



QUR'ANIC CALLIGRAPHY Through The Ages

VALENTINE
WILLIE
fine ART



QUR'ANIC CALLIGRAPHY

Through The Ages

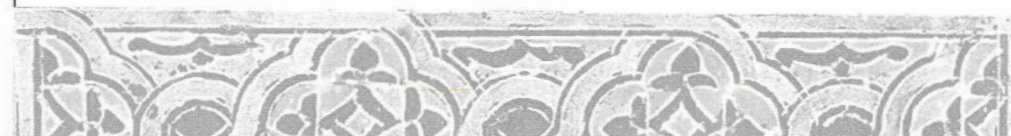
Just as the Holy Qur'an is central to the faith of Islam, so the arts of the Book are central to Islamic Art. Adorned by book-binding, leather- and lacquer-work and the most exquisite illumination with the finest of geometric and floral design, calligraphy, the written word, is the start and the centre of Islamic Art. The start because the earliest Qur'anic writings on vellum in Kufic script were the first visual manifestations of what was to develop into the most elaborate and magnificent use of the art of writing and illumination. The centre because calligraphy and Qur'anic quotations are the inspiration used to adorn buildings, rooms, tiles, ceramics and glass, metal-ware and so much more. Calligraphy conveys and gives worldly form to the highest and most profound teachings of Islam in a unique way which no other visual manifestation can or indeed is permitted to do so.

One of the great achievements of Arab Muslim civilization in its very first centuries was the development of an impressive and distinct style of writing used to record and transmit the text of the Holy Qur'an. This style has traditionally been

called both in Muslim and Western sources: Kufic script (al-Khatt al-Kufi). The term is used to identify a variety of scripts with similar features and distinguish them from Naskh and other scripts used from about 1,000 A.D. to copy the text of the Holy Qur'an. By this time Kufic was divided into two distinct styles: Western or Maghribi Kufic and Eastern Kufic or New Style. This Eastern Kufic continued to be used till the 13th Century when it was replaced by the new Proportional scripts. Maghribi Kufic continues to be used until today. Kufi remains an important archaic script used for inscriptions notably on the walls of mosques, even today.

The rarity, age and great price of these early manuscripts prevent us from having any in this exhibition; however, the Maghribi examples we have are direct descendants of those times as I shall briefly explain.

The Maghrib or Western area of Islamic civilization comprising Arab Spain, Al-Andalus, and Morocco and North West Africa gradually became separate from the mainstream of Islamic civilization.



A major cultural change occurred in the eastern areas, traditionally the heartland of the Islamic world, in the 13th Century as the shock of the Mongol invasion was felt. The Mamluks, former slaves with roots in Central Asia, became rulers of Syria and Egypt and an open-ness to many eastern influences especially from Iran, long a cross-roads of the Far East, Central Asia and the Middle East, made a great cultural change.

The scribes of the Maghrib (West) had long followed their own line of calligraphic development separate from the East and now only here in the Maghrib did the Arab civilization of the Middle Ages continue to evolve on its own terms untouched by other influences. This division into two clear cultural zones is easily observed in Qur'anic calligraphy: the Kufic style is still in use in the Maghrib till the present day and no completely new script was ever developed, while in Egypt and to the East new Proportional scripts evolved and replaced Kufic as a medium for copying the Holy Qur'an. We have a few examples of Maghribi script in our selection from prayer books but more important is the wonderfully illuminated copy of the Dala'el Al Khairat from Morocco which has a truly beautiful and finely developed Maghribi script. Examples of Qur'ans in scripts which

are Maghribi Kufic can be found from Islamic Spain through Morocco right to Nigeria, Mali and Western Sudan.

We leave the Maghrib now and turn to Egypt and the Middle East which is the heartland of Islamic thought and civilization. Here new scripts were developed and the name which dominates this new era and is legendary in the history of calligraphy is Yaqut al Mustasimi. It would be true to say he was the perfecter or the one who refined Naskh, Muhaqqaq, Rayhani and Thuluth scripts to a high standard worthy of copying the text of the Holy Qur'an. His name implies he was a freedman of the last Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad: al-Mustasim (d.1258) and a contemporary source states he lived till 1299. He is reported to have passed his knowledge to six chosen pupils who became great calligraphers and who taught others. We are fortunate to have a page thought to be by Pir Yahya al-Jamali al-Sufi, a pupil of one of the six Yaqutian calligraphers.

It is an example of a large and important Qur'an, written in large Rayhani script in gold on paper. The letters are spaced out and elegant with long vertical lines and graceful curves taking as much space as needed. Scribes travelled from court to

court: Egypt, Iraq and Iran, to execute these works for their royal patrons creating a fairly homogeneous culture of calligraphy throughout the region. This example is tentatively dated 1340-1350 and probably from Shiraz.

We have an only slightly later example of a fine Muhaqqaq script thanks to the four pages on loan from the collection of HE Dr. Norbert Heinrich Holl, ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany. These show a beautiful and classical Muhaqqaq script at the height of its development and confidence. They are embellished with very fine illuminated Sura headings and marginal medallions in gold and colour, all pointing to a royal provenance or one from an important mosque or institutional library. The Proportioned script in this case is a Muhaqqaq in its full glory; and what a delight it is to look at its bold but so graceful movement from letter to letter, word to word, line to line and page to page. A true wonder of Islamic calligraphy.

Other great centres of Qur'anic calligraphy developed over the ages: Persia, the Ottoman Empire, India of the Moghuls, the Malay World and China. We have examples from all the above in this exhibition. I must however, mention one more

piece of special interest: the two pages of the Qur'an in Bihari script from India. This is a pre-Moghul invasion of India script, developed in N. Central India, large parts of which were Muslim already from the 12th Century. These pages date from around 1400 A.D. The strength and rhythm found in them are striking; so also is the fine illumination in gold and orange which adds a specifically Indian accent to this early and rare example of Qur'anic calligraphy from the sub-continent.

It would be difficult to do justice to any, let alone all of the different manifestations of Islamic calligraphy in such a short essay. The places, times and contexts, and people are so varied and distant; yet there is this immense unity and understanding binding all these styles and ages together. The one reason for all this effort and art: to convey the message of the Holy Qur'an. This is the starting point and final purpose of all this amazing calligraphy we see through the ages even to the present day.

I hope you enjoy the exhibition and that the works presented to you will be far more eloquent than anything I can write in impressing on you the wonder and beauty of Qur'anic Calligraphy Through The Ages.

LAWRENCE WISNIEWSKI



Pir Yahya Sufi Al-Jamali

Single page from an important Qur'an

♦ C.1350 ♦ SHIRAZ ♦ CALLIGRAPHY ♦ 42.5 x 26 CM



Anonymous

Bihari Script

♦ EARLY 15TH CENTURY ♦ INDIA ♦ CALLIGRAPHY ♦ 28 x 18.5CM

♦ COLLECTION OF HE DR. NORBERT HEINRICH HOLL,
 AMBASSADOR OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

٢٨
فَلَمَّا قَتَلْتُمُوهُمْ أَنْ كُنْتُمْ صَاحِبِينَ

فَأَنْ كَذَّبْتُمْ عَنْ كَذِبِ رَسُولٍ فَأُولَئِكَ جِئُوا بِالْحَقِّ
وَالَّذِينَ وَالْكِتَابِ الْمُنِيرِ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَإِنَّمَا

تُفَوِّزُ أَجْرَ الْجَوْرِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فَمَنْ

نُخْرِجَ عَنِ النَّارِ وَأُدْخِلَ الْجَنَّةَ فَقَدْ فَازَ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا
إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ لِيُبْلِيَ فِي أَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَنْفُسِكُمْ

وَلِتَسْمَعَنَّ مِنَ الذَّنْوَ تَوَالِي الْكَلَامِ

Anonymous

Mamluk Script

- ♦ EARLY 16TH CENTURY ♦ CALLIGRAPHY ♦ 41 X 33CM
- ♦ COLLECTION OF HE DR. NORBERT HEINRICH HOLL,
AMBASSADOR OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

Anonymous

Qur'an Safavid

- ♦ C.1580S ♦ CALLIGRAPHY ♦ 39.5 X 26 SM



Anonymous

Opening pages from an Indian Qur'an

♦ 17TH CENTURY ♦ NORTHERN INDIA ♦ CALLIGRAPHY ♦ 45 X 25.5CM (x2)



Anonymous

Al- Juzuli: Dalal al Khayrat

♦ c.1700 TO 1750 ♦ NORTH AFRICA ♦ CALLIGRAPHY ♦ 16 X 10.5CM (x2)



Mahboub Abd-el-Latif

Moghul Qur'an

♦ 18TH CENTURY ♦ INDIA ♦ MANUSCRIPT ♦ 27.5 X 17CM (x2)



Anonymous

A pair of Qur'an pages

♦ 1743 ♦ PERSIA ♦ CALLIGRAPHY ♦ 35 X 21.5CM (x2)



Anonymous

Opening verse of the: Al-Fatihah & Al-Baqarah

♦ 18TH CENTURY ♦ OTTOMAN, TURKEY ♦ CALLIGRAPHY ♦ 33 X 44.5CM

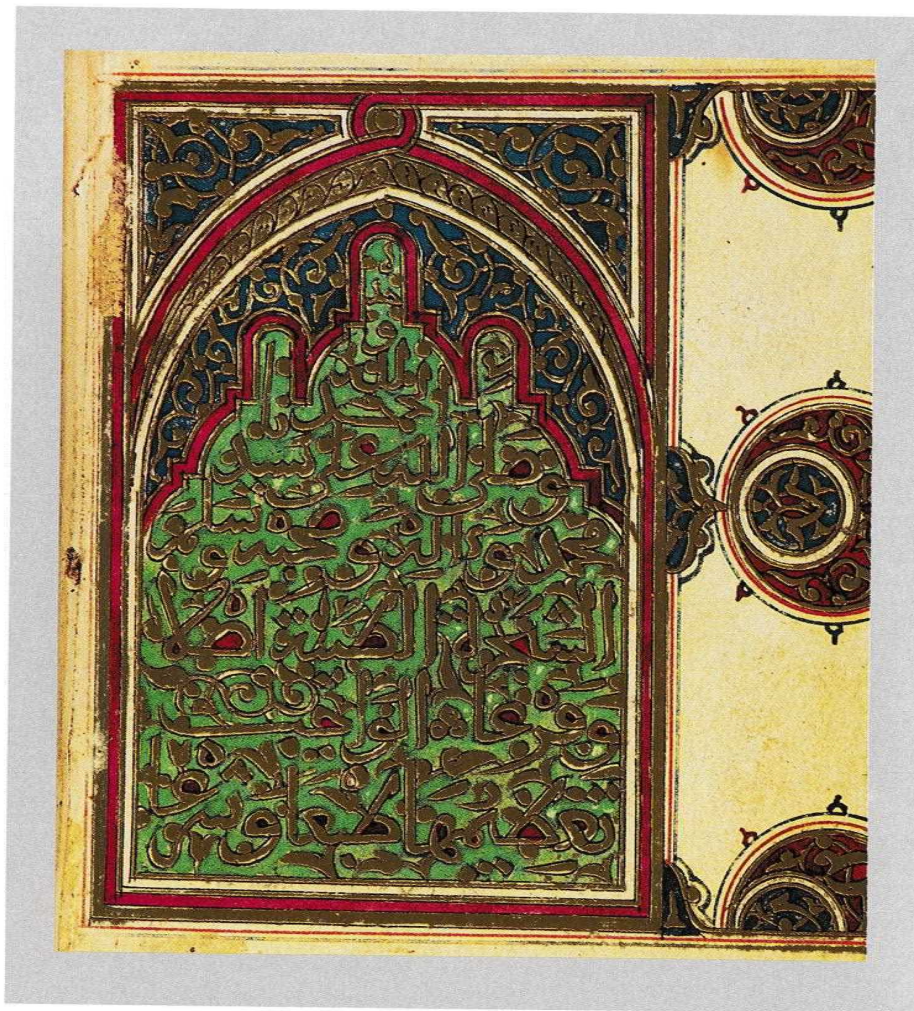


Anonymous

Chinese manuscript of the Holy Qur'an

♦ 18TH TO EARLY 19TH CENTURY ♦ CHINA ♦ CALLIGRAPHY

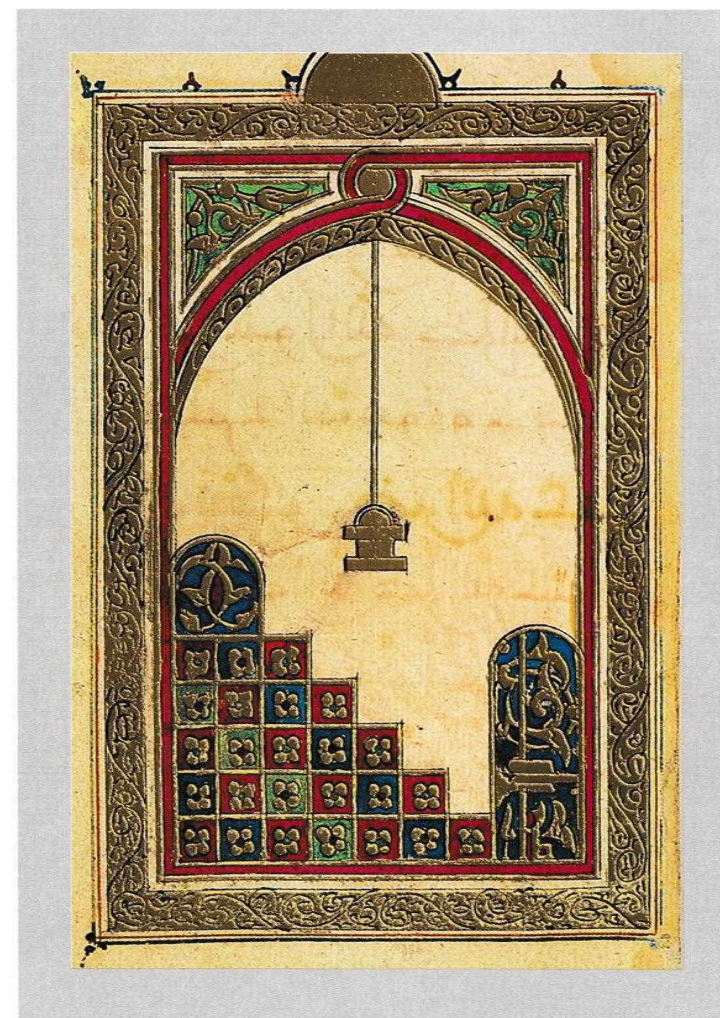
♦ LEATHER-BOUND MANUSCRIPT



Abu Makarem Hamdun ibn il Marhum ibn l' Wazir Abba Muhammad

Dala'el Al Khairat

♦ 1124 HIJRAH ♦ MOROCCO ♦ MANUSCRIPT ♦ BOOK



Abu Makarem Hamdun ibn il Marhum ibn l' Wazir Abba Muhammad

Dala'el Al Khairat

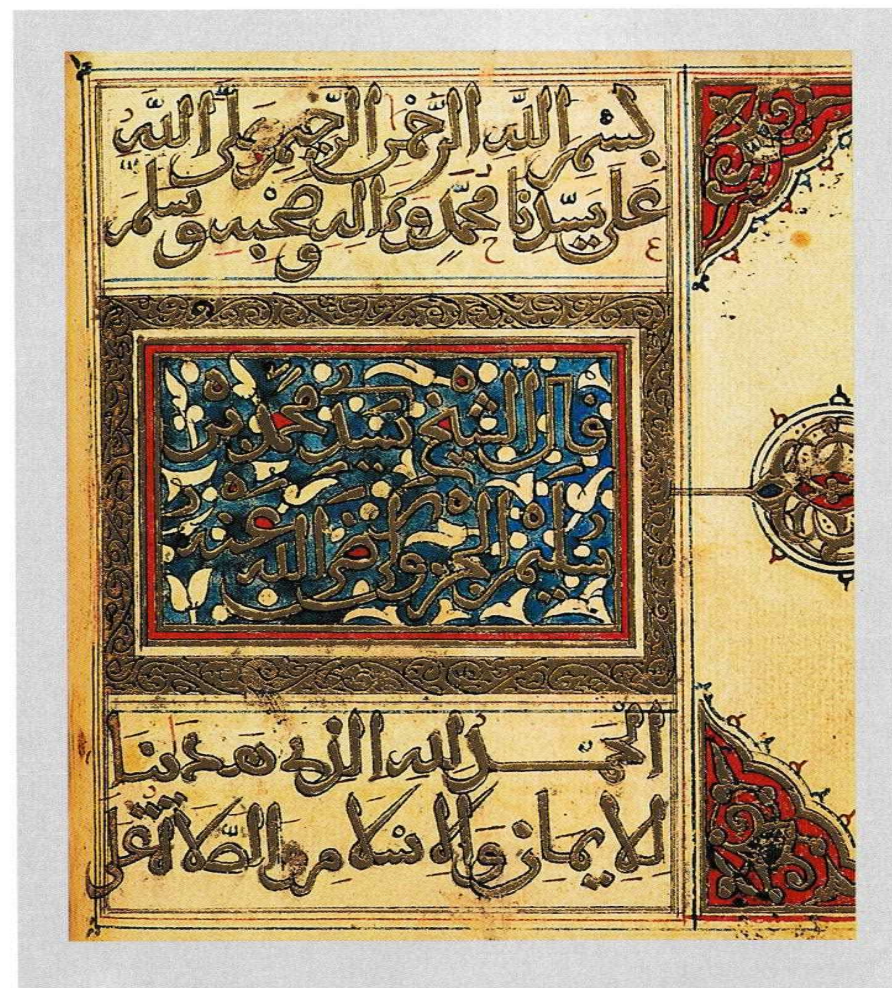
♦ 1124 HIJRAH ♦ MOROCCO ♦ MANUSCRIPT ♦ BOOK



Abu Makarem Hamdun ibn il Marhum ibn l' Wazir Abba Muhammad

Dal'el Al Khairat

♦ 1124 HIJRAH ♦ MOROCCO ♦ MANUSCRIPT ♦ BOOK



Abu Makarem Hamdun ibn il Marhum ibn l' Wazir Abba Muhammad

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Abu Makarem Hamdun ibn il Marhum ibn l' Wazir Abba Muhammad

Dala'el Al Khairat

♦ 1124 HIJRAH ♦ MOROCCO ♦ MANUSCRIPT ♦ BOOK



Salah Sherzad

Allah is the Light of Heaven and Earth

♦ 1415 HIJRAH (CONTEMPORARY)

♦ ORIGINAL CALLIGRAPHY ♦ 25.5 X 35 CM



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Gallery

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Southeast Asian Paintings & Works of Arts

This exhibition will be opened by

YABhg. Datin Seri Dr. Siti Hasmah Bte Haji Mohd Ali
on 5th February 1999, and will end on 27th February 1999

Curated by

HE Dr. Norbert Heinrich Holl and Lawrence Wisniewski

This exhibition is exclusively sponsored by **SIEMENS**

