Early Qur'anic Fragments

by Adam Gacek

The present paper is a description of 21 early Qur'anic leaves preserved at McGill University. Looking at the extant specimens, as well as classical Arabic literature, the author attempts to review our knowledge of the development of some of the Qur'anic hands and to re-examine a number of primary sources.

Cette article décrit 21 feuillets anciens du Coran qui sont archivés à l'Université McGill. Par l'étude des spécimens conservés et de la littérature arabe classique, l'auteur tente de dresser l'acquis de nos connaissances sur l'évolution de certaines écritures coraniques et d'étudier sous un jour nouveau de nombreuses sources primaires.

Among some 200 fragments and calligraphs preserved in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections of McLennan Library, there are 20 early fragments of the Qur'an written on parchment and paper. One additional parchment leaf is preserved in the Islamic Studies Library. Most of these fragments were acquired in or around 1938 from two main sources: A. Khan Monif of New York and Kirkor Minassian. Some were in the possession of F. Cleveland Morgan, the great McGill benefactor, who donated them to the University Library. The last item is a gift from the former President of Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba, and presented to the Islamic Studies Library in 1959.

QUR'ANIC HANDS

This small collection of fragments represents a variety of scripts and styles. Even so, many a scholar, contemporary or not, would term most of them as Kufi or Kufic. This tendency resulted from a lack of any satisfactory system for the correct identification of Arabic scripts. Even though many names of these early scripts have survived recorded in various Arabic sources, with perhaps one or two exceptions they do not tell us anything about the real characteristics of these scripts. In this seemingly hopeless situation, a glimmer of light has been found by using an approach based on a classification which groups these scripts according to a very specific palaeographical method consisting of data which relate to the shape of such letters as alif, 'ayn, mim, waw, haa' and lam-alf. This new approach found its expression in several recent publications by F. Déroche and, in particular, in his catalogue of a large collection of Qur'anic fragments preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Having said this, however, and with full awareness of the importance of this approach, it seems to me that the palaeographer cannot entirely abandon the written Arabic tradition concerning the development of the Arabic script and its calligraphic manifestations. True, many errors have been committed by relying solely on this classical Arabic tradition, but one still hopes that a discovery of yet another unknown text or even a passage will elucidate an unclear and ambiguous appellation. For after all, it is much more satisfactory and easier to use a concrete label such as Hijazi or Irāqi rather than an invented system of classification consisting of letters and numbers. The label, however, has to be clearly defined.

My observations based on the present collection and other reproduced specimens of
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early Qur'anic fragments prompt me to make a few comments which may not be all that novel to some Arabic palaeographers but might encourage further discussion. These comments should not be taken as conclusive.

I. There seems to be no doubt that the early development of the Arabic script followed two somewhat different paths. The simultaneous existence of curvilinear and rectilinear dacty had been primarily caused by two major needs of the Arabic state and society, namely, the need to issue state documents and conduct correspondence, on the one hand, and the need to copy the Holy Writ, on the other. The divine message, in the eyes of Muslims, could not be copied in just any script. It deserved something more hieratic and majestic. This, however, does not mean that the Qur'an was not copied in scripts which exhibited curvilinear features. On the contrary, we find that some of these early Qur'anic scripts were not as "angular" as they are often portrayed and that they were influenced by Syriac. This influence has already been pointed out by Nabia Abbott, among others. That this influence must have been quite considerable is attested by the fact that in the time of Muhammad, copies of the Qur'an were not infrequently produced by Christians. 'Abd Allah ibn Abi Dā'ūd (d. 275/889), for example, mentions that 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Abi 'Awf (d. 326/939) paid sixty dirhams to a Christian from al-Hirah for a copy of the Qur'an and 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Abi Laylā (d. 401/611) paid seventy dirhams. A copy of the Qur'an was also made by a Christian for a certain 'Alqamah. The Syriac influence is traceable not only to the estrangelo, but also to the Jacobite (serto) and Nestorian varieties. In this short overview, I will concentrate on one letter in particular, the alif. The characteristic alif in serto with a wavy shaft and a left-sloping barbed (or knobbed, hooked) head (known in Mamluk literature as tarwis) is recognizable in one entire group of Arabic scripts which François Deroche classifies as NS and proposes to call "broken cursive" (la cursive brisée).

We read in Kitāb al-kuttāb of Abd Allāh al-Baghdādi (fl. 3/9th cent.) that the people of al-Hirah used a script called al-Jazm, which was then learned by the people of al-Kūfah. If Abbott's proposed explanation of jāzm as coming from the Syriac gezne and meaning "cut rods" (a possible reference to the straight upstrokes in estrangelo) is true (and there is no reason not to accept it), then the Kūfī proper (i.e. the script used by the people of al-Kūfah) must have been heavily influenced by the somewhat stiff appearance of this script. Al-Baghdādi also tells us that the people of al-Anbār used a script called al-Mashq and explains that it was characterised by lightness (jībi khaṣṣah). He goes on to say that mashq in the phrase mashaqubu bi-al-rumāh means "he pierced him with a spear in a nimble and uninterrupted stroke" (tas'abhatu ta'nanu khaṣṣan mutatābanān). Moreover, Ibn Abi Dā'ūd in his Kitāb al-masāḥif tells us that to write in mashq, characterised as zād al-masāh ("extra flowing"), was disliked and when Ibn Sirin was asked why, he answered "there is in it imperfection (naqṣ); do you not see how the alif is plunging (drowning), it should be brought (thrown) back (restored)" (alā tarā al-alif kayfa yughbarriqūha yanbāqī an tartadd). The definitions of al-Mashq as given by al-Baghdādi and Ibn Abi Dā'ūd appear to be substantially different from the features attributed to it by Nabia Abbott. The fact that we are told that writing in mashq was disliked is significant, for it implies that this script was not considered worthy of the Qur'an. One could, therefore, assume that it was not deemed as hieratical as the other scripts. The recommendation was to copy the Qur'an in large formats and a large format would require a script of an appropriate size. Nabia Abbott even though recognizing the fact that using mashq was disliked, says "Yet it is not at all impossible to eliminate the evident faults of hasty writing and to produce a boldly extended yet carefully written script". The Mashq as characterised by N. Abbott is an elegant script, using large and bold letters!

The above description of the alif is also of significance. For if al-Mashq was the script used by the people of al-Anbār and if it was a light script, with the "plunging" alif it is likely to have been heavily influenced by serto...
and Nestorian. If this is the case, should we not expect to find in it the characteristic hooked alif? Furthermore, if these influences existed simultaneously one should be able to see the characteristics of serto and Nestorian in the specimens of this early period. One such early specimen can be found in al-Munajjid’s Dirrisiṣ, featuring a copy of the Qurʾān transcribed by Hudayj ibn Muʿawiya ibn Maslamah al-Anṣārī for ‘Uqbah ibn Nafiʿ al-Fahri (the founder of the city of Qayrawān) and dated 49 A.H./669 A.D.16 If the date of this copy is authentic (and there is no reason to believe otherwise), it is very likely that the NS category is much earlier than hitherto recognized, and that this NS category is directly linked to the serto and Nestorian scripts.

II. We are told by ʿAbd Allah al-Baghdādi that after the calligrapher Yūsuf Laqwah “invented” from al-jalīl a much lighter (abzaḥ) and more slender (ahxal) script, it so pleased the vizier Dhuʿal-Riʿasatayn al-Fadl ibn Sahl (d. 802/1402) that he ordered his secretaries to use it as the script of his chancery. The script consequently acquired the name ‘I/-Riʿisi.

Furthermore, Ibn al-Nadim informs us that a smaller version of this script called a/-Mūdawwar a/-Qābir, a/-Sagkir, (as opposed to a/-Mūdawwar a/-Kābir, being al-Riʿāsī) was used for writing in registers (dafaṭīr) and for the copying of hadith and poetry.17 If this “small round script” was a bookhand of the day we should look for it in the extant non-Qurʾānic codices of this early period. It is interesting to note here that most of these codices were written in scripts which share several common features, including the characteristic Syriac alif.16 During my work on Mamluk texts on calligraphy I found a specimen of the Riʿāsī script in the work of al-Tibi and the first thing which struck me was that, unlike other scripts, its alif has a tarwis protruding to the left.17 This important feature makes it stand out from among the other scripts. Naturally, the Riʿāsī of this late Mamluk period must have been quite different from the Riʿāsī of the late second/eighth century. However, it seems to me that such an important element as tarwis would have been the characteristic of all Riʿāsī-type scripts. If this indeed is the case, we have here a direct connection between the Riʿāsī family and the Syriac serto and Nestorian scripts. What a coincidence, therefore, that the name Riʿāsī should be derived from the same root as tarwis, its main characteristic!

III. We know that Dhuʿal-Riʿasatayn was a Persian and that the NS category, which is often called “Eastern Kufic”, is associated with Persia.18 It would be quite natural, therefore, to see in a truly Persian script such as Taʿliq some influence of the NS category. This we find in none other than the tarwis. The left-sloping tarwis in the Taʿliq is indeed its main feature.10 The Taʿliq was a chancery hand and it is for this reason that when it was adopted for the Ottoman chancery (diwān) it was given the name of Diwānī. The Diwānī not only preserved the left-sloping tarwis, but made it even longer than its “ancestor” Taʿliq.

But, according to our sources, al-Riʿāsī was primarily a chancery and “secular” (non-Qurʾānic) hand. However, this does not mean that this script, being already an established bookhand used for the transcription of prophetic sayings, could not have been used for the copying of the Qurʾān for more private purposes. Ibn al-Nadim informs us that one of the scripts used for the copying of the Qurʾān (presumably in his time) was al-ʿAjam (read Pīrāmūz or Pīrāmūz?), from which is derived al-ʿAjam, with its al-Mudawwar (round) and al-Nāṣirī varieties. These scripts are usually associated with Persia. Is it not likely that these Qurʾānic hands are “dressed up” and/or later versions of the Mashq-Riʿāsī family?20

IV. Most Arabic palaeographers and historians of Islamic art divide the so-called “Kufic” scripts into two categories: Eastern and Western. As pointed out earlier, the Eastern category is the group NS of Deroche or, if we accept the above argument, the Mashq-Riʿāsī family. They assert that the Magribī script developed from “Western Kufic”. As an example of this type of script they give our specimens nos. 5 and 13.21 True, the slender descender of the mim and a nicely rounded mim are common to the nos. 5 and 7. However, looking at our specimen no. 7.
we cannot fail to recognize in the first place the existence of, among other common elements, our Syriac-type alif. The Maghribi (to use a generic form) is most likely a hybrid of several classical scripts, with a very heavy admixture of the NS category. The influence of the NS category is clearly visible in the Andalusian (or Andalusian-style) Maghribi. On the other hand, the Sūdānī (also known as Ifriqi) script, as recently pointed out by Adrian Brockett, could well have been derived from a script represented by musḥaf al-Ḥāḍīnah (no. 13).

POINTING AND VOCALIZATION

The early Arabic script was a very defective medium of communication. It was devoid not only of vocalization but also lacked diacritical marks to distinguish its various identical letter shapes. Arabic tradition is not unanimous as to who introduced the system of pointing and vocalization (naqīf). Abū al-Aswad al-Duʿālī (d. 69/688) is usually credited with the introduction of vocalization by means of red dots based on the system used in Syriac. Naṣr ibn ʿAṣim al-Laythi and Yahyā ibn Yaʿmūr al-ʿAdwānī (the pupils of al-Duʿālī) are said to have been involved in the introduction of diacritics (iʿjām) using dots of the colour of the main script. The system of al-Duʿālī consisted of the use of one or two red dots (depending on whether the word was defined or not). Thus fathāb was represented by one dot placed above a letter, kasrāb by a dot below a letter, dammāb by a dot before the letter and tanwīn by two dots. The system in use in the present day is credited to Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farihīdī (d. 175/791). The vocalization of the text of the Qurʾān was originally disapproved of but later accepted, even in the mosque copies (ummāhāt).

Reflections of the various systems for pointing and vocalization of the Arabic script mentioned above are clearly visible in our specimens. Of special interest here are nos. 5, 6, 10, 11 and 12 where oblique strokes are used as diacritical marks (as opposed to black round dots as in no. 8) and for the separation of verses. No. 8 uses a mixed system of dots and oblique strokes, the former being most probably a later addition. Item no. 3 uses the system of al-Duʿālī and Aḥmad ibn Khālīl, as well as oblique strokes for pointing. Nos. 2 and 9 are pointed by means of black dots and vocalized with red dots. Nos. 1 and 4 are vocalized by means of red dots but unpointed. The orthographic signs such as bamzāh, shaddāb, maddāb and sukuṅ are less frequently used in our fragments. Only the nos. 6, 7, 9, 12 and 13 have any of these represented. The colours used are green (nos. 6, 9, 12 and 13), yellow (no. 7) and blue (nos. 7 and 13).

WRITING SURFACES AND FORMATS

This small collection of 21 fragments, which consists of 13 parchment and 8 paper leaves, comes from 13 different copies of the Qurʾān. Among the extant leaves there are two parchment and one paper bi-folios (conjugate leaves). It is interesting to note that the numbers 2, 3, 6, 7, 9 and 13 have vertical formats—that is, the height is greater than the width—and all the other leaves have horizontal formats, often referred to as safḥāh (boat-like). At the same time, all the vertical format leaves are executed in scripts of the NS or NS-linked category. Moreover, the Maghribi (Andalusian) specimen has a vertical format not far removed from a square. Nos. 2, 6 and 9 (all vertical formats) are written on paper.

INKS AND DECORATION

The main letter shapes (excluding chapter headings) of most of the fragments are written in brown or dark brown ink. Nos. 2, 6 and 9, however, are mainly in a black or almost black ink. The other pigments used are red, yellow, green and blue. These pigments are mainly used for vocalization, although yellow gouache is used for decoration (including sūrāb-headings) (see nos. 6, 9, 10 and 13), red for a sūrāb-heading (no. 10) and blue can be seen as part of the medallion or palmette (nos. 11 and 13). The gold ink is entirely associated with sūrāb-headings, ornaments (discs, roundels, rosettes etc.) indicating verse divisions, marginal medallions and palmettes.
Figure 1. Fragment 10, AC 193. (Photograph by Robert Rohonczy.)
Figure 2. Fragment 4, AC 175. (Photograph by Robert Rohonczy.)
Figure 3. Fragment 12, AC 195. (Photograph by Robert Rohonczy.)
Figure 4. Fragment 8, AC 184. (Photograph by Robert Rohonczy.)
Figure 5. Fragment 5, AC 181. (Photograph by Robert Rohonczy.)
Figure 6. Fragment 1, AC 151. (Photograph by Robert Rohonczy.)
Figure 7. Fragment 11, AC 194. (Photograph by Robert Rohonczy.)
Figure 8. Fragment 9, AC 192 and Fragment 3, AC 166. (Photographs by Robert Rohonczy.)
Figure 9. Fragment 6, AC 182 and Fragment 7, AC 183 (Photographs by Robert Rohonczy.)
Figure 10. Fragment 2, AC 153 and Fragment 13, ISL 167. (Photographs by Robert Rohonczy.)
DATING
None of the extant leaves is dated or bears any external evidence such as a bequest note (waqfiyah) to allow us to date them with any degree of confidence. One thing which can be said, however, is that the fragments on paper cannot go back to the period earlier than the middle of the second/eighth century, as the traditional date for the introduction of paper to the Arab world via Samarqand is 133/751. And it was not until the end of the second/eighth century that it was used in any large quantity in the Arabic chancery. Qur’ans began to be written on paper much later, most probably as late as the third/ninth century. Also, the pointing and vocalization are not always reliable factors as these were often added by later hands. As far as the red dot system is concerned, it was in use long after the system of Khalil ibn Ahmad was introduced. Finally, parchment, even though in common use before the introduction of paper, continued to be used in the Eastern Lands of the Islamic Empire for Qur’anic production as late as the fourth/tenth century, and in the West (Maghrib) well into the eighth/fourteenth century. Thus we can only say that our specimens nos. 2, 6 and 9 are not earlier than the third (less likely) or fourth (more likely), i.e. ninth or tenth century.

In the circumstances, the only satisfactory way to estimate a date would be by comparison with similar dated specimens. Since our corpus of dated early Qur’ans is very limited, an attempt at dating this collection of fragments is bound to be very approximate, perhaps even misleading, and therefore, unsatisfactory.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FRAGMENTS

1. AC 151 (Figure 6)
One leaf; 125 × 170 / 84 × 135 mm., 14 lines per page. Written on parchment in dark brown ink, unpointed but vocalized by means of red dots. The leaf is damaged at the outer edge; upper corner water-stained and one small area oxidized. The text begins on the flesh side. No verse division.

2. AC 153 (Figure 10)
Bi-folio; 164 × 110 / 105 × 65 mm., 6 lines per page. Written on laid paper, with laid lines clearly visible, in a script derived from the NS category (without tarwīṣ), in deep-brown ink. Khalīl ibn Ahmad’s system of pointing; vocalized by means of red dots. No verse division.

3. AC 166 (Figure 8)
One leaf; 152 × 106 / 100 × 68 mm., 13 lines per page. Written on parchment in a script of the NS category (with tarwīṣ and “tail” on the alif of prolongation), in brown ink. Pointed by means of short oblique strokes and vocalised with red dots and on occasion using the system of Khalīl ibn Ahmad. Small golden rosettes are used for verse division. Other verse divisions include the letter bā’ to mark the end of v. 68 and a golden medallion with the inscription sittīn to mark the end of v. 63!

4. AC 175 (Figure 2)
One leaf, 185 × 263 / 125 × 264 mm., 15 lines per page. Written on parchment in dark-brown ink. Unpointed, vocalized by means of red dots. Sūrāb-heading on the hair side in gold outlined in black. Next to it is the letter jīm (for juz’) with the number 17
to indicate the beginning of the 17th part (later addition). The letter bā' in gold is used to mark the end of a group of five verses. A larger medallion is used at the end of v. 133 (S. 20) to mark the end of a group of ten verses.


Déroche DIV (pl. XVIII). – Compare Maṣāhib Sa'rā' (Kuwait: National Museum, 1985): 70 – henceforth referred to as Kuwait. Purchased from Kirkor Minassian in 1938 with the funds provided by the Friends of the Library.

5. AC 181 (Figure 5)

One leaf; 204 × 295 / 150 × 230 mm., 3 lines per page. Written on parchment in dark-brown ink. Pointed by means of oblique strokes and vocalized with red dots. Six golden dots arranged in the shape of a triangle are placed at the end of v. 74. On the flesh side at the end of v. 75 there is a golden medallion with the inscription khams indicating the end of a group of five verses. At the bottom of both sides of the leaf is written in Persian in a later hand: Yūsuf ša'lah-i shānzdahum (i.e. Sūrat Yūsuf p. 16) and Yūsuf ša'lah-i bash-dahum (Sūrat Yūsuf p. 17).

S. 12 (Yūsuf), v. 74-76 (incipit: kunntum kā́dhibina {74}... explicit: aḥbībi kādhālika kid).

Déroche DVc (pl. XX). – Purchased from Kirkor Minassian 1938 from the funds provided by the Friends of the Library.

6. AC 182 (Figure 9)

Four leaves; 283 × 187 / 247 × 150 mm., 22 lines per page. Written on laid, thick, brown paper, in a script of the NS category (characterised by a tarwis and “tail” on the alif of prolongation), in dark-brown (almost black) ink. Pointed by means of oblique strokes and vocalized with red dots. Tasbdīd, maddab and sukūn in green. Small yellow circles (occasionally with three oblique strokes underneath) separate one verse from another and yellow medallions with red and green dots on the circumference to indicate a group of ten verses. Sūrab-headings are executed in yellow and outlined in black.

1) S. 5 (al-Mā'idah), v. 13-29 (incipit: fa-bīmā naqīdīm... explicit: wa-dhālikā jazā'ī al-zālimīn).

2) Last word of S. 14 (Ibrāhīm) and S. 15 (al-Hijr), v. 1-49 (incipit: al-ālḥāb {52}... explicit: nābbī 'ibādi).

3) S. 19 (Maryam), v. 7-43 (incipit: yā Za'kariyā... explicit: 'anka shay'ān {42} yā abāti).

4) S. 41 (Hā-Mīm), v. 50-end and S. 42 (al-Shūrā), v. 1-17 (incipit: bādhā lī wa-mā azzmūn ... explicit: al-mizān wa-niā).

Another leaf from the same codex is preserved in Boston Museum of Fine Arts (see Eric Schroeder, “What was the bādi’ script. Manuscripts in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts,” Ars Islamica 4, 1937, pl. 5). Leaf no. 1 bears the name F.C. Morgan (die-stamped).

7. AC 183 (Figure 9)

Bi-folio; 163 × 154 / 120 × 90 mm., 7 lines per page. Written on parchment in Andalusian script, in dark-brown ink. Pointed and vocalized (using Khalil ibn Ahmad’s system). The final niṣṭān and fā’ are pointed. Hamzab indicated by a yellow dot (often oxidised). Tasbdīd and sukūn in blue. The text is divided by means of golden rosettes and three-petalred florettes.


Acquired from Kirkor Minassian in 1938.

8. AC 184 (Figure 4)

Two leaves; 156 × 197 / 115-120 × 165 mm., 15 and 16 (no. 1 recto) lines per page. Written on parchment in brown ink. Pointed by means of oblique strokes and black dots (later addition) and vocalized by means of red
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dots. Three oblique strokes are used for verse division. In addition, the letter bāʾ marks the end of a group of five verses (S. 2, v. 215 and S. 10, v. 35) and a rosette is used to mark the end of v. 30 in S. 10. In both leaves the text begins on the flesh side.

2) S. 10 (Yūnis), v. 29-38 (incipit: [dan] baynāwā wa-baynākum ... [29]... explicit: ista'ūm min du).

Déroche DIV (pl. XVIII).

9. AC 192 (Figure 8)

Two leaves; 150 × 100 / 125 × 80 mm., 20 lines per page. Written on laid, brown paper (thick laid lines clearly visible), in black ink, in a script of the NS category (with tāʾūsūs and "tail" on the alif of prolongation). Pointed by means of black dots and vocalized with red dots. Siirah-headings are executed in yellow and outlined in black.

1) S. 11 (Hūd), v. 101-114 through S. 12 (Yūsuf), v. 1-5 (incipit: al-bihatubum allatī yad'unā ... explicit: ḍāla yā buniyya lā taqṣūs).
2) S. 46 (al-Abgāf), v. 32-35 through S. 47 (Muhammad), v. 1-16 (incipit: wa-layya ša'bū min ʿudnībi ... explicit: wa-ittabaʿu ʿawābūm).

Donated by F. Cleveland Morgan in 1938.

10. AC 193 (Figure 1)

Bi-folio (disjoined); 345 × 250 / 184 × 28 mm., 16 lines per page. Written on parchment in dark-brown ink. Pointed by means of oblique strokes and vocalized with red dots. Siirah-heading (leaf 2, hair side) in red. Verse division indicated by means of three oblique strokes. The end of v. 50 (S. 33) indicated by two discs with four semi circles in green and red inside. Similar ornaments can be seen at the end of v. 60 and 70. Damaged by acidic ink, borders uneven resulting from damage. The rule of Gregory applied (verso of the first leaf and recto of the second leaf are both flesh side).

1) S. 33 (al-Abzāb), v. 50-59 (incipit: khā-lišatan laka ... explicit: yā ayyubā al-nabi qud).

Déroche CII (pl. XVIIA).

11. AC 194 (Figure 7)

One leaf; 154 × 213 / 115 × 160 mm., 5 lines per page. Written on parchment in dark brown ink. Pointed by means of oblique strokes and vocalized with red dots. Small gold rosettes are used for verse division. Additionally, v. 90 is marked with an elegant medallion inscribed with the word tis'ūn.

S. 17 (al-Isrāʾ), v. 89-91 (incipit: bāḥdā al-Qur'ānī min kullī ... explicit: nakhibin wa-ʿinābin).


12. AC 195 (Figure 3)

One leaf; 210 × 300 / 220 × 155 mm., 6 lines per page. Written on parchment in dark-brown ink. Pointed by means of oblique strokes and vocalized with red dots. Siirah represented by a green dot. The end of v. 70 (hair side) indicated by means of a golden medallion with an octagon inside and the word sabʿūn. A small rosette is placed at the end of v. 71 (flesh side).

S. 17 (al-Isrāʾ), v. 70-72 (incipit: al-habīr wa-razaqaḥbum ... explicit: aʿmā wa-adallū).


13. ISL 167 (Figure 10)

One leaf; 440 × 290 / 350 × 190 mm., 5 lines per page. Written on parchment in a
large script derived from the NS category (without tarwīs), in dark-brown ink. Unpointed, but vocalized using the system of Khalil ibn Aḥmad. Vowels indicated in red. Tasbīd and sukūn in blue, bāmzāb and maddāb in green. Sūrā-ending on the verso in a gold-decorated panel with a palm leaf on the right-hand side. No verse division.

S. 41 (Ḥā-Mīm), v. 53-54 through S. 42 (al-Shūrā), v. 1-3 (incipit: al-baqq aw lam yakhī ... explicit: yūḥī ilayka wa-īlā).

Donated to the Islamic Studies Library by the former President of Tunisia Habib Bourguiba during his visit in 1959. Attached to this leaf there is a note in Arabic and French: “Feuille de parchemin provenant d'un coran calligraphié par le célèbre Ali Ibn Ahmad al-Warraq, à l'attention de la princesse Ziride de Qairawan (Fatima) en date du 10 ramadan 410 de l'hégire correspondant au 9 janvier l'an 1020. Écriture koufique de qairawan (Tunisie).” The above label does not seem to be accurate. This conclusion has been drawn from comparison with illustrations reproduced from the famous Qairawan codex, generally known as Musḥaf al-Hādīnab (i.e. the Nurse’s Qur’ān), because it was executed for the former nurse of the Zirid prince Mu‘izz ibn Bādis.


Notes

I am grateful to Dr. Eric Ormsby, Director of McGill University Libraries, for his valuable suggestions.


2. One of the earliest accounts of the various Arabic scripts can be found in the Fihrist of Ibn al-Nadim (d. 380/990) (see e.g. the Cairo edition of 1348 A.H., 8). The only scripts in any way characterised are al-Makki and al-Madani. They are described as having an alif with a slant to the right and elongated ascenders (fa-ṣī alif-tāʾīb tawīl ilā yamanat al-yad wa-ālā al-ṣābīb wa-ṣī shaklīb inḍīfā’ ya-sīr). This has been understood as a script whose more extreme version is al-Mā’īl. The whole Makki/Madani family is conveniently termed al-Hijāzī (see in particular F. Déroche, Les manuscrits du Coran. Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1983, I: 35-36, pl. V-VII). It has to be noted, however, that the Makki/Madani script as illustrated in the oldest surviving manuscript of the Fihrist of Ibn al-Nadim and apparently collated with the holograph has all the characteristics of the so-called “Eastern Kufic” or “broken cursive” (!): see The fihrist of al-Nadirn, ed. and translated by Bayard Dodge (New York/London: Columbia Univ. Press, 1970), I: xxiv-xxvii, 10. For an argument against such a possibility see N. Abbott, “Arabic paleography,” Ars Islamica 8 (1941), 70-71.


5. The rise of the North Arabic script and its Qur’ānic development with a full description of the Qur’ān manuscripts in the Oriental Ins-
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11. Ibn Abî Dâ‘ûd, Kitâb al-masâhif, 149-150. To Ibn Sirin is also ascribed the following saying: “copying the Qur’ân in nashq was disliked because there is in it ta‘ajrafall (coarseness, awkwardness) and khrûf (clumsiness) or kharq?” (tearing, disruption, violation); see Abû Hayyân al-Tawhîdi (d. after 400/1000), “Risâlah fi lîm al-kitâbah,” Tbabîth nasrîlah, ed. Ibrâhîm al-Kaylanî (Damascus, 1951), 46. It is interesting to note here that the word nashq is very often used in manuscripts as a synonym of naskh (i.e. transcription, copying) and in the Persian context it is employed by students of calligraphy for signing their practice sheets.


15. Ibn al-Nadîm, Fihrist, 12.


19. A good example of al-Tâlîq can be found in The Encyclopædia of Islam, new ed., vol. 4, pl. XXXVII.

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an early and little known Arabic script called *Fīrāmūz* (sic), an unpretentious cursive script which was apparently in use until the early ninth century. The general opinion, however, is that Ta'liq only became established as a defined script after the invention of *Riyāsī* (sic) in the ninth century. For examples of the script labelled as *Fīrāmūz* see Badrī Ṭābābāy, *Fihrist Qura'nā-yi khatti Kitābkhānāb-i Saltanati* (Tehran, 1351 A.H.), 299-300 and Fakhr al-Dīn Nasīrī Aṃnī Fakhrī, *Gaizjlnah-i khutzit-i 'ulanzi-i a'linz va-diuishnza~2diiw ikirim*... (s.l., 1409 A.H.), 2: 1510-11, 1516-19, 1521, 1525, 1528, 1530-31, 1539-40, 1545. Another name which seems to be associated with the *Ri'āsī* family is *al-Rayhānī* apparently named after 'Alī ibn 'Ubaydah al-Rayhānī (d. 219/834). This name is mentioned by Abū Ḩayyān al-Tawhīdī in his “Risālah fi 'ilm al-kitāb” (p. 30) as one of the so-called “Kūfī” scripts; see also F. Rosenthal's translation “Abū Ḩayyān at-Tawhīdī on penmanship,” *Fozur es-sayy in art and literature in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 24. It is interesting to note that Muhammad Tāhir al-Kūrdī links it with *al-Dīwān*: see his *Ta'rīkh al-khatt al-'Arabī wa-adabubu* (Cairo, 1358/1939), 121. See also my “The ancient sījīl of Qayrawān”, *MELA Notes* 46 (1989), 27.


22. This apparent similarity has already been pointed out by F. Deroche in his “Collections de manuscrits anciens”, 160. For an overview of Maghribī scripts see O. Houdas, “Essai sur l'écriture maghrebine,” *Nouveaux mélange orientaux* (Paris, 1886), 88-95. Houdas uses, as a point of departure for his analysis, a copy of Ibn Sahnūn's *al-Mudawwanah* going back to the early fourth/tenth century and written in what he calls a “cursive Kūfī” (cufique cursif).


25. Compare with the findings of Deroche in his *Manuscripts of the Corān*. 1: 19-33.

26. For a survey of writing materials see e.g. Muhammad Farīs Jamil, *Islamic wiraqah “stationery” during the early Middle Ages*. Ph.D., University of Michigan, 1985 (UMI, 1988), 70-147.


28. Whenever appropriate references are given here to Deroche's *Manuscripts of the Corān*.~