

AMIR MOHTASHEMI



Kashmiri Qur'an

North India, 18th century

Ink, gold and lapis lazuli on paper with lacquer covers

17.8cm high x 10.2cm wide (the manuscript). 17cm x 9.5cm wide (each page)

Stock no.: A5775

Provenance: Formerly in the collection of 'Abd al-Wahhab Khan, Nizam ul-Mulk (1848-1916); thence by descent to a London private collection in the early 20th century.

This single volume Qur'an contains 392 folios made of thin, cream laid paper, plus 6 fly leaves of oriental paper. The first and last fly pages are covered with silver leaf embossed with motifs of waves. The illumination is contained within a double frame of 20.3-6 cm high and 11.4-6 cm wide. The inner frame delimits the text copied in *naskh* with 15 lines per page, in black ink on gold within 'clouds'. The verses are separated by a gold disc. Sura headings (including title, place of revelation and number of verses) are written in *riqā'* style in blue ink in a gold cartouche, covering one or two lines. The area between the inner and outer frames is reserved for marginal devices and textual divisions. The latter are located in the lateral area: the *rukū'* are indicated by the letter 'ayn in red within a leaf shape.

The *juz'* and their quarters (*rub'*), halves (*niṣf*) and thirds (*thalath*), written in red in leaf shapes, are associated with a large central medallion (four or eight lobes) with three ornamental pendants on either side, mainly in gold and blue. The *sajda* (*sunnat* 'recommended', and *wajib* 'obligatory') are marked in red ink. The catchword is placed in the lower inner corner, close to the spine. In the top right-hand corner of each right-hand page is the number of *juz'*, whilst the title of the Sura appears on the left-hand page. These medallions are duplicated towards the end of the text, as several Sura headings appear on the same double opening page.

The manuscript includes eight magnificent illuminated double pages placed between the *Suras al-Fātiḥa* (Q.1) and the beginning of *al-Baqara* (Q.2), then at the beginning of the *Suras al-Mā'ida* (Q.5), *Yūnus* (Q.10), *Banī Isrā'il* (Q.17) *al-Shu'arā'* (Q.26) *aṣ-Ṣaffāt* (Q.38) *Qāf* (Q.50) and *al-Falaq/al-Nās* (Q.113 and 114). The first, fourth and last illuminated double pages have almost identical decoration: the text is framed by a border with a polychrome floral motif that continues to the top of the page. Beyond, there is a large gold and lapis lazuli decoration using broad interlacing motifs enhanced by floral motifs. The second and fifth illuminated double pages feature a wide border with gilded floral scrolls on a blue background. The third, sixth and seventh illuminations are made up of flowers and leaves in gold on a white background. These illuminations mark the division of the manuscript into seven sections (*manāzil*), allowing the entire text to be recited over the course of a week.

Though the lacquer covers are contemporaneous with the text, the book was rebound, as evidenced by the later fly leaves. The front and back covers are decorated with floral motifs and a central medallion with verses 79 and 80 of *Sura al-Wāqī'a* (Q.56) respectively. The dark brown leather spine is unadorned. The inside covers feature red and gold floral motifs on a black background.

This manuscript is an example of production attributed to the province of Kashmir in northern India. The arts of the book – especially papermaking and bookbinding – are said to have emerged in this region during the reign of Sultan Zayn al-'Abidin (1420-1470), but it was mainly from the 18th century onwards that a dynamic manuscript tradition developed. The French traveller Victor Jacquemont, who travelled to Kashmir in 1831, recalled that there were around 700 to 800 copyists, transcribing the Qur'an or the Shahnameh and working to order. Their manuscripts were traded in the region and beyond. In the late 1740s, the transfer of power from Mughal to Afghan Durrani rule in the province of Kashmir had an impact on manuscript production, and the quality declined.

It is extremely hard to rely on material evidence to reconstruct the history of manuscript production during this turbulent period. Kashmiri manuscripts almost never include colophons giving the date and place of copying. A few rare exceptions, including a Qur'an now in the Gulistan Library in Tehran, has a colophon which states that the volume was copied in Kashmir in 1173 AH / 1759-60 CE. Thanks to these few exceptions, we may assume that high-quality Kashmiri Qur'ans, like the present example, were made before 1740. Other examples can be found in the Khalili Collection (object no. QUR396) and the Morgan Library, New York (MS G.69).

This Qur'an comes from the collection of 'Abd al-Wahhab Khan (1848-1916), son of Mirza Kazim Khan Nizam al-Mulk, and the grandson of Aqa Khan Nuri, prime minister of Iran from 1851-58. 'Abd al-Wahhab Khan inherited his father's post of Minister of the Army and the title Nizam al-Mulk after his father's death in 1889. He was appointed Governor of Tehran in 1892. On his death in 1916, the Qur'an was transferred to family in London.