

Manuscripts Of The Holy Qur'an Copied In India (On The Example Of The Reigns Of Babur, Humayun And Akbar)

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a comprehensive study of the manuscripts of the Holy Quran copied in India during the Babur (Mughal) dynasty (1526–1858), analyzing them through historical, artistic, and aesthetic dimensions. Special attention is given to the Qurans produced during the reigns of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, Nasiruddin Humayun, and Jalaluddin Akbar, whose periods marked the foundation, consolidation, and cultural flourishing of the Mughal Empire. The article explores the development of manuscript-writing traditions, the evolution of calligraphic schools, and the introduction of various scripts such as suls, naskh, and nastaliq under royal patronage.

In addition, the research highlights the decorative techniques applied in manuscript illumination, including the use of gold and lapis pigments, floral arabesques, and geometric patterns reflecting the synthesis of Persian, Central Asian, and Indian artistic elements. The role of royal ateliers (kitabkhana) in promoting refined calligraphy and miniature art is examined as a major factor in shaping the aesthetic identity of Qurans of this era. The article also traces the movement and preservation of these manuscripts over time, noting their dispersion across major libraries and museum collections in London, Delhi, Istanbul, and Tashkent.

Through a comparative analysis of stylistic and paleographic features, the study provides new insights into how the Baburid intellectual and cultural environment influenced the spiritual visuality of Quranic manuscripts. By documenting their current condition and conservation practices, the paper underscores the importance of these works as invaluable witnesses of Islamic art and intercultural dialogue between East and South Asia.

Keywords: - Akbar, Babur, Humayun, India, Babur dynasty, manuscript, Holy Quran, calligraphy, suls, decoration, illumination, copy, preservation.

INTRODUCTION

Manuscripts of the Holy Quran are an important scientific and cultural heritage of Islamic culture.

They are not only of religious importance, but also serve as an invaluable source in the fields of art, history, literature and decoration. In particular,

during the Babur dynasty (1526–1858), manuscripts of the Quran were valued not only as religious texts, but also as high examples of the art of calligraphy and miniature. An article entitled “Famous Qurans of India” was published about this. The author of the article focuses on three famous manuscripts from the region, one of which is a 7th-century Quran attributed to Ali (RA) stored in the Rampur Riza Library in Rampur, the second is the Quran of Aurangzeb, one of the Babur rulers, and the third is information about a copy gifted to Abdullah, the then Emir of Allahabad, in the first quarter of 18th century.

The traditions of calligraphy and decoration inherited from the Timurid era reached a new level during the Babur era. In this process, the copying and decoration of Quranic manuscripts was considered not only a religious need, but also an important part of artistic and cultural development.

In 2018, the prestigious cultural organization under the Ministry of Culture of the Government of India organized the first-ever exhibition of “Holy Quran” manuscripts written in various calligraphic styles and written in different periods, namely from the 7th to the 19th centuries AD, in Delhi an exhibition was organized. The copies displayed in it are copied in Kufic, Naskh, Rayhan, and Suls scripts, and most of them belong to the Babur period.

Manuscripts from the time of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur are distinguished by their simplicity and spiritual purity. Historical sources indicate that Babur was personally interested in calligraphy and copied the Quran in the “Babur script” style he invented. This is reported in the article “Mushafi Baburi” by the Afghan scholar Muhammad Halim Yarkin. According to the scholar, this manuscript is decorated in Babur’s personal style of calligraphy, using Kashmiri paper and Indian calligraphy, and is one of the first mushafs from the Babur era. In 2004, the scientific committee of the “Babur International Foundation” brought a photocopy of this mushaf from Iran and presented it to the “Babur and World Culture” Museum in Andijan.

The proliferation of Quranic manuscripts continued during the reign of Humayun Mirza (1530–1540, 1555–1556). Several copies from this period are preserved in the Rampur Riza Library in India (No. 9859 D, No. 4159 D, No. 973 M, etc.).

Although some manuscripts are not dated, their codicological features - paper type, style of

decoration, and calligraphy - allow us to estimate them as belonging to the reign of Humayun or Akbar. In these manuscripts, too, the traditional naskh and suls scripts predominate, and they are decorated with gold letters and multi-colored frames.

The reign of Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar (1556–1605) was one of the highest stages of the cultural development of the Baburites. The ruler patronized science, art and literature and actively supported the reproduction of Qur'an manuscripts.

As a result of the research, 18 manuscripts copied during the reign of Akbar were identified. They are stored in various libraries and archives of India and in world-famous museum-libraries of Europe. If we look at them chronologically, the first copy of them dates back to 1575. Currently, it is stored in the Nizam Museum in Hyderabad under the number NM No. No. 4. The remaining copies are in the Nadwatul Ulama of Lucknow (NW Ms. 17, 1578), Rampur Riza of Rampur (RRL MSS Accession No. 1, 1580), Bhopal State Archives (9, 1582), Britannia in London (Or. 12988, 1589), Chester Beatty in Dublin (MS Is 1433, 1590), and Bodleian Library in Oxford (MS. Pers. d. 89, 1595). Most of these manuscripts are decorated with gold and silver, and their pages are wrapped in elegant frames. These manuscripts demonstrate the high level of calligraphy at the Mughal court.

The manuscripts of the Holy Quran from the Mughal dynasty initiated a new phase in the traditions of calligraphy and decoration in the Islamic world. The manuscripts created with Babur's personal participation, the schools of calligraphy during the reign of Humayun, and the flourishing of calligraphy and printing during the reign of Akbar demonstrate the continuity of this process. These manuscripts are today preserved in libraries and museums in Britain, India, the Netherlands, the Vatican, and Uzbekistan, and serve as the scientific basis of Baburian culture.

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