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The £60,000 book

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Posted by: Keach Hagey on March 4, 2010 4:07 PM

Tags: British Library, facsimile, Facsimile Editions, qur'an, Sultan Baybars' Qur'an



The highlight of my Abu Dhabi book fair experience so far was this book, a leather-bound facsimile of a 14th-century Qur'an written entirely in large, gold script interspersed with jaw-dropping illumination.

The original was commissioned by Sultan Baybars II in 1304, during the Mamluk Sultanate, in Cairo, and today is housed in The British Library in London. It's considered one of the world's great manuscript treasures, but if you happen to want a copy for your personal library, you can have it, all seven volumes -- for a cool £60,000.

Aside from the beauty of the object itself, the interesting thing about it was the peek it offered into the very risky world of high-quality manuscript reproduction. Facsimile Editions, the British company producing the replica, is producing the edition as a private venture. To give you a sense of what goes into the making of one of these things, the company has done 13 of them in the last 30 years. This is its most expensive to date.

"We've just starting recently," with the Qur'an, said Linda Falter, who runs the business with her husband, Michael. "We've done some pages and we're hoping to complete it within three years. We are looking for a sponsor. It could be single people or somebody who wants the whole edition."

Sponsors have the option to commit to buying the whole print run upfront for a reduced price, or to buying part. At the moment, Mrs Falter said the company was considering a run of 175 copies, though it had not yet decided for sure. Once it does decide, however, that's it. To preserve the value, the edition must be limited.

A word in the company's promotional materials notes: "The reproduction of the Baybars Qur'an is the most ambitious and largest facsimile project in the history of publishing." Maybe it will get its own spot in the British Library.

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