

CHRISTIE'S

MEDIA ALERT | London
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OUTSTANDING RESULTS FOR AN UNRECORDED QUR'AN PALIMPSEST COPIED ON AN EARLIER COPTIC BIBLE **AS IT ACHIEVES £596,750**



A QUR'AN PALIMPSEST WRITTEN ON AN EARLIER COPTIC BIBLE
PROBABLY EGYPT, SECOND CENTURY AH/CIRCA 8TH CENTURY AD AND EARLIER

Estimate: £80,000 – 120,000

Price realised: £596,750

London – Christie's is pleased with the results achieved for the palimpsest of a Qur'an copied onto a Christian text, realising **£596,790** during the [Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds Including Oriental Rugs and Carpets](#) auction, which is still ongoing. As [Lot 1](#) of the sale, this remarkable manuscript dates to the earliest period of Islam. The leaves from these folios derive from an earlier Coptic manuscript containing passages from the Book of Deuteronomy, which is part of the Torah and the Christian Old Testament. It was very probably produced in Egypt, home to the Coptic community, at the time of the Arab conquest. This appears to be the only recorded example of a Qur'an written above a Christian text, and the importance of this manuscript resonates with the historical reality of religious communities in the Near East and as such is an invaluable survival from the earliest centuries of Islam. Christie's is honoured to have offered it at auction in London.

This remarkable discovery was made with the help of French scholar Dr. Eléonore Cellard, as the folios are in fact a palimpsest, a manuscript from which the first writing has been effaced so that the vellum could be reused. Beneath the Arabic script an original Coptic text may clearly be seen.

The [Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds Including Oriental Rugs and Carpets](#) sale continues.

Dr. Eléonore Cellard, Postdoctoral fellowship at Collège de France, Paris *“This is a very important discovery for the history of the Qur’an and early Islam. We have here a witness of cultural interactions between different religious communities.”*

Eleonore Cellard is attached to the College de France, a leading academic institution based in Paris. She works under the supervision of Prof Déroche, the leading expert in the field of early Islamic scripts and early Islamic codicology.

Qur’anic palimpsests are extremely rare and only a handful are known:

1. Two leaves from a 7th century Hijazi Qur’an, sold at Christie’s, London, 8 April 2008, lot 20 (sold £2,484,500) and 01 May 2001, lot 12 (sold for £163,250). The Qur’anic text is copied above an earlier version of the Qur’an.
2. The late 7th /early 8th century Mingana-Lewis Palimpsest (MS Or.1287) at the Cambridge University Library. The Hijazi script has been erased and the leaves were used for a 9th /10th century codex of Christian Arabic homilies produced in Palestine. The palimpsest was acquired by Agnes Smith Lewis in Suez in 1895.
3. A leaf from a 7th century Hijazi Qur’an in San’a (*Masahif San’a*, exhibition catalogue, Kuwait, 1983, cat.4, p.59). The surviving Qur’anic text is copied above an earlier version of the Qur’an.
4. The present folios, dating from the 8th century.

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**Please note when quoting estimates above that other fees will apply in addition to the hammer price - see Section D of the Conditions of Sale at the back of the sale catalogue.*

**Estimates do not include buyer’s premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer’s premium and are reported net of applicable fees.*

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Images available on request

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