

N. G. McBurney
*early printing & manuscripts
of the Islamic world*

List I

2019

Imperial illuminator's personal Qur'an in a contemporary binding

1. **al-Qur'an.** [*Istanbul*], copied by Hasan ibn 'Abdallah, 23 Sha'ban 984 AH (15 November 1576 CE).

8vo (17.5 x 12 cm), Arabic manuscript on burnished laid paper; ff. ii, 323, ii; 13 lines of black *naskh* per page within triple frames of black, gold, and blue, with catchwords, text vocalised in black and rubricated in red, verse divisions marked by gilt circles, *sura* headings and marginal *hizb* and *juz'* divisions in gold *tawqi'*, ff.1v-2r with 7 lines of *naskh* per page within four narrow triple-framed compartments, filled with gilt arabesques on a blue ground, top and bottom compartments with gilt cartouches containing *sura* headings and verse counts in white *tawqi'*, margins with blue penwork decoration extending from frames, f.323v flecked with gold; bound in fine contemporary brown morocco with flap, each board with a central gilt-stamped medallion of asymmetric arabesques and lobed pendants above and below, cut and gilt-stamped cornerpieces, single gilt-tooled frame, doublures in red morocco with painted gilt frames and four-lobed central florets; joints repaired, likely by an Ottoman binder in the 19th-century, spine rebaked by a European who retained the original headbands. Text with numerous cancels in gilt, marginal and interlinear corrections and additions in the copyist's hand, f.53 with a single marginal hole just touching two letters, ff.178 misbound, occasional marginal stains, and a few gutters discreetly reinforced, but contents generally in excellent condition. 19th-century paper fragment inscribed *ya Muhammad* loosely inserted between ff.22-3, and French bookseller's pencil catalogue note on endpaper: *Coran - ornements en couleurs et en or - jolie reliure doublé.*
SOLD

[*images*](#)

An unusual Ottoman Qur'an manuscript, epitomising the austerity and elegance of Istanbul's scribal ateliers in the 16th century and the abiding influence of the imperial master-calligrapher Sheikh Hamdullah (d. 1520), in a remarkably well-preserved contemporary binding. Ottoman Qur'ans of the 15th century display a variety of decorative influences and hybrid textual formats, influenced by the movements of scribes, illuminators, and binders across the Islamic world in search of patronage: this artistic admixture gave rise to a distinctive Ottoman tradition of book arts in the following century. Where Safavid manuscripts dazzled with great explosions of colour and bindings whose surfaces shimmered all over with gold, Istanbul now seduced with sober but flowing *naskh*, restrained illumination, and compellingly understated bindings.

The compact format and modest decorative scheme of this manuscript, lack of inscriptions, seal impressions, or attribution to any patron, and fine but not extravagant binding strongly suggest that it was intended for Hasan ibn Abdallah's personal use.

Hasan ibn Abdallah is not recorded in *Manaqib-i hunar waran (Epic deeds of artists)*, the earliest Ottoman survey of calligraphers, illuminators, painters, and associated artists, compiled by the disgruntled functionary and litterateur Mustafa Ali (1541-1600), but one Hasan ibn Abdallah illuminated two Qur'an manuscripts copied by Sheikh Hamdullah during the final years of Sultan Bayezid II (1447-1512), one now in the Topkapi Palace Museum Library (MS A.5), the other in Istanbul University Library (MS A.6662).

Some seventy years separate the court illuminator associated with Sheikh Hamdullah and the copyist of the present manuscript but the working lives of many Ottoman artists often far surpassed the individual reigns of their imperial patrons: the court illuminator Bayram ibn Dervish was active from 1498 to 1554, serving Bayezid II, Selim I, and Suleiman the Magnificent, to give one example.

The present manuscript is not imperial and was evidently never intended for any patron, but a number of distinctive aspects in its production make identification of the copyist Hasan ibn Abdallah with the imperial illuminator compelling. The text's scribal cancels and corrections are unusually numerous, but the manuscript is not a slovenly piece of work: the scribe has used gold lavishly when cancelling errors. Hasan ibn Abdallah was both an error-prone copyist and a diligent editor, an unusual pair of characteristics in a working scribe, and the heavy use of gold for cancels serves to highlight rather than obscure scribal error.

One could suggest that this was the work of a journeyman calligrapher learning his craft, but the idea that any such journeyman would use gold as liberally as Tip-Ex is absurd. An elderly illuminator such as Hasan ibn Abdallah in the twilight of his art, with a strong calligraphic hand and access to the necessary materials, is exactly the man who would have produced this curious Qur'an, errors, corrections gilt, and all. To copy the Qur'an is a virtuous act of devotion and the natural occupation of a man nearing the end of his life.

Our manuscript's fine contemporary binding bears close comparison to the 16th-century Ottoman binding of a Qur'an copied at Aleppo in 1489, now in the Khalili Collection (QUR213). The finely executed decorative scheme of central medallion, pendants, and cornerpieces within a gilt-tooled frame visible in both bindings is characteristic of the period.

This Qur'an must have remained in Muslim hands until the 19th-century on the basis of the loosely inserted Arabic note invoking Muhammad. Ottoman ateliers often reworked and refurbished valued manuscripts and this manuscript's joints appear to have been sympathetically repaired by an Ottoman bookbinder. By the late 19th or early 20th-century the manuscript seems to have passed into European hands, given the French bookseller's note and the folio misbound when the manuscript was rebacked, a natural error for a bookbinder unable to read its Arabic text.

As the personal project of an imperial artisan, this Qur'an is a rare example of one man's act of private devotion, completed at the end of his life. It has been cherished across centuries, by Ottoman and European alike, with its contemporary binding maintained in remarkable condition. Ottoman art is often seen through the prism of grand court work: here is the humble, honest art of a single man, Hasan ibn Abdallah.



Important Ottoman text in a contemporary binding

2. Sheikhzadeh, 'Abd al-Rahman bin Muhammad bin Suleiman. **Majmua' al-anhur fi sharh multaqa al-abhur.** [*Istanbul*], *Dar al-Khilafah al-'Aliyah*, 1276 AH (1859 CE). 4to (30 x 21 cm); two parts in one volume; printed in Arabic text within double-ruled frames on wove paper; pp.[viii, index], 948, two printed headpieces. Bound in a contemporary blind-stamped Islamic binding with flap, pastedowns of yellow glazed and blue marbled papers; some early repairs to the joints, a few shallow splits along spine, boards slightly warped; text crisp and clean.

SOLD

[images](#)

Third edition, rare, of this 17th-century commentary on Burhan al-Din al-Halabi's *Multaqa al-abhur*, a 16th-century Ottoman compilation of Hanafi jurisprudence, which was a touchstone for Ottoman scholars and judges of the early modern period.

This is a splendid example of the hybrid state of Istanbul book production in the 19th century. While Muteferrika's 18th-century Istanbul press introduced printed Arabic script to the Ottoman world, it was only in the following century that Ottoman printers were permitted to produce Islamic texts.

The present work was printed at an imperial press and bridges neatly the gap between manuscript and printed text – reproducing the illuminated headpieces and text-frames of a manuscript, underlines, and even catch-words, but adding brackets and other typographical devices as textual annotation and ornamentation, together with a continuous printed pagination. The printed index which begins the book is as one would find in many manuscripts, and the two parts of the text each reproduce the colophons of the source manuscript, with its characteristic triangular shape.

A square colophon, following the reproduction of the manuscript colophon at the end of each part identifies the press. The second of these square colophons provides the name of the reigning sultan (Abdülmejid I), the date on which printing was completed, and the name of the printer responsible for the book, Muhammad Labib. The naming of an individual printer suggests that the Ottoman authorities still required some guarantee of accuracy in their printing, lest errors be repeated and multiplied, and that Labib was the man held liable should such errors slip into the printed text.

Toronto and Princeton only.



“Vac-ci-na-tion keeps a-way small-pox. / When sick, nev-er use charms.”
3. [Christian Literature Society for India.] **English and Roman-Urdú first book. Revised edition.** *Allahabad, published by the Christian Literature Society, printed at the Mission Press, 1898.*

12mo (14 x 10 cm); printed English and romanised Urdu text; pp.69, [1, blank], vignette on title, 10 vignettes in text. A very good copy in original cloth-backed pictorial wrappers, faded, spine worn at top and bottom with loss, text in excellent condition.

SOLD

[images](#)

Attractively printed and illustrated, this missionary work outlines a two-part programme to teach English to Indian children, printed in facing English and romanised Urdu. The first part comprises an alphabet and syllabary; the second, short lessons on common phrases, grouped thematically. These include practical gems such as “Vac-ci-na-tion keeps a-way small-pox. / When sick, nev-er use charms.” and rotely imperialist lines like “In-di-a is un-der the Queen of Eng-land. / Hindustan Inglistan ki Malika ke zer taht hai.” The illustrations range from Christ carrying his cross to charming vignettes of animals, including a cat chasing a mouse and an unusually large peacock, which occupies half of page 13.

The text was clearly intended for use by a teacher rather than students and includes a page of instructions on how to use the book. Although the short lessons include simple Christian catechisms, the instructions specify that the “name of God or Jesus Christ should never be pronounced lightly... Religious lessons should, in no case, be used for teaching spelling or grammar. The teacher should only ascertain, in a becoming manner, that the pupils understand the sense.”

The Christian Literature Society for India was founded in 1858 by the Baptist Missionary, Church Missionary, London Missionary, and Wesleyan Methodist Missionary societies as the Christian Vernacular Education Society for India. Their was to provide evangelical and educational texts in local vernaculars for poorer students, rather than the wealthier Indian students who already studied at existing missionary schools. The Mission Press at Allahabad was established by American Presbyterians in 1840. It undertook commercial work, like the present example, in addition to printing for the Prebyterian mission.

Very rare. Stated edition of 5000 copies. We locate a single copy at Wellesley College. No copies of the first edition traced.

Miniature Qur'an printed in gold by David Bryce

4. [al-Qur'an.] [*Glasgow, David Bryce, circa 1900.*]

24mo (3.5 x 2.5 cm); 16 lines of Arabic text within a single frame per page; approximately pp.800, with marginal *juz'* and *hizb* markers, printed throughout in gold. Lacking initial blanks and first page of text, with intermittent marginal rust stains. Partially unopened. Loose in original but heavily worn paper wrappers, printed in silver, gold, and red, gold-printed purple endpapers.

RESERVED

[images](#)

A remarkable and important survival, this is a very rare example of a miniature Qur'an printed in gold by David Bryce, the Glaswegian publisher who produced the first commercially successful miniature Qur'an. The first Bryce Qur'an was printed in 1898; a second edition followed in 1899; and he continued producing his miniature Qur'an until at least 1907.

The Bryce Qur'an was an export good, with the majority of copies shipped to a single Bombay bookseller, D. B. Taraporevala, who distributed them across the Muslim world. T. E. Lawrence records a copy purchased by the Bedouin chieftain Auda before the outbreak of World War I in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*; the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam holds another copy originally purchased by one Cut Peudada at Mecca in 1918 while on *hajj* from Aceh, gifted after his return to Indonesia to a Dutch colonial official. Bryce sold thousands of copies, which continue to appear on the market with regularity. The Bryce Qur'an was a photolithographic reduction of lithographed Ottoman Qur'ans. We know of two variants, one based on an 1871 Istanbul lithograph, the other on an 1881 Istanbul lithograph. The present copy is an apparently unique Bryce variant, based on an 1892 (1310 AH) lithograph. Bryce's habit of reproducing the imprints of the lithograph editions he pirated for his miniature book appears to have sown the seeds of bibliographical confusion: references to earlier miniature Qur'ans printed at Delhi and Istanbul are the result.

The National Library of Scotland holds a copy of Bryce's miniature edition of the Sanskrit *Bhagavad-Gita* (RB.s.2747), printed in gold, apparently a unique proof copy, acquired from David Bryce's granddaughter by the collector and bibliographer, Louis W. Bondy. We trace a single Bryce Qur'an (1871 variant) printed in gold, sold at auction (Lot 173, *Miniature Books: Rico Onuma Memorial Auction, Part I*, PBA Galleries, 18 August 2016).

Our copy's binding is not the standard gilt-stamped morocco found on most Bryce Qur'an copies. The use of the 1892 text suggests that our copy was a trial copy: the

relative illegibility caused by the gold ink may explain why Bryce did not produce many copies. Even though the majority of these miniatures were clearly carried as amulets, the use of Ottoman Qur'ans with excellent Arabic calligraphy was plainly a factor in their commercial success and ubiquity. Textually, this is a unique variant of Bryce's Qur'an, all the more remarkable for being one of only three known miniature books printed in gold.



Satire for a brave new Persia - first appearance of the revolutionary *Charand Parand*

5. Dekhoda, Mirza Ali Akbar Qazvini, *literary secretary*; Mirza Jahangir Khan Shirazi & Mirza Qasim Khan Tabrizi, *editors*. **Sur-i Israfil. No. 1, Volume 1. Tehran, Kitab-khanah-i Tarbiyat, 30 May 1907.**

4to (36 x 23 cm), typographically printed Persian text; pp.8, unstapled, with elaborate pictorial masthead lithographed in red. Central fold mark, some light wear and a small hole at rear just touching two words, overall in very good condition. With blindstamped Russian postmark and a Royal Mail one penny stamp with Brixton postmark dated 24 Ju[ne] 1907.

SOLD

[*images*](#)

First issue of the foremost reformist newspaper published in Tehran during the Constitutional Revolution, the most successful and popular from the sudden efflorescence of Persian periodicals after the Constitution's adoption at the end of 1906. *Sur-i Israfil*, a weekly named for the trumpet blast sounded by the angel Israfil at the end of days, was established by the revolutionary intellectual Mirza Jahangir Khan (1870/5-1908), who enlisted the scholar Mirza Ali Akbar Qazvini known as Dekhoda (1879-1954), unusually well-travelled after two years' diplomatic service in Europe, as literary editor and columnist. Dekhoda wrote the biting satirical column *Charand Parand* throughout the newspaper's brief existence, which blended literary nuance with popular language, appealing to educated and semi-literate reader alike, tapping into the rich tradition of Persian folktales. One of the many pseudonyms he adopted, "Dekhow", was that of a stupid village headman from his hometown Qazvin, whose mishaps are told in the same vein as those of Molla Nasreddin.

The newspaper was published in Tehran from 1907-8, but banned for months at a stretch, as its columns and articles outraged conservative clerics: the second issue carried an article describing the "amicable" discussion to which Mirza Jahangir Khan was summoned after the first issue's comparison of religion to opium addiction, nodding towards Marx's saw about the opium of the people. Even in this near constant

state of controversy, the paper's circulation was unusually large, approaching 5,500 at its peak.

The masthead is a fascinating but anonymous piece of work, vivid in red. The angel Israfil is depicted winged and robed, sounding his trumpet above a mass of men, half dressed as mullahs, the others in the distinctive hats of the Qajar. His pose is much it would be in an illustrated manuscript of eight hundred years earlier, but now he carries a banner, emblazoned in Persian with the revolutionary "Liberty / Equality / Brotherhood."

Unsurprisingly, *Sur-i Israfil* did not survive long amidst the political turmoil. During the bombardment of the Majlis by the forces of Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar in June, 1908, Mirza Jahangir Khan was seized and strangled on the shah's orders, and the paper was suppressed. Dehkhoda took refuge in the British legation, eventually escaping to exile in Switzerland. He published four more issues of the newspaper at Yverdon in 1909.

Our copy bears an intriguing pair of contemporary postmarks, indicating that it was sent to an individual in Brixton within a month of publication. We have failed to trace a plausible recipient, whether a sympathetic British radical or scholar of Persian, and their identity remains an intriguing mystery.

Cambridge, Columbia, Minnesota, Princeton, and Yale only. This is a rare publication, despite its print run, owing both to the fragility of its thin, unstapled sheets and to periodic suppression within Iran.

