

Documentation of Illuminated Qur'ānic Manuscript and its Impact on the Social System of the Subcontinent

Nomana Zaryab and Dr. Rana Eijaz Ahmad

Abstract

Illuminated Qur'ānic Manuscripts are unique religious and intellectual cultural heritage of Muslim world. It is important to record these manuscripts, as they are not in a good condition. It is necessary to preserve them and to document them to highlight the highest form of Islamic Arts and to pave way for further researches. This research paper focused on the documentation of an illuminated manuscript, a step towards making copies of these rare manuscripts in order to conserve them. To study and to comprehend Illuminated Qur'ānic Manuscript, the research methodology employed in this paper is derived from qualitative and theoretical research. This research will explain the history and evolution of Islamic Illuminated Qur'āns from the beginning and styles of illumination during different eras and documentation of a specific illuminated manuscript of Qur'ān to preserve the copy. The research focuses on its style of writing and decoration in the development of Muslim Arts and traces its origin in comparison with the other manuscripts of the same era having similar decorative motifs and style of decoration.

Keywords: Illuminated, folios, calligraphy, margins, geometric patterns, arabesque

Introduction

Qur'ān played an important and essential role in the history of Islamic Arts. Written form of Qur'ān is the discernible manifestation of the eternal and for the faithful, an aptitude to perceive the divine. Writing and decorating Qur'ān has become an aesthetic path to a spiritual experience (Grases, & Junod, 2010).

Over the centuries, variety of scripts was used for the writing of Qur'ān including Hījāzī, Kūfic, Thuluth, Muḥaqqaq, Naskh, Behārī and Rehānī. Earliest available examples of Qur'ān are in Kūfic script and were written on vellum or parchment and format was usually horizontal (Lewis, 1976).

In the 5th and 6th century AH cursive scripts like Naskh and Muḥaqqaq, previously used for secular texts gradually replaced Kūfic for Qur'ān writing and introduction of paper to the Islamic world replaced parchment, allowed a shift from horizontal to vertical layouts and the possibility of a bound single volume (The Farjam Collection, n.d). Attention was given to the decoration of these manuscripts and it emerged as an art form typically associated with Muslims. While during 7th to 10th century AH, cursive script was used for Qur'ān writing. Geometric decoration reached its peak and

* Authors are MPhil Scholar, Art History, Assistant Professor, Government College for Women Gulburg, Lahore and Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

vegetal patterns began to appear in Sūrah heading and Juz opening but throughout the text (The Farjam Collection, n.d).

With the rise of Timūrid period, the art of Qur'ān evolved. Naskhi script in the style of Yāqūt was commonly used in Qur'ānic writing, although some examples represent the use of multiple scripts in one Qur'ān. Later during the 10th to 13th century AD, three main centers were developed, Safavid Iran, Ottoman Turkey and Mughal India. Safavid and Indian Qur'āns show interlinear translation. Illuminations were intricate and floral (The Farjam Collection, n.d).

These illuminated manuscripts are now rare Art form of Islamic world, should be preserved and documented as symbols of earliest Islamic heritage, and can be a source of Inspiration for traditional Calligraphers to work in the same style. Keeping in view this purpose, a unique Qur'ānic manuscript is documented by using qualitative methodology. To achieve this goal, the research mainly focusses the contextual and formal analysis. Many books are available on the history of Islamic Art and Calligraphy that throw light on the Islamic aesthetics, color symbolism and meaning of different type of decorations like geometrical, spiral and arabesque patterns etc. The main source for documentation of manuscript is live documentation. The author of the research paper takes photographs of the manuscript for research and preservation.

The Making and Process of Manuscripts

The development of an artistic manuscript was a long process and it involved the calligrapher, the decorator and the bookbinder. This Art form flourished under high patronage of major centers like Baghdad, Tabriz, Shirāz and Hirāt. The illumination of a manuscript comprised the embellishment of the first and last folios and layout of the text and borders. In the beginning frontispiece was single paged, later double paged frontispiece appeared. Its function was to embellish the beginning of the text making it eye catching for the reader. The inside pages had frames consisting of fine parallel lines, enclosing and highlighting the text along with ornamented headpieces having chapter titles. Decoration of the margins was usually done with the gold spray, vegetal or geometric patterns. Colophon also had great importance as the names of the calligrapher and of patron were usually inserted together with the date and place of production. Bookbinding was also high esteemed art. Covers were made of animal skins and patterns were applied to it (Ashrafi, & Soucek, 1996).

Holy Qur'ān (Juz 15- 30) With Persian Translation

This illuminated Qur'ān is displayed in the Manuscripts and Calligraphies Gallery of the Lahore Museum. The gallery exhibits Persian and Arabic manuscripts.¹ This illuminated Qur'ānic manuscript is one of them. (Figure 1) Its accession number is MSS-125 and previous number was 226. It was a donation from the mother of Mian Sāeed Ahmed ex- administrator Lahore Municipal Corporation. Display card suggests that manuscript was copied in Hirāt in 846 AH/ 1442 AD. (Figure 2)

Documentation of Illuminated Qur'ānic Manuscript and its Impact on the Social System of the Subcontinent

The Qur'ān is copied into a single volume and is an incomplete manuscript. This vertically formatted manuscript of dimensions (31.5 x 23 cm) now includes 267 folios. Its frontispiece, first fifteen Juz and colophon are missing. The first page indicates the name of the scribe and illuminator: Muḥammad Bin Junaid Meḥmūd Bin Abd al- Raḥeem. First eighteen pages about the tafseer of Qur'ān seems to be added later as writing does not seem to be the work of same scribe as the rest of the Qur'ān's one. (Figure 3) Binding is also not original. Apart from the division into Sūrah, the text of the Qur'ān is partitioned into 30 Juz, now only fifteen are available. It is written on an ivory colored smoothed paper of good quality, although not in good condition now.

Outline margins (jadval) are carefully drawn with the help of a ruling pen, defines the space in which the Qur'ānic text is inscribed. The layout of the page is carefully delineated keeping in view the design element and space for text and illumination is carefully defined. All pages contain eleven lines of writing within a series of ruled frames. Strong black ink is used for the writing of Qur'ānic text and has been translated into Persian between the Arabic lines. Interlinear Persian translation is in a smaller cursive script. The translation is written in a very fluid handwriting, whereas, Arabic verses are carefully formed and rhythmically spaced. One can surely observe the dynamic balance and integration of the size, shape and spacing of each letter with the overall structure of the page. Interlinear translation was included later in the copies of Qur'ān to solve the language problem faced by the non- Arab Muslims as it was difficult for them to understand the Arabic text of Qur'ān. (Figure 4)

The scribe used to begin his work with the preparation of the sheets of paper. Lay out of the page and dispensation of written and blank spaces are decided by the scribe. He determines the number of lines and the width of the margins with the help of ruling board or mistāra. The space of text, the size of letters and space reserved for the comments are also measured (Grases, & Junod, 2010). In this Qur'ānic Manuscript three thicker lines, having thickness of 1.2 inches are arranged on equal distances in which Qur'ānic script is written in Muḥaqqaq while in between each thicker lines, three thinner lines measuring 0.5 inches present Arabic script, written in Naskhi and interlinear Persian translation is also written in Naskhi script. The line thickness of translation is 0.2 inches. Blank rectangular spaces are drawn on either side of the thin lines to form symmetry and enhance design element. The longer side of these rectangles is 1.8 inches and thickness is 1 inches. Almost every page is further adorned with marginal ornaments and textual annotation or Tafseer-e-Hussanion the margin of 1 inch presented diagonally. Outer margin again of 1 inch shows the geometric decoration. (Figure 5, 6). Number 3, like the circle and triangle is a symbolic representative of heaven all over the world and earth is symbolized by the number 4 like a square or a rectangle (Lings, 2005). The page format of this manuscript suggests the division of three broader lines and in between three thinner lines and again three thinnest lines of translation. Rectangles are also visible on the

either sides. Page format enhances transcendentalelement for the words of God and scribe's desire to represent himself as a mediator between heaven and earth.

Two or more cursive scripts were commonly used in the central Asia during the 12th century for those books that included both the text of Qur'an and explanatory materials (Ashrafi, & Soucek, 1996). The body of the text and interlinear Persian translation of the presently analyzed Qur'an is transcribed in Naskhi, a style of small cursive script of Islamic East. Naskhi is a supple and rounded script without prominent angles and is more legible and quicker to execute than Kūfic. It is known for its balance and proportion and is more frequently used in Islamic manuscript production (Grases, & Junod, 2010). Its consistent nature symbolically represents the harmony of Quran's message and its continuity through ages and centuries without change.

Page format suggest three lines of muḥaqqaq script in a forceful style in broader bands with background spiral and floral illumination. Muḥaqqaq script is grander and more elegant than Naskhi. Muḥaqqaq, large cursive script of Islamic East is a style with sharp edges and a marked contrast between the very high alif and the flat, pointed lower endings was the favorite hand for copying Qur'an in Mamlūk Egypt and in Iran during the late 13th to 15th century AD (Schimmel, 1992). (Figure 7)

Calligrapher carefully utilize two different inks for the Arabic text and its Persian translation, black for Qur'anic script and red for translation along with the differences in sizes of the scripts, help to distinguish the two and maintain the authority and sovereignty of the Arabic text. In few pages, black and red inks are use in contrast by the scribe for the description of Tafseer diagonally to enhance beauty. The page format of the Manuscript is not bearing page number originally and page numbers are added with lead pencil by the Museum authorities for their record.

Decorative Elements

Gold, dark blue and black colors are used for decoration. Blue and gold are contrasting colors and together they both enhance each other. Gold helps in balancing the depth of blue. Color is used for the same symbolic purpose in manuscript decoration as the ornamental forms. Primarily gold was used for decoration but from the 10th century AD blue was given priority and began to use with gold in the Islamic East. Blue symbolizes truth, wisdom, infinite mercy, sea and sky, representing the limitless vastness of Qur'an and the hidden possibilities in it. Whereas gold like sun is the symbol of spirit and is the transcendental representation of the world of Forms. It is light and indicate knowledge and teachings of Quran spreading light in all directions. Together they both are a symbol of mercy and divine revelation to reveal itself (Ling, 2005).

Circles or rosettes within the text, made luminous with gold, mark verses. Geometrical circular and elongated motifs drawn and painted on the side margins. The division of the bands also contributes in the decorative appearance of the page. The turnip shaped vignettes are delicately painted on the outer border of the folio. (Figure 8)

Documentation of Illuminated Qur'ānic Manuscript and its Impact on the Social System of the Subcontinent

A turnip shaped vignette is painted in golden and dark blue colors with floral golden motifs in between. On the outer lower side of the oval is a three pattīmotif and on the upper outer portion two leaves and above three pattīs are painted in rhythm. Lines on either sides show continuity and add beauty and delicacy to the page. (Figure 9)

Some folios presents two vignettes with a roundel in the center, again painted on the outer margin. Color combination is the same and the inner motives of the roundel are the similar as seen in the vignettes. The constant repetition of the same motive at regular intervals suggest portrayal of rhythm and rhythmic recitation of Qur'ān not only on earth but throughout the universe (Ling, 2005).

Another folio depicts only roundel with floral designs on the side along with delicate antenna like finials, creating linear effect. Same motifs are painted in a variety of styles on different folios that creates variation in the illumination of the manuscript. The purpose of illumination and text is to describe the beauty and majesty of holy words (Ling, 2005).

This kind of abstract decoration has been created by Islamic world that can be applied anywhere and artistically adds beauty where they are applied (Lewis, 1976). These motifs are geometrical and floral at the same time, as they are combination of curvilinear and rectilinear lines. Ornamentation is naturalistic in origin but leaves and floral patterns are stylized and enhance abstraction. The lines all along the roundel represents the rayed sun, a symbol of light from the next world but at the same time throws light towards the next world. It shows the light of guidance for the purification and lightening of the human soul (Ling, 2005). (Figure 10)

Arabesque designs are specifically associated with Islamic art as human and animal forms are not depicted in them. They are not only a pattern, but a representation of unending repeated motifs which create rhythm. These arabesque designs are composed of flowers, leaves and tendrils with the help of flowing line. Islam believes in the supremacy of God. Writing and decorating Qur'ān is the most sacred duty and these arabesque patterns are meant for illumination as they symbolically connected with the thought process from the outer margin leading to a central point. The arabesque has no beginning and no end and is limitless (Chavalier, & Gheerbran, 1996). So they were considered as a perfect illumination for copies of Qur'ān.

Illuminations of Sūrah heading also play an important role in symbolic illumination. New Sūrah heading is decorated with arabesque designs. (Figure 11) shows heading illuminated with floral arabesque pattern in golden flowing lines and delicate colorful flowers creating rhythm and representing glory of God.

The headings of different Sūrahs like Sūrah Ṭalāq,

Sūrah Ḥashar and Sūrah Hadid (Figure 12, 13, 14) are decorated with spiral illumination. Spiral is decending and diminishing series of circles and according to Muslim mystics, this movement initiates with God, has its way through the circle of prophecy and initiation and ends in the soul of mystic. It symbolizes the circumambulation of the Kaaba. In art, spiral create spirituality and is not a wordly representation but evoke metaphysical world (Papadopoulos, 1980). Spiral decoration

in the Book of Allah especially in the Sūrah heading is the symbolic representation of Muslim faith in divine and eternity. Gold color is used for decoration which is also known as the color of heaven and good council (Chavalier, & Gheerbran, 1996).

Three styles of decoration are visible behind Muḥaqqaq script. (Figure 15, 16) represents the abstract and realistic depiction of flowers and leaves in curvilinear lines, painted with thin golden color showing the rhythmic and circular movement.

Another folio (Figure 17) presents the filling of gold color behind the Muḥaqqaq script. The color is outlined with black color, adding charm and brightness to the page. Golden color here again is the symbolic representation of the light of heaven that is distributed equally all over the block and strongly highlighting the words of God.

On one folio, on the inner margin circular stamp measuring 1.6 inches bears the name "Umer." Thick circular outline is golden and within the dark blue filler, the name "Umer" is again written in gold color.

The circular stamp is painted within the diagonally written text of "Tafseer" with black and red ink. A finial is also added on the lower side of the page. It is painted on one of the later page and purpose of its depiction is unclear. (Figure 18)

Some floral decoration on the later pages in the rectangular blocks seems to be added later.

The flower and leaves painted here are not delicate, made with thick brush and lacks delicacy of the other illumination done in this manuscript. (Figure 19)

Nasser D. Khalili in his book "The TimeLine History of Islamic Art and Architecture" mentioned that Tabriz, Shirāz and Hirāt were important centers of Safavid Iran for the production of illuminated Qur'ānic manuscripts. Qur'āns were single-volume with medallions and oval vignettes on the outer margins. Muḥaqqaq and Naskhi script were favored and Sūrah headings were also decorated (Khalili, 2005). (Figure 20)

Two folios from another copy of Qur'ān is also from Iran, dated c. 1480-90 shows same kind of marginal decoration as in the Illuminated Qur'ān under description. The roundel, the turnip shaped vignettes and the finial along with the style of placement show higher degree of resemblance. Sūrah heading is also decorated with golden floral motifs and same style of rosettes is prominent within the verses. Thus proving that both the copies belong to same time period and the same place. (Figure 21)

Martin Ling in his book, "Splendors of Qur'ān Calligraphy and Illumination" describes the symbolic meaning of illumination used for Qur'ān. He clearly indicates that Muḥaqqaq and Naskhi script were favorite in Islamic East for copies of Qur'ān along with marginal decoration. Roundels and turnip shaped vignettes with finials were commonly used for the illumination of the Holy Book. Mostly blue and gold colors were used for embellishment. Use of rosettes within the verses is another similarity. So we can say that same style of decoration can also be seen in the Qur'āns written in Naskhi and other smaller scripts and in muḥaqqaq and other larger scripts in the Islamic East during the same time period. (Figure 22)

Later Islamic East show the production of large Qur'āns with elaborate embellishment like double marginal decorations along with fully decorated double frontispieces, in short more emphasis on decoration (Ling, 2005).

Documentation of Illuminated Qur'ānic Manuscript and its Impact on the Social System of the Subcontinent

Qur'ānic Manuscript and its Impact on the Social System of the Subcontinent

These scripts which traced their history from medieval age to the 19th century hardly appreciated by the people since they were unaware of those traditional setup and its significance regarding its script. It shows that in the subcontinent people were very much interested in that script at that time and their aesthetic sense was much better than today. This is how we can perceive the transformation of a social system that migrated from aesthetics to digital world. In the contemporary subcontinent people hardly appreciate such script as far the calligraphy is concerned.

Although people are interested in the Quranic scripts which are which are in multicolour to understand the meanings of the Arabic script yet they are non-Arabic so want to get acquainted with the language with different colours. Ironically people are very much interested in keeping Quran in very much sophisticated covers but hardly have they acted upon the teachings of Quran. Undoubtedly, the aesthetic effects that are used for the production of new books of Quran are appreciated by the people in the subcontinent out of reverence.

Customarily what is scripted between the lines of Arabic script, to make the translation comprehensible without changing the original meanings is a real task that is appreciable and commendable on the part of the production of new books of Quran. There are visual and audio sources of Quran where different technologically sophisticated softwares are being used in the contemporary subcontinent and making a serious impact on the social life of the local people.

Such Quranic version which are assisted with technological tools are very much beneficial for special people especially who have been visually impaired and unable to read Quran. Such technology ridden Quranic versions are also designed aesthetically but far different in their grace and beauty than the scripts of Quran that we discussed earlier used to exist in the medieval period.

It is evident that until or unless the Quran is learnt and implemented in the lives of individual, it cannot make any difference in the social system even it has been written in the most beautiful, artistic and best script of all ages. The Muslim history of the the subcontinent was more indulged in unIslamic practices which penetrated in the society so deep that no version or script of Quran could change the meanings of their life. Quran has not been a book of exposing for its beauty but a book for Hidaya as the Quran itself narrates in Sura ALbaqra, “ It is a source of correction for the noble people. Therefore, calligraphy of Quran is just a way to produce such NUSKHAS which might be the source of pleasure for the rich wealthy and mughal emperors in the subcontinent. Quran believes in the noble attitude of the people while they interact with each other instead of reading and writing quran in its best way.

Conclusion

Ab'IFazl, famous writer of the Mughal courtsaid, "The written letter is the spiritual geometry emanating from the pen of invention." This point of view has some resemblance to Plato's concept that writing is the geometry of the soul (Grases, & Junod, (2010). Writing and illumination of Qur'ān has a very important place in Islamic art. This is related to the faith and spirituality of Muslims. The presence of the Qur'ān among the finite is the symbolic and mysterious presence of the infinite (Ling, 2005). The decorative patterns like arabesques, spirals, and circles all are symbolic of the continuity, infinity and permanence as Qur'an is going to be a continuous source of guidance for the faithful and is going to remain forever as Allah has promised. One can observe a continuity and an evolution in the art of copying Qur'ān. The purpose of the Islamic sacred art is to present the divine beauty as according to the Islamic faith, God is beautiful and likes beauty. The documentation of this copy of Qur'ān suggests that beauty and majesty are inseparable as writing styles and illumination, both have symbolic meanings. These elegant and magnificent art forms are now rare with the introduction of the printing press to the Islamic world. For this purpose, this hand-written copy is recorded, preserved and presented before the world.

We have to review our thinking regarding the calligraphic art of writing Quran in the most beautiful way is important or the teachings of Quran are important to decorate our lives for the world hereafter. Of course we believe in decorating our lives according to Islamic and Quranic junctions instead of just getting pleased out of its calligraphic artistic specimens.

Documentation of Illuminated Qur'ānic Manuscript and its Impact on the Social System of the Subcontinent

References

- Ahmed, N. (2004). *Lahore Museum a gallery of our culture*. Lahore: Sang-e- Meel Publications, 44.
- Ashrafi, M. M. & Soucek, P. (1996). *Arts of book and painting*. UNESCO, 473-475.
- Chavalier, J. & Gheerbran, A. (1996). *A dictionary of symbols* translated from the Spanish by Jack Sage, New York: Philosophical Library, 38-39.
- Cirlot, J. E. (1962). *A Dictionary of Symbols: Translated from the Spanish by Jack Sage, Foreword by Herbert Read*. Routledge & K. Paul.
- Grases, M. S., & Junod, B. (2010). *Treasures of the Aga Khan Museum: Arts of the book and calligraphy*. Istanbul: Sabanci University and Sakip Sabanci Museum.
- Lewis, B. (1976). *The world of Islam*. London: Thames and Hudson, 156.
- The Farjam Collection. *Holy Quran Exhibition Catalogue*. Dubai: Hafiz Foundation, 56.
- Lings, M. (2005). *Splendours of Quran calligraphy and illumination*. Vaduz: Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation, 20052.
- Khalili, N. D. (2005). *The timeline history of Islamic art and architecture*. China: Worth Press, 55.
- Schimmel, A. (1992). *Islamic calligraphy*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 16.
- Papadopoulos, A. (1980). *Islam and Muslim art*. London: Thames and Hudson, 101, 102.

Figure 1:
*Qur'ān with
Persian
translation
placed in Lahore
Museum*

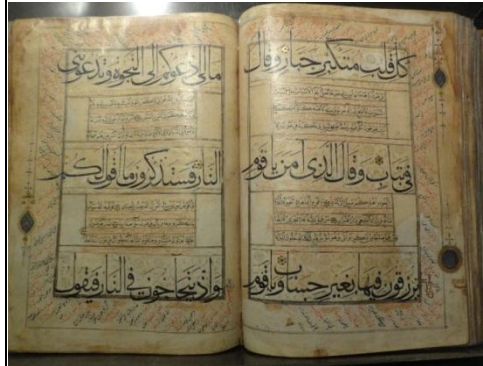


Figure 2:
*Display card
suggesting
details of
calligraphy and
the date and
place of the
Manuscript*

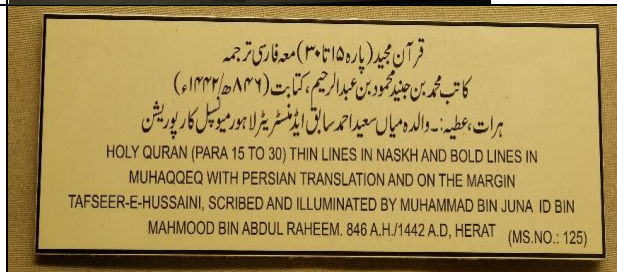


Figure 3: *First
page of the
Qur'ān
mentioning the
name of the
calligrapher and
the illuminator.*

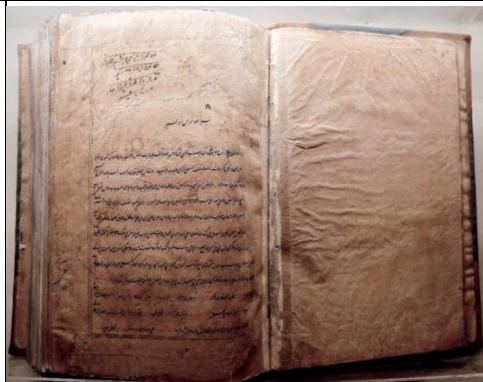


Figure 4: *A folio*



Documentation of Illuminated Qur'ānic Manuscript and its Impact on the Social System of the Subcontinent

Figure 5:
Double page of the Qur'ān showing details of page format



Figure 6:
Another folio

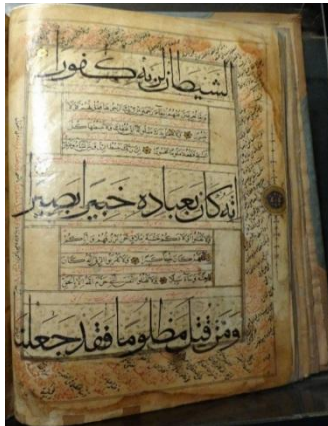


Figure 7: *Last page of the Qur'ān.*

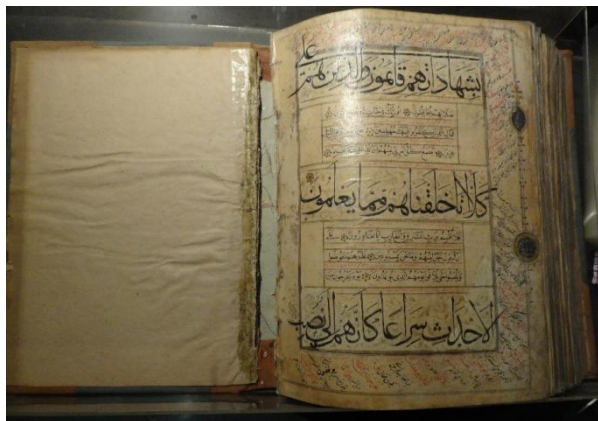


Figure 8:
Decoration on
the outer margin.



Figure 9: A
turnip shaped
vignette with
arabesque
patterns and
finial



Figure 10:
Roundel with
rays, arabesque
patterns and
finial.



Figure 11:
Arabesque
patterns used in
Sūrah Heading.



Documentation of Illuminated Qur’ānic Manuscript and its Impact on the Social System of the Subcontinent





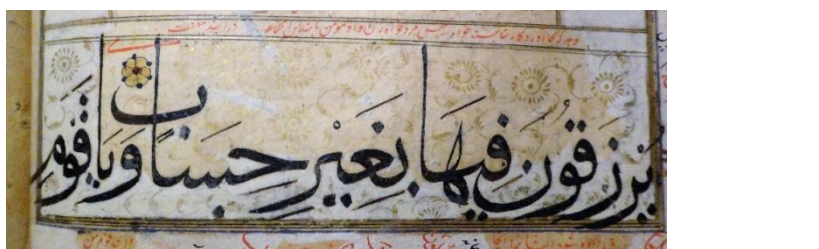

<p>Figure 12: <i>Sūrah Ṭalāq</i></p>	
<p>Figure 13: <i>Sūrah Hashar</i></p>	
<p>Figure 14: <i>Sūrah Hadid.</i></p>	
<p>Figure 15: <i>Decoration behind muhaqqaq script</i></p>	
<p>Figure 16: <i>Floral decoration behind muhaqqaq script</i></p>	
<p>Figure 17: <i>Gold filling behind muhaqqaq script.</i></p>	

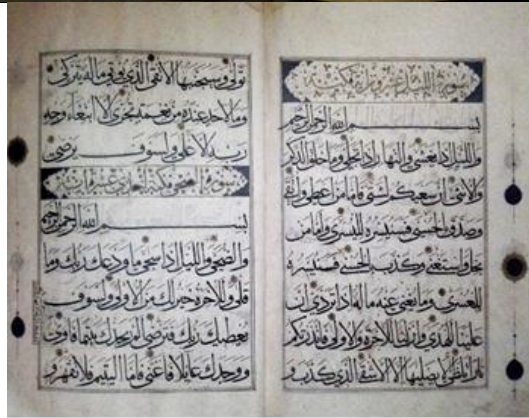
Figure 18:
Circular stamp
with Umer.



Figure 19:
Decoration
added later



Figure 20: Two folios written in muhaqqaq, with sura headings in gold thuluth, from a single-volume Qur'an. Iran, Tabriz or Shiraz, c. 1480-90. Source: *The TimeLine History of Islamic Art and Architecture*. P 55.



Documentation of Illuminated Qur'ānic Manuscript and its Impact on the Social System of the Subcontinent

Figure 21:

Example of smaller cursive script. Iran or Iraq. 15th century

Source:
Splendours of Qur'ān
Calligraphy and Illumination



Figure 22:

Example of larger script. Iran or Iraq
Source:
Splendours of Qur'ān
Calligraphy and Illumination

