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## **Analysis of Illuminated Manuscript of Qur'an at Ganj Bakhsh Library Islamabad**

**Saima Syed**

### **Abstract**

*This study focuses on illuminated manuscripts of the Qur'an and samples have been collected from Ganj Bakhsh Library (GBL), Islamabad. The purpose of this study is to highlight the common and uncommon dependent variables (calligraphy, glossy golden dots, colours, floral and geometrical shapes, marginal frames, Surah Heading, Surah indication (rosette, medallion), marginal design, variance in paper/page size, binding style and clouds underlining the text) and independent variable(time) of the sample. GBL collection is from different regions of subcontinent, Iran, Afghanistan and Kashmir. The study divided the samples into two groups. Group "A" (text with translation) and "B" (text without translation). The study is conducted under the theoretical framework of manuscriptology.*

### **Introduction**

The Qur'an is a holy book of Muslims. Initially, it was written on regional available material (stone, animal skin, bones and leaves). Gradually, it transforms into book form (horizontal and vertical). In the Muslim art, the field of illuminated manuscript of the Qur'an is an important subject. The illumination may be defined as the process of beautification of the manuscript or a written page with a variety of calligraphic styles, colours and designs. The Holy books are specially beautified to make them prominent and significant among other books. Divine religion followers (like Muslims, Christians and Jews) have fundamental beliefs in Holy writings. The words of these Holy writings are highly respected. The extreme love and respect resulted in the use of visual ornamentation and production of illuminated manuscripts with extraordinary care and design sensitivity.

The ancient illuminated Islamic manuscripts are not organized and properly placed. These are present in various places and even in scattered portions and parts. A significant proportion of these illuminated Islamic manuscripts had been lost, destroyed and stolen. It has been observed that many Qur'an's leaves are found in the various parts of the world.

Sometimes it is hard to find, out the name of the artist or calligrapher of ancient manuscripts. Art historians classified the illuminated manuscripts in terms of typology and chronology. In the initial centuries of the Islamic glorious era, the art of the book is emphasized to the manuscript of the Holy Qur'an. The classification of the arts of the book is as calligraphy, illumination, illustration and book binding.

Initially the calligraphy was practiced as decorative way and then gradually with the passage of time; the inscriptions are decorated with different elements. The commonly used elements include foliage (leaves, flowers, fruits and vegetables). There was no usage of animal and human representation as these are prohibited in the Islam. For the illumination of borders, gold, silver leaves, red, black ink, reed pen and brush were used. After thorough evaluation of artistic work, it may be concluded that it was for the royal class due to the usage of most expensive, highly decorated material. It is also a time-consuming activity. The illumination/decoration is normally planned at the beginning of the manuscript writing and done after the completion of the text.

Ganj Bakhsh Library (GBL) has a variety of illuminated manuscripts. The selected manuscript of Holy Qur'an can be divided into two categories. The first category "A" includes the manuscript of the Holy Qur'an with Translation and commentary (sample no 1618, 825) the second category "B" includes manuscripts of the Qur'an without translation and commentary (sample no 10049, 10071)

Aims and objective of this study is to find out the various decorative elements (variables) in the selected illuminated manuscripts of the Quran. The study is based on primary (physical analysis) and secondary data drawn from the various sources.

### **Main Feature of Sample**

The first line of every part and word Allah is golden of this sample (1618 group A). A text box is enclosed in frames. Golden circles with blue outline are designed on deep red background. Other pages are less illuminated and outer margins contain a zigzag commentary on the path of the text. A large pear shaped marginal illuminated medallion mark a new *Juz* in the gold *thulath* script (Fig 2). *Shamsa* medallion (Fig 3) is commonly used for the indication of *raqu*, *sajda*, *rubā*, *nisaf* and *salasa*. *Sura Maryam* is designed the way like Indian manuscript of the Qur'an has adopted.



Fig. 1 - Sample 1618 (Photo by the Author, source: *GBL*), six lines only for opening pages and fifteen lines per page.

It is a combination of Indo- Persian patterns and colour palettes with outstanding combination. This Indian *naskh* script called *bihari/bihari*. J.P Losty argued on the assigned name of script *bihari* like “This term of vague origin unlikely refers to the Bihar region of India, where no tradition of manuscript copying” (Losty 1982). It was promoted under the patronage of *Sultan* of Jawnpur in the 15th century CE, kings of Bengal and Mughal sultans (Blair 2006). According to the James, the tradition of the copying Qur’an in this script appears to have been short- lived, coinciding with the period between the collapse of the Delhi *sultanate* in the last year of the 14<sup>th</sup>

century CE and the consolidation of Mughal rule in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century CE (James 1992). A few features are common like floral spray, detailed and delicate design, border, text box, double pages with Timurid and Turkoman Qur'ans. Indo-Pakistani manuscript of Holy Qur'an may easily be distinguished by the characteristic version of *naskh* (*Bihari* script).



Fig. 2 - A large pear shaped marginal illuminated medallion (Photo by the Author).



Fig. 3 - Shamsa marginal medallion (Photo by the Author).

The layout and design (of sample 825, Fig 4) resemble to the manuscript of the Holy Qur'an described by the Blair in her book "Islamic Calligraphy".

She explained about the Holy Qur'an "it was transcribed in the land of Kashmir in 1759-60 CE". She further described that a copy in Tehran whose colophon specified the actual date. Kashmir emerged as a new centre for the fine manuscript production in seventeenth and eighteenth century CE. The Holy Qur'an was transcribed in a fine, bold *naskh* and *aya* marked by black outlined golden rounds. The text of the opening and ending pages are set in clouds bands.



Fig. 4 - Sample 825, eight lines of text with sarloh, Borders of the pages filled with Persian translation and explanation of Arabic text (Photo by the Author).

Every page has three colourful triangles (Fig. 4), add the beauty in the commentary. All pages have the eleven lines except the first page of *sura Bakrah* (eight lines). The Arabic text is in *naskh* (enclosed with clouds) and

Persian translation in *nasta'liq* script. Text in black and diacritic marks are in red. This manuscript of the Holy Qur'an has a unique *sarloh* with a variety of colours. And the paper they used called *Hirati*. The manuscript of the Qur'an (10049, group B, Fig 5) is handy-sized and portable of 1200 Hijri (which is approximately around 1785 CE) by unknown artist.



Fig. 5 - Sample 10049, page layout, double faced sample, photographed by Syed Umer Armaghan (Photo by the Author).

Prominent blue background of first and last pages enhance the golden colour. Opening illuminated pages are designed in three parts. The first part is a beautiful vertical frame. A flower bud pattern enclosed the whole frame. Secondly, there is a text box inside the vertical frame and thirdly, the highly-illuminated part is full of colours and flower patterns inside and outside the golden arches.



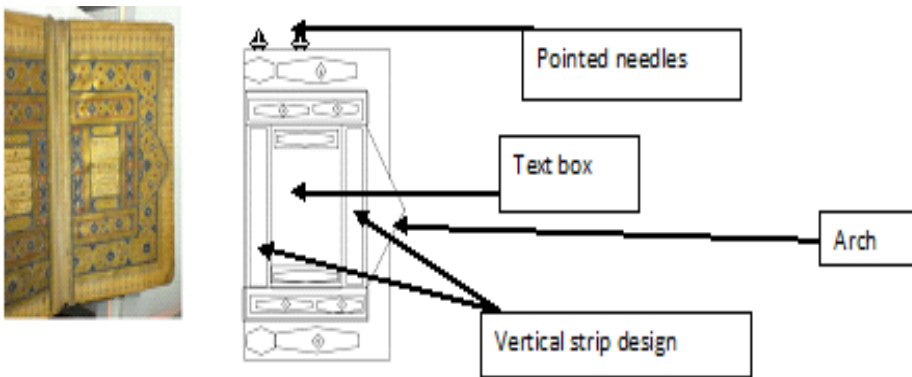


Fig. 6 - Design layout of sample 10071 (Group B) Design layout of sample 10071 (Group B) (Drawings by the Author).

The sample no. 10071 (Group B) manuscript was transcribed in eleven hundred *Hijri* which corresponds roughly to 17<sup>th</sup> century CE. It was an experimental work by an unknown artist during the Mughal rule. For the elaboration of layout both facing illuminated pages may be divided in four parts.

The First part is vertical in shape and 5 lines of black text wrapped by golden clouds within the box. Aya marker is a small circle with four blue dots on its surroundings at equal distance. During the Mamluk rule, Ahmad al-Mutatabbib transcribed the manuscript of the Qur'an at Cairo in 1330 CE which had rosette at the end of every *aya* (Blair2006). The second part is an illuminated vertical frame which is made of four designed (with floral and geometric) stripes. The third part has a prominent arch, placed in the middle of the both facing pages. Which breaks the sequence of the fourth part of the layout. Arch background is golden.

The different patterns and colour combinations, enhanced the beauty of the page. Corners of the facing pages have a flat leaf gold pattern filled with floral repeated patterns of the red range along with the Centre aliened blue pattern. Fourth part has a series of pointed needles with three leaves on its head. That is also repeated in the arch of the *Sura Baqrah head piece* in this sample.

These manuscripts have lined (ruled) frames and the margins are very narrow. Ruled frames are rare in Mamluk's manuscripts of Qur'ans initially (Gallop 2006). A manuscript of Qur'an belonging to the Mamluk

period (15<sup>th</sup> century CE) had ruled frame. From the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the manuscripts of the Qur'an from Turkey, Iran and China have a verity of ruled frames. It reveals that the ruled frames were in fashion during the 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> century CE in various parts of the Islamic world.

S No	Q.no	N of Page	Ink	Group	Internal Width (cm)	External Height (cm)	External Width (cm)	External Height (cm)
1	10049	798	Black	B	8	13	9	14
2	10071	648	Black	B	6	12	11	18
3	1618	1164	Black, Gold, Blue	A	14	23.5	22.5	34
4	825	980	Black	A	11	20.5	15.9	22.4

Table 1 - Features of Samples

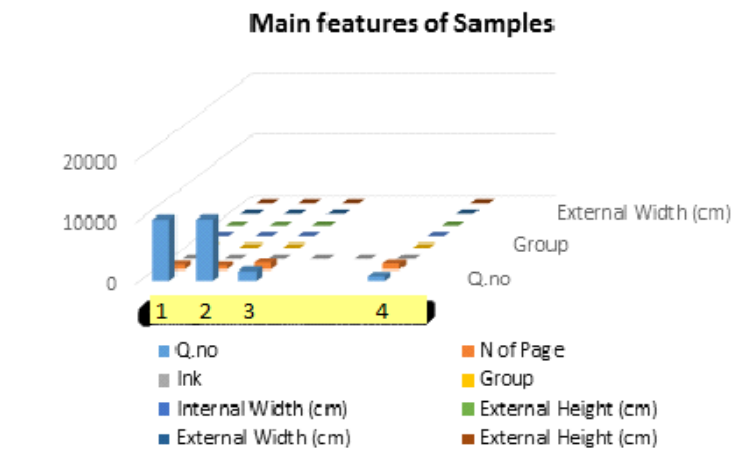


Chart 1 - Features of Qur'an Sample (10049, 10071, 1618, 825) (Chart by the Author).



According to the Graph first two samples are almost close due to certain reason, firstly assigned number is in 5 digits, secondly belong to the same group / category, thirdly text ink is black in both samples, fourthly there is a minor difference in external width, internal width and external height of the pages. Next two samples have not similar characteristics. Their differences are, script, paper quality, colour combination, page layout, diacritical marks and size.

S No	Q. No.	Calligraphy	Paper	Colour	Condition	Clouds	Decorated Both (front and back)
1	10049	Naskh	Kashmiri	black blue red white golden	Good	No	Both
2	10071	Naskh	Kashmiri	black red golden blue	Good	Yes	Both
3	1618	Bahari	Samarqandi	black red golden blue	Damaged	No	One first and two last pages
4	825	Naskh	Hirati	pink golden black blue red	Damaged	Yes	Both

Table 2. Characteristics of Samples

\* \* \*

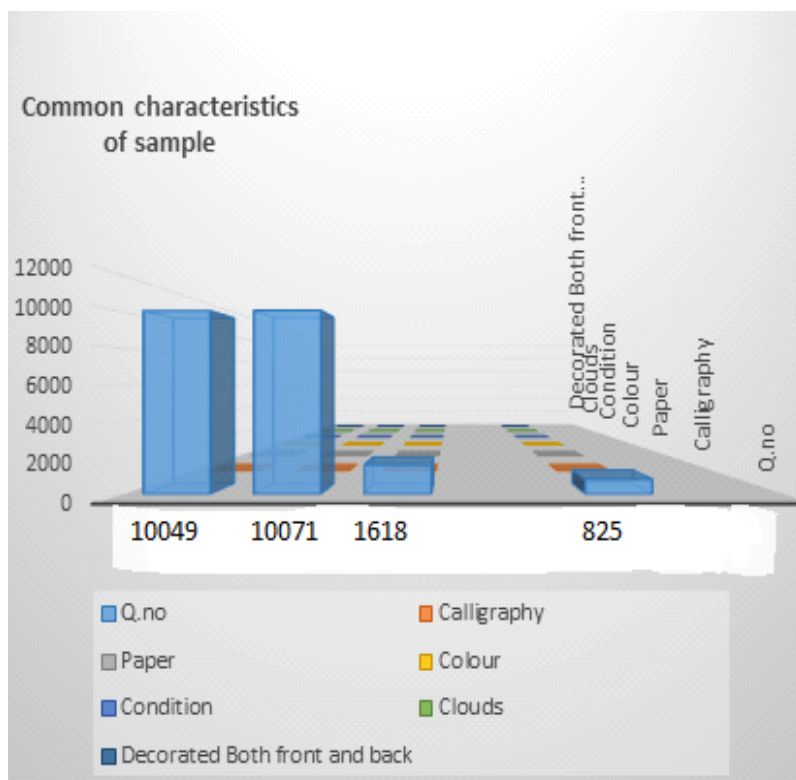


Chart 2 - Common characteristics of samples (Chart by the Author).

The Selected manuscripts of Qur'an can be categorized based on size into three classes small, medium and large. Sample numbers 10049 (16 lines per page), 10071 (14 lines per page) belongs to small as their size of the pages are 8x13cm and 6x12x5cm. Sample 825 is medium in size (20.5x15.9cm and 11lines per page). The larger sample is 1618 (15lines per page).

## Conclusion

In first group (A) samples are different in size, style and have their own identity (overall design) along with common variables. Though these variables are the part of each design, but in a different way. As this study mention time as the independent variable, so it shows the changes in the behaviour of its dependent variables. Like in the second group (called B) table 1 shows that most of the elements (variables) are same in both samples. But chronological order (1100, 1200 *Hijri*) indicated a lot of

differences, firstly, regional and foreign influences on script, colour application and design pattern secondly page layout, thirdly diacritic marks (simplified by the time).

Artistic preferences and high class involvement also fashioned the hybrid style. This fusion created a little bit difficult for the indication of the specific style. Sample 10071 is hybrid (inspired by the Ottoman and Safavid style) in nature. Different elements of design are introduced by the artist like marginal frames has no significant importance at the beginning, gradually it became a part of illumination which may be due to two reasons, first for the alignment of the page (just to separate the text box from marginal text) which gives some extra spaces for binding and second for beautification. This study indicates that the first reason is more appropriate because marginal lines and ruled frames separate the text box from the marginal text and other indicators aesthetically which enhances the importance of text.

Sample no 1618 is a very different from the others. The words in this manuscript are not congested like other samples. While one line has maximum six words. The words are clear and easily readable due to sufficient space between them. The last letter of the word is swiftly laid down as in the honour of the next word.

### **Acknowledgement**

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