the youngest artists to have contributed to this masterpiece of the illustrated book. It was around 1540 CE, in other words well after the completion of this *Shahnama*, that this painting and the work by Dust Muhammad entitled “Haftvad and the worm” (AKMoo164) were incorporated into the manuscript. This painting represents a famous episode in the unceasing wars between the Iranians and the Turanians. After a bloody combat, the armies withdrew for the night and the opposing commanders, Guderz the Iranian and Piran the Turanian, met to negotiate an honourable outcome that would decide the victory while at the same time avoiding the massacre of thousands; the forces involved were tremendous but equal in terms of strength. They decided to have ten knights from each army fight in single combat, with the two commanders themselves forming the eleventh pair of combatants; all of this would take place in a secluded environment away from the troops. The first joust, shown here, ended with prince Fariburz, son of Kay Kavus and the uncle of the Iranian Shah, killing Kalbad, the brother of Piran. Unlike many other scenes from the *Shahnama*, which are teeming with characters in order to convey the vast size of armies or the splendour of courtly magnificence, here the solitude and the responsibility weighing on the two heroes fighting in single combat are poignantly expressed in the two figures on horseback, who occupy most of the painting. Despite the painting’s martial subject, the birds, animals, landscape and stream are depicted with a refinement that contrasts with the violence of the main action.



### Folio from a dispersed manuscript of the *Khamsa* of Nizāmi

This is one of four folios from the same manuscript held in the Aga Khan Museum collections (other folios are AKM00066, 67 and 69). In its original state the manuscript is thought to have been produced for open sale (rather than being for commissioned by a patron) in late-sixteenth century Shiraz, where commercial artists imitated current styles of court painting for a market of wealthy members of the public who aspired to own luxury manuscripts. The long slender figures of this image are predominantly very young men, although some are bearded, with various skin tones possibly indicative of differing ethnic types; they have been painted in a manner that seems to follow the late-sixteenth century court painting style of Qazvin and Mashhad. An interesting feature of this folio and others from this manuscript is the elaboration of the text block into a spatial element that both impinges on and interacts with the space of the illustration. The figure in the top left of the garden who is partially cropped by the central text block appears to be entering the garden from behind the space of the text, an effect that is enhanced by the slanting edge of the text panel above him giving the upper text block the appearance of an awning. The corresponding angled panel below, meanwhile, leads from the far left of the page into the picture space like a path.

125

Safavid Shiraz, Iran, dated 984 AH / 1576 CE

Opaque watercolour, gold, silver and ink on paper

Page: 26.5 x 30.2 cm;

image: 10.2 x 17.7 cm

Inv.: AKM00068

Published: Welch 1972a, p. 164





بزار و دراکا و داباسو

بیاز است که موی بر خاک

بسر بر لهار و بدان سن کا

سوار بر زمین تیر کشد و راز

ز در کا و بر خاست او از کوا

زمین آیین شد موا آبوش

گفتار اندر گشتن سپید یار که کار

سپه راز دشمن که و آربود

بر و گفت لکر آیین بدار

همی چم از گفتمه کر کار

یرین گستران بر با پسته

بیا پوشید خندان جنگ

بیستند بر زمین شکر گت تک

بقریر برسان غنچه شیر

بیدر مذکر کان بر و مال اوی

میان کی جنگ و کو مال اوی

ز نامون سوی اوشتا و زردی

بر اسر نینان تیر باران

دو پهل سراسر زرد و چو کوی

کرفت

بندی کین سواران گرفت

کرفت

### Isfandiyār fights two monstrous wolves

Four leaves from this dispersed *Shahnama* manuscript, bearing five illustrations in all, are held in the Aga Khan Museum collections (others are AKM00099, 101 and 103). Other folios are held in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin (Per256) and the Reza 'Abbasi Museum in Tehran. Robinson (1976a) traced forty-nine illustrations from this manuscript, noting that all of them relate to the first half of the *Shahnama*: he has proposed that the manuscript was never completed due to the premature death of its patron Shah Ismā'il II (r. 1576–1577), whose reign lasted a mere eighteen months. Many of the illustrated folios bear attributions to individual artists written in a contemporary hand, proposed by Anthony Welch to be that of a librarian (Welch 1976a, pp. 78–79). The name on this painting, Naqdi, is associated with six other paintings in this manuscript, but no other works by this artist are known. In this image one of the heroes of the *Shahnama*, Ispandiyar the son of Shah Gushtasp, encounters two monstrous wolves on his way to the Brazen Hold to rescue his sisters from the Turanians. The wolves are a type of monstrous beast called *karkadann*, often depicted in Persian painting as looking something like unicorns or rhinoceros (Canby 1998, p. 62): here they have been rendered rather more like lions in face and form, but with pointed central horns and dark mottled coats. The vivid duck-egg blue of the ground and exquisite flowering tree growing out of the left-hand side of the picture plane underscore the breathless fantasy of this moment: in the next instant Ispandiyar will destroy the creatures and continue on his journey.

126

Ascribed to Naqdi  
Folio from a dispersed *Shahnama*  
executed for Shāh Ismā'il II  
Iran, Qazwin, c. 1576–1577  
Opaque watercolour, gold, silver  
and ink on paper  
Page: 45.6 x 31.4 cm;  
image 30.2 x 24.7 cm  
Inv.: AKM00102  
Publ.: Robinson 1976a, p. 5; Welch  
1978a, pp. 90–91; Canby 1998, p. 62  
(no. 37).





## 127

Author: Husayn ibn 'Ali al-Wāiz al-Kāshifi  
 Copied by Na'im Muhammad al-Husayni al-Tabrizi for Sādiqi Beg the painter; illustrations attributed to Sādiqi Beg  
 Iran, Qazwin, dated 13 Safar 1002 H / 8 November 1593 CE  
 Opaque watercolour and ink on paper  
 30.1 x 20.3 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00289  
 Publ.: London 1976, (no. 261); Welch 1976, pp. 125–144, figs. 42–55 (fols 10r, 17r, 38r, 28v, 20v, 52r, 309r, 55v, 85r, 227v, 40v, 313r, 83v, and 22r); Welch–Welch 1982, pp. 100–105, (cat. no. 32) (fols 22r, 139v, and 198r); Falk 1985, (no. 80) (fol. 22r); Canby 1998, pp. 70–72 (no. 43); (fols 89v, 148r, 201v); AKTC 2007a, p. 136 (no. 103); AKTC 2007b, p. 138 (no. 103); Melikian-Chirvani 2007, pp. 446–447 (fol. 22r); AKTC 2008a, pp. 208–209 (no. 79; fol. 63v); AKTC 2009a, p. 196 (no. 149); AKTC 2009b, p. 196 (no. 149); AKTC 2010a, pp. 196–197 (no. 154; fols 41v, 190v, 167r).

### Illustrated manuscript of the *Anwār-i Suhayli* (Lights of Canopus)

Uniquely, this manuscript appears to have been both illustrated and commissioned by the Safavid court painter Sādiqi Beg (d. 1612). The 107 paintings in this volume depict stories from the *Anwar-i Suhayli* (Lights of Canopus) by Husayn ibn 'Ali al-Waiz al-Kashifi (d. 1504). The text is a Persian recension of fables drawn from the tradition of *Kalila wa Dimna* (Kalila and Dimna): the origins of the story cycle are thought to lie in the oral traditions of India and to have been first recorded in writing around 300 CE as the *Panchatantra*, sometimes translated as “Five Occasions of Good Sense” (De Blois 1991, p. 10). The textual framework is provided by an Indian king who consults his court philosopher about the proper conduct of rule in a variety of situations; the philosopher responds to each question with a fable featuring animal protagonists, each fable in turn framing other stories and sub-stories. In this remarkable and innovative image a mouse, who is ultimately to pay the price for his *largesse*, has his first sight of the unparalleled riches of which he will boast far and wide: a stream of grain falls like a beam of light from the floor of a farmer's barn into the space beneath. The frontal presentation of flat external surfaces, including the closed and locked door, enables the artist to create a powerfully evocative non-naturalistic illustration of a closed space, penetrated only by the mouse under the floorboards. Meanwhile, the focus of the picture lies in the strong colour contrast between the black background of the subterranean space, the light grey mouse and the fine golden hail of the falling grain.



## A king prepares to mount his warhorse as the armies gather at night

The *Tuhfet ul-Leta'if* tells the story of the epic romance between Shah Ramin, son of the king of Ghazni, and Mah Parvin, daughter of the vizier Shahrüz. Unlike the classic stories inherited by the Ottomans from Persian poetry, such as *Layla u Majnun* or *Khusraw u Shirin*, or the episodes from the *Shahnama*, this romance does not have a long history of illustration with a readymade cycle of stock compositions for the artist to follow. Instead, the Ottoman artists were obliged to invent new compositions to fit the new subject matter. The dynamic style of the illustrations is typical of late-sixteenth century Ottoman painting, and a similar style can be seen in illustrated chronicles of the sultans' reigns, and the cycle of images of the Prophet Muhammad in the late-sixteenth century *Siyar al-Nabi* (a Turkish version of the life of Muhammad) now held in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin (MS. T.419; see Rogers 2002, pp. 137–139). Although Ottoman painting inherited much from Persian models – it has been conjectured that court painters were brought from Tabriz in the early years of Süleyman's reign – it reformulated the pictorial conventions of Persian painting with a new interest in topography and the overt display of power, and a sometimes more direct approach to the relay of narrative details, creating an idiom that very quickly became identifiable with the Ottoman state. In this painting we are left in little doubt that the point of the illustration is not the lyrical expression of poetic allegory, but the depiction of a very large army assembled in one place before the king. The distinctive palette of this manuscript consists of a striking combination of red, brown, lilac, salmon pink and mint green.

128

Folios 275v–276r of an illustrated manuscript of the *Tuhfet ul-Leta'if* by Ali ibn Naqib Hamza Ottoman Istanbul, completed for Murād III in 1002 H / 1593–94 CE Opaque watercolour, gold, silver and ink on paper  
Manuscript: 35.3 x 22.5 x 4.8 cm;  
folios: 35.1 x 21 cm  
Inv.: AKM00280  
Publ.: (Including other folios from this manuscript) Welch–Welch 1982, pp. 38–42 (fols 177v, 226v–227r, 252v–253r); Canby 1998, (nos 70–71) (fols 296v–297r).



شهر و زبوعوغا اشدراب و نديک  
نه حکايتدر ديب يرن دن صر و کليک



صوردی قوللر ایتد لر نه صور سرین  
عالم فنانه کتدی لشکرک

قیامت د وینی اولدی قیاقی غوغا  
غلبه عینوقه پیوسته اولدی شاه



رامین لشکر نازک داخی این ممله  
قلدر جهان برکردن پراشوب اولدی

129

**Bābur racing with Qāsīm Beg and Qambar 'Ali**

Folio from a dispersed manuscript of the *Bābur-nāma* (Memoirs of Babur)

Mughal India, c. 1589

Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper

Page: 26.7 x 15.8 cm;

image: 21.5 x 13.6 cm

Inv.: AKM00130

Publ.: Welch–Welch 1982, pp.

151–153 (no. 51); Fischer–Goswamy

1987, no. 50; Canby 1998, pp.

113–114 (no. 82).

In the *Babur-nama* the first Mughal emperor of India, Babur (1483–1530), recorded in lively detail his observations of the land he had conquered as well as descriptions of his military progress. In 1589 a senior courtier named 'Abd al-Rahim Khan Khanam translated the *Babur-nama* from Chaghatai Turkish into Persian, which was by then the language of the Mughal court. It was produced as a magnificent illustrated manuscript and presented to Babur's grandson, the emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605); the present folio comes from that manuscript. This scene shows the moment before Babur fell from his horse, a minor incident that took place during a campaign in 1501. Babur had just ceded Samarqand to the Uzbeks, surrendering after a long siege. In the peace negotiations, Babur's elder sister was married to Shaybani Khan, and remained in Samarqand. As they traveled along, Babur raced ahead with two officers, Qasim Beg (d. 1522) and his son Qambar 'Ali: "My horse was leading when I, thinking to look at theirs behind, twisted myself around; the girth may have slackened, for my saddle turned and I was thrown on my head to the ground. Although I at once got up and remounted, my brain did not steady 'til the evening; 'til then this world and what went on appeared to me like things felt and seen in a dream or fancy." (*Babur-nama*, trans. A.S. Beveridge, 1990, p. 147).





عقب مانده اند خم شده پر شسته دیدم تک است خود

## 130

Folio 104r from the first volume of a *Shahnama* manuscript illustrated by Mu'in Musavvir  
 Safavid Isfahan, Iran, dated 29 Jumādā 1064 H/ 16 May 1654 CE  
 Opaque watercolour, ink, gold and silver on paper  
 Manuscript: 38.5 x 24 x 7 cm;  
 folios: 37.9 x 23.5 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00274  
 Publ.: Welch 1978b, pp. 92–97 (fols 12v, 19v, 89r, 92v, 141r, 163v); Welch–Welch 1982, no. 38 (fols 12v, 19v); Falk 1985, no. 94 (fol. 92v); Canby 1998, (no. 55) (fol. 92v); AKTC 2010a, p. 209 (no. 160; fol. 133r).

## The marriage of Siyāvush and Farangis

This codex is the first volume from a *Shahnama* manuscript, richly illustrated by Mu'in Musavvir, a prolific artist of seventeenth-century Isfahan. The second volume is dated to the month of Muharram in 1066 H (November 1655 CE), and is in the collection of the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin. Mu'in Musavvir produced artwork from the 1630s to the 1690s, all apparently in Isfahan, the capital of Safavid Iran. He was trained by the renowned painter Reza 'Abbasi (d. 1635), who had completely dominated Safavid painting in the early seventeenth century. As the century progressed and other Indian and European vogues were becoming current in Safavid art, Mu'in unswervingly continued to work in Reza's by then rather traditional style, evident in the highly formalized beauty of the figures depicted here. He had at least two Safavid courtiers as portrait-sitters but, rather surprisingly, there is no evidence that he ever worked for the Safavid shahs, as he is not mentioned in the written sources. As if in compensation for this, many of his drawings are signed and dated: within this *Shahnama* Mu'in's signature is a near-constant feature set below each painting or within the composition. A tender romantic scene, this painting of the hero Siyavush and his Turanian bride Farangis provides a number of interesting details that may be illustrative of Safavid palatial interiors, such as the blue-and-white painted wall behind the nuptial couple which in both its colours and its landscape motifs owes some debt to Chinese ceramics, and the chamfered pool and channel in the middle of the floor.



### Manuscript of the *Nigāristān* by Ahmad ibn Muhammad Ghaffārī (d. 1567)

At some point in its history this binding has been turned inside out to protect its beautiful and delicate external paintings from further damage, leaving the closing flap on the wrong side. However, as the gilt leather doublures, which are now on the outside, are still in good condition, this change must have been made relatively recently in the volume's history. The *Nigāristān* itself is a compendium of historical anecdotes about key figures in earlier Islamic history, arranged in chronological order, and it is highly unlikely that the design of this binding is intended to refer to any episodes in the text. The fantastic forest scene that emerges here in bright colours and gold from a black background shows a variety of richly dressed mounted hunters, attendants on foot, a standing archer, figures who watch from the background and a rather unexpected strolling musician on the closing flap, the last representing a not uncommon conflation of the standard imagery of the hunt with that of princely entertainments. An earlier binding painted in the same technique, very finely executed but rather more dense and static in appearance than the present example, shows an outdoor enthronement scene with musicians, dancers and one attendant who holds a bow and arrow, a reminder of the interconnected nature of such scenes of courtly pleasure within the so-called "princely cycle" (illustrated in Melikian-Chirvani 2007, p. 229). This manuscript and its binding have recently been restored by the Centre de Conservation du Livre, Arles.

131

Safavid Shiraz, Iran, dated 980 H/  
1573 CE  
Paint, gold and varnish on  
pasteboard  
42.3 x 26.8 x 8 cm  
Inv.: AKM00272  
Published: Welch 1978b, pp. 81–83.





## 132

Zand or Qajar Iran, late eighteenth century

Wood, painted and varnished

Length: 92 cm

Inv.: AKM00641

Publ.: AKTC 2007a, pp. 144–145 (no. 110); AKTC 2007b, pp. 25 and 148 (no. 110); AKTC 2008a, pp. 220, 222–223 (no. 84); AKTC 2009a, p. 222 (no. 168); AKTC 2009b, p. 222 (no. 168); AKTC 2010a, p. 239 (no. 185).

## Lacquer bow

Although Persian lacquer-work was normally executed on a base of papier-mâché, here it has been added to a structure that, for practical reasons, was made of wood. The bow has been decorated with fine paintings of mounted horsemen and animals in an infinitely extended rising ground with grassy tussocks growing sprigged flowers, all of which has been covered with layers of a clear sandarac-based varnish that protects the painting and imparts a mellow glossiness. Persian literary sources from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries in fact refer to this varnish as *rawghan-i kaman*, or “bow gloss”; this is quite a different substance from the gummy sap of the “lacquer tree” *Rhus vernicifera* used in Chinese and Japanese lacquers. The archer’s bow was a heavily symbolic item in Islamic Iran, connected to images of kingship inherited from the pre-Islamic period, and given its high level of decoration we may assume that this object was not primarily intended for hunting. Intriguingly, the hunting figures that decorate the bow do not, by and large, seem to hunt with bows themselves; instead they can be seen stabbing their prey with long spears, hunting with dogs and even apparently lassoing deer. The lassos are possibly in reference to the hunting exploits of Rostam in the *Shahnama*, where that hero is frequently described as using a lasso. However, other examples of Iranian lacquer-decorated bows from this period, such as an example in the Charles E. Grayson Collection (Grayson–French–O’Brien 2007, p. 66), are dominated by images of archers and it is not clear why they should not figure more prominently on this example.



### “Hunting” carpet

This carpet, which is in fact one of a pair (its partner is in a private collection in North America), belongs to a group known as “hunting” carpets because they include depictions of animals in combat; sometimes – although not in this case – they also show mounted figures of hunters. Here the figural elements are restricted to the central panel of the rug, surrounding the central lobed medallion in arrangements that are symmetrical across both axes, and they include lions bringing down bulls, further bulls possibly lying prone, and affronted pairs of leopards and grey animals (wolves?). Less common in the context of a fine Persian hunting carpet is the inclusion of pairs of dragons that delineate the corner spandrels of the central panel, holding between them in their mouths some form of animal mask. The rather large eyes and stumpy feet of the dragons are a world away from the terrifying serpents borrowed from Chinese art (see cat. no. 123), possibly a result of the complications involved in transposing an intricate design from painting to carpet weaving. The imagery of the hunt is an all-pervading subject in imperial Iranian art, most often represented through the depiction of beautifully dressed mounted riders evenly arranged through a fantastic field of plants, with at least one hunter depicted at the point of bringing down his prey. Here the emphasis lies entirely on the animals themselves, but the image of the lion bringing down the bull is itself a very ancient symbol of kingship in the Middle East (Hartner–Ettinghausen 1964, pp. 164–170).

133

Eastern Iran, Safavid period, late sixteenth or early seventeenth century  
 Silk warp and weft; z-spun wool knotting (asymmetric open to the left)  
 Approx. 213 x 152 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo82o  
 Unpublished





## Portraits and Albums





Laura E. Parodi

## Portraits and Albums

Contrary to widespread assumptions, portraiture has accompanied Islamic art since its inception and throughout its history: from the stylized yet recognizable sculptural images of the caliphs that adorned the façades of Umayyad palaces, to the Timurs and Ismail Samanids that have replaced the Lenins and Stalins in post-Soviet Central Asia. Before the twentieth century, however, figural sculptures in Islamic societies did not perform public functions (religious or secular) comparable to their counterparts in other cultures. The difference is especially striking in comparison with ancient Rome, whose legacy weighs heavily upon much of the world's visual landscape to this day. By contrast, Islam's condemnation of idolatry resulted in a controversial status for figural representation and its confinement within an eminently secular and overwhelmingly private domain – whether as palace decoration or in the form of objects for secular use, such as the bird incense burner in this exhibition (cat. no. 155).<sup>1</sup> This equally applied to figural paintings, with consequences to their preservation, given that most palaces were abandoned within a generation or two (the Alhambra and the Topkapı being notable exceptions). We are therefore left to assess Islamic figural art in general, and portraiture in particular, almost exclusively from paintings of relatively small size in manuscripts once meant for restricted use, even though it must once have been available in other media and within more varied contexts.

Perhaps as a consequence of these limitations, popular Islamic imagery always regarded other figural traditions as superior. Besides the historical figure of the prophet-painter Mani, textual sources often refer to the painters of *Rūm* and *Chin* as paradigms of artistic merit. There may be more historical truth to these claims than is commonly assumed: the Manichaean contribution to Islamic painting is slowly being unveiled, while the role of *Rūm* and *Chin* has long been acknowledged, though mostly episodically. Depending on time and context, *Rūm* may stand for ancient Rome, Byzantium or Europe; *Chin* is, of course, China. It was often through the infusion of fresh ideas from such “foreign” traditions that visual artists working in Islamic milieus were able to challenge the constraints imposed upon them. Portraits and albums, two

distinct yet intimately connected aspects of the Islamic manuscript tradition, provide eloquent examples.

Within the the manuscript tradition, portraiture is documented at the same time as the earliest substantial corpus of illustrated manuscripts, which can be ascribed to Iraq in the early thirteenth century, although it must have had a longer history – if not in now lost manuscripts, at least in mural painting.<sup>2</sup> Even at this early stage, images performed functions more sophisticated than the mere illustration of texts, providing commentaries on them or introducing additional themes, as in the case of frontispieces. In the cosmopolitan environment of late ‘Abbasid Iraq, artists experimented with a wide range of models (or were themselves recruited from different milieus), resulting in great heterogeneity: from the imaginary likenesses of long-deceased individuals found in the author portraits modelled upon Christian manuscripts, to the more individualized frontispieces showing Badr al-Din Dīn Lu’lu’ enthroned.<sup>3</sup> The latter are also based on centuries-old conventions – “enthronement” scenes of Buddhist or more probably Manichaeian ascendance; yet they reveal a precise intention to immortalize the patron through physical as well as sartorial attributes. Evidence from the following three centuries or so is too scant to reconstruct a coherent history, but the enthroned rulers in a copy of the *Shahnama* that has been ascribed to the royal Ilkhanid atelier in of the 1330s are remarkably individualized and include an accurately rendered Mongol Khān.<sup>4</sup> Schematic yet recognizable likenesses of Timurid rulers and princes are also seen in manuscripts produced from the 1430s onwards, demonstrating a continuing interest in portraiture that seems to be especially characteristic of the Turkic and Mongol milieu.<sup>5</sup>

Momentous developments were sometimes triggered by a single patron. This was certainly the case with Mehmet II (r. 1432–1481) after his conquest of Constantinople in 1453. A whole lineage of portraits may be traced back to those he commissioned from Italian Renaissance artists in various media, from medals to oil painting, in the latter half of the fifteenth century.<sup>6</sup> These were followed up by painters working in more traditional Islamic media such as opaque watercolour on paper, whose works circulated beyond the borders of the Ottoman Empire and were copied or adapted in Iran, Central Asia and India. This long-lived tradition is represented in the exhibition by an early example and a later one (cat. nos 134, 135). The fresh infusion of ideas from Europe soon brought with it a higher status for the artists that who were capable of such verisimilitude. The concept – which paralleled yet never fully matched the rise in status of European visual artists during the Renaissance – seems to have found a receptive milieu further east, in Timurid Khurasan and Central Asia, where an interest in the depiction of contemporary figures had developed independently during the preceding decades. By the turn of the sixteenth century, these suggestions were fully assimilated by Timurid artists, resulting in such masterpieces as the tiny yet remarkably expressive portrait of the contemporary poet Hātifi (cat. no. 137). A slightly later Safavid caption ascribes it with a high degree of probability to the great master Bihzād, himself an artist who attained legendary fame.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth century, patrons and artists in the Indian subcontinent were directly exposed to European paintings and prints; this fresh wave of inspiration quickly spread beyond the borders of the Mughal Empire and the boundaries of

traditional ruler portraits, to produce accurate likenesses of people from other walks of life. Portraits of holy men or ascetics such as cat. no. 139 – often commissioned by royal patrons – testify to an increasing popularity of Sufism and other forms of mysticism, including syncretic practices, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries; cat. nos 141 and 142 are quality examples of more articulate scenes depicting princely encounters with holy figures. Sketches drawn from life became more and more widespread, first at the Mughal court and then elsewhere: they were used as a basis for fully painted portraits assembled in albums,<sup>7</sup> or for more complex records of historical occurrences that included increasing numbers of recognizable figures.<sup>8</sup> Portraits also increasingly circulated as diplomatic or otherwise official gifts alongside the more familiar illustrated manuscripts. Some were treasured: one such instance is cat. no. 138, an exquisite Mughal work that bears an official inscription stating it was gifted to Emperor Jahāngīr. The inscription and numerous later seal impressions suggest it was highly valued, and probably appreciated as much for its craftsmanship as for its accuracy in depicting a now unidentified individual. A page from a dispersed imperial Mughal album contains a slightly smaller version (probably a copy) of cat. no. 138; this is combined with a portrait of Jahāngīr,<sup>9</sup> suggesting the Mughals regarded the sitter as someone equal in dignity, even though the portrait does not resemble any known Ottoman sultan.

Compared to the Ottoman and Mughal Empires, Safavid Iran, even though a direct heir to the Timurid atelier, was initially not very receptive towards a naturalistic approach. Cat. no. 137 was probably once part of the album assembled for the brother of Shāh Tahmāsp (r. 1524–1576), Bahrām Mīrzā;<sup>10</sup> but despite the Shah's own connoisseurship and the high esteem in which he held Bihzād, Tahmāsp's own preference seems to have gone to more idealized representations. There exist no realistic depictions of him or his close relations, although several idealized portraits of princes and courtiers – some of them inscribed with names – are included in mid-sixteenth century Safavid albums.<sup>11</sup> This is further testified by the decision of the Mughal emperor Jahāngīr (r. 1605–1627) to send one of his finest portraitists, Bishn Das, on a mission to the Safavid court in 1613 to secure an accurate likeness of his contemporary Shāh Abbās the Great (r. 1571–1629). The various “types” created by Bishn Das, where ‘Abbās is portrayed in different attitudes and combinations of headgear and dress, enjoyed durable popularity and gave rise to endless variations (cat. no. 140 being an example).<sup>12</sup> The Mughal painter's passage also sparked a new attitude towards portraiture in Safavid Iran: cat. no. 136 is a good example of this, a portrait of the Russian ambassador – doubtlessly sketched from life – which the court master Muhammad Zamān produced at the behest of the Shah (Sultān Husayn, r. 1694–1722) about a century later. Alongside this greater interest in realistic portraiture, idealized depictions of dynastic ancestors or sensuous youths, both female and male, continued to be popular. This genre is exemplified by cat. no. 146, in a pure seventeenth-century Safavid manner, and cat. nos 148 and 145, both with Indian connections. The latter echoes a specific eighteenth-century Indian fascination for female figures originating in Rajput painting, where – depending on context – women may be mere courtesans or ideal beauties, but more often allude to musical modes or the soul's longing for union with the divine. Outside the subcontinent, these associations were often lost in favour of more straightforward sensuous overtones.

The impact of European conventions on the Safavid attitude to portraiture by the eighteenth century, whether absorbed directly or through the intermediary of Mughal painting, may be measured at a glimpse by comparing cat. no. 145 (where the choice of black and white may itself be traced back to the popularity of European prints) with the highly stylized late sixteenth-century maiden in cat. no. 147. Their approach to the subject could not be more different, although paradoxically the earlier figure may well in its own time have been regarded as the portrait of a specific individual, whereas the later one is more likely a generic “maiden.” Cat. no. 148 stands somewhat in between and, perhaps not coincidentally, an attribution to the Indian Subcontinent has alternatively been proposed – more specifically, to the Deccan (India’s central plateau), whose courts entertained conspicuous relations with Safavid Iran until their final capitulation to the Mughals in the 1680s. Women’s portraits were naturally a sensitive issue in Islamic societies: although some were occasionally produced, they were seldom drawn from life, due to the impossibility for male artists to access women of good birth. The few realistic female portraits that do exist – most notably of Jahāngīr’s chief queen, Nūr Jahān, and some princely consorts – are seventeenth-century Mughal works. Jahāngīr encouraged women to practise painting, and it is likely that the portraits – even when signed by male artists – were based on sketches drawn by female practitioners.<sup>13</sup>

Most of these individual sketches and paintings, whether conventional types or portraits, found their way into albums alongside more detailed scenes (such as cat. nos. 141, 142), calligraphy (cat. no. 143) and other materials. Not unlike portraits, albums provide fascinating insight into the way artists working in an Islamic milieu were able to reinterpret suggestions from *Rūm* and *Chin*. While the European contribution to Islamic portraiture is widely acknowledged, the potential connections between Chinese and Islamic albums remain largely conjectural and would deserve a fuller contextualization.<sup>14</sup>

Evidence for Islamic albums begins with some collections of calligraphy, images or a combination thereof that were assembled in the Timurid milieu in the first half of the fifteenth century. The rationale behind such albums has been plausibly traced back within the Islamic tradition to collections of *Hadith*, anthologies and other compendia. These already had a long history within Islam, but their popularity dramatically increased in the decades immediately preceding the earliest surviving instances of Timurid albums.<sup>15</sup> By the fifteenth century, however, the practice of collecting paintings in albums was already well established in China; it had developed under the influence of block printing under the late Northern Song (late eleventh – early twelfth century).<sup>16</sup> Chinese albums differ in format from their Islamic counterparts, which are mostly in codex (book) format, consisting instead of individual leaves folded along the middle. Yet the combination of several components arranged in this manner gave rise in China to the “accordion” format. This was also adopted for Islamic albums (exemplified by cat. no. 143) alongside the codex and the small, elongated and eminently portable *safīna* (lit. “boat”) favoured for poetry or calligraphic excerpts, of which a specimen is held by the maiden in cat. no. 147.

Further parallels are evident between the two traditions, and can hardly be deemed coincidental. To begin with, in both cases, albums seem to have emerged as a response to a changing attitude towards both literature and painting, which favoured more intricate



relationships between texts and images than the mere illustration of narratives. In China, album leaves enabled artists to create single, unified scenes or even concise sketches, without the extensive demands of the hanging scroll and long handscroll.<sup>17</sup> Early Islamic albums similarly defied conventions by denying the traditional progression expected of a codex even while adopting its format, and by presenting a novel theme with each opening. In China, the rise of albums is connected with the emergence of a new literati class and a deprofessionalization of painting, which could subsequently be practised independently of the court and sometimes in open defiance of it. Even though early Islamic albums would seem to be the product of a courtly environment, their popularity soon percolated to other levels of society. Moreover, their patrons in the early stages were more frequently princes than rulers – Bāysunghur, Bahrām Mirzā,<sup>18</sup> Jahāngīr himself as Shāh Salīm before his accession<sup>19</sup> all being prominent examples. The same princes were skilled practitioners of poetry, calligraphy, painting, music and so forth, testifying to a similar deprofessionalization of the arts, and embodying an ideal of “educated gentleman” that is very close to that of the Chinese literati. Finally, in both cases, this shift in attitude involved an aesthetic preference for brief and personal poetic expressions, which in turn encouraged an awareness of authorship. China seems to have been a precursor of both Islam and Europe in this respect; the Mongols may have played a role in spreading some of these ideas, and possibly contributed the foundations for the curricula later used in the education of Timurid princes.

Compared to European art, the Chinese tradition doubtlessly displayed greater kinship with Islamic art in a shared use of the paper medium (itself an early Chinese contribution to Islamic material culture) and the high status accorded to calligraphy. The latter was a prominent feature of Islamic albums and often their only subject. This and a greater geographical proximity encouraged exchanges in both directions that are seldom considered by scholarship, yet would be worth exploring. Albums seem to have enjoyed special popularity under the Ming, with whom the Timurids exchanged several embassies.<sup>20</sup> Ming album leaves at the turn of the sixteenth century are sometimes sprinkled with gold flecks that closely resemble those used in coeval Islamic album or manuscript borders. Some few Ming albums even adopt the codex format, while a group of Timurid manuscripts are penned on Chinese paper embellished with gold designs that may have been specially commissioned.<sup>21</sup>

At variance with Chinese albums, though, borders became very important in Islamic albums, even more so than in most illustrated manuscripts. Although Islamic albums borrowed many of their features from books (see for example the illumination panels that serve as fillers in cat. nos 149, 147), over time specific features were developed for them. They would seem to stem as much from the desire to expedite the compilers’ work as from an intention to obtain more consistent and visually compelling pages. Borders in particular – often multiple – became a means to achieve a degree of uniformity despite the inclusion of materials that were disparate in size, script, palette and so forth. Their design and palette gave each album a specific character: cat. nos. 151, 153 and 156 exemplify a wide chronological range.

Sometimes contributions from *Rūm* and *Chin* intersected, as in the case of the bird or flower paintings (cat. nos. 153, 157, 151, 156, 142) that enjoyed great popularity from the seventeenth century onwards and, in India, eventually became a strand of nineteenth-century

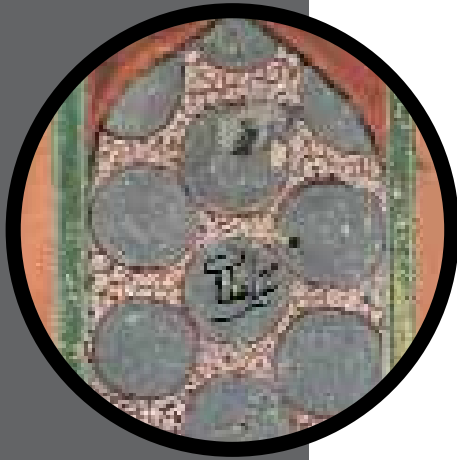
“Company Painting”. An influence of European herbals has been conclusively demonstrated on the naturalistic plants popular both in paintings and in album borders during the seventeenth century. But Chinese bird paintings and copies thereof had been included in Islamic albums much earlier;<sup>22</sup> and in some flower paintings or borders, the inclusion of large-scale insects signals a reliance on Chinese models (see for example cat. no. 156).

Albums seldom survive in pristine condition: individual leaves, when not individual components, were often disassembled and refashioned by successive owners. Not only did this occur historically, at the behest of such patrons as the nawāb of Oudh, Shujā‘ al-Dawla (r. 1754–1775) or the Ottoman sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909), but art dealers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries frequently chose to sell paintings individually to maximize profit. Unlike Muslim patrons, who understood and valued the format, logic and facture of albums, Western collectors until relatively recent times were usually more interested in certain subjects than others, and generally valued paintings above calligraphy. Particularly when mounted on separate pages – as in cat. no. 143 – calligraphy panels were often removed, thereby depriving albums of a key component. Calligraphy specimens were collected in their own right and should not be confused with text panels providing historical information (sometimes quite ornate) or poetry excerpts intended as a commentary or counterpoint to an image: cat. nos. 137, 147 and 160 exemplify a range of possibilities.

Reconstructing the original appearance of dismembered albums requires painstaking research.<sup>23</sup> Even those albums that are relatively well preserved present us with such variety as to defy categorization.<sup>24</sup> We have only begun to explore their potential, but already it has become apparent that there are lessons to be learnt from Islamic albums in a time when globalization encourages the viewer to tolerate, rather than truly appreciate, difference.

- 1 For further examples of figural sculpture from Iran and Anatolia, see David J. Roxburgh (ed.), *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600* (London 2005), nos. 39–41, 49, 58, 69, 87.
- 2 Early Islamic mural painting is poorly preserved, but a sense of the prior tradition may be gained from the twelfth-century painted *muqarnas* ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo (Sicily), which includes portraits of the patron, the Norman king Roger II: see Ernst Grube and Jeremy Johns, *The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina, Supplement I to Islamic Art* (Genova – New York 2005), esp. nos. A23.5, A23.6, A28.5.
- 3 See Roxburgh, *Turks*, no. 54.
- 4 See Linda Komaroff and Stefano Carboni (eds), *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256–1353* (New York – New Haven – London 2002), esp. no. 39.
- 5 Eleanor Sims, *Peerless Images: Persian Painting and Its Sources* (New Haven – London 2002), no. 185; see also Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles – Washington, D.C. 1989), nos. 21, 42 and fig. 33; Barbara Brend, *Muhammad Juki's Shahnamah of Firdausi* (London 2010), pl. 17.
- 6 See Roxburgh, *Turks*, nos. 224–26.
- 7 Numerous examples are illustrated in Elaine Wright (ed.), *Muraqqa': Imperial Mughal Albums from the Chester Beatty Library* (Alexandria VA 2008).
- 8 See for example Wright, *Muraqqa'*, no. 25.
- 9 *Ibid.*, no. 49.
- 10 Sims, *Peerless Images*, no. 188.
- 11 See David J. Roxburgh, *The Persian Album 1400–1600: From Dispersal to Collection* (New Haven – London 2005), figs. 117, 124, 126, 132, 133, 135 and *passim*.
- 12 See also Sheila R. Canby, *Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran* (London 2009), nos. 19–21.
- 13 See for example the portrait of Nur Jahan illustrated in Jeremiah P. Losty, “‘Abu'l Hasan’,” in Pratapaditya Pal (ed.), *Master Artists of the Imperial Mughal Court* (Bombay 1991), 78.
- 14 I am indebted to Marco Guglielminotti Trivel for helping me develop this suggestion, although he cannot be held responsible for any of the views expressed in this essay.
- 15 Roxburgh, *Persian Album*, 29 and *passim*.
- 16 See Jerome Silbergeld, *Chinese Painting Style: Media, Methods, and Principles of Form* (Seattle – London 1982), 13–14.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 18 Roxburgh, *Persian Album*, Chapters 2 and 6 respectively.
- 19 On the Salim Album, see Wright, *Muraqqa'*, 54–67 and nos. 26–33.
- 20 Two early sixteenth-century examples are illustrated in Shane McCausland and Ling Lizhong, *Telling Images of China: Narrative and Figural Paintings, 15th - 20th Century, from the Shanghai Museum* (London 2010), no. 9, 36.
- 21 See Roxburgh, *Persian Album*, 162 and figs. 85, 86.
- 22 See Roxburgh, *Persian Album*, 286 and fig. 55.
- 23 For some examples see Wright, *Muraqqa'*, appendices 1–5, and Stuart Cary Welch *et al.*, *The Emperors' Album: Images of Mughal India* (New York 1987).
- 24 Roxburgh, *Persian Album*, 309.





## Portraits and Albums

CATALOGUE ENTRIES 134 — 157

**Across** ancient Western Asia, the power of the image of the king had long been publicly acknowledged and expressed in different ways: on coinage circulated throughout the realm and beyond, on majestic rock reliefs for all to behold, and on the walls of royal audience-halls. In representing the king's person, the royal image promotes his power, and acquires powerful connotations of its own. Many of these aspects of royal portraiture passed into the Islamic period, at different times and contexts. From the thirteenth century onwards, the ruler-portrait became a staple feature of royal manuscript illustration, particularly in frontispiece paintings – the all-important first double-page opening of a book, typically reserved to celebrate the book's genesis, production and patronage. For an illustrated manuscript, be it a work of science, history or literature, the full-page frontispiece paintings were not generally part of the proceeding cycle of text-illustrations. For a royal biography or dynastic history manuscript however, royal portraiture would be a natural inclusion, referencing textual description of the ruler's aspect and appearance, or illustrating an impressive episode in the king's life (cat. nos 141, 152).

Many of the royal portraits in this exhibition were intended for an album, or *muraqqa'* (cat. nos 134, 135, 140). The album developed from connoisseurial interest in collecting excellent examples of single artworks on paper (such as calligraphy, illumination patterns, preparatory sketches and finished paintings, both old and new, local and international), arranging and mounting them on individual pages of the album, and presenting them in a context not unlike a miniature museum – a sequence of different items 'curated' by a discerning collector (cat. nos 143, 144, 147). Portraits were inherently suitable for this context, as single-page records of important or transient figures whose image or whose work the album-owner wished to preserve (cat. nos 136 – 138). Popular from Ottoman Turkey to Timurid and Safavid Iran and Mughal India, the practice of album-making guaranteed a market for single-page works, which allowed artists to flourish outside of royal workshop projects of extensive manuscript production, and allowed individual non-royal artists to pursue patronage. The vogue for *muraqqa'* albums also bespeaks a sophisticated art world of owners, practitioners and commentators. Sometimes, a patron would commission artists to decorate the page-margins with new paintings, with subtle themes linked to the mounted image at the centre (cat. nos 151, 154, 156). A completed album spoke eloquently of the taste, wealth and discernment of its patron.

## 134

Attributed to Haydar Re'is, called Nigari  
 Ottoman, Istanbul, c. 1570  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper  
 44.2 x 31.2 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00219  
 Publ.: Welch–Welch 1982, (no. 6); Falk 1985, (no. 106); Canby 1998, pp. 97–99 (no. 70); Carboni 2006, pp. 142 and 297; Carboni 2007, pp. 142 and 297; AKTC 2007a, pp. 98–99 (no. 68); AKTC 2007b, pp. 94 and 96 (no. 68); AKTC 2008a, pp. 138, 140–141 (no. 50); AKTC 2009a, p. 138 (no. 96); AKTC 2009b, p. 138 (no. 96); AKTC 2010a, p. 140 (no. 98).

## Portrait of Sultan Selim II

This large album portrait of Sultan Selim II (r. 1566–1574) reveals much about his reign. It was Selim's father, Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566), who solidified the geographical borders of the Ottoman Empire and refined the central administration of his government, allowing his son and successor to pursue more sedentary pleasures such as literature, art, and architecture. The sultan was a great bibliophile and patron of architecture, music, and the arts of the book. The artist of this piece has been identified as Haydar Re'is through a signature inscribed on a group-portrait that comes from the same dispersed album as this piece (Binney 1979, no. 11); the two paintings are thought to have originally formed a double-page composition. Selim II has been depicted as larger than life; the robust sultan in his luxurious fur-lined and brocaded gold garment dwarfs both the pageboy and the interior in which he sits in cross-legged on a carpet. This composition was one of a number of conventions for Ottoman royal portraiture developed in 1570s and is similar to portraits in Loqman's *Kiyafetü'l-Insaniye fi Semailu'l-Osmaniye*, a study formulated to record the physiognomy, and by inference the character, of the Ottoman sultans from Osman Gazi to Murad III. There are two later inscriptions in the windowpanes: (right) *sultan*; (left) [*ya*] *kabikaj* (an invocation against bookworms).



### Portrait of Sultan Selim III

Royal portrait series bound into albums provided an important way for Ottoman sultans to record their lineage and create an imagery that reinforced their right to rule: the portraits of Selim II (cat. no. 134) and Selim III (r. 1789–1807) are both examples of this particular tradition of statecraft. However, this medallion portrait of Selim III represents a different format for Ottoman royal portraiture from that shown in cat. no. 134. The profound effect of European, particularly French, painting on Ottoman art by the nineteenth century is evident in the attention that has been given to shading and in the grisaille, blue, and gold palette, as well as the painting's presentation of an oval portrait medallion above a smaller, heavily allegorical panorama, both framed as if in masonry set on a black ground highlighted with gold details. Regarding the lower "window", Canby has suggested that the buildings in the distance may be the new army barracks built by Selim III at Haydarpasha in Istanbul, or restorations of Mevlevi complexes (Canby 1998, p. 103). In either reading, this depiction reflects the Ottoman interest in topographical representations and maps, particularly as a means of expressing Ottoman domination of the landscape through ambitious programmes of building. The series to which this portrait belongs was copied in a group of engravings eventually published in London in 1815 by John Young, titled *A Series of Portraits of the Emperors of Turkey: Engraved from Pictures Painted at Constantinople*. European interest in Ottoman Turkey as a major political power and fascinatingly "other" society on the doorstep of Europe remained very strong into the nineteenth century.

135

Ottoman, Istanbul, c. 1805  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
 on paper  
 54.1 x 40.5 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00220  
 Publ.: Canby 1998, p. 103 (no. 75);  
 AKTC 2007a, p. 99 (no. 69);  
 AKTC 2007b, pp. 96–97 (no. 69);  
 AKTC 2008a, pp. 144–145 (no. 52);  
 AKTC 2009a, pp. 140–141 (no. 98);  
 AKTC 2009b, pp. 140–141 (no. 98);  
 AKTC 2010a, p. 142 (no. 100).



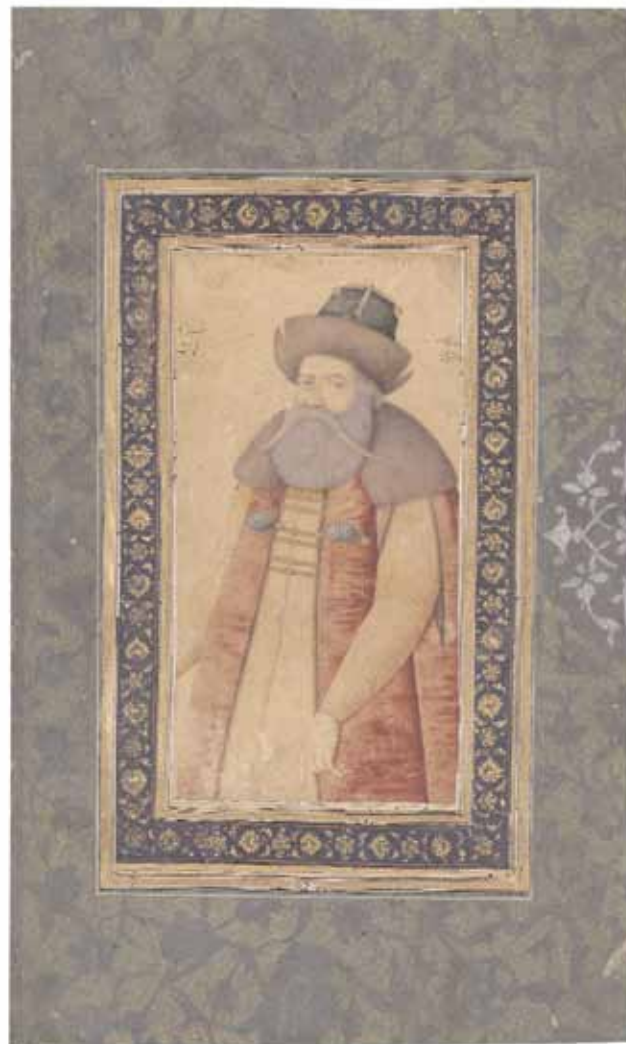


## 136

Inscribed *raqam-i Muhamm[ad Za]mān fi sana 1129* ("painted by Muhamm[ad Za]mān in the year 1129"), but attributed to Muhammad 'Ali ibn Muhammad Zamān  
 Iran, Safavid Isfahan, dated 1129 H / 1716–17 CE  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper  
 Page: 31.8 x 18.9 cm;  
 image: 16.4 x 8.7 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00114  
 Publ.: Welch 1978a, p. 171;  
 Welch–Welch 1982, pp. 129–131 (no. 43B); Canby 1998, pp. 91–92 (no. 65).

## Portrait of a Russian dignitary

This painting has been suggested to represent Artemii Petrovich Volynsky, a Russian diplomat known to have led a mission from Peter the Great to the last Safavid ruler, Shah Sultan Husayn (r. 1694–1722). Volynsky's mission left St Petersburg in 1715, arrived in Isfahan in March 1717, negotiated a trade agreement and left on a return journey that lasted from September 1717 to early 1719, giving a window of opportunity that would accord with the date inscribed on this painting. However, Volynsky was only twenty-eight years old when he left St Petersburg, and even allowing for the hardship of the journey this is clearly a likeness of a much older man (Savory 2007, p. 246). The man shown here may perhaps be a member of Volynsky's mission, although Canby notes his similarity to a figure standing behind Shah Sultan Husayn in a painting of the Shah delivering New Year's gifts in 1721, suggesting that he may have been a more long-term presence at the Safavid court. A very close copy of this painting, dated to the same year and signed by 'Ali Quli, is also held in the collection of the Aga Khan Museum (AKM00113); it may have been created to be placed opposite this image in an album. The present painting, inscribed *raqam-i Muhamm[ad Za]man fi sana 1129* ("painted by Muhamm[ad Za]man in the year 1129"), and produced on orders of the shah, is too late to be the work of Muhammad Zaman, a prominent artist of the seventeenth century and specialist in the new Europeanizing style. Canby suggests that this portrait is the work of Muhammad 'Ali, the son of Muhammad Zaman (Canby 1998, p. 91).



## Portrait of the poet Hātifi

Beyond the world of manuscript illustration, Persian painters also excelled in the art of the album portrait. The poet Hatifi, wearing a Safavid turban with a red baton, is the subject of this small painting. Gold inscription bands, possibly added when the painting was mounted in a album, identify Hatifi as the subject and the legendary Persian artist Bihzad as the painter. Roxburgh has proposed that this small portrait was once in Dust Muhammad's 1544–1545 album created for Bahram Mirza, brother of Shah Tahmasp (Roxburgh 1998, pp. 34, 49). Hatifi (d. 1521) was a well-known poet for the Timurid ruler Sultan Husayn Bayqara (d. 1506) in Herat and later for Shah Isma'il (r. 1501–1524) after the Safavid conquest. Dickson and Welch suggest that this portrait is perhaps the one Shah Isma'il commissioned from Bihzad to commemorate his meeting with the Shi'i poet in 1511 outside Herat (Dickson–Welch 1981, vol. I, pp. 34, 240, n. 12). Shortly thereafter, Hatifi began the *Isma'il-nama*, his poem celebrating the victorious reign of Shah Isma'il. Stripped of the virtuoso details that made Bihzad famous, the power of this portrait concentrates on the intense eyes of the poet: the plain blue background and Hatifi's unadorned robe further draw the viewer's eye toward the bearded poet's gaze.

137

Inscription: *Sūrat-i Maulānā 'Abd Allāh Hātifi, 'amal-i ustād Bihzād* ("Portrait of Maulānā 'Abd Allāh Hātifi, the work of master Bihzād") Herat, c. 1511

Opaque watercolour and gold on paper

Page: 11.8 x 7.7 cm;

image: 7.1 x 6 cm

Inv.: AKM00160

Publ.: Sakisian 1929, pl. 74;

Welch–Welch 1982, pp. 67–69 (no.

20); Falk 1985, no. 37; Bahari 1996,

fig. 108; Canby 1998, p. 42 (no. 21);

Canby 1999, pl. 22; Sims 2002,

pp. 271–272; Thompson–Canby

2003, pp. 76–77; AKTC 2007a,

p. 160 (no. 130); AKTC 2007b,

p. 160 (no. 130).





### Portrait of an Ottoman dignitary with a book

Like his father Akbar before him, the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627) showed an interest in portraiture, continuing his father's portrait albums and encouraging court artists to capture the psychology of their subjects in their portraits (Welch 1985, p. 226). This portrait of an Ottoman dignitary holding a book – which he seems to be presenting rather than reading – demonstrates that the subjects of such portraits were not limited to Mughals and Indians alone, but also included foreigners who were in frequent contact with the royal court. It was not unusual for court artists to record meetings between the Emperor and his visitors in painting (see, for example, a portrait study of Shah 'Abbas by Jahangir's court artist Bishn Das, in the British Museum, in Canby 2009, p. 38). The verso of this image carries a collection of Mughal seal impressions received from various scribes and superintendents of the royal library, from the time of Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1657) and Awrangzib (r. 1658–1707), as well as chancellery notes in a variety of hands. These calligraphic notes attest that, as well as being given as a gift by a man called Baha' al-Din in 1610, the painting was inspected at various points in its history. Notes and seals of this type are often found on the reverse of paintings and calligraphy housed in the royal collections; as well as often being works of art in themselves, such stamped and handwritten inscriptions are of colossal value in reconstructing the histories of individual pieces.

138

Mughal India, c. 1610  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
 on paper  
 15.5 x 20 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00733  
 Publ.: AKTC 2009a, p. 245 (no. 181);  
 AKTC 2009b, p. 245 (no. 181);  
 AKTC 2010a, p. 260 (no. 198).



## 139

Inscription (on bag strap): '*amal Nādir al-Zamān* ("the work of Nādir al-Zamān")

Mughal India, c. 1618–1620  
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper

Page: 36.7 x 24.5 cm;

image: 11.5 x 6.5 cm

Inv.: AKM00152

Publ.: Brown 1924, pl. 17, fig. 1;  
Anand 1958, fig. 4; Colnaghi 1976,  
(no. 93); Robinson *et al.* 1976, no.  
93; Beach 1978, p. 91; Welch –  
Welch 1982, (no. 68); Falk 1985,  
(no. 140); Fischer – Goswamy 1987,  
(no. 87); Canby 1998, pp. 140–141  
(no. 104); AKTC 2007a, p. 68  
(no. 36); AKTC 2007b, p. 62 (no.  
36).

## An aged pilgrim

This delicate and luminous painting was executed by Abu'l-Hasan, one of the most important painters in the service of the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627). Abu'l-Hasan, honoured with the title *Nadir al-Zaman* ("Rarity of the Age") by Jahangir, was part of the younger generation of Jahangir's artists, men who developed a new, naturalistic style of painting which incorporated European techniques of shading and rendering volume. Jahangir was particularly proud of Abu'l-Hasan's skill, as the painter had trained and come to artistic maturity under his patronage, and he wrote in his memoirs: "Without exaggeration, his work is perfect, and his depiction is a masterpiece of the age" (*The Jahangir-nama*, trans. Wheeler Thackston, Oxford, 1999, p. 267). The weary old pilgrim of this painting is a recurring theme in Abu'l-Hasan's work: in his court scenes, the old and thin ascetic may appear in a marginal role, acting as an allegorical reminder of the superiority of the spiritual path, while here the pilgrim fingers his rosary as he hobbles along, nothing but a beautiful flower sharing his picture plane. The dark background of the scene emphasizes both the luminously volumetric form of the pilgrim, who seems to emerge from the darkness, and the impression of a non-naturalistic spiritual space in which the ascetic operates.

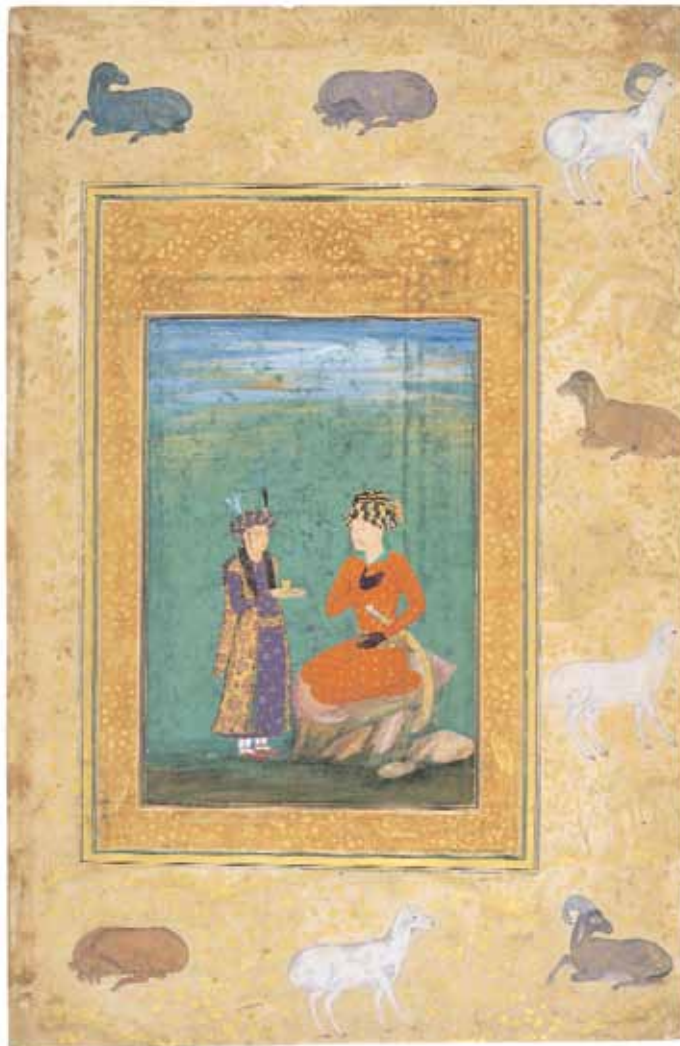


### Shāh ‘Abbās I attended by a page

This painting is thought to have been originally partnered by an image of two standing pages dressed in Iranian style and carrying dishes and cups (AKM00144); thus, the complete double-page image would show Shah ‘Abbas I of Iran (r. 1587–1629) attended by three pages. Being a Mughal depiction of the Safavid ruler, the painter seems to have made a point of emphasising the small stature of Shah ‘Abbas by placing him in a kneeling position on a rock, eye-to-eye with the splendidly dressed young page. A famous Mughal painting (now in the Freer Gallery) by Abu’l-Hasan presents the imaginary scene of a diminutive Shah ‘Abbas being almost smothered in the embrace of the much larger Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627); thus, there was a known precedent within Mughal painting for this type of subtle political undermining. Simplified copies of a painting by the Mughal artist Bishn Das, showing Shah ‘Abbas meeting the Mughal ambassador Khan ‘Alam, were created at the provincial courts of Mughal India for centuries after the event (Canby 2009, pp. 60–63), and the present painting may be related to that group. The borders of the page are decorated with sheep or goats of various colours and various poses, which may also be part of a pointed attempt to present the Safavid state as supine and representing no threat to the Mughals: this was more wishful thinking than political reality. The inscription in tiny letters on the bottom right margin of the border paintings reads *‘amal Padarath* (“the work of Padarath”); a painting of a mountain sheep by this artist is mounted in the Minto Album in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.

140

Folio from double frontispiece composition with elaborate border paintings  
 Inscription on bottom right margin of border painting: *‘amal Padarath* (“the work of Padarath”)  
 Mughal Agra, India, probably c. 1640  
 Opaque watercolour and gold on paper  
 Page: 39.2 x 25.3 cm;  
 image: 18.1 x 12.3 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00139  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 101 (no. 70); AKTC 2007b, p. 100 (no. 70).



## 141

Attributed to 'Abd al-Samad, also known as *Shirinqalam*, or "Sweet Pen"

Mughal India, c. 1585–1590  
Ink, opaque watercolour, gold and silver on paper

Page: 39.6 x 31.3 cm;

image 34.5 x 22.8 cm

Inv.: AKM00122

Publ.: Welch–Welch 1982, pp. 160–162 (no. 55); Fischer–Goswamy 1987, no. 14; Canby 1998, pp. 111–113 (no. 81); Canby 1998b, fig. 8; AKTC 2009a, pp. 78–79; AKTC 2009b, pp. 78–79; AKTC 2010a, pp. 80–81 (no. 41).

## A prince visits a hermit

This rocky landscape depicts a prince visiting a hermit at his cave. The prince is seated submissively before the hermit, his green robe toning with the tree above him, while his eight brightly dressed attendants wait below on both sides of a small creek. The dappled grey horse of the prince dominates the lower half of the painting and forms its initial focus, but the eye is subsequently pulled diagonally up the page with the stream, towards the pale hermit who emerges from the darkness of his cave. As Anthony Welch has observed, the stallion was a symbol of authority and splendour but also one of "worldly impermanence" (Welch–Welch 1982, p. 160), and its foregrounding here means that it functions first as a dazzling celebration of royalty's privileges, only to be transformed into a reminder of the insipidity of earthly greatness compared with spiritual rewards. Welch has attributed the work on stylistic grounds to the Persian painter 'Abd al-Samad, an artist of the Safavid dynasty who left the court of Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–1576) to work first for Akbar's father, the Mughal emperor Humayun (r. 1530–1539 and 1555–1556), and then for Akbar (Welch–Welch 1982, p. 160). Welch believes that the prince represented in this image could be Akbar's son Salim, the future emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627). Canby, however, has suggested that the princely figure may represent Akbar himself: she links the scene to an event that took place during a hunt in April–May 1578. According to Akbar's historian Abu'l-Fazl (d. 1602), Akbar experienced an epiphany that led him to end the hunt and free the captured animals. It was rumoured amongst Akbar's circle that he had met with an anchorite who inspired him to adopt a more ascetic lifestyle (Canby 1998, pp. 111 and 113).

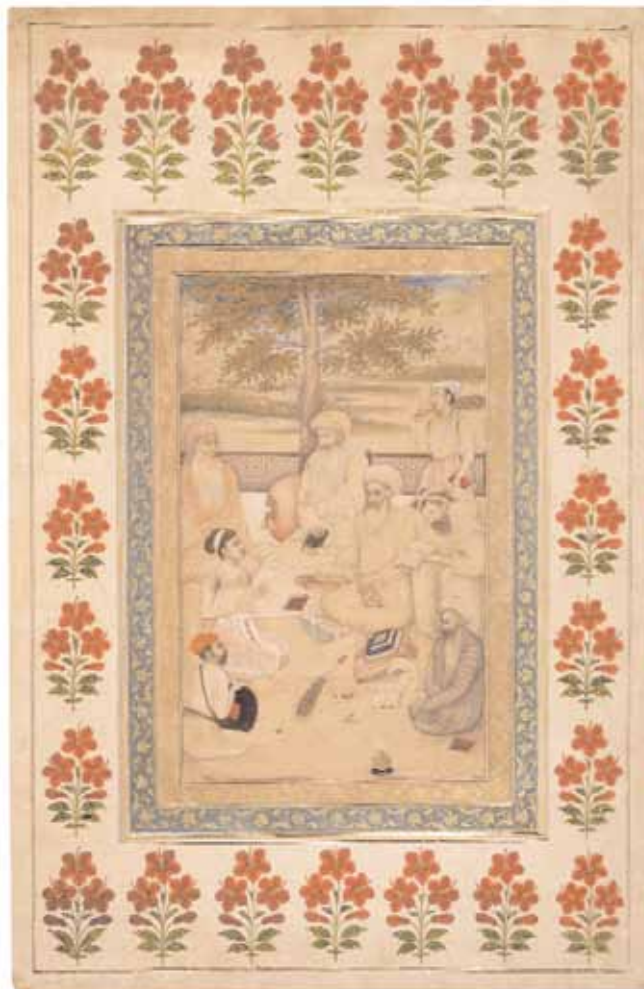


### Portrait of a young prince with mystics

The Mughal Prince Dara Shikoh (1615–1659) was the eldest and favourite son and heir apparent of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658) and his adored wife Mumtaz Mahal. Dara Shikoh was scholarly, profoundly interested in mysticism, and preoccupied with the possibility of achieving mutual tolerance between Hinduism and Islam; contemporary accounts suggest that these interests were pursued to the exclusion of military foresight or administrative capability. A noted patron of the arts, in 1641–42 the prince presented his wife Nadira Banu Begum with an album of paintings and calligraphy now known as the Dara Shikoh Album and held in the British Library (Add. Or. MS 3129). The style and composition of some of the paintings in that album relate extremely closely to the present image; particularly relevant are the album paintings by an artist identified by Falk and Archer only as “Artist B” (Falk–Archer 1981, pp. 73, 383). In both the Dara Shikoh Album and the present image carefully graded washes have been used to tint the paper rather than cover it, thus muting the palette, creating subtly shaded volumes, and enjoining a further air of tranquility and thoughtfulness onto what is in this case already a very cerebral scene of learning and mysticism. It has been suggested that “Artist B” was influenced by the work of Govardhan (active in the first decades of the seventeenth century), the celebrated Mughal painter whose paintings of sages and ascetics are typified by a subdued palette and perspectival rendering.

142

Mughal India, c. 1635  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper  
 42.7 x 82.2 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00498  
 Publ.: AKTC 2007a, pp. 66–67 (no. 35); AKTC 2007b, pp. 62–63 (no. 35); Makariou 2007, pp. 30–31 (no. 4); AKTC 2008a, pp. 94–95 (no. 27).





## 143

Album (*muraqqa'*) of portraits and calligraphy

Tehran, Iran, late eighteenth – early nineteenth century

Sixteen hinged folios: opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper in a contemporary lacquer binding 29.2 x 19.5 cm

Inv.: AKM00275

Publ.: Welch 1978b, pp. 98–119; Welch and Welch 1982, pp. 132–134 (no. 45); Diba 1998, pp. 176–178; AKTC 2007a, p. 110 (no. 76); AKTC 2007b, pp. 110–111 (no. 76); AKTC 2008a, pp. 162–163 (no. 59); AKTC 2009a, p. 217 (no. 162); AKTC 2009b, p. 217 (no. 162); AKTC 2010a, p. 232 (no. 174).

This album (*muraqqa'*) opens concertina-style to reveal twelve Persian ruler-portraits and eighteen calligraphy specimens mounted onto decorated pages. The calligraphy pages are written in *shikasta*, *thuluth*, *naskh* and *nasta'liq* scripts, set within finely illuminated floral borders. As Welch has noted, the album is notable for containing works by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century calligraphers rather than samples by the great masters of the past; this is apparently a reflection of the personal taste of Fath 'Ali Shah (Welch–Welch 1981, p. 134). The dominance of *shikasta* scripts (see cat. no. 45) within the album is symptomatic of this late date: the script was enormously aesthetically refined – and at times barely legible – by the nineteenth century, and was a popular “showpiece” script for professional scribes. The twelve portraits in the album include three of the major kings of the *Shahnama* – Jamshid, Kay Khusraw, and Kay Kavus – as well as portraits of Genghis Khan, Timur, and rulers from the Safavid, Zand and Qajar dynasties. A painting of Fath 'Ali Shah (r. 1798–1834) in opulent imperial finery on the Sun Throne on fol. 3v contains a medallion inscribed with his name and the date 1234 H/ 1819 CE. The juxtaposition of Fath 'Ali Shah with historic images of Iranian kingship amply conveys the Qajar message of imperial power and dynastic legitimacy. According to Robinson, the album is perhaps a “portable” version of the large oil paintings commissioned by Fath 'Ali Shah from the artist Mir 'Ali for the 'Imarat-i Naw palace in Isfahan (Ekhtiar in Diba 1998, p. 176).





## 144

## Album page with four mounted paintings

Inscription, upper left image: *Yā sāhib al-Zamān* ("Oh Lord of Time")  
 Safavid Iran, c. 1650–1675, and  
 Mughal India, c. 1610–1620  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
 on paper  
 Page: 46.7 x 30.5 cm;  
 image: 27.9 x 17.9 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00159  
 Publ.: Falk 1985, p. 128;  
 Canby 1998, pp. 90–91 (no. 63).

A rather startling combination of different styles has been juxtaposed in this album page; sometimes an interest in presenting different pictorial modes overtook aesthetic concerns within the production of such albums. The top two images and the painting at bottom right can all be attributed to Iran in the second half of the seventeenth century, while the depiction of an allegorical nude in the bottom-left corner appears to be somewhat earlier, and Indian in origin. The punning inscription on the top left painting of two lovers has caused it to be attributed to Muhammad Zaman, a leading painter in seventeenth-century Iran, while the top right image of a kneeling young man has been attributed to Shaykh 'Abbasi (Canby 1998, p. 90). In both images the costumes and "props" of the figures are traditional Iranian types, but the atmospheric skies, wooded parklands in the background and firmly shaded modelling of bodies, faces and objects derive, possibly indirectly, from European sources. The lower right drawing of a dervish, on the other hand, reflects a style of Iranian painting that goes back to the late sixteenth century and the heyday of Reza 'Abbasi (d. 1635). The very cursorily drawn landscape behind the figure gives the little scene an ethereal appearance in comparison with the other Iranian paintings on this album page. The tinted drawing of a partially draped nude with attendant in the bottom left can be grouped with a large number of Mughal paintings and drawings that derive from European prototypes, in this case probably an allegorical image, but the sprigged ground, the figure at the window and the man and child in the foreground appear to be interpolations on the part of the Mughal artist.

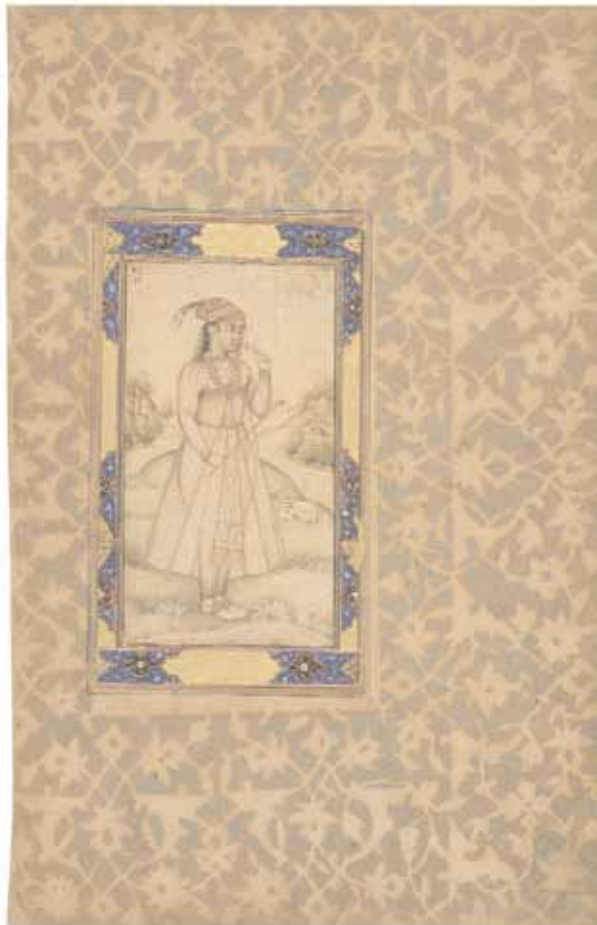


## Young woman in Indian dress

This painting of that perennially popular subject, a pretty young woman, belongs to a group painted in Iran in Indian style. During the seventeenth century paintings and drawings from Mughal India were imported to Isfahan, where the combination of techniques descended from Persian miniature painting with European modelling and perspectival composition proved immensely popular with Iranian artists. It has recently been suggested that the changes seen in Iranian painting in the seventeenth century may not have been as dependent on direct exposure to European models as was previously believed, with the new Indian style providing much of the impetus for innovation to the Iranian artists (Schmitz 2004, n.p.). The young woman of this painting is dressed in a fair approximation of Indian costume, holding a flower to her nose and a long narrow pipe known as a *chibouk* in her other hand, and stands in front of a receding background with wooded hills and simple buildings: the transposition of the conventions of Mughal art is almost complete. The painting bears the inscription *Hova baha gereft cho kardid Shaykh-i 'Abbasi sana 1094* ("it achieved worth because he became Shaykh 'Abbasi in the year 1094 H [1683]"). Shaykh 'Abbasi, also thought to be the painter of one of the paintings in cat. no. 144, was attached to the court of Shah 'Abbas II (r. 1642–1666) and subsequently that of Shah Suleyman (r. 1666–1694); Schmitz observes that in his work European influence is refracted through "an Indian veneer" (*ibid.*). A comparable image of a young Indian woman holding a cup and a flower in a wooded landscape, signed by Shaykh 'Abbasi and dated 1682–1683, is held in the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. The rather flowery formula of the inscription on the present painting, which can be translated to mean that Shaykh 'Abbasi himself (and presumably by extension his work) gained value because his imperial patron Shah 'Abbas II granted him use of the *nisba* "'Abbasi", was the painter's standard signature and appears on many pieces by him.

145

Signed Shaykh 'Abbāsi  
Safavid Iran, c. 1683  
Opaque watercolour and ink on  
paper  
Page: 26.6 x 17.1 cm;  
image: 11 x 6.1 cm  
Inv.: AKM00197  
Unpublished



## 146

Safavid Iran, c. 1630–1650  
 Opaque watercolour and gold on  
 paper  
 Page: 30.8 x 18.8 cm;  
 image: 18.3 x 8.3 cm  
 Inv.: AKMoo436  
 Unpublished

## Youth in a red coat

From the early sixteenth century onwards Safavid artists began to supplement their manuscript illustrations with single-page paintings intended for inclusion in *muraqqa*'s, or albums of paintings and calligraphy (Canby 1999, p. 54). As the genre developed, the most common subjects for illustration were elegant courtiers and dandies, often rather decadent in appearance, but portraits of Sufis and other notable personages were also made. Reza 'Abbasi (d. 1635) is probably the best-known artist of this genre: he is often credited with developing a distinctive calligraphic line within his figure studies, and admired for his bold and experimental use of colour. The influence exerted by his style on both manuscript illustration and album paintings produced throughout his long career and after his death can be seen in the work of painters like Mu'in Musavvir (cat. no. 130) – who was trained by Reza 'Abbasi – and also in the present painting. The thick eyebrows which meet in the middle, round white cheeks and rosebud mouth of this figure are all characteristic of seventeenth-century painting of the Reza 'Abbasi school (*ibid.*, p. 107), as is the background decoration of plants and fronds rendered in simple brushstrokes of gold. Although Indian and European painting played a major part in shaping the directions taken by Iranian painting later in the seventeenth century, it is important to remember that there was also an ongoing taste for the highly idealized idiom perfected by Reza 'Abbasi and his followers.





## 147

## Young woman standing by a vase of flowers, with calligraphic samples

Safavid Qazvin, Iran, c. 1600  
 Opaque watercolour and gold on  
 paper  
 Page: 35.3 x 22.8 cm;  
 image: 13.9 x 6.6 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00416  
 Unpublished

A further development of the album format was the combination of paintings and calligraphic samples into complex single- or double-page compositions. In this example the main panel on the right contains eight lines of *nasta'liq* script set on a diagonal and signed "Shah Mahmud", probably Shah Mahmud al-Nishapuri (active in Tabriz from late 1520s to late 1540s), a famous Safavid calligrapher and the creator of cat. no. 54. The lower left-hand panel shows a *nasta'liq* script done in white with extremely fine black outlining and signed "Imad al-Hassani". The latter calligrapher is more often known as Mir 'Imad (d. 1615), one of the foremost practitioners of the art at the court of Shah 'Abbas (r. 1587–1629). His work was immensely popular and widely collected in his own lifetime and after his death; once collected, even small calligraphic samples made by such masters would be mounted up into album pages like this one. The figural painting that shares the page with these calligraphic samples, although damaged in the face, is of an elegant type with an interesting and brightly painted costume. The white robe, which has been lifted to reveal a striped and patterned underskirt and striped trousers, is tucked up in a similar fashion to the robes of pageboys seen in a Khurasani painting from the 1560s now in the British Museum (British Museum OA 1920.9-17.0302; Canby 1999, p. 74), but the image can perhaps be more immediately associated with the frank sensuality of a female figure in an album painting of c. 1640 whose skirts are lifted above her waist, revealing her midriff and a long pair of striped knickers (BM OA 1930.4–12.02; *ibid.* p. 137).



## Woman in a landscape

Like cat. no. 145, this painting presents a young woman in Indian-style dress standing very upright in a landscape with trees and buildings, this time on a sprigged ground. The painting is so thoroughly in the Indian idiom that Welch has suggested that the painting must have been executed in the Deccan around 1670; however, Soudavar has identified another, related image that shows a very similar woman being embraced by an Iranian man, and is signed by the same artist and also dated to 1050 H (Soudavar 1992, p. 366, no. 145). Canby has further argued that an inscription on an album painting in the British Museum, dated 1096 H/ 1685 CE and referring to an artist who is the son of “Master Bahram farangi saz at Isfahan”, is further evidence that Bahram Sofrakesh was an Iranian artist, and that the date on the present painting is reliable and the piece should be attributed to Safavid Isfahan. The confusion raised by this image demonstrates how extremely close to Indian models were the imitations of the Indian style that were in circulation in seventeenth-century Isfahan.

148

Signed Bahrām Sofrakesh  
Safavid Iran, dated 1050 AH/  
1640–41 CE  
Opaque watercolour and gold on  
paper, pasted onto card  
Page: 35 x 22.3 cm;  
image: 12.1 x 5.8 cm  
Inv.: AKM00150  
Publ.: Welch–Welch 1982,  
pp. 227–229; Canby 1998, pp. 81–82  
(no. 54).





## 149

Attributed to Mu'in Musavvir  
 Safavid Isfahan, Iran, dated 14  
 Shawwal 1082 H /  
 13 February 1672 CE  
 Ink, watercolour and gold on paper  
 Page: 14 x 22.5 cm;  
 image: 4.6 x 9.3 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00111  
 Publ.: Welch 1978a, pp. 158–159;  
 Canby 1998, p. 86 (no. 58).

## A resting lion

During the winter and early spring of 1672 the weather in Isfahan was unseasonably cold, with snowstorms, and the artist Mu'in Musavvir (to whom this painting is attributed; see also cat. no. 130) recorded on another drawing made at that time that he stayed inside during this period because of the snow (Farhad 1992, p. 117). That other drawing, which shows a young man being mauled by a tiger outside a doorway, bears a long text describing the event that it illustrates: a tiger and a rhinoceros were given as gifts to Shah Sulayman by the ambassador of Bukhara during the 'Id al-Fitr celebrations, and the tiger suddenly attacked a young man, who later died from his injuries. Although Mu'in Musavvir did not witness the event himself, descriptions of the big cat seem to have made a powerful impression on him, and may have also prompted him to create this drawing and another, dated 4 Shawwal 1082, showing a monkey riding on a lion (Freer Gallery F1966.13). The economy of line employed in this painting is well calculated to show off the artist's skill as a draughtsman: strong black lines elegantly fix the animal's shoulder, back, lip and ear, while variegated softer lines are used to indicate both form and the texture of fur and hair.



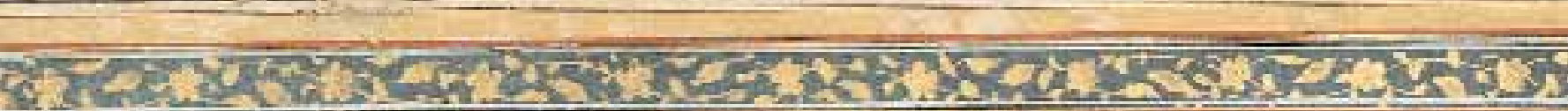
### Shepherd with sheep and goats in a rocky landscape

Although not of the same high quality as the album pieces by masters such as Mu'īn Musavvir (see cat. no. 149), this simple painting, which seems to be unfinished, demonstrates the influence that the work of those masters had on other artists of the seventeenth century. Rejecting the volumetric modelling of the Europeanizing styles that were becoming increasingly popular, the execution of this painting is a distant echo of the traditional Isfahan school of album painting. Several different methods of mark-making have been employed: a calligraphic line of varying thickness is used to mark in the details of the figure, clothes and tree, while the figure's beard and the coats of the two standing ibex in the foreground have been built up out of many extremely fine black brushstrokes. The volume of the rocks upon which the figure leans is indicated with a softer build-up of coloured brush strokes. The sketchy appearance and roughly applied colouring of the two animals in the right of the foreground suggests that they were also intended to be finished with a coat of fine brushstrokes at a later point. The surrounding decorated paper of the border has been heavily trimmed and is made up of separate pieces cut to fit around the painting rather than being painted specifically for this piece, another factor which distinguishes this painting from some of the most highly regarded examples of the genre.

150

Safavid Iran, c. 1620–1640  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
 on paper  
 Page: 27.3 x 19.9 cm;  
 image: 17.8 x 13.1 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00432  
 Publ.: Welch 1972a, p. 189.





### Composite elephant and border painting of animals

Depictions of composite figures and animals appear elsewhere in Mughal art: such images provide a wonderful opportunity for the painter to demonstrate both his powers of invention and his skills as a draughtsman and colourist. In this image both the supernatural elephant and its rider are composed of dozens of brightly painted smaller animals, birds and humans. The artist has cleverly compacted and fit together an extraordinary number of individual creatures within the silhouettes of the elephant and rider, including even the bells of the elephant's harness, which are made in the form of animal heads (possibly feline) with protruding tongues, and the belt of the rider, which is a snake. The rider wears a lavish plumed crown, with golden flames streaming behind, suggesting he should be understood as a royal figure: in other variations on this theme, demons or winged houris ride on the magical elephants. In this instance, however, the plethora of different species contained within the body of the elephant and rider may stand as a metaphor for the diverse worldly elements kept in balance by the Solomon-like ruler. Within this metaphorical interpretation the white figure walking in front has also been interpreted as a Sufi guide leading the way along the spiritual path (Welch–Welch 1982, p. 187). The border framing the painting is a noteworthy work of art in itself, and its images of varying types of animals are most likely intended to echo those seen in the main painting. Margin painting frequently appeared in Mughal albums and the prominence accorded to border paintings as a form of art is demonstrated by the fact that the painter of the borders, Dawlat Khan, has signed his work on this folio.

151

Mughal India, c. 1600; border c. 1640 and inscribed '*amal Dawlat Khān*' ("the work of Dawlat Khān")  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper  
 Page: 38.6 x 25 cm;  
 image: 13.3 x 20 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00143  
 Publ.: Welch–Welch 1982, pp. 184–188 (nos 62–3, recto and verso); Falk 1985, no. 132; Fischer–Goswamy 1987, (no. 24); Vaughan 1999, fig. 3; Ritschard 2000, (no. 231); AKTC 2008a, pp. 116–117 (no. 38).



152

**Salim and the captured cheetah**

Inscription: "Āqa Rizā, the servant of Shah Salim"

Allahabad, Mughal India, c. 1602  
Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper

Page: 38.9 x 27.5 cm;  
image 31.2 x 19.4 cm

Inv.: AKM00166

Publ.: Colnaghi 1979, p. 36 (no. 16);  
Welch–Welch 1982, pp. 179–182  
(no. 60); Verma 1994, p. 67; Canby  
1998, pp. 132–133 (no. 99).

The technique known as *nim qalam* or "half pen" uses black ink, extremely fine brushes and light washes to create an effect similar to the monochromatic European technique known as *grisaille*. *Nim qalam* emphasizes modelling to convey volume and depth; in this painting, small areas of bright colour have been incorporated within the mainly muted palette to eye-catching effect, most notably the sash of bright blue tied around the waist of prince Salim (the future emperor Jahangir) which clearly marks him out as the most important figure in the scene by drawing the eye immediately to him. Within the complex, spiralling composition Salim kneels to blindfold the cheetah that he and his men have just captured, watched by various other members of his retinue who stand around the *qamargah* (a corral of dense wattle), and also watched by two monkeys in the tree. Cheetahs were captured for training as hunting animals: they were greatly prized and this picture shows the pains taken to capture them unscathed, a very difficult task that illustrates both Prince Salim's courage and his skill as a hunter. The painter Aqa Riza trained in the Persian style in Herat and joined the atelier of Prince Salim around 1599; he was, as this painting clearly demonstrates, a notable artist in himself, but he is perhaps best known now as the father of the painter Abu'l-Hasan who was eventually honoured with the title *Nadir al-Zaman* ("Wonder of the Age") by Jahangir (see cat. no. 139).



## Great Hornbill

An extraordinary interest in the natural world was evinced in the work of many Mughal painters, apparently led by the tastes and interests of the Mughal rulers themselves. The circulation of European botanical and natural history prints and drawings within India has often been postulated as a spur to the development of a very meticulous, closely observational style of painting found in Mughal paintings of plants, animals and, as shown here, birds. In fact this painting is a copy of an original image (now in the Shah Jahan album, Metropolitan Museum) made c. 1615 by Mansur, the most famous of the Mughal painters of animals (see cat. no. 156). It is recorded in Jahangir's memoirs that the emperor once called upon Mansur to paint an image of a falcon that had just been killed by a cat, as well as dipper birds of the Deccan and the summer flowers of Kashmir (Thackston 1999, pp. 314, 333, 339). One consequence of this appetite for recording the natural world from life is a wealth of images of immediately identifiable species rather than generic types, creating a fascinating record of the flora and fauna of seventeenth-century India. The Great Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*), also known as the Great Indian Hornbill, is a very large and striking forest-dwelling bird; individual Great Hornbills have been known to live a long time in captivity, so the subject of this painting may in fact have been an *habitué* of the court. In life the Hornbill's beak and wingbars are touched with a very bright yellow; here the artist appears to have muted the colouring somewhat, perhaps as a consequence of working from Mansur's painting rather than from life.

153

Mughal Agra, India, c. 1640  
 Opaque watercolour, ink and gold  
 on paper  
 Page: 34.6 x 55.8 cm;  
 image: 18.7 x 21.8 cm  
 Inv.: AKM00137  
 Unpublished

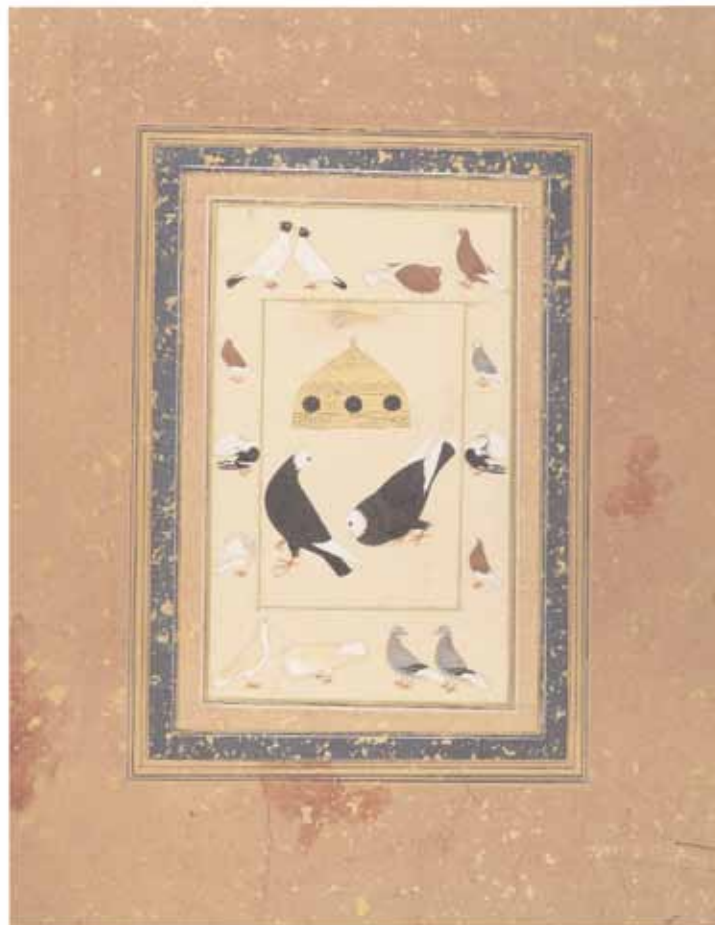


## 154

## Pigeons around a dovecote

Mughal India, c. 1670  
 Opaque watercolour and gold on  
 paper  
 18.7 x 11.6 cm  
 Inv.: M183  
 Publ.: Canby 1998, p. 153 (no. 114).

This remarkable painting imitates the format of the album painting set into a separate, elaborately painted border, but in fact the framing imagery and central composition have clearly been conceived as a whole in this case. The painting is particularly striking in its lack of any landscape setting: in the central image two pigeons stand before an elaborate gilded domed dovecote, but the smear above the dovecote appears to be an eradicated owner's seal rather than a representation of atmospheric effects, and the ground is entirely blank. Instead, the considerable power of the painting comes from the beautifully judged compositional balance of the central pair of pigeons, the rhythmic placement of the smaller surrounding birds, and the striking and bold use of a controlled palette of black, white, grey, brown and gold. A raking light reveals that individual feathers are picked out with an extremely fine gold line, adding a depth of richness that is not obvious at first glance. Although the central pair of pigeons may well, as Canby notes, derive from an earlier image in the Dara Shikoh album (Canby 1998, p. 153), the depiction of the bobbing, throat-swelling courtship display of a male pigeon (right) before a coyly interested female (left) is so accurate as to suggest the artist also had first-hand familiarity with the subject. This is borne out by the more-or-less accurate depictions of pigeon behaviours and postures in the "border", and an obvious interest in differentiating between various real breeds. The Mughal Emperors were noted pigeon fanciers: it is recorded in the *Ain-i Akbar*, written by Akbar's vizier in the late sixteenth century, that Akbar was a pioneer in the breeding of pigeons, developing a sophisticated set of criteria by which breeds were differentiated, and that there were more than twenty thousand pigeons kept at Akbar's court (*Ain-i Akbari* by Abu Fazl Allami, Vol. 1, trans. Blochmann and Jarret, Calcutta 1973, pp. 298–302). This painting is exhibited by kind permission of Princess Catherine Aga Khan.



### Incense burner in the form of a bird

Incense was used in the Islamic world in both secular and sacred contexts: according to the historian al-Mas'udi, guests of the ninth-century caliph al-Ma'mun (r. 813–833) were offered an incense burner to perfume themselves before meeting with him (Bloom–Blair 1997, p. 120), and other sources record the use of incense to scent religious buildings, and to prepare the deceased for burial (Ward 1990–91, p. 67). Given its figural nature and high quality, this example was almost certainly intended for a secular context, probably palatial. A fine example of medieval bronze casting, the head and neck of this piece are hinged to facilitate the placement of the incense, which when burned would emit fragrant smoke through the body's pierced decoration. It has been suggested by Dr. Jean Hansell that the form of this incense burner is not just a generic bird but a representation of a specific variety of pigeon called known as a Scandaroon, thought to have originated in Iraq and spread westward across the Mediterranean: a key diagnostic of this breed is its distinctive long, downward curving beak, a feature which is also prominently displayed on the incense burner. While the present object is close in shape to contemporary bird-shaped incense burners from Khurasan (an area including eastern Iran and Afghanistan), its casting is heavier and more sculptural, the pierce-work holes are larger, and the colour and patination are different. It has been suggested that this incense burner may have been produced in Sicily in the late eleventh or early twelfth century under its Arab and Norman governors, although further research may yet indicate a different source.

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Islamic Mediterranean, possibly Sicily, eleventh or twelfth century  
Cast bronze with pierced and engraved decoration  
Height: 17 cm; length: 25.5 cm  
Inv.: AKM00603  
Publ.: AKTC 2007a, p. 85 (no. 55); AKTC 2007b, p. 82 (no. 55); AKTC 2008a, pp. 30, 122–123 (no. 42); AKTC 2008b, no. 6; AKTC 2009a, p. 102 (no. 55); AKTC 2009b, p. 102 (no. 55); AKTC 2010a, p. 104 (no. 56).





## 156

## Two spot-billed ducks

Ascribed to Mansur  
Mughal India, c. 1620  
Margins attributed to Muhammad  
Baqir, Iran, eighteenth century  
Opaque watercolour on paper  
Page: 33.2 x 20.5 cm;  
image 14.4 x 9.4 cm  
Inv.: AKM00205  
Publ.: Canby 1998, pp. 148–149  
(no. 110); AKTC 2007a, p. 169 (no.  
143); AKTC 2007b, p. 168 (no. 143).

Mansur, the great Mughal painter of animals (active c. 1580–1624; see also cat. no. 153), is named at the top of the painting as the artist of this image of two ducks standing by a small pool: “These two birds [*murghan*] are [the work] of Mansur”. It has been suggested by Canby that the red inscription naming Mansur may be the work of the emperor Jahangir himself, although no other instances of red ink inscriptions by Jahangir are known (Canby 1998, p. 148). The whole page was previously part of an album of Persian and Mughal paintings compiled in eighteenth-century Iran, and broken up for sale in 1982, and the verso bears an unrelated painting of a rather portly man in yellow playing a *kamancheh* (an Iranian stringed instrument). The ducks are carefully posed to create a pleasing composition of parallel diagonal forms and display their plumage, painted with an extraordinary fineness, to maximum advantage. Both the birds and the details of the washed landscape they occupy are built up from many thousands of tiny brushstrokes, a technique Mansur perfected and one which lends a rather softened, ethereal appearance and is particularly well suited to the representation of fur and feathers. Although Mansur is known for the scientific accuracy of his images of wildlife, in this instance the birds appear to have been endowed with slightly elongated bodies and contracted heads, presumably with a view to creating a more elegant shape on the page. The yellow spots on the tips of both birds’ beaks, their grey back plumage and the white wing bars of the bird on the left would suggest that these ducks are probably a variety of spot-billed duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), a native of Pakistan, India and East Asia. The surrounding border paintings of a nut tree and eglantine rosebushes are probably eighteenth-century, and have been attributed to the court painter Muhammad Baqir (*ibid.*, p. 149).

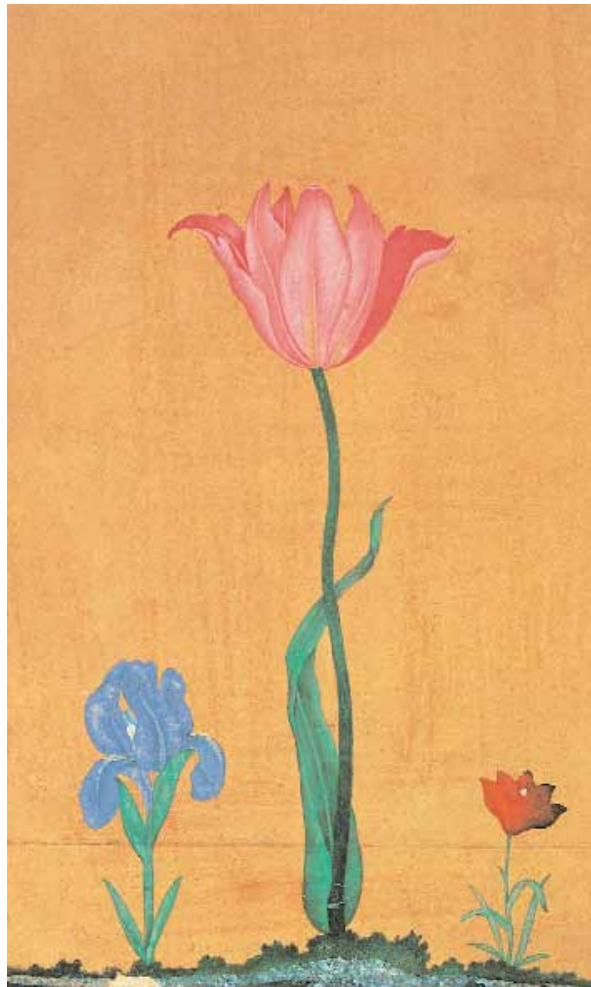


## Tulips and an iris

This delicate and meticulous miniature painting is a spectacular example of the highly observational paintings of plants and flowers that became increasingly popular in India during the period of Mughal rule. Mughal rulers, from the founder of the dynasty Babur (r. 1526–1530) onwards, displayed a marked interest in the natural world, with Babur himself making detailed observations of India's flora and fauna in his memoirs. A surviving description from the *Shah Jahan-nama* of tulips growing in Kashmir shows that the bulb, already so prized in Europe, was familiar to the Mughals by the seventeenth century; however, as Canby has shown, these flowers are unlikely to have been painted from life. The style of drawing and the fantastic perfection of the flowers, with each presented at the point of its fullest and most characteristic bloom, strongly suggests that the model for these images came from European botanical illustrations that must have been traded in both India and Turkey. A seventeenth-century Turkish drawing of the central tulip and the ground from which it grows has been found in the collections of the British Museum (OA 1995.2–28.01; see Canby 1998, no. 107), meaning both the Turkish drawing and this painting must have been drawn from a common prototype. S.C. Welch attributed this painting to an artist he called the “Master of the Borders” (Welch 1995, pp. 245–7). This painting is exhibited by kind permission of Princess Catherine Aga Khan.

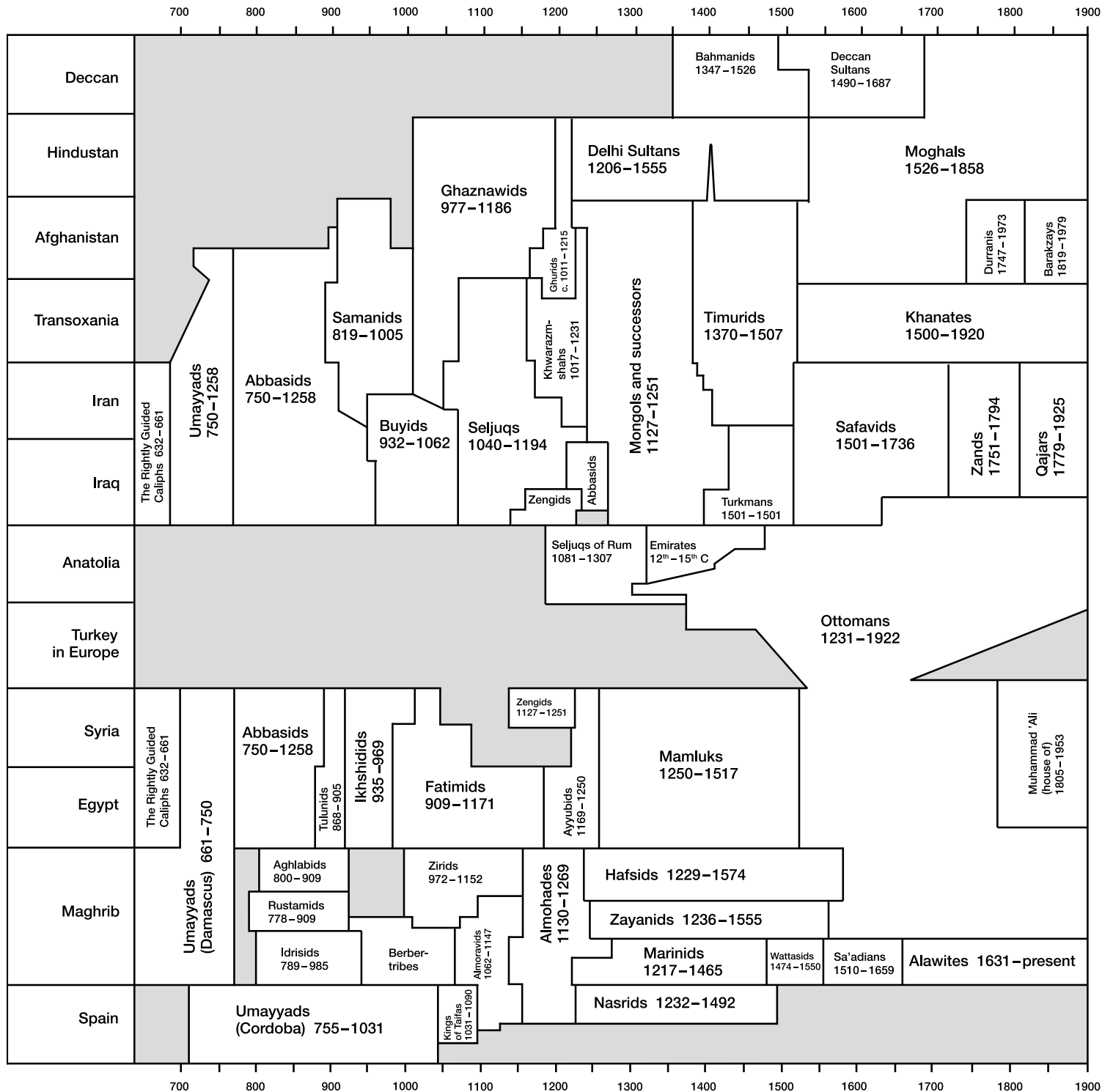
157

Mughal India, c. 1645–1651  
 Opaque watercolour on paper  
 Page: 32 x 20.3 cm;  
 image: 26.5 x 16 cm  
 Inv.: M127  
 Publ.: Welch–Welch 1982, pp. 217–20; Welch 1985, pp. 245–7 (no. 161); Goswamy–Fischer 1987, pp. 74–5 (no. 29); Canby 1998, pp. 144–145 (no. 107); Joseph M. Dye in Ziad 2002, p. 175.



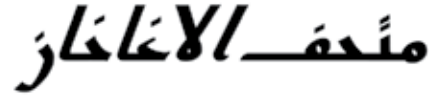


# CHART OF DYNASTIES



## CALLIGRAPHIC SCRIPTS

### Hijazi



Nineteenth-century European paleographers retained this name to designate the script seen in the first Qur'anic writings, appearing in the second half of the seventh century in the regions of Medina and Mecca. Though similar to scripts in common use, the letters are distinguished by their fine, almost slender appearance, and a slight orientation to the right.

### Kufic



Named after the city of Kufa in Iraq, from which site early paleographers believed the style to have originated, this term includes the varied scripts used between the eighth and ninth centuries for copying the Qur'an. The naming of this group of scripts has proved problematic, and Déroche has proposed that "Kufic" be replaced by the term "early 'Abbasid script"; however, "Kufic" remains the most widely recognised name. The script itself is distinguished by its austere angularity, strongly marked lines, pronounced horizontal emphasis, and its vertical elements, which have been reduced as much as possible to the perpendicular. Eventually supplanted by cursive scripts, which could be executed more quickly, Kufic became highly ornamental and in later centuries was largely reserved for titles and epigraphy.

### Eastern Kufic



Appearing in the east of the Islamic Empire in the tenth century, so-called "Eastern Kufic" is more cursive than Kufic proper, and is distinguished by its broken lines and angular shapes, and by the extreme contrast between the thick and thin parts of its letters. The long vertical letters are bevelled on the ends and its short lines incline or lean to the left, giving it a

dynamic forward movement. As with Kufic, the naming of this script is problematic and many scholars now avoid the term "Eastern Kufic": Blair has proposed "broken cursive" as a preferable alternative.

### Geometric or 'square' Kufic



Developed in the thirteenth century, "Geometric Kufic" is created only from straight lines intersecting at right angles. It usually falls within the framework of a square. It was frequently used for architectural decoration, usually representing the names of God, his Prophet Muhammad, or Ali.

### Naskh or naskhi



*Naskh* was the first of the canonical "six styles" of traditional calligraphy. Stemming from common administrative writing, the use of this cursive script, codified by Ibn Muqla, became widespread during the tenth century and remains today the most widely used book script in the Arab world and the basis of modern Arabic typography. It is characterised by its regular course, simple and supple on the line, without particular emphasis or angular features.

### Maghribi



This cursive script with fine lines and sweeping curves developed in the Maghrib and Spain in the tenth century and remained in common use in the western Islamic lands until the invention of printing, when it was replaced by *naskh*. Two consonants, *fā'* and *qāf*, were denoted by different diacritical marks from those used for the same letters in eastern scripts (and in modern typography). The use of colour to designate the vowels was maintained longer within the practices of *maghribi* script than in the rest of the Muslim world.

**Bihāri**

مَتْحَفُ الْأَخَانِ

A stately cursive script used exclusively in pre-Mughal India, with thick, cupping wedges for letter endings and wide spaces between words. The origins of this script are obscure, but it appears to be a mutation of *naskh*.

**Thuluth**

مَتْحَفُ الْأَخَانِ

One of the canonical “six styles”, and often partnered with *naskh*, the decorative character of thuluth comes particularly from its rounded shapes. Wider and more elaborate than *naskh*, with drawn-out strokes, it lends itself primarily to the writing of titles and colophons.

**Muhaqqaq**

مَتْحَفُ الْأَخَانِ

Particularly prized by copyists of the Qur’an under the Mamluks and Ilkhanids, *muhaqqaq* – another of the “six styles” – is a script of large size and is highly legible, with a consistent thickness and with well-spaced ligatures. The endings of the letters are elongated and their flattened curves highlight the text.

**Rayhāni or rihān**

مَتْحَفُ الْأَخَانِ

Also one of the “six styles”, *rayhānā* is a smaller counterpart to the larger *muhaqqaq*; it was used for Qur’ans of smaller size. The script is notable for its smooth line and delicacy.

**Tawqī‘**

مَتْحَفُ الْأَخَانِ

With many similarities to *thuluth*, *tawqī‘* is a script of the chancellery rarely used in manuscripts other than for colophons. It is characterised by small letters and compact words, and permits some unauthorised connections (the linking of certain letters which did not normally join directly to the next character). *Tawqī‘* underwent further development at the hands of Ottoman calligraphers, eventually evolving into a more ornamental version. It was one of the “six styles”, often partnered with *riqā‘*.

**Riqā‘**

مَتْحَفُ الْأَخَانِ

The last of the six canonical styles, this script, derived from *tawqī‘*, is essentially an administrative and secretarial script. It is characterised by rounded curves; the loops of the letters are invariably filled, the horizontal lines are very short and several unauthorised connections are employed.

**Ta‘liq**

مَتْحَفُ الْأَخَانِ

Although Persian and Arabic share an alphabet and a number of individual words, the two languages are radically different in linguistic terms and their appearance on the page differs correspondingly. To accommodate the different endings of Persian words, Iranian calligraphers developed so-called “hanging” scripts. *Ta‘liq*, the first of the hanging scripts, was standardised by the late thirteenth century. Thought to have developed from *riqā‘* and *tawqī‘*, it displays extreme contrasts between compression and expansion, and a sinuous curvilinearity.

**Nasta'liq**

متحف الافاخان

*Nasta'liq*, which appeared in fourteenth-century Iran, was a combination of *naskh* and *ta'liq*. A script of the chancellery, it is characterised by a slightly suspended quality and the strong contrast between its downstrokes and upstrokes. Graceful and light, it was adopted by the Persian, Ottoman and Indian empires, and is currently the standard script for Persian and Urdu. The elongations are abnormally long, tight curves are important, and letters and words have very precise dimensions that do not follow the horizontal line. *Nasta'liq* is often written at a slant, enabling the next word to be started above the end of the preceding one.

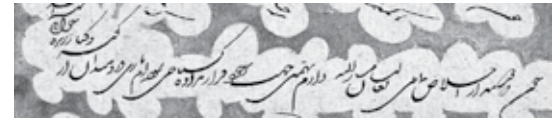
**Divānī**

متحف الافاخان

Derived from *ta'liq*, this majestic script was developed under the Ottomans and was normally reserved for important documents and decrees. Significantly, within this script spaces were not left between words, nor at the ends of lines, in order to avoid the possibility of later (fraudulent) interpolations within the official text. It is difficult to decipher because it is written very closely, with multiple diacritical marks; this also protected confidentiality, as training was required to be able to read and write *divānī* script.

**Chubāri**

*Chubāri* was a miniscule script, the name of which comes from the Arabic word for “dust”. Said to have been invented for writing messages to be sent by carrier pigeon, it was later used to copy miniscule Qur’ans for talismans.

**Shikasta**

This variant of *nasta'liq* emerged in the early seventeenth century in Iran and is characterised by its great density due to very large ligatures, low and slanting verticals and an absence of vowel signs. It permits more unauthorised connections than other scripts, and sometimes words were even joined together. It was reserved for chancellery use and for poetry, and appears in a number of calligraphic samples from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.

The calligraphic examples in this section were created by Mustafa Ja'far.

Stéphane Ipert – François Vinourd CCL

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN THE ARTS OF THE BOOK

**Burnishing** Finishing work that smoothes the heavy papers used in manuscript production, making them glossy by polishing with a burnisher, in agate, glass or metal. This process eliminates irregularities, creating a better writing surface.

**Colophon** A written statement at the end of a manuscript in which the scribe gives the date or place of copying, and sometimes his name as well as that of the manuscript's sponsor.

**Decorated and coloured paper** Many manuscripts were composed on decorated paper. Pages could be dyed, decorated with flecks of gold or silver, or marbled. There exist other less common techniques, such as paper silhouettes, cut-outs, or decoration with stencils. Similarly, the paper was often tinted; this could be done by simply soaking or boiling, or by combining the dye with a chemical fixer so that the colour penetrated more easily into the fibres, or by still more complex processes.

**Decoration of bindings** Concerning decoration, there are generally three different types of bindings: bindings without decoration, bindings whose boards are entirely decorated and bindings featuring a central design element. Nevertheless, all three patterns of decoration allow for diverse techniques of ornamentation by stamping, cutting, tooling and gilding as well as ornamentation with textiles or lacquer.

**Decoupage** A decorative technique that involves cutting the leather binding to fully remove parts and thus create an openwork design. A coloured background, in textile or in paper, could then be inserted to enhance legibility.

**Doublure** A piece of skin or hide glued to the inner face of the covers of a binding. The lining materials may be leather, parchment, paper or textiles. These are characterised especially by their refinement, and constitute a distinctive quality of the bindings of the Islamic world.

**Endpapers or fly leaves** Sheets of paper or parchment added at the beginning and ending of a book to isolate the binding from the text itself.

**Frontispiece** An important page, or sometimes two facing pages, of decoration that marks the beginning of a book or text. When at the end of a book, such a

decoration is termed a finispiece.

**Gilding** The process of decorating the leather binding of a book by embossing it with thin gold leaf. Done with the aid of hot irons such as an awl featuring a distinct motif, or using large iron plates, generally applied with a press.

**Headband** A headband is a sewn reinforcement braided or embroidered on each extremity of the body of a volume. It is built on a frame, a narrow strip of leather or parchment, placed flat on the edge of the volume. Often, it has a pattern with two colours in the form of chevrons (fig. 1).

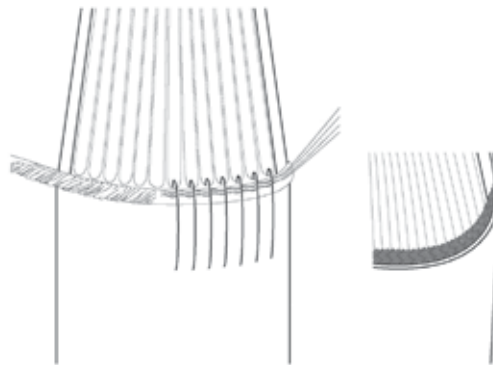


Figure 1. Headband.

**Islamic bindings** The earliest Islamic bindings were box bindings or case bindings. These are characterised by a leather strap with a height equal to the thickness of the book. Attached by one part to the back of the book and by the other part to the lower cover, this strap formed a case protecting the book once it was closed. These binders were generally provided with a clasp (fig 2).

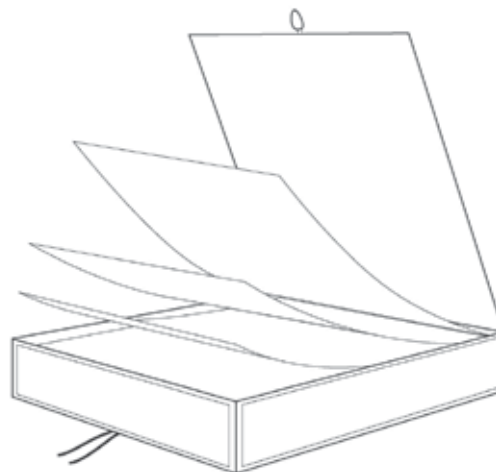


Figure 2. Box or case binding.



Flap bindings are emblematic of Islamic bindings. As their name suggests, they have a flap that extends the outside of the lower cover and whose height equals the portion of the volume that it covers once closed. The flap itself is extended by a pentagon-shaped covering over the upper board from its opening on the left side in the middle (fig. 3).

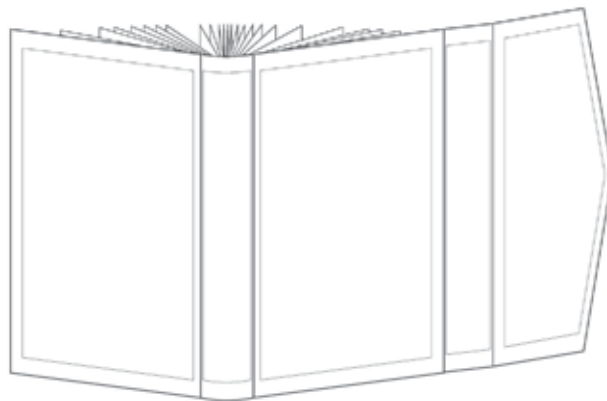


Figure 3. Typical Islamic flap binding.

Finally, there are also western-type bindings consisting simply of a back and two covers; these may have cords or clasps (fig. 4). A full exploration of this subject can be found in François Déroche, *Manuel de codicologie des manuscrits en écriture arabe* (Paris, 2000).



Figure 4. Western-style binding.

**Lacquer** In the arts of the book, this term refers to bindings whose decorations, realised by various processes, are then covered with a thick shiny varnish, which can be painted and gilded.

**Leather** Leather is made from the tanned skin of a goat, sheep or calf. It is rendered soft and rot-

resistant by a chemical process. Once tanned, the skin can also be dyed. *Basan* is a sheepskin smooth and resistant to weakness, offering leather with an even grain and supple flesh. Morocco is, in turn, a goatskin with a full and irregular grain. Finally, *chagrin* is a goatskin with a particularly tiny grain, thick and bulging.

**Libraries** The Islamic world historically contained several kinds of libraries: caliphal libraries, religious libraries in mosques and the libraries of *madrasas*, traditionally colleges of religious instruction. The first were places of cultural, political, religious, philosophical or scientific exchange intended to promote and increase knowledge. The second form of library remains a vital part of contemporary Islamic cultural life; these provide readings or teaching of the Qur'an as well as secular books, and might also loan books. Finally, the traditional library of the *madrasa* is a vital resource for religious education. Places for the preservation, transmission and dissemination of knowledge, all of these types of library experienced a true blossoming from the eighth to the fifteenth century in the Islamic world through scientific advances that developed and were disseminated through manuscripts. They welcomed readers and scholars alike, and certain libraries hosted workshops of scribes and bookbinders as well as translators. Their existence was ensured in part through *waqfs* (charitable trusts).

**Marbling** A complex technique which involves floating coloured inks on a bath of viscous liquid, creating patterns within the inks and taking a print from them. When done successfully, marbling makes it possible to generate on the surface of a piece of paper or the edge of a book a unique decoration with spots or streaks of various colours artistically arranged.

**Mastara (ruling-board)** A matrix of wood or cardboard on which are hung the threads that order the entire layout of the manuscript: these designate the spacing of lines and columns as well as the location of illustrations and illuminations. Once defined, the matrix is placed under a sheet that is rubbed slightly, so that the hanging threads are embossed in relief on the sheet.

**Midād or Hibr (Black ink)** Black ink has almost always been used by Muslims for most writing, coloured ink being reserved for other more ornamental uses such as highlighting certain words or elements of the text like titles, systems of vocalisation, punctuation signs or the beginning of Suras. Recipes for black ink varied according to region but also in accordance with the social and

cultural environment, as well as with the quality of writing that a scribe wanted to give to his work. However, depending on the correct proportioning, the quality of the ink and its retention time varied. Furthermore, it is difficult to identify specific inks. Black ink recipes are divided into three major groups that all use the same binder: Arabic gum. The first group consists of carbon inks, known as *midād*. Charred material remains the basis of these inks, but the substances used are of plant, mineral or animal origin and the method of carbonisation varies. Then there are the metallo-gallic inks resulting from a chemical reaction between two components: a tannic element and a metallic salt. These are known as *hibr*. Finally, the third group combines the components of the other two groups.

**Mihbara or Dawāt (Inkwell)** Frequently both a utilitarian object and a work of art, the inkwell is of paramount importance since the preservation of the ink used in calligraphy is dependent upon it. Inkwells from the Islamic world were normally fitted with a tuft of wool or cotton to control of the quality of the ink by maintaining homogeneity and avoiding the formation of deposits in the bottom of the container, while also giving the scribe close control over the amount of ink loaded into the *qalam* when dipped.

**Muraqqa' (Album)** Widespread in Turkey, Iran and India, the *muraqqa'* is an album often containing paintings and exercises in calligraphy. The calligraphic samples may comprise Qur'anic verses, traditions from the *Hadith*, panegyrics and all manner of poetic texts. Especially made for the album format, the individual pieces are generally designed in the form of a rectangle; the text is copied on one side only and framed by a cardboard support with four decorated margins. The sheets are then bound together in accordion fashion.

**Paper** Paper was born in China in the first century CE. The techniques of fabrication were revealed to the Arabs by Chinese prisoners of war after the Battle of Talas in 751. First manufactured in Samarqand, paper production spread very quickly within the Islamic world and even beyond its borders. While there are different manufacturing processes, paper from the pre-modern Islamic world is distinguished by its thickness and smooth appearance, which is due to the fact that the sheet is pasted with rice or wheat starch and polished with a burnishing instrument of glass, agate, metal or ivory. It also has the distinction of being manufactured with the help of a flexible form, a sieve.

**Papyrus** Papyrus is made from a plant called *Cyperus papyrus*. Pulp bands are placed side by side on two

layers, the fibres of the second layer perpendicular to those of the first. The dried sheets are then beaten until level.

**Parchment** Parchment is the skin of goat, sheep or donkey that has been limed but not tanned, dried under tension and scraped for use as a medium for writing. Its surface is smooth, and it is expensive to manufacture.

**Pigments** Pigments, of vegetable or mineral origin, were used to manufacture coloured inks or paint for decoration or for miniatures. The principal pigments used for white were ceruse (white lead pigment) and talc. Yellow was obtained from orpiment or saffron with white; orange from red lead; red from mercury sulphide, ochre, or plant or animal exudations; and green from a mixture of orpiment and indigo, Appian green, the green earth of Smyrna or verdigris. Finally, blue was principally obtained from a base of lapis: along with gold, lapis lazuli was the most precious material in manuscript production. Once prepared, these pigments were mixed with mediums or binders such as Arabic gum or vegetable or animal glues to ensure that they would adhere to their support. The content of the binders varied in accordance with the intended use of the pigments, i.e. whether they were to be used in ink or paint.

**Qalam (Reed Pen)** A hollow reed sharpened into a point for writing. The manner in which the *qalam* is cut, held in the hand, placed on the page and made to glide across the paper defines the quality and precision of the writing. In addition, each writing style demands a corresponding reed pen of a particular size, adapted to the thickness of the letters.

**Qalamdān (Pen box)** Intended to hold reed pens, examples of the pen box (along with the inkwell) constitute some of the most beautiful objects manufactured in the Islamic world. This stems in part from their association with the art of calligraphy, which, of all the arts, is the closest to God. Pen boxes can be of lacquer, metal, wood or ceramic. Their size, shape, material, decoration and inscriptions often reveal much about the social status of their owner. In Turkey they are usually made of silver and termed *divit*.

**Rahle or Kursi (Lectern)** Various types of wooden structure associated with scribal practice and reading existed in the pre-modern Islamic world. Although many images show the scribe leaning on a board, often balanced on his knees, there also existed a type of low folding table which, once opened, takes the appearance of an X with the upper opening receiving

the book. This is called a *rahle* in Turkish, while it is sometimes known as a *kursi* in Arabic, although the latter term is also used to refer to lecterns and supports of other forms.

**Sewing** The action of sewing together the notebooks or sections of a volume for binding.

**Stamping** The process of decorating by embossing with shaped iron stamps, normally used for the decoration of the backs or covers of bindings. Stamping is usually done without gold (blind-stamping), with hot irons and often uses repeated small motifs to form mandorlas, stars, circular patterns or larger and more complex designs.

**Textile** Textiles such as brocades, calicos, satin, silk or silk embroidered with gold can be used for book-coverings. The textiles are used to cover the boards while the edges are usually made of leather and form a frame.

**Tooling / engraving** Carving or engraving of leather bindings, at times cutting some pieces into concave hollows. Done with the aid of an awl, often practised in combination with stamping.

**Vellum** Parchment of the highest quality is often known as vellum. Strictly speaking, vellum is prepared from the skin of a young animal or, in some cases, an unborn or stillborn animal, giving it a particular fineness that is highly prized.

**Watermarks** Unlike Western paper the paper of the Islamic world has no watermarks, with the exception of some examples found in Spain or Morocco. Dating from the twelfth century, these are laid papers with threads of chain placed at regular intervals and contain, near the middle of the sheet, a zigzag mark whose function is not yet known with certainty. However, it is also possible to find Islamic manuscripts of the early modern period that contain watermarks: the Islamic world began to import European paper from the sixteenth century onwards, primarily from Italy, leading to the creation of a special watermark of three crescent moons.

## GENERAL GLOSSARY

### 'Abbasids

Dynasty of Sunni caliphs descended from 'Abbās, the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad. The 'Abbasids took power in 749 over much of the Islamic world as well as Iraq, after overthrowing the Umayyad caliphate. They founded the 'Abbasid caliphal capital at Baghdad in 762 and extended their empire to India. From the tenth century the 'Abbasid caliphs lost political authority; although the 'Abbasid ruler continued as caliph in name, in reality political power increasingly lay outside of Baghdad. The 'Abbasids were finally overthrown by the Mongols in 1258 with the sack of Baghdad.

### *abjad*

Alphanumeric system in which each letter of the Arabic alphabet is assigned a numerical value.

### Almohads

Berber dynasty that ruled North Africa and southern Spain from 1130 to 1269.

### Almoravids

Berber dynasty that ruled North Africa and southern Spain from 1062 to 1147.

### *āya*

A verse from the Qur'an.

### Ayyubids

Of Kurdish origin, this dynasty, divided into several branches, reigned over Egypt, Syria and Yemen from 1169 to 1260. It was founded by Salāh al-Dīn, known in the West as Saladin (1169–1193), who recaptured Jerusalem from the Crusaders in 1187.

### *basma*

The invocation *bi-smi llāhi l-rahmāni l-rahīm*, meaning "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful". This expression opens every Qur'anic Sura except the ninth, and is arguably the most repeated phrase in Muslim usage. It is held that recitation of the *basma* should precede every text or important act.

### Buyids

Originating from northern Iran, the Buyid dynasty (c. 932–1062) secured the control of vast territories in the 'Abbasid domain, especially in Iraq and western Iran. They placed the caliphs of Baghdad under their de facto control from 945 to 1055 before being ousted by the Seljuqs.

### Caliph

The political and spiritual leader of the Islamic community. After the first four "Rightly-Guided"

caliphs, the title was taken by the leaders of the Umayyad and subsequently the 'Abbasid dynasties, and also by leaders of competing dynasties, notably the Fatimids in North Africa and the Spanish Umayyads in Cordoba.

### *dhikr*

Form of prayer, which consists in the constant repetition of a name or formula, performed either in solitude or collectively.

### *divān*

Anthology of poetry.

### Fatimids

Shi'i dynasty that ruled large parts of North Africa and the Middle East from 909 to 1171, and founded the city of Cairo (*al-Qāhira*). Fatimid rulers bore the title of caliph and opposed the Sunni 'Abbasid Caliphate and that of the Umayyads of Cordoba. The Ayyubids brought the dynasty to an end in 1171.

### Ghaznavids

Turkic dynasty that ruled parts of Iran, Afghanistan and India from 977 to 1186.

### *Hadith*

Report of the sayings or actions of the Prophet. These reports formed the basis of the Traditions of the Prophet, which were first transmitted orally and then collected into anthologies.

### Hajj

Annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

### Hijaz

The birthplace and spiritual centre of Islam. Comprising the north-western part of the Arabian Peninsula, this area contains the two most holy cities of Islam: Mecca and Medina.

### Ilkhanids

Mongol dynasty established by Hūlāgū, the grandson of Genghis Khan, in Iran and part of Iraq. Vassals of the Great Mongol Khan of China, the Ilkhanids ended the 'Abbasid caliphate with the sack of Baghdad in 1258 and ruled the Iranian territories from 1256 to 1353.

### Imam

In general, a leader of prayers or religious leader; used by the Shia to denote the spiritual leader of the Shi'i community, chosen by God.

### *Janna*

Literally "garden", *janna* is one of the names given to paradise in Islam. This is the reward given to believers after their death on the day of resurrection.

**Jazira**

(*al-Jazīra* = “the island”) Expression designating the northern part of the plateau situated between the Tigris and the Euphrates, which also includes some land lying to the north of the upper Tigris and to the east and west of the two rivers.

**Juz'**

One thirtieth part of the Qur'an.

**Ka'ba**

Sanctuary in Mecca, focus of the Hajj and the point towards which all Muslims orient themselves when they pray.

**khānqāh**

Lodge or hospice for Sufis.

**khutba**

Sermon delivered in a mosque during Friday prayers.

**Lampas**

Technique of weaving silk fabrics that appeared at the end of the tenth or the early eleventh century in Persia. Lampas fabrics were assembled from threads of silk, gold and silver, with designs formed in relief on a woven background.

**Madrasa**

College or educational institution, especially for religious studies.

**Maghrib**

Western part of the Islamic world, including modern Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya and Mauritania, and sometimes also taken to include Islamic Spain.

**Mahout**

The teacher, the guide and the trainer of an elephant.

**Mamluks**

The word *mamlūk* literally means “a thing possessed”, hence “slave”. Formed from the personal guard of the Ayyubid sultan, whom they overthrew in 1250, the Mamluks ruled Egypt and Syria through two lineages, the Bahri Mamluks (1250–1382) and the Burji Mamluks (1382–1517). The dynasty fell to the Ottomans in 1516–17.

**maqṣūra**

“Imperial Box” in the form of a separate section of the mosque traditionally reserved for the sovereign, usually beside the minbar.

**mihrab**

Niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the direction of prayer (*qibla*). It is normally distinguished from the rest of the building by its decoration.

**minbar**

Elevated pulpit in a mosque, from which the imam addresses the faithful during the Friday sermon and announcements are made to the community.

**Mudéjar**

Name given to Muslims who continued to live in the territories of al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) after they were conquered by Christians during the *Reconquista*.

**Mughals**

Founded by Babur, who claimed both Mongol and Timurid ancestry, the Mughal dynasty became established in India in 1526. It reached its peak between 1556 and 1707, and ended in 1858 with the deposition of its last ruler by the British.

**muqarnas**

Decorative vaulting system composed of tiers of small niche-like elements resembling stalactites or honeycombs.

**muraqqa'**

Album with a collection of samples of calligraphy and paintings.

**Nasrids**

Dynasty that ruled southern Spain from 1230 to 1492.

**Ottomans**

Turkish dynasty that came to power in Anatolia during the early fourteenth century. Rapid Ottoman territorial expansion toward Europe and the Balkans was marked by the capture of Edirne and Constantinople in 1366 and 1453, sealing the end of the Byzantine Empire. The greatest extent of the dynasty's power, covering part of the Maghrib, Syro-Egypt, Turkey and the Balkans, took place in the sixteenth century under Süleyman the Magnificent (1520–1566) and in the seventeenth century. This power gradually declined until its overthrow in 1924 by Mustafa Kemal.

**pir**

Spiritual guide qualified to lead disciples on the mystical path.

**Qajars**

Stemming from Turkic tribes, the Qajars, ruled Iran from 1779 to 1924. Many of their sovereigns formed alliances with European powers. They chose Tehran as their capital instead of Isfahan, and were replaced by the Pahlavis in 1924.

**qibla**

The relative direction of Muslim prayer towards Mecca.

**Safavids**

Dynasty that ruled Iran from 1501 to 1722 and established Shi'ism as the official state religion.

**Samanids**

Dynasty that ruled from 819 to 1005 in Central Asia and Transoxania.

**saz**

Type of vegetal decoration common in Ottoman art of the sixteenth century.

**Seljuqs**

Sunni Turkic dynasty that ruled parts of Iran and Iraq from 1040 to 1194, as well as Anatolia from 1081 to 1307. In 1055 they seized Baghdad and liberated the 'Abbasid caliph from the control of the Shi'i Buyid dynasty. They were then assigned the title of sultans and assumed the leadership in Iran and Iraq.

**shahāda**

The Muslim profession of faith. *Ashhadu an lā ilāha illā llāh wa-ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasūlu llāh*: "I testify that there is no god but God and I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God".

**Shahnama ("Book of Kings")**

Vast Iranian national epic in verse. Several versions exist, but the most famous is that which was completed by Firdawsī around the year 1010.

**shari'a**

Standard term used for the body of rules guiding the life of a Muslim.

**Simurgh**

Mythical Persian bird, involved in the lives of various heroes of the *Shahnama*.

**Sura**

Chapter of the Qur'an.

**tawhīd**

The Oneness of God or belief in Divine Unity, one of the fundamental tenets of Islam.

**Timurids**

Dynasty founded by Timur (known in the West as Tamerlane) that ruled in Central Asia and Afghanistan from 1370 to 1507.

**tirāz**

Fabric adorned with decorative bands of inscriptions, on which were normally given the caliph's name and titles, and sometimes the date and workshop of manufacture. As luxury textiles, essentially destined for elite use, the fabrication of *tirāz* constituted a

state monopoly. This term is also used to designate the workshops from which they were derived, and sometimes also the technique of tapestry making.

**tughra**

Distinctive and intricately executed monogram of the Ottoman sultan.

**Tulunids**

Dynasty that governed Egypt from 868, gaining power against the backdrop of a declining 'Abbasid caliphate but effectively ended by temporarily revitalised 'Abbasid forces in 905.

**Turanians**

Descendants of Tur, one of the three sons of King Faridun, the Turanians were a Central Asian tribe of Iranian origin who ruled Turkistan and China. Their legendary origin is related in the Persian epic the *Shahnama* as well as in the holy book of the Zoroastrian religion, the *Avesta*.

**'ulamā'**

Religious and legal scholars.

**Umayyads**

The first hereditary caliphate of Islam, the Umayyads were at the head of the Islamic empire from 661 to 750 and established their capital in Damascus. They were overthrown by the 'Abbasids; a surviving member of the house eventually settled in Spain where the Spanish Umayyads ruled until 1031, assuming the title of caliph as rivals to the 'Abbasid caliphate.

**waqf**

Pious endowment or trust stipulated for a charitable purpose.

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