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# THE TRANSFORMATION OF ARABIC WRITING: PART I, QUR'ĀNIC CALLIGRAPHY

BY YASSER TABBAA

THE CONVERSION OF QUR'ĀNIC AND MONUMENTAL CALLIGRAPHY from angular to cursive is one of the most important but least discussed developments in Islamic art. Occurring first in Qur'ān manuscripts in the tenth century and later in monumental inscriptions, this transformation had a deep and long-lasting impact, shaping the subsequent evolution of Islamic calligraphy for several centuries. It was also a geographically widespread change, and although it began in the central Islamic world—most likely in Baghdad—no Muslim country from India to Spain was left unaffected by it.

A development of this magnitude, occurring in the most visible medium of Islamic art, requires an explanation. Furthermore, in view of the fact that in the medieval Islamic world calligraphy fulfilled a central iconographic function (as the transmitter of pietistic messages and political propaganda), this explanation cannot be restricted to the mere formal alteration of the script but must reach to the underlying cultural factors that would have made such a change necessary. The following paper will therefore attempt to address both formal and iconographic aspects of this transformation as they apply to Qur'ān manuscripts. Since the change in monumental epigraphy lagged by about one century behind the Qur'ānic transformation and was contingent upon it, it seems logical to proceed chronologically from Qur'ān manuscripts to monuments, which will be discussed in a subsequent article.

Given the central importance of this problem, why has it attracted so little attention among specialists in Arabic manuscripts and monumental inscriptions? It is certainly not for lack of diligence and creativity: specialists in these areas have, over the last century and a half, examined countless manuscripts and fragments and documented nearly all the important monumental inscriptions in the Islamic world. In the process they have laid the foundations of the two fields of paleography and epigraphy, which today are among the most developed fields in Islamic studies. Instead it seems that the main reason for this neglect is methodological, emanating from the specialized approaches and rather inflexible agendas prevailing in epigraphy and paleography.

Research in Islamic epigraphy has generally been restricted to the recording and translation of inscriptions on monuments and art objects, and somewhat

later to their interpretation.<sup>1</sup> Little attention has been given to calligraphic form, whose relevance to the very specialized endeavor of the first epigraphers was not at all perceived. While this is understandable given the enormous scope of epigraphic documentation and the outline format of its early publications, the dismissal of the formal qualities of the script is far more problematic in the recent works of art historians who have used epigraphy as an interpretive tool.<sup>2</sup> By simply perpetuating the restrictive methodology of the first epigraphers, they have generally reduced calligraphy to mere information, thus diminishing the artistic meaning and visual impact of inscriptions instead of enriching them.<sup>3</sup>

The analysis of the formal qualities of scripts has traditionally fallen in the domain of paleography, although in recent years a number of art historians have also made important contributions toward charting the course of Arabic calligraphy and distinguishing its many varieties. But, with rare exceptions, these writers have been disinclined to consider the reasons behind changes in calligraphic form.<sup>4</sup> Instead of searching for underlying cultural causes, most writers on calligraphy have tended to explain the great developments in Arabic and Persian scripts in terms of regional variation, autonomous chronological change, or artisanal improvements determined primarily by the innovations of a few well-known calligraphers and the lesser contributions of minor calligraphers.<sup>5</sup>

This overly specialized approach is problematic in at least two respects. First, in its emphasis on authenticating the works of the most important calligraphers and its dismissal, or at least negative evaluation, of all "questionable" specimens, it has tended to lose sight of the broad artistic trends of the period and even of the legacy of the calligrapher under consideration. This is especially troublesome in the case of Ibn Muqla, of whose calligraphy no specimens have survived but whose method is known to have influenced one or two generations of calligraphers. Second, traditional paleography has left unexamined the impact of external factors, such as politics and religion, on the world of the calligrapher—factors that may have directly or indirectly contributed to paleographic changes.<sup>6</sup> Just as the specialized approach of epigraphers limited them to the content of the inscriptions, so the approach of paleographers has restricted them to problems of dating, provenance, and authorship.

The question of the transformation of Arabic writing, though closely related to both epigraphy and paleography, seems to fall in a methodological middle ground between the two disciplines. Being equally concerned with the formal and semiological aspects of this transformation, this paper and its sequel will draw on the findings of both epigraphers and paleographers while at the same time charting an entirely new course. More than anything, the paper will attempt to examine the various dimensions of the relationship between the form(s) and meaning(s) of certain new calligraphic styles: how and why these new forms were created; how and why meanings were ascribed to them; and what religious or political requirements these meaningful forms were intended to address.<sup>7</sup>

We begin, therefore, by examining the formal qualities of the new Qurʾānic calligraphy produced by and under the influence of Ibn Muqla and Ibn al-Bawwāb, basing our investigation on a fairly large number of manuscripts culled from several American, European, and Middle Eastern libraries.<sup>8</sup> We proceed next to investigate a number of factors that may have contributed to this transformation, including the gradual replacement of vellum by paper; the wide application of geometric principles to Islamic art, including calligraphy; and finally the attempts to create a canonical recension of the Qurʾān in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Methodologically, this paper follows a tradition perhaps first established by Nabia Abbott, whereby evidence derived from the paleographic analysis of Qurʾānic manuscripts and fragments is juxtaposed against a wide variety of literary sources.<sup>9</sup> Although Abbott's work has enjoyed widespread influence, it should be noted that two recent writers on Qurʾānic paleography have taken exception to her textual approach on two entirely different grounds. Estelle Whelan has correctly questioned Abbott's reliance on secretarial manuals for the identification of Qurʾānic scripts, suggesting that this undermines the usefulness of her conclusions for the study of extant manuscripts.<sup>10</sup> Yet despite this methodological flaw, Whelan reaffirms in her conclusion the importance of a comprehensive approach to the material, one that takes into account "paleographical, codicological, textual, and ornamental" criteria.<sup>11</sup>

Déroche, on the other hand, having voiced some objections about the "relatively modest" impact of Abbott's method on paleography, nearly dismisses the literary sources and bases his entire investigation on the close examination of large collections of Qurʾān manuscripts.<sup>12</sup> While the thoroughness and meticulous care of his approach are indeed admirable, the

absence of the cultural backdrop, which in the case of calligraphy is quite elaborate, casts some doubt on his detailed classifications and formalist schemes. At best, such an ahistorical approach may be convenient for purposes of taxonomy and classification, but it falls far too short when one attempts to deal with problems of change and transformation in calligraphic styles—problems that have long been identified by the writers on calligraphic and scribal arts.

What seems needed, therefore, is not to silence these sources but to utilize them with a greater sense of purpose and focus than Abbott or others have. Despite their often ambiguous statements, impressionistic ideas, and incomplete schemes, these texts can nevertheless provide an adequate framework for posing questions to the available specimens. Most researchers in Islamic art agree that all these sources have their limitations and are often silent about matters that seem to us of the greatest importance.<sup>13</sup> The challenge, then, is to establish links among these specialized sources and between them and the works of art in the hope of composing a reasonably coherent picture of a particular cultural or artistic phenomenon. While such a reconstruction may remain incomplete and may even lack the apparent authority of positivist classification, the juxtaposition and interlinking of a variety of texts, including the artistic one, will ultimately enrich the cultural discourse and enhance our experience of its various facets. Often in Islamic art, that is the most one could wish for.

### *Before Ibn Muqla*

Our attempt to present the transformation of Arabic writing in the fourth and fifth centuries A.H. is made infinitely easier by the substantial paleographic research on the first three centuries of Islam. The main points of this body of research that are relevant to this paper can be summarized as follows. First, cursive Arabic writing did not originate from an older angular script, but rather the two forms coexisted from the earliest days of Islam (fig. 1).<sup>14</sup> Second, the early cursive scripts were used exclusively for secular purposes, *never* for the Qurʾān, which was written in the angular Kūfic script (fig. 2).<sup>15</sup> Third, secular and Qurʾānic scripts were subject to totally different calligraphic rules, those applied to the Qurʾān being far more exacting.<sup>16</sup> And finally, most treatises on calligraphy dealt with secular not Qurʾānic scripts since their authors tended to be scribes and officials of the administration.<sup>17</sup>

With few exceptions, Qurʾānic script from the first two and a half centuries of Islam is extremely

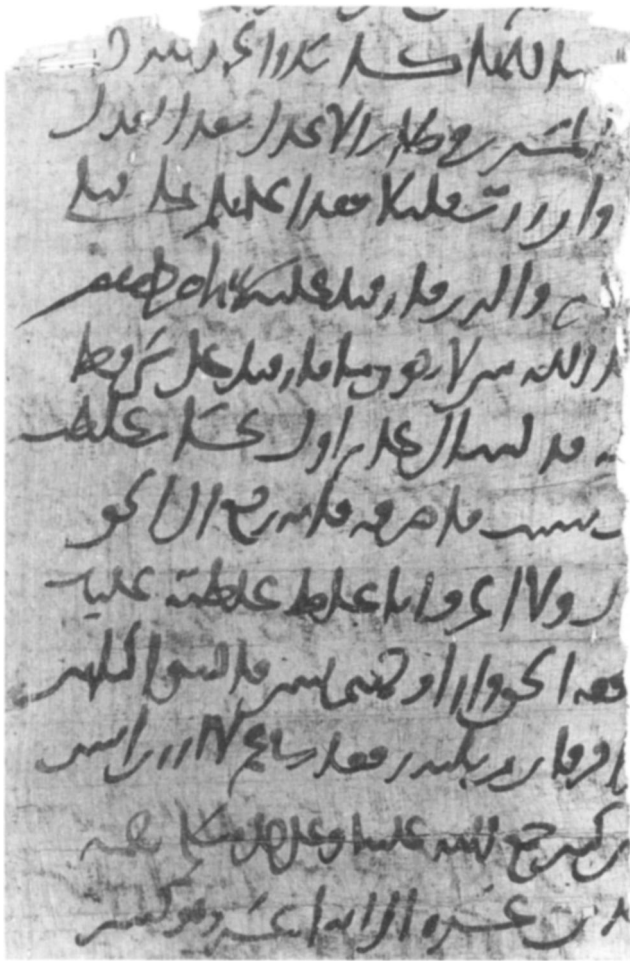


FIG. 1. Papyrus fragment, Egypt, third/ninth century. Ann Arbor, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 67.1.52.

uniform, a fact that Arthur Arberry attributed to “the tenacious conservatism of many Koranic scribes.”<sup>18</sup> There is in fact so little variation in the Kūfic script of these Qurʾāns that paleographers have had to depend on diacritical and orthographic marks and decorations for their dating and classification.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, judging from the literary sources and the few preserved specimens, secular scripts exhibited far greater variety.<sup>20</sup> By the end of the ninth century Ibn al-Nadīm had listed twenty-six styles ranging from large and angular to small and cursive.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, such a large number of these “secular” scripts existed by the end of the ninth century that Ibn Wahb al-Kātib, a contemporary of Ibn al-Nadīm, complained that “the scribes were no longer aware of all the different styles of the olden days.”<sup>22</sup> Nabia Abbott maintained that many of these scripts represented subtle variations on the major scripts,<sup>23</sup> but their sheer number and the subsequent need for reform suggest a loss of standard and a general decline in scribal writing.

*Ibn Muqla and his Circle of Influence*

Thus, on the eve of the reforms of Ibn Muqla (886–940), Arabic was being written in a standard Qurʾānic script that only a select few copyists (*muḥarrirūn*) had mastered and in an unwieldy variety of secular scripts, many of inferior quality and none following an established standard (table



FIG. 2. Page of Qurʾān, Iraq/Iran, third/ninth century. Tehran, Iran Bastan Museum, 4251.

1).<sup>24</sup> It has been firmly established that, contrary to legend, Ibn Muqla did not create any new scripts and certainly was not the inventor of cursive writing, incorrectly referred to today as the *naskh* script.<sup>25</sup> Known primarily as *ṣāhib al-khaṭṭ al-mansūb* (master of the proportioned script), Ibn Muqla gained fame chiefly for inventing a system of proportional writing based on the principles of geometric design (*handasat al-ḥurūf*).<sup>26</sup> Some idea of the geometric quality of his script may be derived from the laudatory remarks of the tenth-century writer Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī: "Ibn Muqla is a prophet in the field of writing. It was poured upon his hand, even as it was revealed to the bees to make their honey-cells hexagonal."<sup>27</sup>

Ibn Muqla's rules of proportion were not intended for Qur'ānic Kūfic but for the large variety of scribal scripts. In other words, Qur'ānic Kūfic, which by the tenth century had reached a very high standard, was not directly affected by the changes of Ibn Muqla; the reform was at first intended for the more mundane scripts. The result of these reforms, therefore, was not the gradual softening of the angular Kūfic script but

its supplantation by the redesigned scripts of the chancery. I will return to this important point below.

The system of proportion that Ibn Muqla devised was based on measurement by dots. The dot was formed by pressing the nib of the *qalam* (reed pen) on paper until it opened to its fullest extent, after which it was released evenly and rapidly. This produced a square on edge, or a rhombus. The size of the dot affected only the size of the writing; the relative proportions of letters remained constant for each individual script. Placing dots vertex to vertex, Ibn Muqla then proceeded to straighten the Kūfic *alif*, which had been bent to the right, and adopt it as his standard of measurement (fig. 3). His next step was to standardize the individual letters of the various corrupted secular scripts by bringing them into accord with geometric figures. By giving each letter a proportional relation (*nisba*) to the *alif*, Ibn Muqla was able to construct a canon of proportions for the entire alphabet.<sup>28</sup> This allowed the creation of a number of systematic methods or templates for each of the major scripts, which henceforth could be produced accurately to scale.

This standardization came at a price: a relatively small number of scripts was admitted into the canon of reformed scripts, while others were neglected and gradually slipped into oblivion (table 1). The canonical scripts, known collectively as *al-aqlām al-sitta* or *shish qalam*, were *thuluth*, *naskh*, *muḥaqqaq*, *riqā'*, *tawqī'*, and *rayḥān*. Of these scripts *thuluth* was to attain the greatest importance in view of its nearly exclusive use for monumental inscriptions and for *sūra* headings in the Qur'ān. *Naskh*, originally a minor and somewhat disdained script, became the preferred style for literary manuscripts and small Qur'āns, especially during the Ottoman period. *Muḥaqqaq* and *rayḥān* achieved the peak of their fame in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when they were used for writing the splendid Mamlūk and Mongol Qur'āns, the former script for large copies and the latter for smaller ones. *Riqā'* was employed for correspondence, while the use of *tawqī'* was restricted to royal decrees and official letters.<sup>29</sup>

Although the name of Ibn Muqla is second to none in the history of Islamic calligraphy, no authentic specimen in his hand has been found. Some specimens bearing his name have at different times been suggested as authentic, but all of these have ultimately been dismissed as forgeries.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, in their zeal to authenticate works by Ibn Muqla, paleographers may have dismissed certain evidence that, though of no particular use in finding definitive specimens by him, may help us to approximate the appearance of his calligraphy and therefore determine

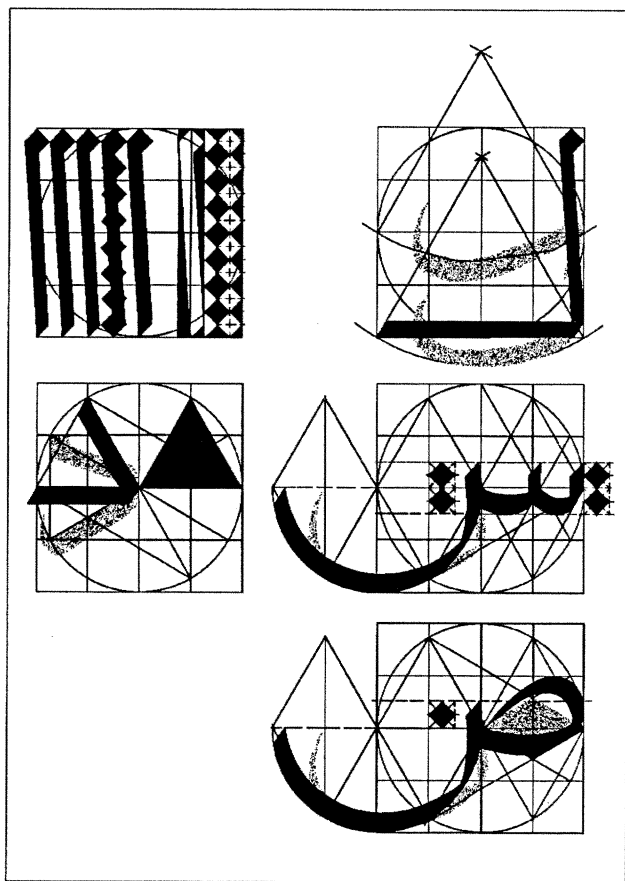
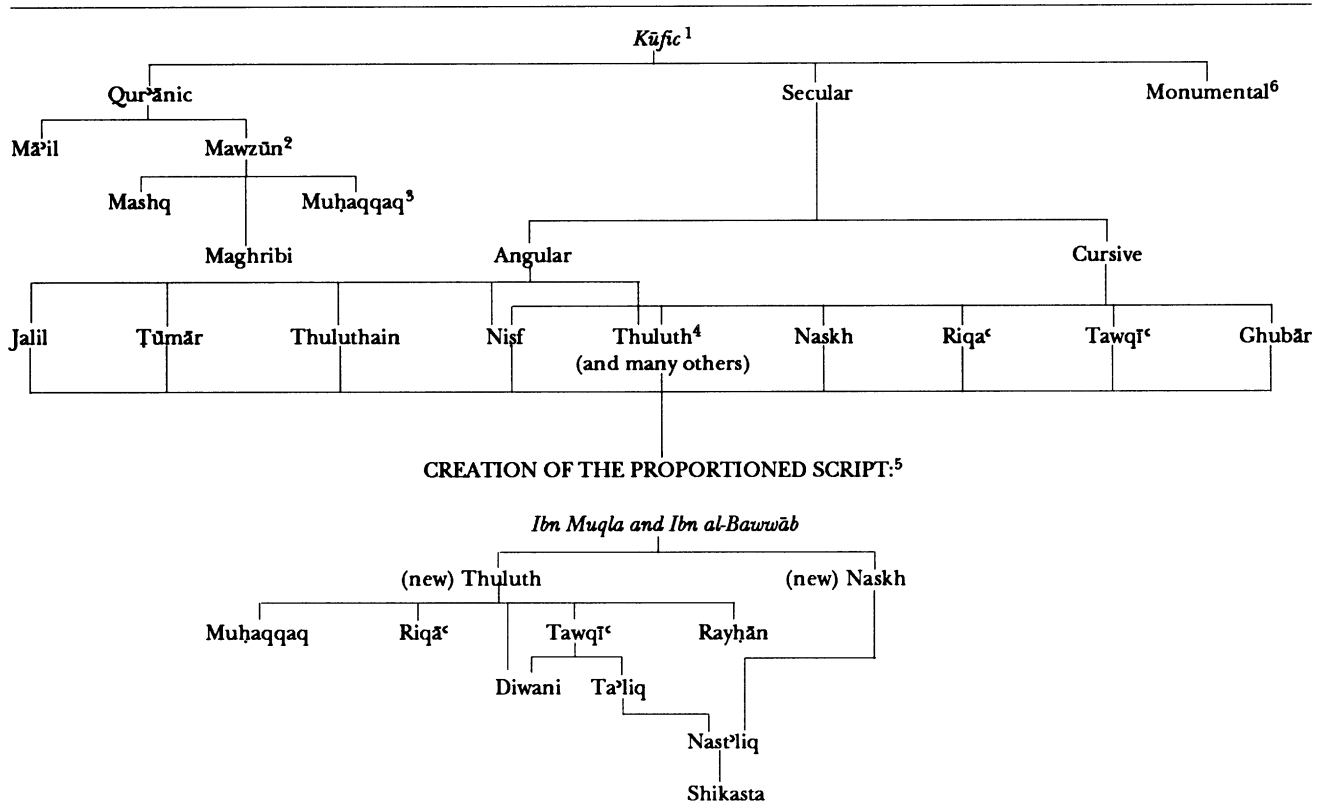


FIG. 3. Reconstruction of the method of Ibn Muqla:  
letters *alif*, *lām*, *sīn*, *dāl*, *ṣād*.

After Soucek, "Islamic Calligraphy," from Aḥmad Muṣṭafa.

TABLE 1. Development of Arabic Calligraphic Scripts



1. “Kūfic” is used here in its original sense as the mother script of all later Arabic scripts. According to Qalqashandi and others (see n. 15) Kūfic has two basic terminal features, flatness (*basf*) and concaveness (*taqwīr*), such that all calligraphic scripts derived from it contain these properties in specific proportions. As a rule, the larger scripts such as *tūmār* are flat and angular and the smaller scripts such as *tawqīʿ* and *ghubār* are concave and cursive, while the middle scripts such as *nisf* and *thuluth* combine the two features in characteristic proportions.

2. The distinction between *māʾil* and *mawzūn* has been suggested by Yousuf Thannoun in “Khaṭṭ al-thuluth wa marājīʿ al-fann al-Islāmi,” unpublished conference paper in “The Common Themes and Principles of Islamic Art,” Yildiz Palace, Istanbul, 1985.

3. *Muḥaqqaq* occurs as a variety of Qurʾānic Kūfic in Ibn al-Nadīm. See Abbott, “Arabic Paelography,” table 1 and p. 79. I have distinguished it here from two other primary types of Qurʾānic

Kūfic, *mashq* and *maghribi*. The same term is employed again for a fully cursive script first used in the early thirteenth century. Although the scripts have nothing in common, the term *muḥaqqaq* (verified) seems to refer to Qurʾānic script of especially high quality.

4. Such scripts as *thuluth*, *naskh*, *riqāʿ*, and *tawqīʿ* have pre-reform and post-reform existences. Their post-reform appearance is well known although their original form, with the possible exception of *naskh*, is likely to remain a mystery.

5. The table conflates the accomplishments of Ibn Muqla and Ibn al-Bawwāb. It should be noted, however, that what I have chosen to call semi-Kūfic, or the script influenced by Ibn Muqla, may in fact represent a number of related scripts.

6. To be discussed in Part II.

the extent of his influence. This evidence can be summarized under two headings: the method of Ibn Muqla as described in his own treatise *Risālah fiʾl-khaṭṭ al-mansūb* (Treatise on proportioned writing) and the specimens that have been spuriously attributed to Ibn Muqla.

Given Ibn Muqla’s far greater fame as the innovator of a method than as a calligrapher, the obsessive search for authentic specimens in his hand may have been misguided. Those efforts could perhaps have

been more fruitfully spent in examining Qurʾānic manuscripts that postdate him but may have been influenced by his method. By comparing samples of such manuscripts with the reconstructed alphabet of Ibn Muqla, we may be able to establish the circle of influence of his method.<sup>31</sup> Following the instructions given in the *Risālah*, Nabia Abbott, and more recently Aḥmad Muṣṭafa,<sup>32</sup> have obtained a script characterized by regularity, verticality, semiangularity, short sublineal curves, and the triangular appearance of

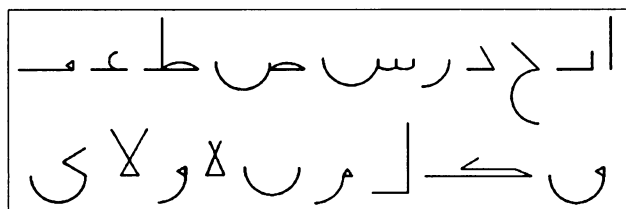


FIG. 4. Tentative reconstruction of Arabic letter forms according to Ibn Muqla. After Abbott, *Rise*, fig. 1.

some of the characters (fig. 4). Its *alifs* are pointed and almost vertical and its knots always open. In all these respects, this reconstructed script resembles the so-called semi-Kūfic script<sup>35</sup> used in many tenth- and eleventh-century Qurʾāns.<sup>34</sup> Some specimens of this script are so regular as to be somewhat rigid, which might be seen as the result of strict adherence to the geometric precepts of Ibn Muqla.

A second kind of evidence comes from Qurʾānic fragments and album pages that have been spuriously attributed to Ibn Muqla (fig. 5). Although certainly not in his hand and often written two or three centuries after him, these manuscripts nevertheless display



FIG. 5. Qurʾān fragment on paper, Iran, twelfth century. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, Ms. Add.

striking similarities both to one another and to the group of semi-Kūfic Qurʾāns mentioned above.<sup>35</sup> Such consistency is significant even in forgeries, for a forger after all has to pay due respect to the original he is copying. In this case, there is no doubt whatsoever that what is being copied is an especially precise form of the semi-Kūfic script. For these reasons, it seems quite likely that semi-Kūfic Qurʾāns—which immediately follow Ibn Muqla—are written in a style that resembles his, at first perhaps by calligraphers who were directly under his guidance.

Within the body of Qurʾānic manuscripts, semi-Kūfic Qurʾāns form a fairly distinct group sharing a number of features. In terms of their date, these manuscripts tend to cluster from the late tenth century to about 1100 (figs. 10 and 16), although the script continued to be used and further evolved in eastern Iran up to the end of the twelfth century and even later.<sup>36</sup> The few examples that have been suggested from the first half of the tenth century are quite different from regular semi-Kūfic. Of these the earliest is perhaps CBL 1417, which consists of four small *juzʿs* of a single Qurʾān on vellum, dated to 292/905 and signed by Aḥmad ibn Abiʾl-Qāsim al-Khāyqānī



FIG. 6. *Juzʿ* of Qurʾān on vellum, Iran, Shaʿbān 292/June 905, signed Aḥmad ibn Abiʾl-Qāsim al-Khāyqānī. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, 1417, f. 15b.

(fig. 6). James suggested that it was “one of the earliest Eastern Kufic manuscripts,”<sup>37</sup> and Déroche<sup>38</sup> compared it with BN 382 and TIM 12800, which are dated 325/936–37. But the script in all these manuscripts, though somewhat cursive, is quite irregular, resembling contemporary secular manuscripts such as CBL 3494 (dated 279/892) more than semi-Kūfic Qurʾāns.<sup>39</sup> In fact the loose form of many of the letters, especially the *alif* with a pronounced hook to the right, shows no sign of having been influenced by the conventions of Ibn Muqla.<sup>40</sup>

Eliminating these problematic fragments from our sample, we may then proceed to outline the prominent features of semi-Kūfic manuscripts. With consistently clear letter forms and distinct words separated by spaces on either side—instead of the previous practice of dramatically scattering word fragments across the line—the most striking feature of the semi-Kūfic script is its legibility, especially when compared to the preceding Abbasid Kūfic script (cf. figs. 2 and 10). This legibility is further enhanced by a clear and often complete system of orthography and vocalization. The old system of using large colored dots for vocalization and groups of black dots for orthographic marks was abandoned in a two-step fashion:<sup>41</sup> First,

the orthographic dots were standardized and made smaller (fig. 8), and second, a totally new system of vocalization was introduced, consisting of slashes for *fatḥa* and *kasra*, a small *waw* for *dhamma*, a small circle for *sukūn*, and other signs for *shadda* and *madda* (figs. 14 and 17).<sup>42</sup> This is the system still in use today.

The semi-Kūfic script is also remarkable for its consistency and regularity, as demonstrated by numerous fragmentary and complete Qurʾāns in European and Middle Eastern libraries.<sup>43</sup> It appears generally as a small and rather compact script with very simple letter forms and crisp, angular ligatures. The uprights are nearly vertical although the *alif* can vary from being slightly bent to the right to being perfectly straight (cf. figs. 16 and 18). The “eyes” of the letters *sād*, *ṭāʾ*, *ʿayn*, *qāf*, *mīm*, and *hāʾ* are always open and have a generally triangular appearance. An exercise in the art of restraint, it has neither the deep sublineal curves of Maghribi Kūfic nor the flourishes of later cursive writing. In fact, most examples seem to follow rather closely the method of Ibn Muqla, although divergences begin to occur from the second half of the eleventh century with the widespread use of the so-called Eastern Kūfic (fig. 7).<sup>44</sup>

In addition to their distinctive and legible script,

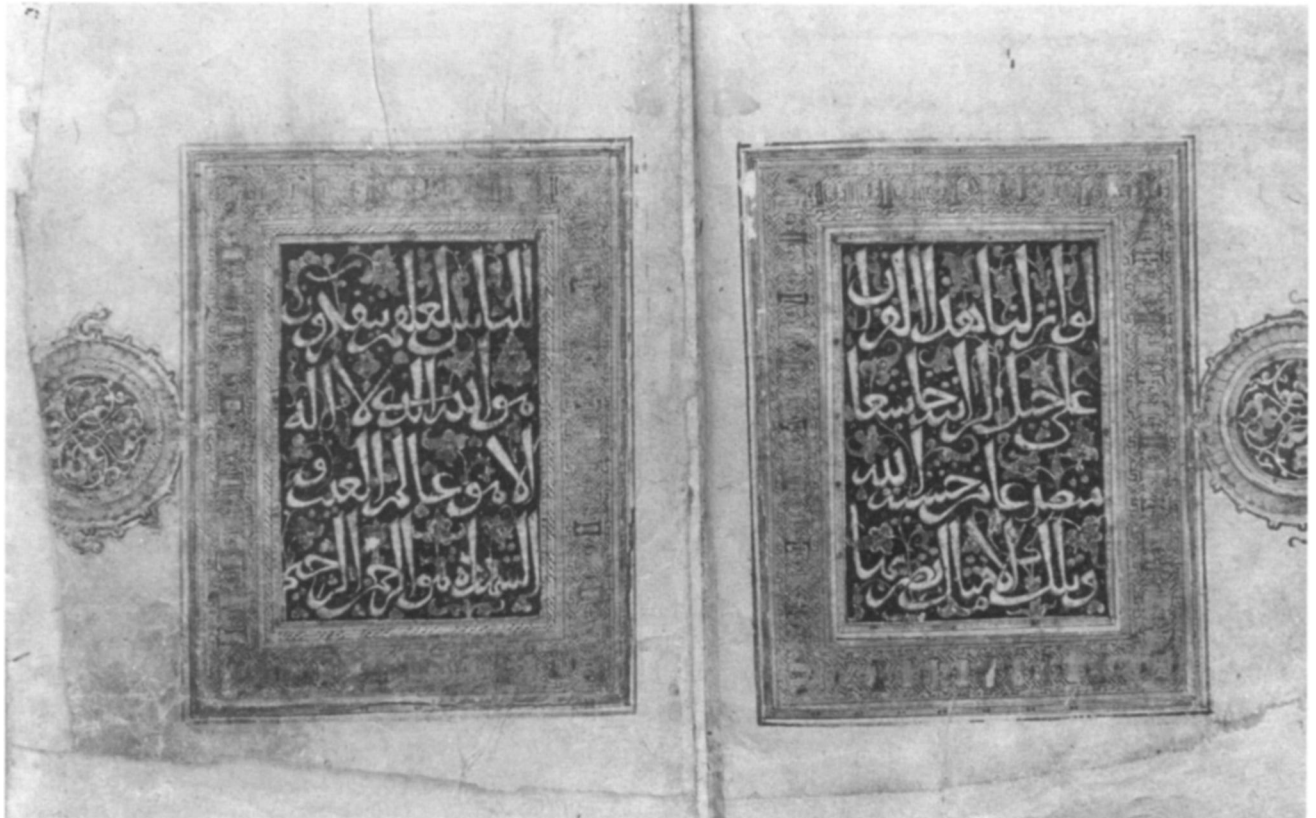


FIG. 7. Eastern Kūfic Qurʾān on paper, Afghanistan, dated 573/1177, signed Abu Bakr Aḥmad ibn ʿAballah al-Ghaznawī. Istanbul, Topkapı Saray Library, EH 42, ff. 1b and 2a.



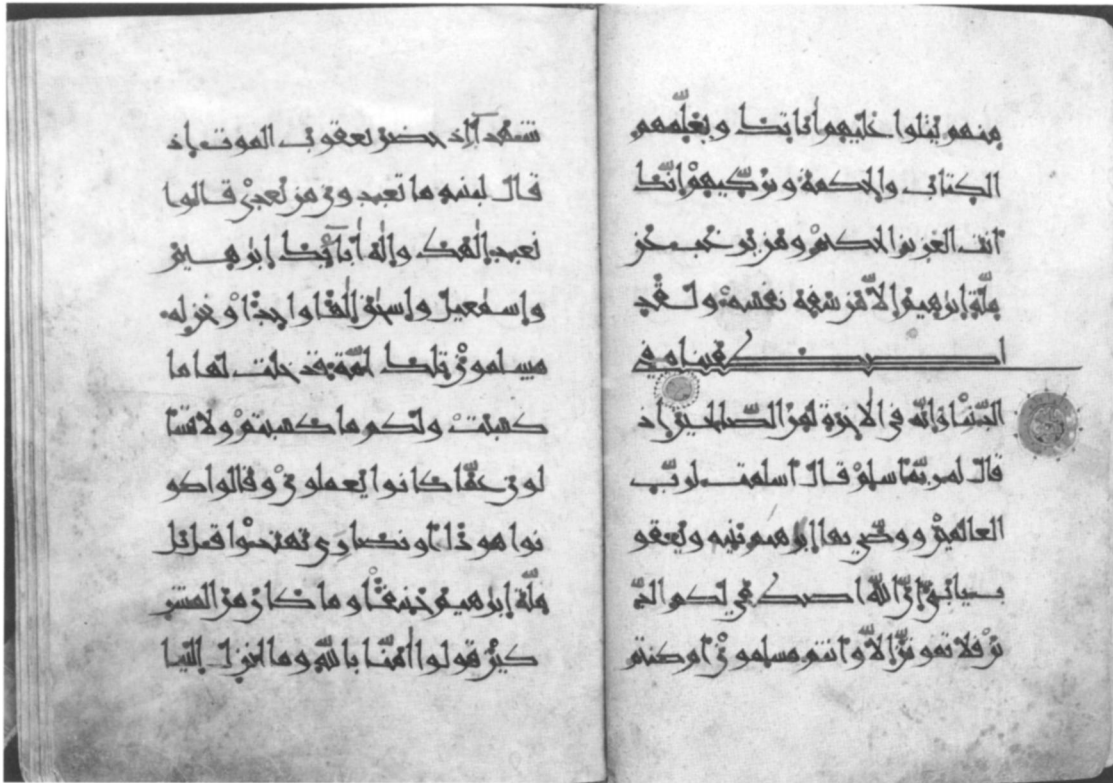


FIG. 8. Large fragment (first quarter) of Qur'an, Iran, other parts of same ms. dated 361/972.  
Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, 1434, ff. 22b and 23a.

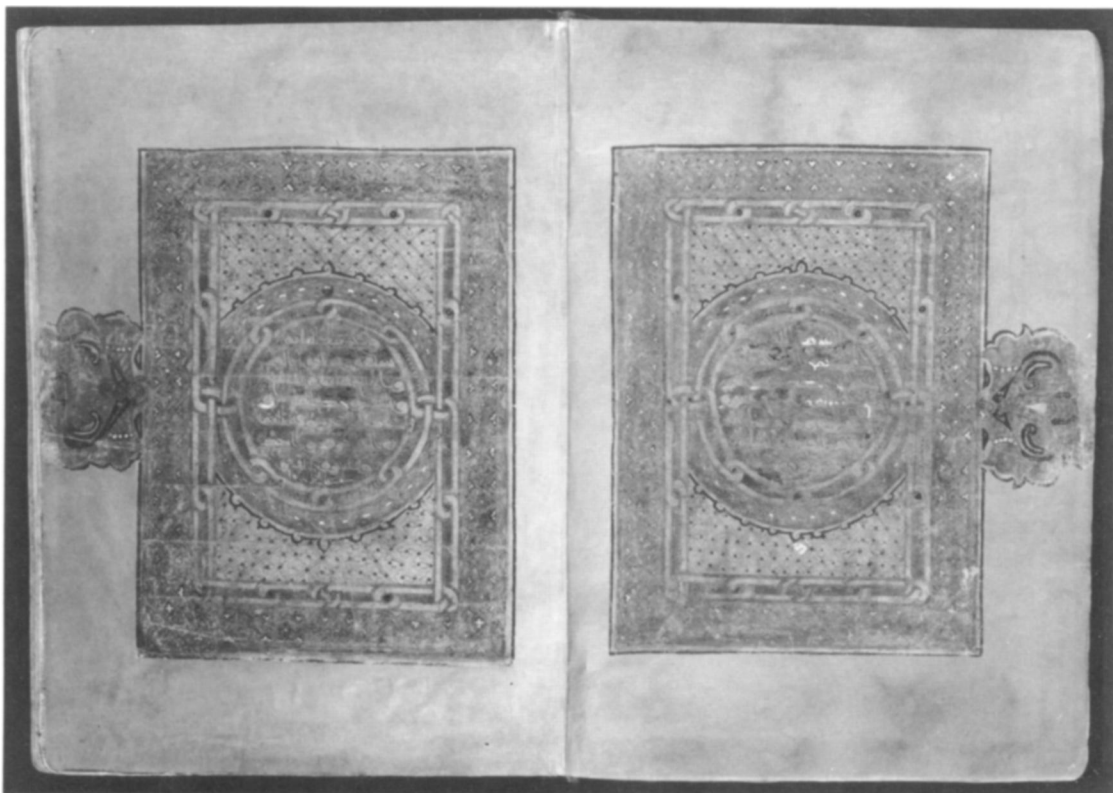


FIG. 9. Verse count. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, 1434, ff. 1b and 2a.

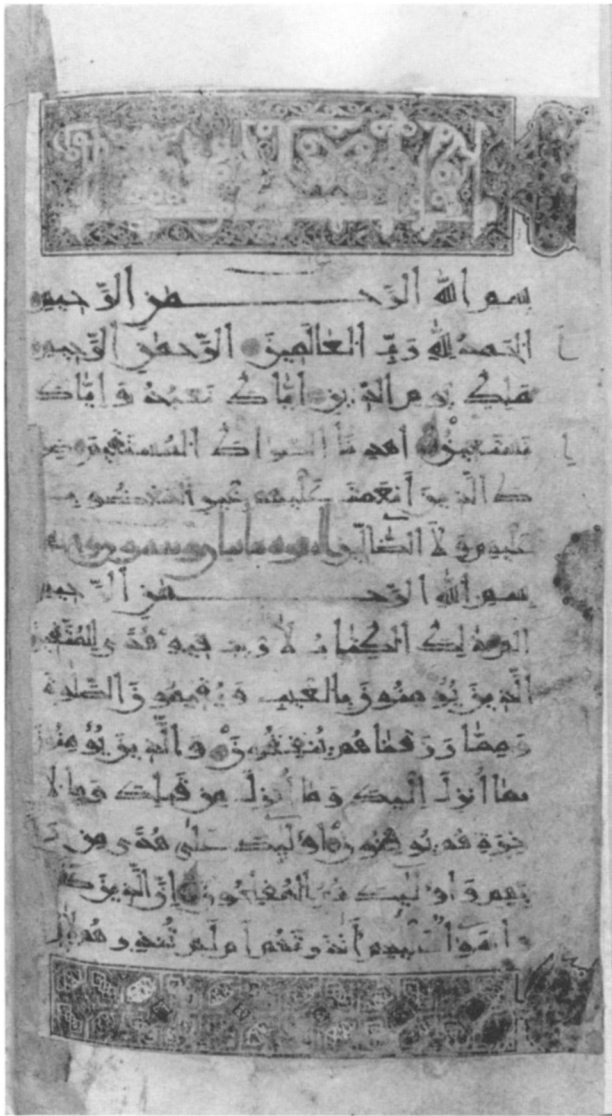


FIG. 10. Semi-Kūfic Qur'ān on paper, Iran, 388/998. Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Library, HS 22, f. 2b.

semi-Kūfic Qur'āns display at least three other features that distinguish them from their predecessors. The first is that they are almost all written on paper instead of vellum (table 2). Out of our sample of eight manuscripts, two (BL 11, 735 and TKS R-38; figs 12 and 15) use vellum and the rest paper. Statistical information on the percentage of the use of vellum in semi-Kūfic or Eastern Kūfic Qur'ān manuscripts is still unavailable, but the present investigation suggests something under 20 percent. Although paper began to be used for secular manuscripts sometime in the late ninth century,<sup>45</sup> these are the earliest Qur'āns written on paper and represent the transition from Kūfic Qur'āns on parchment to fully cursive Qur'āns on paper.<sup>46</sup> In fact the earliest known dated paper Qur'ān is written in a very upright and regular semi-

TABLE 2. Semi-Kūfic Qur'āns, Tenth-Eleventh Centuries

manuscript	medium	place and date	verse count	fig. nos.
CBL 1434 (juz')	paper	Iran 972	on ff. 1b, 2a	8, 9
TKS HS 22 (1/4 Qur'ān)	paper	Iraq/Iran 998	none in section	10, 11
BL 11,735 (juz')	vellum	Iraq/Iran late 10th century	on f. 1a; 1st part missing	12, 13
TKS R-38 (complete)	vellum	Iraq/Iran late 10th century	on f. 317b; 1st part missing	14, 15
TKS Y-752 (complete)	paper	Iraq/Iran 1004-5	none	16, 17
BL Or. 12884 (complete)	paper	Iraq/Iran mid 11th century	none	
MMA 45.10 and 40.164 2a-b (detached folios)	paper	Iran/Afghanistan	detailed count before each āyah	18
TKS R-10 (complete)	paper	Iran 11th century	on f. 235a; 1st part missing	19

Kūfic script. This is CBL 1434 (figs. 8 and 9), a large fragment of a manuscript, portions of which also exist at the Ardabil Shrine and the University Library in Istanbul (A 6758), whose section is dated 361/972 and signed by 'Alī ibn Shādhān al-Rāzī (of Rayy).<sup>47</sup>

The second is that these semi-Kūfic Qur'āns abandon the horizontal format of Abbasid Kūfic and adopt the vertical format that had been used previously in



FIG. 11. Colophon, dated 388/998, signed Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn al-Husayn al-Shāfir. Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Library, HS 22, f. 257b.

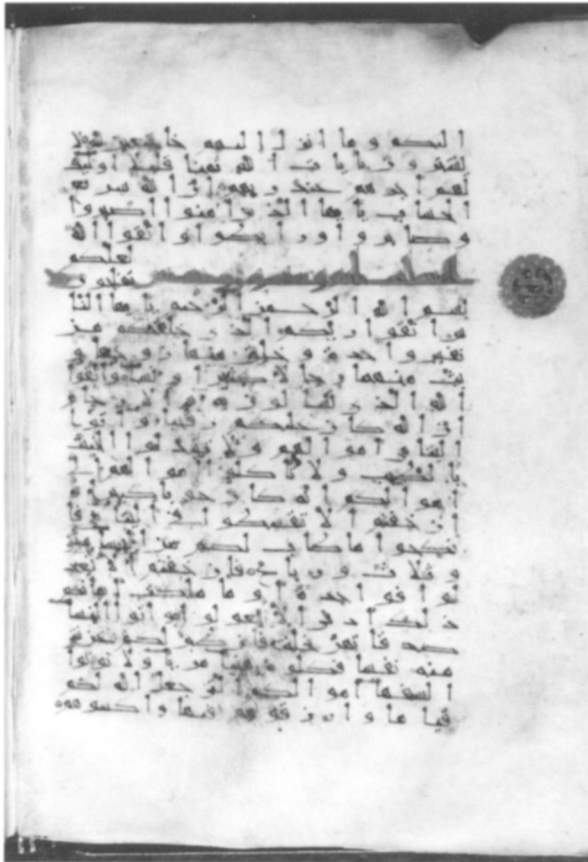


FIG. 12. Semi-Kufic Qur'an fragment on vellum, late tenth century, Iraq or Iran. London, British Library, 11,735, f. 46b.



FIG. 13. Verse count. London, British Library, 11,735, f. 4b.



FIG. 14. Semi-Kufic Qur'an on vellum, Iraq or Iran, late tenth century. Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Library, R-38, ff. 12b and 13a.



FIG. 15. Verse count. Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Library, R-38, f. 317b.



FIG. 16. Semi-Kūfic Qurʾān on paper, Iraq/Iran, 394/1004–5. Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Library, Y-752.

the so-called Hijāzī Qurʾānic manuscripts of the *māʾil* script and even more commonly in secular manuscripts.<sup>48</sup> The motive for this change has not been determined, but it is unlikely to have been due to the switch from vellum to paper since both formats had been used previously with vellum. It is more likely that the use of the vertical format of secular manuscripts went hand in hand with the adoption of scripts that had been primarily used in the chancery and in literary manuscripts. The change in format, therefore, could have been simply an outgrowth of the calligraphic change. But it could also have been intentional, as a way of further differentiating the new Qurʾānic manuscripts from their predecessors.

The third feature shared by several semi-Kūfic Qurʾāns is that they begin with single- or double-illuminated folios that refer to the particular recension of the Qurʾān and give a verse count (figs. 9, 13, and 15). As far as we know, this feature did not exist in Abbasid Kūfic Qurʾāns<sup>49</sup> but begins with the earliest dated semi-Kūfic Qurʾān, namely CBL 1434, dated 972. Since most semi-Kūfic Qurʾāns exist as fragments with missing frontispieces and colophons, it is impossible to say what percentage of them would have included a verse count. But out of seven complete or nearly complete semi-Kūfic Qurʾāns from before the end of the eleventh century, four contain a verse count. Although admittedly a small sample, it does suggest at least that the use of verse count was a prevalent and quite deeply rooted practice in semi-Kūfic Qurʾāns between ca. 950 and ca. 1100.

The content of the verse count varies slightly from

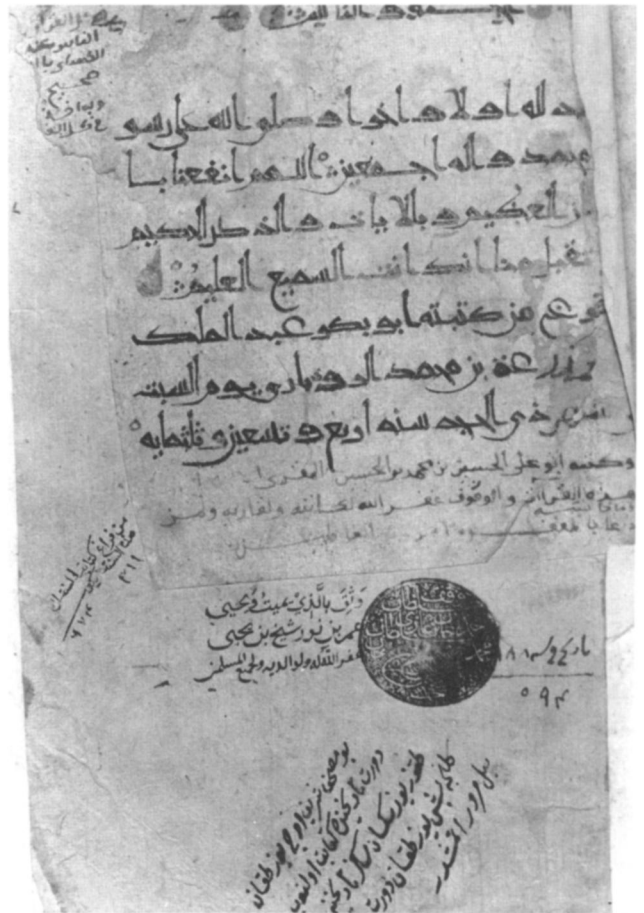


FIG. 17. Colophon, dated 394/1004–5, signed Abu Bakr ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Zar‘ah ibn Muḥammad al-Rūzbārī. Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Library, Y-752, f. 294a.



FIG. 18. Fragment from a semi-Kūfic Qurʾān on paper, Iran or Afghanistan, mid eleventh century. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 40.164.2b.

one manuscript to the next, but it generally includes the number of *sūras* and words in the Qurʾān. CBL 1434 begins with two folios (ff. 1b, 2a) that give within circular medallions the number of *sūras* (114), verses



FIG. 19. Fragment of a semi-Kūfic Qurʾān on paper, Iraq or Iran, eleventh century. Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Library, R-10, f. 31a.

(6,226), words (27,439), and even letters (321,015) (fig. 9). BL 11,735, which is datable to the second half of the tenth century in view of its use of vellum, contains the second folio (f. 1a) of a double-folio verse count (fig. 13). It gives exactly the same figures as CBL 1434 for the number of words and letters. TKS R-38, which is also a vellum manuscript, contains in its last folio (f. 317b) the first part of a two-folio verse count that gives the number of *sūras* in the Qurʾān as 114 and the number of verses as 6,224 (fig. 15). In TKS R-10, a paper manuscript, the statistical information also once covered two folios, one of which (f. 235a) is still preserved but in such a fragmentary condition as to render it practically illegible with any accuracy. Finally, the highly unusual fragments at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 40.164. 21a–d, contain a rather detailed verse count in very small semi-Kūfic script at the beginning of each chapter (fig. 18).

Semi-Kūfic Qurʾāns, therefore, differ from Abbasid Kūfic Qurʾāns in terms of their medium, format, script, diacritical marks, and verse count. Despite their superficial similarity to the earlier Qurʾāns, they should not be seen simply as a stage in a continuous evolution from angular to cursive but rather as a complete, and as I will argue deliberate, departure from past custom. Once this transformation is accepted on these terms, we must then look for the factors that led up to it. But before doing that we should examine next the second step in the transformation of Qurʾānic calligraphy, the one traditionally associated with Ibn al-Bawwāb.

### *Ibn al-Bawwāb and his Circle of Influence*

The second most important stage in the reformation of Qurʾānic calligraphy took place under Ibn al-Bawwāb (d. 1022). All the sources agree that Ibn al-Bawwāb followed the method of Ibn Muqla but further improved it by making the script clearer, more cursive, and more elegant. Ibn Khallikān, the thirteenth-century historian, said that “Ibn al-Bawwāb revised and refined [the method of Ibn Muqla] and vested it with elegance and splendor.”<sup>50</sup> Ibn Kathīr, the fourteenth-century Damascene historian, added that “[Ibn al-Bawwāb’s] writing is clearer in form than Ibn Muqla’s” and that in the author’s time “all people in all climes follow his method except a few.”<sup>51</sup>

Only one small Qurʾān has been securely attributed to Ibn al-Bawwāb, the famous copy at the Chester Beatty Library (1431), dated 391/1000–1 (figs. 20–23).<sup>52</sup> This is the earliest known cursive Qurʾān and undoubtedly one of the earliest made, since Ibn al-Bawwāb was the first to write Qurʾāns in fully cursive

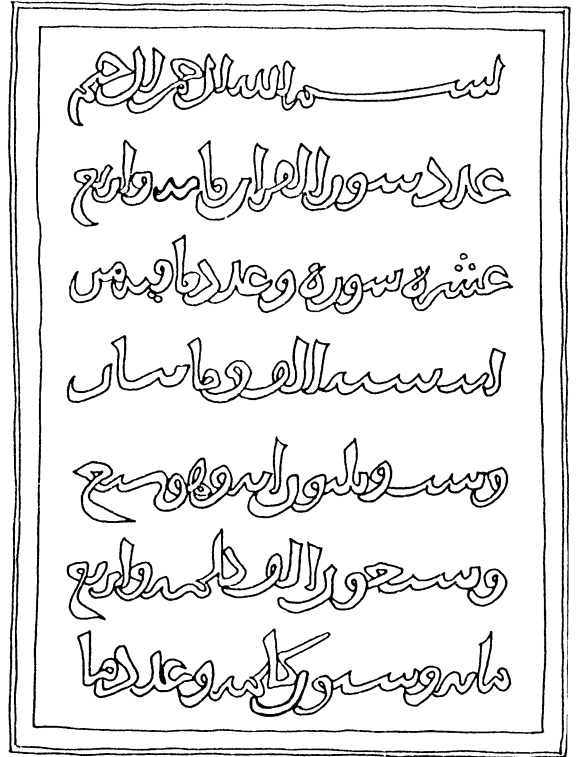
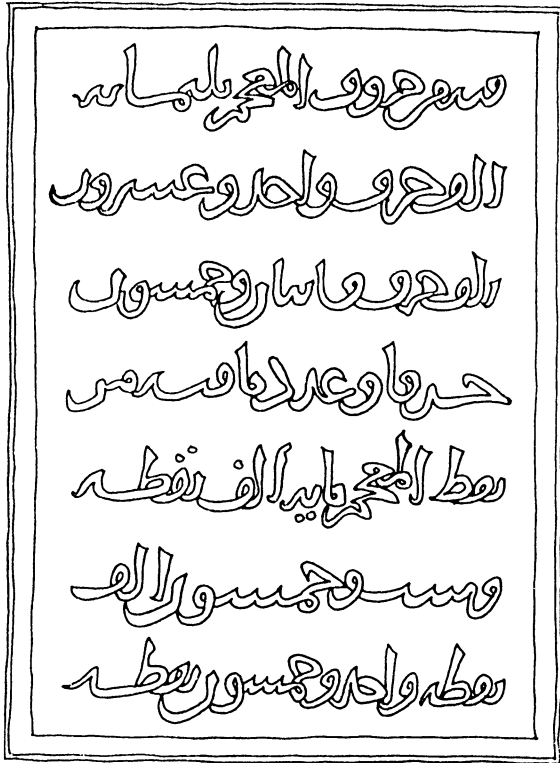


FIG. 20. Qur'ān of Ibn al-Bawwāb, Baghdad, 391/1000-1, signed 'Alī ibn Hilāl Ibn al-Bawwāb. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, 1431, drawing of verse count on ff. 6b and 7a.

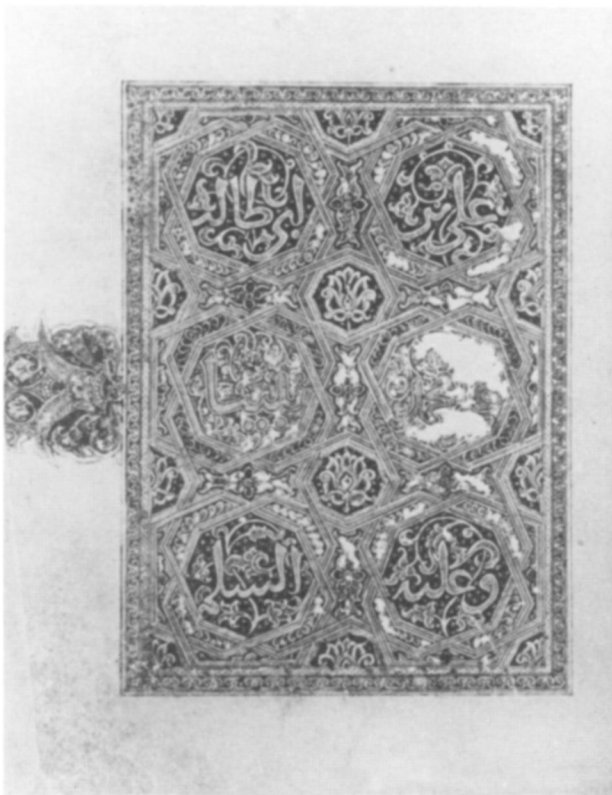


FIG. 21. Qur'ān of Ibn al-Bawwāb. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, 1431, ff. 7b and 8a.

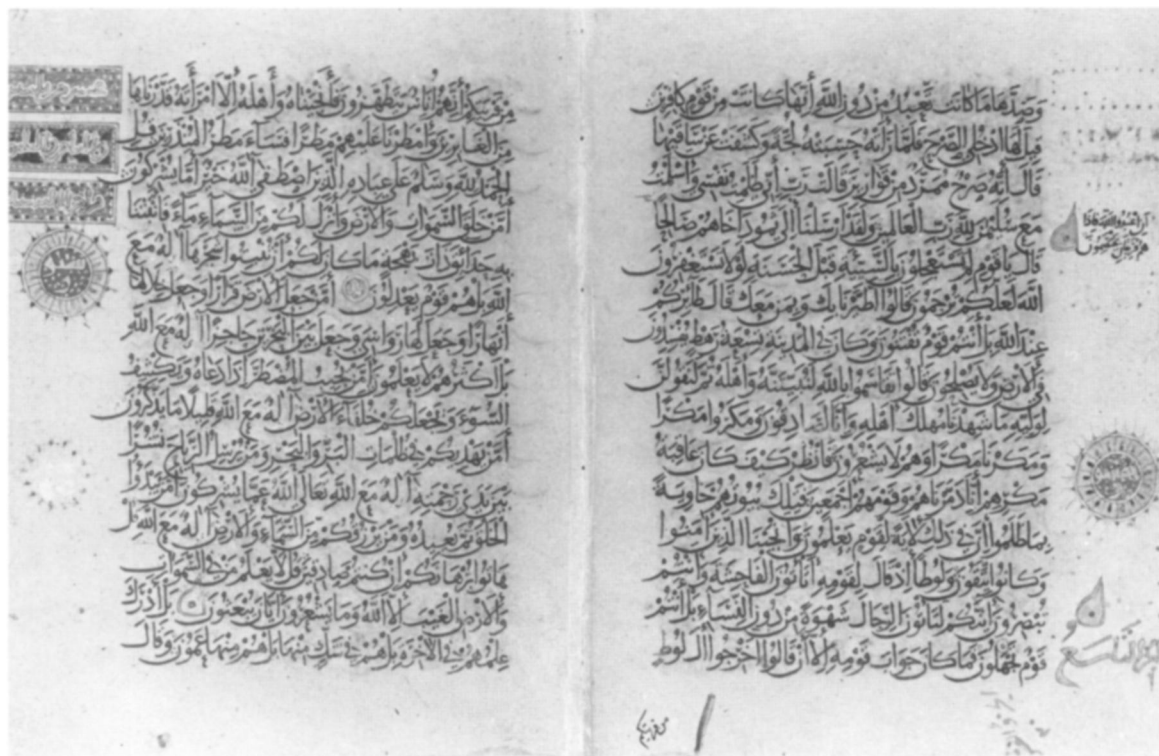


FIG. 22. Qur'an of Ibn al-Bawwāb. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, 1431, f. 241a and 241b. After Rice, *Ibn al-Bawwāb*.



FIG. 23. Qur'an of Ibn al-Bawwāb. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, 1431, f. 284a. After Rice, *Ibn al-Bawwāb*.



FIG. 24. Small cursive Qur'an on paper, Baghdad?, dated 402/1011, signed Sa'd ibn Muhammad ibn Sa'd al-Karkhi. London, British Library, Or. 13002, f. 120a.

TABLE 3. Dated Cursive Qurʾāns, 1000–1200

<i>manuscript</i>	<i>place and date</i>	<i>script</i>	<i>verse count</i>	<i>fig. nos.</i>
CBL 1431 (complete Qurʾān)	Baghdad 391/1000–1	text: <i>naskh</i> ; headings: <i>thuluth</i>	on two double folios	20–23
BL Or. 13002 (complete Qurʾān)	Baghdad 402/1011	text: small <i>naskh</i> ; headings: varied	on ff. 22b, 23a	24
TIM 431/2 (complete Qurʾān)	Iran 419/1026	text: <i>naskh</i> ; headings: <i>thuluth</i>	only in <i>sūra</i> headings	25, 26
BL Add. 7214 (complete Qurʾān)	Baghdad 427/1036	text: small <i>naskh</i> ; headings: semi-Kūfic	in <i>sūra</i> headings and margins	28
CBL 1430 (complete Qurʾān)	Iraq or Iran 428/1037	text: small <i>naskh</i> ; headings: floriated Kūfic	only in <i>sūra</i> headings	29, 30
TIM 449 (incomplete Qurʾān)	Baghdad? early eleventh century	text: <i>naskh</i> ; headings: Eastern Kūfic	none preserved	31, 32
DK 227 (3/4 of Qurʾān)	Iraq or Iran 491/1106	text: large <i>naskh</i> ; headings: <i>thuluth</i>	only in <i>sūra</i> headings	
BN Ar. 6041 (fifth <i>juzʾ</i> of Qurʾān)	Bust (Iran) 505/1111–12	text: <i>naskh</i> verging on <i>thuluth</i>	none in this <i>juzʾ</i>	33, 34
DK 144 (complete Qurʾān)	Iraq or Iran 555/1160	text: <i>rayḥān</i> ; headings: <i>thuluth</i>	only in <i>sūra</i> headings	
UMP NEP-27 (complete Qurʾān)	Hamadhan, Iran 559/1164	text: <i>naskh</i> ; headings: <i>thuluth</i> and semi-Kūfic	very detailed, on ff. 1a, 1b	35, 36
CBL 1438 (complete Qurʾān)	Iraq or Iran 582/1186	text: <i>muḥaqqaq</i> and <i>naskh</i> ; headings: E. Kūfic and <i>thuluth</i>	on ff. 1b, 2a	37, 38
CBL 1435 (large part of Qurʾān)	Iran 592/1195	text: <i>naskh</i> ; headings: E. Kūfic	on ff. 2b, 3a	39, 40
CBL 1439 (complete Qurʾān)	Iraq or Iran 597/1200	text: large <i>naskh</i> ; headings: E. Kūfic	on ff. 1b, 2a	41, 42

scripts (table 3). Written on brownish paper in a clear and compact *naskh*, this manuscript is rather easy to belittle: it has neither the majesty and mystery of early Kūfic folios nor the grandeur and sumptuousness of later cursive Qurʾāns. But it is precisely because it looks so familiar and legible to the contemporary reader that this Qurʾānic manuscript is in fact so original. In effect, this copy makes a clear and final break with the majestic but ambiguous script of the first three Islamic centuries, replacing it with a robustly cursive and perfectly legible script that has survived until the present day.<sup>53</sup>

The two most important cursive scripts are represented in this manuscript, *naskh* in the text and a variety of *thuluth* in the opening folios and *sūra* headings. *Naskh* was one of the pens in which Ibn al-Bawwāb excelled, and his particular style in writing seems to have been imitated until near the end of the twelfth century (e.g., figs. 30, 32, and 41). James has recently suggested that “the *naskh* of Ibn al-Bawwāb seems to be associated with areas east of Baghdad,”<sup>54</sup> an observation that is readily confirmed by several Iraqi and Persian manuscripts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>55</sup> In fact, the renown of Ibn al-Bawwāb’s Qurʾānic *naskh* immediately brings to mind the wide appeal of Ibn Muqla’s calligraphic method.

As with Ibn Muqla, the manuscripts closest in date to Ibn al-Bawwāb (before 1100) adhere the most closely to his hand while those from the succeeding century begin to show some divergence (e.g., figs. 36 and 37).<sup>56</sup>

The *thuluth* used in the statistical pages and the *sūra* headings of the Qurʾān of Ibn al-Bawwāb is no less remarkable than the *naskh* used in the text (figs. 20 and 21). Despite its early date, it shows a number of refinements that remain with Qurʾānic calligraphy for nearly two centuries and that even influence monumental writing. The script is of a type called *thuluth-ashʿar*, appearing here as a fully cursive script, thinly outlined in gold. Although somewhat densely written, the script is especially noteworthy for its clarity and legibility, achieved in part by its totally explicit letter forms, with open “eyes” and pointed uprights (*tarwīs* of the *alif* and *lām*).

The overall squatness of the script is relieved by variation in the thickness of its lines and by the very distinctive feature of interconnection: normally unconnected letters and even independent words are connected smoothly to one another through the use of thin, sinuous extensions. This identifying feature occurs a number of times in the introductory folios, as for example on f. 6b, line 5 (fig. 20), where the *waw*





FIG. 25. Qur'an in large gold *nashk* on paper, possibly Iran; possibly made for a Sulayhid prince in Yemen, dated 419/1026, signed Al-Hasan ibn 'Abdallah. Istanbul, Turkish and Islamic Art Museum, 431/2.



FIG. 27. Maghribi Kufic Qur'an on vellum, North Africa, eleventh century, *suras* 99–104. Note headings in *thuluth*. Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Library, A3, f. 285a.



FIG. 26. Heading of Sura 21 (*Al-Anbiya*) in *thuluth*, 419/1026. Istanbul, Turkish and Islamic Art Museum, 431/2.

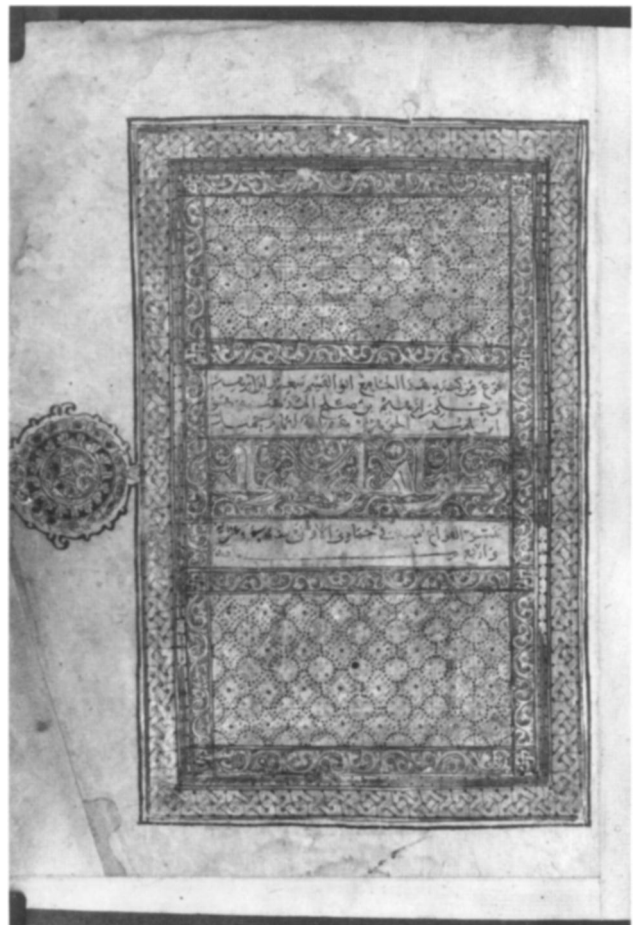


FIG. 28. Qur'an in small *nashk* script on brownish paper, Iraq or Iran, dated Jumada I 427/March 1036, calligrapher: Abu'l-Qasim Sa'ad . . . ibn Tilmidh al-Jawhari, illuminator: Abu Manzur ibn Nafi' ibn 'Abdallah. London, British Library, Add. 7214, f. 74a.

of *huwais* connected to the *sīn* of *sab'ūn*, and on f. 8a, line 1, where the *alif* and the *bā'* of *abī* are interconnected (fig. 21). Some of the manuscripts in the present sample and several later ones slavishly copy this peculiarity, or perhaps embellishment, at first because of the immediate impact of Ibn al-Bawwāb but later perhaps as a sign of homage to the great calligrapher (fig. 19).<sup>57</sup> In fact, it can be said that nearly all the manuscripts in table 3 that employ *thuluth* (i.e., BL Or. 13002, TIM 431/2, CBL 1430, DK 227, DK 144, UMP NEP-27, CBL 1438) copy the style of Ibn al-Bawwāb, down to the feature of interconnection (e.g., figs. 24, 26, and 37).<sup>58</sup>

The influence of Ibn al-Bawwāb extended even farther than that of Ibn Muqla, and calligraphers continued to employ his method for more than two centuries after his death.<sup>59</sup> Later calligraphers not only honored and emulated him, but a few even made forgeries bearing his signature and attempted to sell them as originals. Some of these forgeries were almost contemporary with Ibn al-Bawwāb<sup>60</sup> while others postdated him by several centuries.<sup>61</sup> Although his impact was mainly felt in the lands east of Baghdad, at least one Qurʾān manuscript from North Africa (TKS A3), datable to the late eleventh century, tries to copy the *thuluth* of Ibn al-Bawwāb in its *sūra* titles (fig. 27). The calligrapher, who was quite proficient in the Maghribi style in which most of

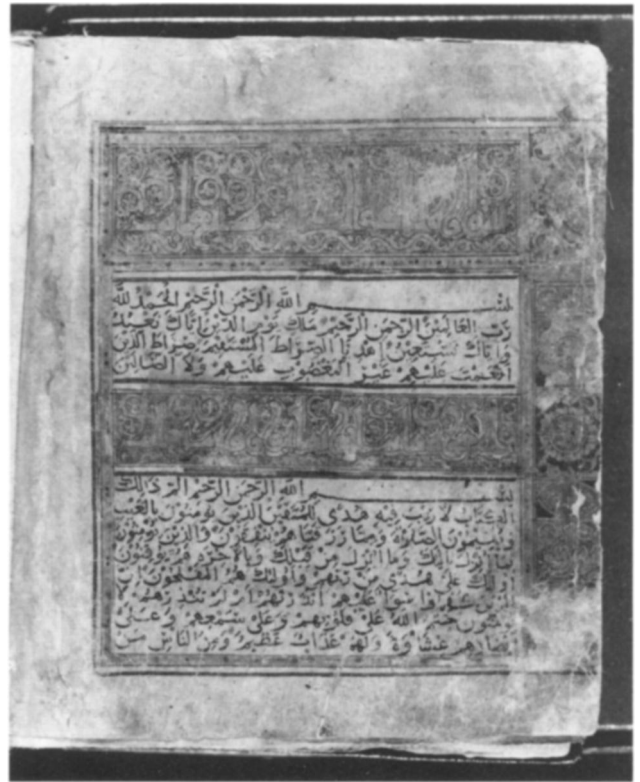


FIG. 29. Qurʾān in small *nashk* script on brownish paper, Iraq or Iran, dated 21 Rajab 428/10 May 1037. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, 1430, f. 1b.

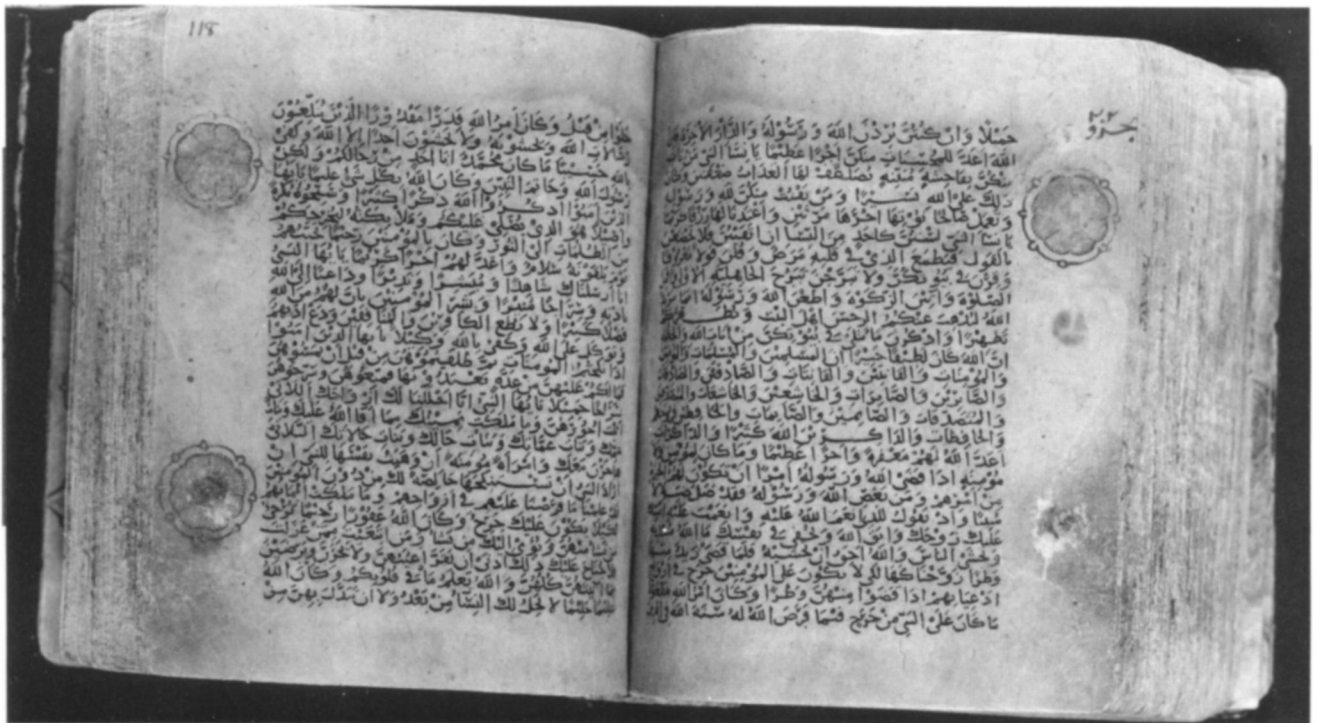


FIG. 30. Qurʾān in small *nashk* script on brownish paper, Iraq or Iran, 1037. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, 1430, ff. 117b and 118a. Note the striking similarity to the script of British Library, Add. 7214 (fig. 28).

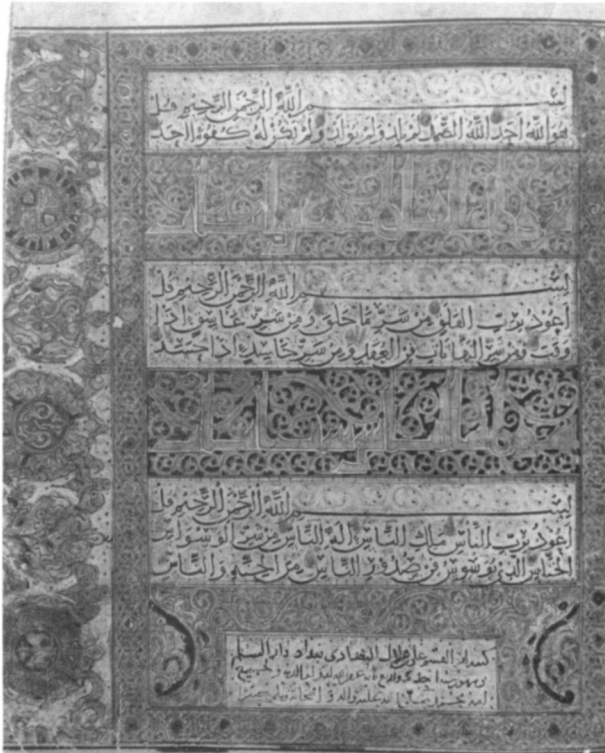


FIG. 31. Qurʾān in small *naskh* script on thick buff paper, Baghdad? early eleventh century, colophon falsely signed in the name of Ibn al-Bawwab. Istanbul, Turkish and Islamic Art Museum, 449, f. 286a.



FIG. 32. Qurʾān in small *naskh*, Baghdad? early eleventh century. Istanbul, Turkish and Islamic Art Museum, 449.



FIG. 33. Fifth volume of Qurʾān in *ta'wiif*, pen on paper, Bust (Iran), dated 505/1111–12, signed 'Uthmān ibn Muḥammad. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ar. 6041, f. 107a.



FIG. 34. Colophon of Bust Qurʾān, 1111–12. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ar. 6041, f. 125a.

the manuscript is written, betrays a certain naiveté when trying to write such a distinctive cursive script. An even greater illustration of Ibn al-Bawwāb's prominence among later calligraphers is an early sixteenth-century manuscript that attempts to reproduce his various styles.<sup>62</sup> Written five hundred years after Ibn al-Bawwāb and dedicated almost in its entirety to his various calligraphic styles, this manuscript must be seen as an homage to the great master and as an attempt to perpetuate his legacy.

It is important to note, however, that despite their great renown and immediate influence in the eastern Islamic world, Ibn Muqla and Ibn al-Bawwāb had virtually no impact on Egypt. Out of our two samples

of eight semi-Kūfic and thirteen early cursive Qurʾān manuscripts, not one was produced in Fātimid Egypt. In fact the vast majority were made in Iraq and Iran, with Baghdad occupying a position of honor. Geography may have played a role: Baghdad, the center of this calligraphic transformation, was in the period under consideration better connected with Iran than with Egypt. But the absence of any semi-Kūfic or cursive Qurʾān manuscripts from Egypt until the beginning of the thirteenth century must have another explanation, to which I will return.

In addition to perfecting the cursive proportioned script, the Qurʾān of Ibn al-Bawwāb contains other important developments. The two-folio verse count,



FIG. 35. Qurʾān in *naskh* on paper, Hamadhan (Iran), dated 559/1164, signed Maḥmūd ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Kātib al-Kirmānī. The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, NEP-27, f. 1a (neg. #21586). Opening page showing verse count according to different schools.



FIG. 36. Qurʾān in *naskh* on paper, Hamadhan, 1164. The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, NEP-27, f. 2a, *al-Fātiḥa* (neg. #21590).



FIG. 37. Qurʾān in *naskh* and *muhaqqaq* with *thuluth* and Eastern Kūfic headings, Iraq or Iran, dated 15 Jumada I, 582/3 August 1186, signed ‘Abd al-Rahmān . . . al-Kātib al-Malikī ‘Zarrin Qalam’. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, 1438, f. 125a. Throughout the manuscript one line of *muhaqqaq* alternates with several lines of *naskh*; Eastern Kūfic is used for Bismillāh and *sūra* titles; small gold *thuluth* is employed for emphasis.

which we have seen in several semi-Kūfic Qurʾāns, is further expanded here to enumerate the words and letters in each *sūra*, the total number of words and letters in the Qurʾān, and even the number of dotted and undotted letters (ff. 6b and 7a; fig. 20). Such obsessive record keeping seems to stand in sharp contrast to the early Kūfic Qurʾāns, none of which included even the most casual verse count.

The verse count is followed by another double folio (7b and 8a; fig. 21), which mentions the particular recension of this Qurʾān. Placed within hexagonal cartouches, six per page, the inscription reads:

[f. 7b:] According to the count of the people of Kūfa, which is told after the Commander of the Believers

[f. 8a:] ‘Alī ibn abī Ṭālib and Muhammad our Prophet, peace be on him

Despite being the first documented Qurʾān to refer to any recension, it does not provide quite enough information, since Kūfa boasted not one but three canonical Qurʾānic readers, namely ‘Āṣim, Ḥamza, and al-Kisāʾī.<sup>69</sup> It is possible that this was a deliberate ambiguity, intended to establish the authority of this Qurʾān by reference to all three of these recensions.

Of the thirteen dated eleventh- and twelfth-century Qurʾāns in this sample, the first six (all from the first half of the eleventh century) are quite easily comparable with the Qurʾān of Ibn al-Bawwāb in terms

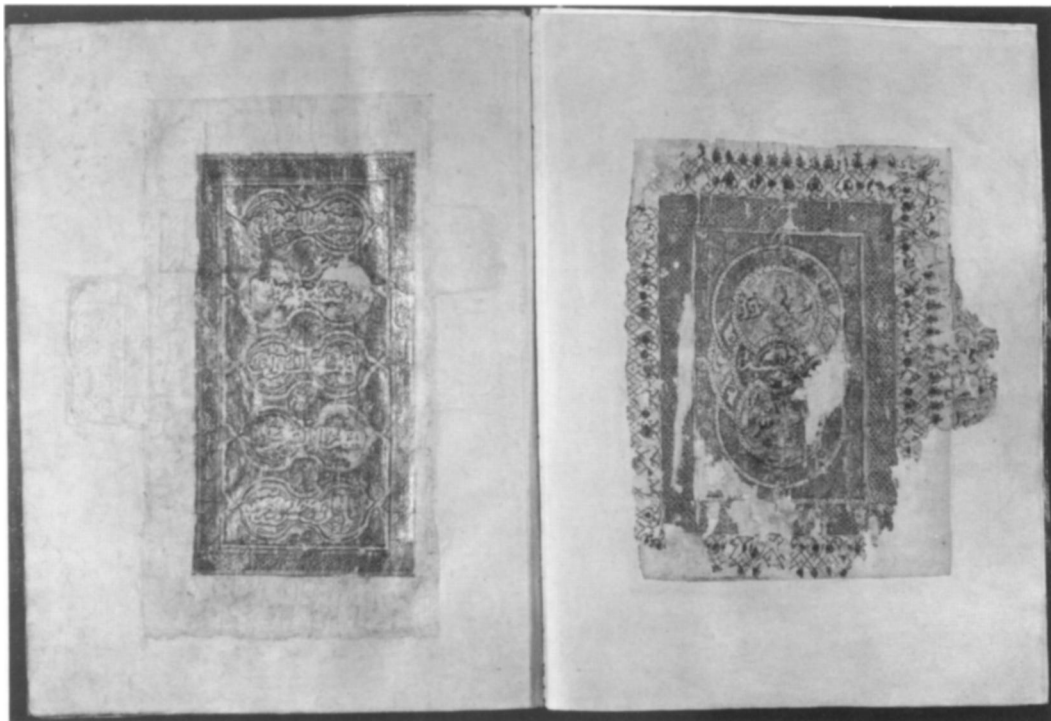


FIG. 38. Verse count. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, 1438, f. 2a and 1b.



FIG. 39. Large section of a Qur'an in *naskh*, Iraq or Iran, dated Muharram 592/December 1195, signed Abū Na'im ibn Ḥamza al-Baihaqi. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, 1435, ff. 117b and 118a.

of calligraphy, size, and the reliance on accurate verse count (table 3). The closest to his hand are without doubt BL Add. 7214 (1036), CBL 1430 (1037), and TIM 449, which must be very close in date to these manuscripts but whose colophon has been rewritten to refer to Ibn al-Bawwāb (figs. 28–32).<sup>64</sup> Produced about two decades after the death of the master, possibly by students of his, the *naskh* hand used in these splendid manuscripts is extremely close to that of Ibn al-Bawwāb. BL Or. 13002, the closest in date to Ibn al-Bawwāb, also uses a similar *naskh* hand but is on the whole a less accomplished manuscript (fig. 24). TIM 431/2 (figs. 25 and 26), which seems to have been intended for the Ṣulayḥid ruler of Yemen, clearly belongs to a higher level of patronage than the only extant Ibn al-Bawwāb manuscript. Although the undotted *thuluth ash'ar* used in some of the *sūra* headings (fig. 26) recalls the *thuluth* of Ibn al-Bawwāb, the text itself is written in a totally original mixture midway between *naskh* and golden *thuluth*. Indeed, the lavish use of gold, the numerous illuminations, and, for the time, the large size of the script seem to describe a royal manuscript that has yet to be properly studied.

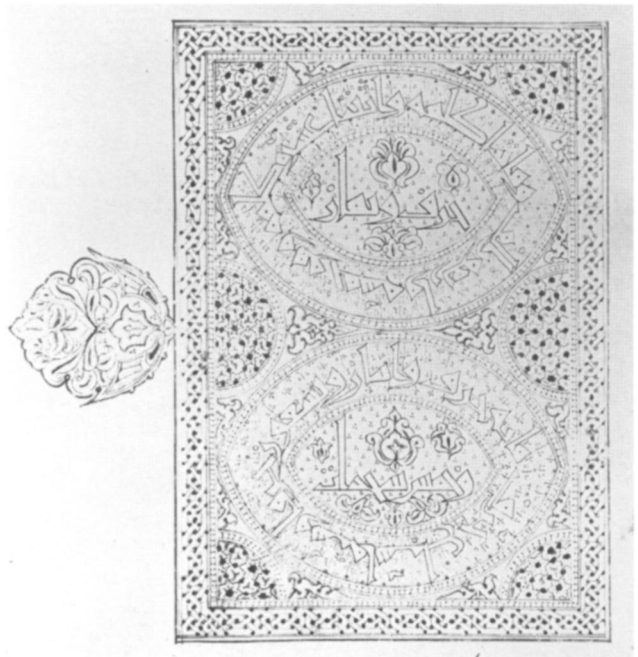


FIG. 40. Verse count. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, 1435, f. 3a.

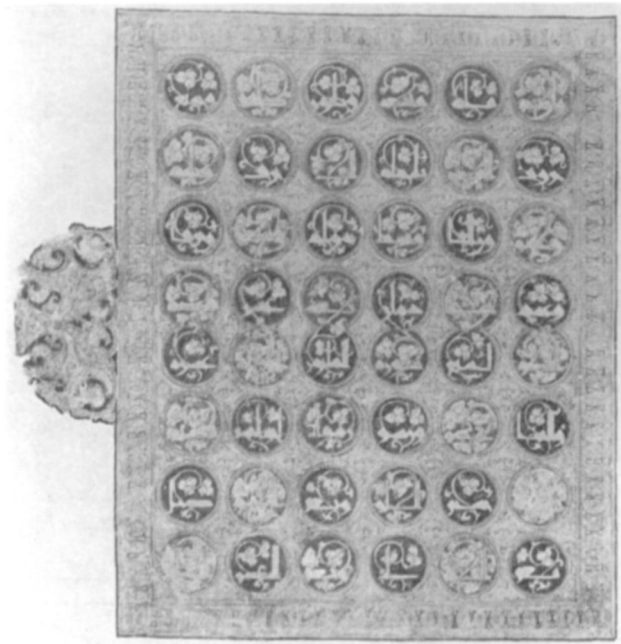


FIG. 41. Qurʾān in *naskh* on paper, Iraq or Iran, datable by *waqf* to ca. 597/1200, signed by calligrapher Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Jabali and illuminator ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad al-Sūfi. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, 1439, f. 366b.



FIG. 42. Verse count in floriated Kūfic contained within circular medallions. Dublin, The Chester Beatty Library, 1439, f. 1r.

As would be expected, manuscripts from the twelfth century, which are separated from Ibn al-Bawwāb by five or more generations, display much greater calligraphic freedom. One of the most original is the little-known manuscript BN Ar. 6041, written in Bust (Iran) in 505/1111–12. Déroche has convincingly identified its script as *tawqīf*, which is a larger and more cursive pen than *naskh* (figs. 33 and 34).<sup>65</sup> NEP-27 at The University Museum in Philadelphia uses a rather sparse *naskh* script, which is comparable though not identical to that of Ibn al-Bawwāb (fig. 36). CBL 1438, dated 582/1186 and written by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kātib al-Maliki ‘Zarrin Qalam’, has been identified by James as a royal manuscript.<sup>66</sup> It displays a bewildering array of scripts, including Eastern Kūfic, *muḥaqqaq*, *naskh*, and a *thuluth* that is remarkably close to the hand of Ibn al-Bawwāb (figs. 37 and 38). As with the earlier TIM 431/2, its royal status sets it apart from the less elaborate Qurʾān of Ibn al-Bawwāb. The last two manuscripts in the sample, CBL 1435 and 1439, dated respectively 1195 and 1200, are both written in a clear and sober *naskh* that resembles the style of Ibn al-Bawwāb in most respects but has taller uprights and far fewer lines per page (figs. 39–42).

Taken as a group, six out of the thirteen manuscripts in the sample contain a verse count (figs. 20, 24, 35, 38, 40, and 42). Restricting the sample to the ten complete Qurʾāns, we still get six manuscripts

with full verse count, leaving the possibility of an even higher ratio since folios bearing the verse count are especially vulnerable to destruction and loss.<sup>67</sup>

In short, then, this group of Ibn al-Bawwāb-related Qurʾāns exhibits some continuity and some development over Ibn Muqla-related tenth-century Qurʾāns. The new scripts are totally cursive, betraying none of the formulaic regularity of the semi-Kūfic group. Orthographic signs, while similar to those of the previous century, are more consistently used; verse counts are expanded and also used in *sūra* headings; and the particular recension is often clearly stated.

### Interpretation

Between about 930 and the first decades of the eleventh century, Qurʾānic calligraphy therefore underwent two decisive changes that completely transformed the physical appearance of the Qurʾān, both in sum and in detail. The first change led to the creation of a paper Qurʾān written in a crisp, sometimes rigid script with full diacritical marks, while the second resulted in a variety of fully cursive Qurʾāns, which have remained relatively unchanged until recently. Paleographic and artistic concerns aside, what really distinguishes these Qurʾāns from the earlier Kūfic ones is legibility. Semi-Kūfic Qurʾāns

are, with the exception of some ornate examples, reasonably legible, while the fully cursive ones can be easily read by any literate person.

This raises a number of important questions. What was behind this two-phase but total transformation of Qurʾānic calligraphy? Why was a script as old as Islam itself abandoned in Qurʾānic writing and replaced by the reformed scripts of Ibn Muqla and Ibn al-Bawwāb—scripts that had originated in the secular sphere? In what ways was the old Kūfic script considered deficient, and what new associations did the new scripts convey vis-à-vis their predecessor? And lastly, what was the reason for the compulsion to count verses and record them accurately?

A technical explanation may stress the change from parchment to paper in Qurʾāns—a change that had begun in other manuscripts as early as the late ninth century. Ernst Kühnel, for example, has suggested in passing that the spread of paper as an inexpensive writing medium in the succeeding centuries led to the development of a less cumbersome and pretentious style.<sup>68</sup> Actually, the impact of paper on literacy and book production in the Islamic world, which remains a poorly studied subject, was far more complicated than Kühnel suggests.<sup>69</sup> There is little doubt that the availability of Chinese paper from the eighth century and its widespread manufacture in the Islamic world by the tenth century contributed to the expansion of literacy. As a cheap writing medium became available, the number of scribes (*nussākh*) increased and so did the number of scripts, which in turn led to the relaxation of calligraphic standards and the general decline in the quality of writing.<sup>70</sup> Some system was urgently needed for secular writing, and it was provided, as explained above, by Ibn Muqla in the form of *al-khaṭṭ al-mansūb*. But although paper and literacy were significant factors in this transformation, they do not explain why the new script was used for the Qurʾān, thereby ending a four-century-old tradition of angular writing. A technical explanation is simply untenable for a matter of such importance.

One is also tempted to see in the proportioned script yet another of the many applications of geometric principles to Islamic art in the late tenth and eleventh centuries. Certainly, the method of Ibn Muqla has more to do with geometry than with calligraphy—a fact that was not lost on contemporary authors. We might also add that there is a clear difference between the visible geometry of the angular Kūfic script and the invisible geometry of the proportioned script of Ibn al-Bawwāb, often described as a script without any visible external edges (*an lā turā min al-khārījī zawāyāhu*).<sup>71</sup> It is this

assimilated geometry that pervades a variety of artistic forms in the eleventh century, namely geometric strapwork and *muqarnas*. In fact, it can hardly be accidental that these calligraphic and architectural changes occur simultaneously and within the same geographic regions.<sup>72</sup>

Yet, despite the key role played by geometry in the formation of the proportioned script, it could not have been the primary cause for this development, and one has to search for the factors that led up to its application in Qurʾānic calligraphy. What the geometry of Ibn Muqla did was to make certain mundane scripts such as *naskh* sufficiently worthy for writing the Qurʾān. But the question remains as to why this development was demanded in the first place. Why was this new script preferred over the Kūfic for writing the Qurʾān?

To answer these questions we must look closely at certain contemporary ideas about the content of the Qurʾān. The need to produce a universal recension of the Qurʾān was strongly felt in the early Islamic period; finally, under the third caliph ʿUthmān, the official recension was finished, and all other variants were allegedly destroyed.<sup>73</sup> Only one reader, Ibn Masʿūd, refused to destroy his version of the Qurʾān or stop teaching it when the ʿUthmānic recension was made official.<sup>74</sup> His codex, which differed from the ʿUthmānic recension in several important respects, was later taken over by the Shiʿite Fāṭimids.<sup>75</sup> As time went on, even the so-called canonical version once more became a source of great confusion because of the ambiguity of the script, “to the point that it became impossible to distinguish ʿUthmanic from non-ʿUthmanic ones.”<sup>76</sup>

By the end of the tenth century, the differences in the texts became more pronounced as a result of the general use of more precise scripts, making it possible for the authorities to enforce a greater measure of uniformity. Under the patronage of Caliph al-Muqtadir, a jurist named Aḥmad Ibn Mujāhid produced Qurʾānic codices based on the seven canonical readings belonging to important *qurrāʾ* of the eighth century. His views, set forth in a book called *Kitāb al-Sabʿa*,<sup>77</sup> were adopted by none other than the Ibn Muqla, in his position as vizier of the Abbasid state, and made official in the year 322/934.

In fact, Ibn Muqla’s involvement in the creation of a canonical body of Qurʾānic recensions went much further than that. He was certainly involved in the trials of two of the variant readers, Ibn Miksam and Ibn Shanabūdh.<sup>78</sup> The persecution of Ibn Shanabūdh, who had persisted in teaching the Qurʾān according to the non-ʿUthmānic variant of Ibn Masʿūd, by Ibn



Mujāhid and Ibn Muqla is especially noteworthy. He was brought to trial at a court presided over by the vizier Ibn Muqla, where he at first quite confidently and belligerently defended the variant readings that had provoked the charges. But after he had been flogged, he completely disavowed his previous position and signed a document stating that in the future he would adhere to the ʿUthmānic text.<sup>79</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, who also mentions Ibn Shanabūdh's flogging at the order of Ibn Muqla, quotes his alleged recantation: "I used to read expressions differing from the version of ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, which was confirmed by consensus, its recital being agreed upon by the Companions of the Apostle of Allāh. Then it became clear to me that this was wrong, so that I am contrite because of it and from it torn away. Now before Allāh, may his Name be glorified for Him is acquittal, behold the version of ʿUthmān is the correct one, with which it is not proper to differ and other than which there is no way of reading."<sup>80</sup>

We have therefore in the person of Ibn Muqla both the calligrapher who created the calligraphic system that led to the conversion of the form of the Qurʾān and the vizier who enforced the caliphal order to establish a body of canonical Qurʾānic readings. There is every indication that the two matters are related: that the creation of *al-khaṭṭ al-mansūb* and its adoption for copying the Qurʾān were inspired by the canonization of the text of the Qurʾān. This reforming zeal is further reflected in the emphasis on correct verse count in the Qurʾāns of the tenth century. The new script, with its improved orthography and the correct numeration, would have left no doubt in the mind of Muslims that they were reading one of the new orthodox recensions, certainly not a Qurʾān with aberrant readings.

It is very likely that the act of al-Muqtadir and his vizier Ibn Muqla was politically motivated. The caliphate and orthodox Islam were under attack from many different sides by heterodox groups of various Shiʿite persuasions. Closest to Baghdad were the Qarāmiṭa, who had, during the reign of al-Muqtadir, occupied Baṣra and Kūfa and threatened Baghdad several times. Farther away, but nonetheless a threat to the orthodox caliphate, were the Fāṭimids, who in the first quarter of the tenth century had conquered central North Africa and Sicily and were pushing eastwards. In the face of these overwhelming threats the caliphate could resort to one of the very few weapons it had left, namely its nominal position as the safeguard of the Islamic community and the enforcer of the correct religion. Establishing the canonical recensions of the Qurʾān and creating a new unambiguous script for these standard versions

were acts in keeping with that role.

The second reform of the Qurʾānic script, the one that led to the Qurʾān of Ibn al-Bawwāb, also may have had its source in contemporary events. In 945 the Abbasid caliphate fell under the control of a foreign dynasty, namely the Buyids, who, to make matters worse, were Shiʿites. By the second half of the tenth century, in fact, most of the Islamic world was controlled by Shiʿite dynasties, with the Fāṭimids even proclaiming a Shiʿite counter-caliphate centered in Cairo. Only the Ghaznavids in northeastern Iran actively supported the staunch orthodoxy of the Abbasid caliph.

While the office of the caliph was immensely weakened under the Buyids, it was still possible for a strong caliph to reclaim some measure of power and authority, especially in times of disunity among the actual rulers. This is precisely what happened during the long reign of the assertive caliph al-Qādir (991–1031). Taking advantage of the strong popular reaction against the Buyids, al-Qādir gradually introduced measures that would undermine Shiʿite law and keep the Shiʿites out of governmental offices. In 1011, he issued a manifesto condemning the Fāṭimid doctrine, denigrating their genealogy, and declaring the Ismāʿīli Fāṭimids to be among the enemies of Islam.<sup>81</sup> In 1017 al-Qādir attempted something not tried since the caliph al-Maʾmūn in the ninth century, namely to promulgate an official theology that condemned all opposing doctrines. The so-called Epistle of al-Qādir (*al-Risāla al-Qādiriyya*) took aim primarily at the Muʿtazili-Shiʿites but also numbered much more moderate groups among its enemies. It forbade *kalām* and all other forms of theological argumentation and negation. It even permitted the imprisonment, exile, and execution of all those jurists and rulers who persisted in their unorthodox practice. Finally, it decreed the cursing of heterodox rulers at the pulpits of mosques and encouraged rebellion against them.<sup>82</sup>

The cornerstone of the arguments in the Epistle of al-Qādir, as explicated by his chief apologist al-Bāqillānī, concerned the nature of the Qurʾān: It was not created in time, as the Muʿtazilis and others believed, but simply recorded the eternal words of God.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, it was uncreated in whatever form it existed: *maktūb* (written), *maḥfūz* (memorized), *malluw* (recited), or *masmūʿ* (heard). It had only one meaning, not two—a surface meaning (*zāhir*) and a deeper reading (*bāṭin*)—as the Muʿtazilis and Ismāʿīlis maintained. Third, the Qurʾān of Ibn Maṣʿūd, which was used by the Fāṭimids, constituted an unacceptable alteration of the Qurʾānic text.<sup>84</sup> The first two tenets were related, for a Qurʾān that was created in time can be interpreted with greater freedom than

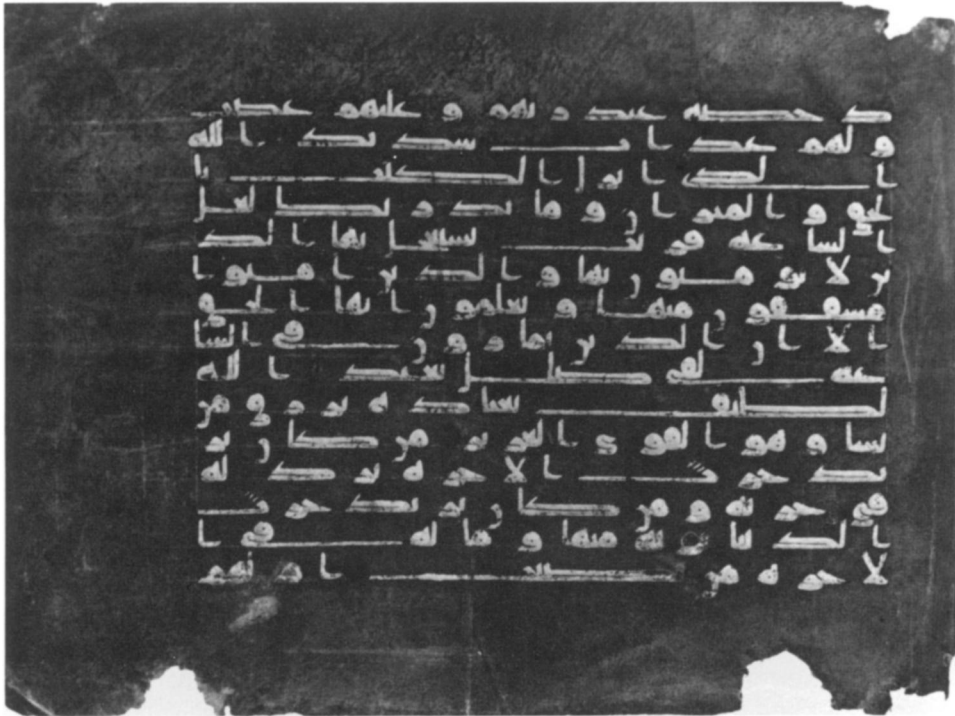


FIG. 43. Page from the "Blue Qur'an," gold on blue parchment, North Africa, tenth century. Private collection, chapter XLII, verses 10–23.

one that is, like God, eternal. And a Qur'an with two levels of meaning must be interpreted by those who know for those who do not. Conversely, an eternal Qur'an with a clearly manifest truth cannot be further interpreted, and therefore one had to accept the traditional exegesis presented by the jurists in the first two centuries of Islam. Therein lies the political importance of *al-Risāla al-Qādiriyya*. By closing the door to interpretation after the first two centuries of Islam and by insisting on the incorrectness of the recension of Ibn Mas'ūd, it was undermining the religious foundations of the Fāṭimid and Buyid states and affirming the legitimacy of the Abbasid caliphate.

The Qur'an of Ibn al-Bawwāb represents the creation of a perfectly cursive and easily legible script suitable for expressing the clear and explicit nature of the Word of God. Although ultimately based on the script of Ibn Muqla, the uncompromising clarity of the new script must be seen as a direct reflection of the Qādirī creed's insistence on the single and apparent truth in the Qur'an.

Conversely, the reformed Qur'an was equally intended to challenge the earlier Kūfic Qur'āns, whose use seems to have continued in Fāṭimid Egypt until the establishment of the Ayyubid dynasty in the late twelfth century. As noted above, not one semi-Kūfic or early cursive Qur'an seems to have been produced

under the Fāṭimids. In fact very few Fāṭimid Qur'āns of any description are known, and to my knowledge, only the so-called "Blue Qur'an" has been attributed with any degree of authority to the early Fāṭimid period in North Africa (fig. 43).<sup>85</sup> Scholars have often commented on the archaizing nature of the script, whose unvocalized and undotted letters seem to recall ninth-century Qur'āns.<sup>86</sup> In fact, the ambiguity of the script is further enhanced in this manuscript by the fact that it is written in gold over dark blue. The gold shimmers and seems to flow over the receding blue background, creating an evanescent effect that appears to affirm the Mu'tazili belief in the created and mysterious nature of the Word of God. One can hardly imagine a greater contrast than that between a page from the "Blue Qur'an" and one from the Qur'an of Ibn al-Bawwāb.

The symbolic implications of the proportioned script have long been lost, but its usefulness remains as a clear and legible script. Yet, at the time of its inception and particularly its adoption throughout the only recently Sunni Islamic world, it literally reflected the triumph of a theological view and all its political ramifications. The actual image—not just the content—of the Word became the symbol of the most important principle of the Sunni revival, a movement that redefined the course of medieval Islam.

## Notes

For his help in the area of Qurʾānic readings, I would like to express my special gratitude to Professor Wolfhart Heinrichs. I would also like to thank Professor Oleg Grabar for his valuable comments on several drafts of this paper. I am also grateful to Dr. Sheila Blair for her many helpful comments and bibliographic notes and to Muhammad Zakariyya for providing me with the “insider’s view” as a practicing calligrapher and for his assistance in the question of *qirāʾāt*. Obviously, I am alone responsible for the conclusions reached in this article.

1. The rise of Islamic epigraphy went hand in hand with the creation of two related bodies of historical inscriptions. The first and most important was the *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*, ed. E. Combe et al., 16 vols. (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1932–64). The second, which combined epigraphy with architectural documentation, was *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptiorum Arabicarum* (hereafter *MCIA*). It included the following publications: Max van Berchem, *MCIA, Première partie: Égypte, Mémoire de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire* 19 (1894, 1903); van Berchem, *MCIA, Deuxième partie: Syrie du Sud, Jerusalem*, 2 vols., *Mémoire. Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale (MIFAO)* 43–44 (1922, 1927); and Ernst Herzfeld, *MCIA, Troisième partie: Syrie du Nord, Inscriptions et Monuments d'Alep*, 3 vols. (*MIFAO*) 76–78 (1954–56).
2. The first attempts at using epigraphy for the interpretation of objects and monuments were made somewhat tentatively within the format of *MCIA* by Max van Berchem and later by Ernst Herzfeld. But the method was further developed by Oleg Grabar in his highly important study, “The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem,” *Ars Orientalis* 3 (1959): 39–62. Even here, however, the austerity and rigidity of Umayyad Kūfīc and its effective illegibility from the viewer’s standpoint may have further problematized the interpretation.
3. For example, even as recent a work as E. C. Dodd and S. Khairallah, *The Image of the Word: A Study of Quranic Verses in Islamic Architecture*, 2 vols. (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1981), pays very little attention to calligraphic form. See also my review of this publication in *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 17, no. 2 (May 1985): 263–66.
4. This is true of even the most recent publications, including Anthony Welch, *Calligraphy in the Arts of the Muslim World* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 22–35; Priscilla Soucek, “Islamic Calligraphy,” in *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia, 14th–16th Centuries*, ed. Basil Gray et al. (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 1979), 7–34; and David James, *Qurʾāns of the Mamluks* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988).
5. The trilogy of Ibn Muqla, Ibn al-Bawwāb and Yāqūt al-Mustaʿsimī is repeatedly invoked by all writers on Islamic calligraphy, including Yasin Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 13–19, and all those mentioned in the preceding note. But the cultural and political context in which these calligraphers worked is very rarely explored. Glenn Lowry has raised a similar objection regarding this restrictive view of the development of Islamic calligraphy in his excellent essay: “Introduction to Islamic Calligraphy,” in Shen Fu, Glenn Lowry, and Ann Yonemura, *From Concept to Context: Approaches to Asian and Islamic Calligraphy* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1986), 104.
6. One of the few exceptions is Nabia Abbott, *The Rise of the North Arabic Script and Its Qurʾānic Development, with a Full Description of the Qurʾān Manuscripts in the Oriental Institute* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 33–41. Although the book is rich in its references to political and religious factors, these are not considered as possible causes for changes and variations in calligraphy.
7. Although somewhat based on semiotic theory, this exploration of the relationship between form and meaning is ultimately justified by contemporaneous literary theory. It has been shown, for example, that the literary critic ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078) had trodden similar grounds as early as the eleventh century. See *Al-Jurjānī’s Theory of Poetic Imagery*, ed. Kamal Abu-Deeb (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1979), where the author elucidates the complex and rather modern principle of the image or form of meaning (*sūrat almaʿna*), which he sees as a structural whole made up of inner relations. Calligraphy, which conveys a specific message within a complex artistic form, seems ideal for this kind of investigation. The sequel to this paper, which will deal with public inscriptions, will further explore this problem.
8. These include the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (MMA), The University Museum in Philadelphia (UMP), the British Library in London (BL), The Chester Beatty Library in Dublin (CBL), the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (BN), and the Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi (TIM). I acknowledge here my gratitude to the librarians and curators of these institutions for giving me access to their important collections. I was able to examine the original manuscripts and obtain the necessary photographs at all these libraries and museums except Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya in Cairo (DK), where, due to conditions prevailing at the time of my visit in 1986, I had to content myself with the inadequate substitute of microfilms.
9. Abbott, *Rise*, 34–36.
10. Estelle Whelan, “Writing the Word of God: Some Early Qurʾān Manuscripts and Their Milieux, Part I,” *Ars Orientalis* 20 (1990): 135 n. 110.
11. Whelan, “Writing the Word,” 125.
12. François Déroche, *Les manuscrits du Coran, I: Aux origines de la calligraphie coranique* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1983), 14.
13. See, for example, the recent essay by Oleg Grabar, “Patronage in Islamic Art,” in *Islamic Art and Patronage: Treasures from Kuwait*, ed. Esin Atıl (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1990), 27–40.
14. This is easily demonstrated by a large number of early papyrus fragments that have been expertly examined by Abbott, *Rise*, 34–36, and Adolf Grohmann, *From the World of Arabic Papyri* (Cairo: Al-Maʿaref Press, 1952), among others.
15. The Arabic sources present two overlapping definitions of Kūfīc writing. The first, occurring in the earlier sources or describing early developments, refers to the mother script

- from which all subsequent Arabic scripts, whether angular or cursive, were developed. Qalqashandi, quoting an earlier source, says: "The Arabic script, which is now known as Kūfic, is the source of all contemporary pens. . . . The Kūfic script has a number of pens which can be traced to two sources: concaveness and flatness." In *Subḥ al-aʿshāʿ fi ʿInṣāʿ al-Inshāʿ* (Cairo: Turathuna, 1964), 3:11. The second and much later definition of Kūfic refers only to the angular script that dominated early Islamic calligraphy in Qurʾāns and monuments. This is the standard contemporary usage of the term and the one I employ in this paper.
16. Nabia Abbott, "Arabic Paleography: The Development of Early Islamic Scripts," *Ars Islamica* 8 (1941): 68–69.
  17. Abbott, "Arabic Paleography," 76.
  18. *The Koran Illuminated: A Handlist of the Korans in the Chester Beatty Library* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co., Ltd, 1967), xvii.
  19. Many of these difficulties have been discussed by Adolf Grohmann in "The Problem of Dating Early Qurans," *Der Islam* 33 (1958): 213–31. This method has been further refined by Déroche in *Les manuscrits du Coran, I*. Relying on these and other paleographic features, the author has attempted further to subdivide the well-known categories of *māʿil* (slanted script) and early Kūfic into smaller and more precise groups or families of manuscripts. But even within the central Kūfic groups (i.e., neither *māʿil* nor Eastern Kūfic), there is a remarkable degree of consistency in the letter forms and the overall appearance of the scripts.
  20. Abbott, "Arabic Paleography," 76.
  21. *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, ed. and tr. Bayard Dodge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 13–15.
  22. Cited in Abbott, "Arabic Paleography," 67.
  23. *Rise*, 97.
  24. According to Abbott, "Arabic Paleography," 88, "confusion and neglect seem to have gained sway until Ibn Muqla came to the rescue of the Arabic scripts."
  25. Nabia Abbott, "The Contribution of Ibn Muqla to the North Arabian Script," *American Journal of Semitic Languages* 56 (1939): 70–83; and Edward Robertson, "Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān on Calligraphy," in *Studia Semitica et Orientalia* (Glasgow: MacLehose, Jackson and Co., 1920), 57–83.
  26. Robertson, "Ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān," 59–60, who cites Ibn Khallikān as his source.
  27. Franz Rosenthal, "Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī on Penmanship," *Ars Islamica* 13–14 (1948): 9. Also cited in D. S. Rice, *The Unique Ibn al-Bawwāb Manuscript in the Chester Beatty Library* (Dublin: Emery Walker Ltd., 1955), 6.
  28. The method of Ibn Muqla is described in one early treatise and in a number of secondary sources. The anonymous treatise, *Risāla fī l-kitāba al-mansūba in Majallat Maʿhad al-Makḥūlāt al-ʿArabiyyah* 1, ed. M. Bahjat al-Athari (1955), describes Ibn Muqla's method in detail and with diagrams. Of the secondary sources, see: Robertson, "Ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān"; Abbott, *Rise*, 33–38; and Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 16–18.
  29. See Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 52–77 passim, for a discussion of the six scripts.
  30. Some of these forgeries were produced within a few decades of Ibn Muqla's death, while others postdate his death by up to two centuries.
  31. The only attempt that I know of to do just that is Frances C. Edwards' unpublished master's essay, "A Study of Eastern Kufic Calligraphy" (University of Michigan, 1981), esp. 34–60. This excellent and highly original study deliberately stays away from the legacy of Ibn Muqla and focuses instead on the two known works of ʿAlī ibn Shādhān al-Rāzi, the earliest dated semi-Kūfic (Edwards uses Eastern Kūfic instead) Qurʾān and a book on the grammarians of Baṣra. See note 47.
  32. Abbott, *Rise*, 35, presents a tentative reconstruction of Ibn Muqla's method and script. Aḥmad Muṣṭafa has written a thesis on the subject (University of Edinburgh, 1983), but it is unavailable for consultation except for some illustrations that have been published by Soucek, "Islamic Calligraphy."
  33. The term "semi-Kūfic" is something of an established error since it seems to suggest, incorrectly, a gradual softening of the original Kūfic script. Other terms for this script, such as "broken Kūfic" or "broken cursive," have been suggested recently by Estelle Whelan, "Early Islam: Emerging Patterns: 622–1050," in *Islamic Art and Patronage*, 51. I, however, find the adjective "broken" problematic in two respects: the first is that it has a somewhat pejorative tone, which can hardly be an appropriate description of Ibn Muqla's accomplishment, and the second is that it recalls an entirely different late Persian script, the *shikasta*, or "broken." The term "new Abbasid," proposed by Déroche, is perhaps the most appropriate since it seems to refer to the reforms of Ibn Muqla, who was almost certainly behind the development of this script or group of scripts.
  34. As far as I know, this connection has not before been made, although both Nabia Abbott and especially Eric Schroeder have noted the possibility of the indirect influence of Ibn Muqla on Qurʾānic writing of the tenth and eleventh centuries. See Eric Schroeder, "What Was the Badīʿ Script?" *Ars Islamica* 4 (1937): 232–48. Unfortunately, Schroeder's attempts to determine the legacy of Ibn Muqla are diminished by the small number of Qurʾānic fragments he examined and by his insistence on identifying the so-called "Badīʿ" script of Ibn Muqla. In fact, Schroeder's hypothesis was decisively refuted by M. Minovi, "The So-called Badīʿ Script," *Bulletin of the American Institute of Art and Archaeology* 5 (1939): 142–46. Schroeder actually had to retract his views in "The So-called Badīʿ Script: A Mistaken Identity," *Bulletin of the American Institute of Art and Archaeology* 5 (1939): 146–47. See also Rice, *Ibn al-Bawwāb*, 3 n. 1.
  35. Muslim scholars in particular have attributed a number of folios to the hand of Ibn Muqla, often on the basis of a marginal notation by a later owner of the manuscript. See, for example, Najī Zayn al-Dīn, *Muṣawwar al-Khaṭṭ al-ʿArabi* (Baghdad: Wizārat al-ʿIlm, 1968), 45, no. 80; Habib Fazaili, *Atlas-i Khaṭṭ* (Isfahan, 1971), 176; and Ahmed Mousa, *Zur*

- Geschichte der Islamische Buchmalerei in Aegypten* (Cairo: Government Press, 1931), 46, no. 30. More skeptically, Nabia Abbott has reproduced some folios attributed to Ibn Muqla in "Arabic Paleography," 80–81, figs. 1–2. Both the British Library and The Chester Beatty Library (Add. Ms.) have Qurʾānic fragments claiming to be in the hand of Ibn Muqla.
36. Perhaps the latest dated manuscript to adhere closely to Ibn Muqla's method is Mashhad Shrine Library, 84, dated 620/1223, a specimen that can easily be mistaken for an eleventh-century Qurʾān. See Martin Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976), 19, pl. 21.
  37. David James, *Qurʾāns and Bindings from the Chester Beatty Library* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1980), 26.
  38. *Les manuscrits du Coran, I*, 51.
  39. See Whelan, "Writing the Word," 134 n.96, for a detailed discussion of CBL 1417. Her conclusion that its rather ungainly script "differs from 'broken Kūfic' in significant ways" is entirely in agreement with mine.
  40. In fact, Arberry, *Koran Illuminated*, 10, commented that the script of CBL 1417 "appears to have no near parallel."
  41. There was apparently a great deal of resistance to the use of these marks in the Qurʾān. Mālik, one of the early readers of the Qurʾān, was asked: "May Qurʾāns be written according to the innovated system of vocalization? He answered: "No! Only according to the original script." Translated from quotation in Theodore Noldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans*, part 3, *Die Geschichte des Korantexts*, ed. G. Bergstrasser and O. Pretzl (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1961), 20. In private correspondence, Muhammad Zakariyya supplied me with four other versions of this anecdote of Ibn Mālik, attesting to its great popularity. They all repeat more or less the same tale, but three of them add the jurist's more lenient view with regard to *muṣḥafs* written for children.
  42. See Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 13–14, for a good summary of this complicated development.
  43. This consistency notwithstanding, Edwards in "Eastern Kūfic" has identified within the works of ʿAlī ibn Shādhān al-Rāzī two distinct scripts, a "monumental" script used in some titles and chapter headings and a "classical" script used for the text. The "monumental" script, with its bold strokes, high uprights, and *alifs* with a hook to the right, bears a close resemblance to the unelaborated Eastern Kūfic script, suggesting perhaps an earlier date for the origin of that script. For examples of the "monumental" script, see Salahuddin al-Munajjid, *Al-Kitāb al-ʿArabi al-Makhtūʿ* (Cairo: Maʿhad al-Makhtūʿāt al-ʿArabiyyah, 1960), pls. 19 and 22.
  44. Specimens of Eastern Kūfic are abundantly illustrated in Safadi, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 50ff., and elsewhere. Whether or not we accept the existence of Eastern Kūfic in the late tenth century (see previous note), it seems quite clear that this script is dependent on semi-Kūfic for all its character forms. Their differences have to do primarily with the increased size of the Eastern Kūfic script and especially its elongated uprights.
  45. Among the earliest must be CBL 3494, *Gharīb al-Hadīth of Ibn Qutayba*, dated 279/892. Illustrated in Munajjid, *Al-Kitāb al-ʿArabi*, pl. 15.
  46. See Nabia Abbott, "A Ninth Century Fragment of the Thousand Nights," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 8, no. 3 (1949) and n. 67 below.
  47. See James, *Qurʾāns and Bindings*, 27; Fehmi Edhem Karatay, *Istanbul Universitesi Kutuphanesi Arapça Yazmalar Katalogu* (Istanbul: Istanbul Universitesi, 1953), pl. 5. In 376/986 the same scribe/calligrapher copied a text on Baṣran grammarians, *Kitāb Akhbār al-Nahawīyyin al-Baṣriyyin*, now located at the Library of Shahid Ali, no. 1842, Istanbul. It is illustrated in Munajjid, *Al-Kitāb al-ʿArabi*, pl. 22. See also Whelan, "Writing the Word" and Edwards, "Eastern Kūfic," 34ff.
  48. This intriguing connection between the format of Qurʾāns written in the *māʿil* script and that of secular manuscripts has not been explored. Although the Hījāzī manuscripts have been generally assumed to be earlier than Abbasid Qurʾāns, their link with lesser manuscripts may suggest a lower level of patronage or provincial origin. This would cast further doubt on the already problematic chronological distinction between these two types of manuscripts.
  49. Since very few complete Qurʾān manuscripts, with frontis- and finispieces, exist from before the middle of the tenth century, it remains uncertain whether or not they contained verse counts. Meanwhile, only one Kūfic manuscript on vellum (CBL 1404) contains a verse count, but it is a later addition. See James, *Qurʾāns and Bindings*, 23. In his most recent publication, *Qurʾāns of the Mamluks*, 24, James suggested that in at least one Kūfic Qurʾān on vellum the verse count is given on the opening illuminated folios. This is an undated manuscript in the British Library (Add. 11,735). This manuscript, however, is very clearly semi-Kūfic.
  50. *Wafīyyāt al-Aʿyān*, ed. Ihsan Abbas (Beirut: Dar Sader, 1970), 3:342.
  51. *Al-bidāya waʾl-nihāya*, 5th ed. (Beirut: Maktabat al-Maʿarif, 1983), 12:14.
  52. The most important study of this manuscript is Rice, *Ibn al-Bawwāb*. A facsimile edition of it was also made by Club du Livre Facsimile (Paris, 1972).
  53. The value of clarity in this new script has been stressed by Lings in *Quranic Art of Calligraphy*, 53. Lings' observation that the clarity of the new script corresponds to the clarity of the revelation is generally valid, except that, like much of the book, it tends to stand outside of history. One would like to know why it was specifically in the tenth and eleventh centuries that the old ambiguous scripts were replaced by the new clear ones.
  54. James, *Qurʾāns of the Mamluks*, 17.
  55. These would include the following manuscripts in the present sample: BL Or. 13002, TIM 431/2, BL Add. 7214, CBL 1430,

- TIM 449, CBL 1435. James, *Qurʾāns of the Mamluks*, 251, n. 3, mentions another related manuscript in the Library of the University of Leiden (inv.no.Cod. 437 Warn.), copied in Ghazna ca. 1050. This manuscript, *Kitāb Khalq a-Nabī wa Khulqih* by Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallah, was published by S. M. Stern, “A Manuscript from the Library of the Ghaznawid Amir ‘Abd al-Rashīd,” in *Paintings from Islamic Lands*, ed. Ralph Pinder-Wilson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1969), 7–31.
56. In fact James, *Qurʾāns of the Mamluks*, 17, has identified two groups of manuscripts from the second half of the twelfth century that begin to show divergence from the esteemed *nashh* of Ibn al-Bawwāb. The first variant is heralded by a small Syrian manuscript, now at the Keir Collection no. 27, bequeathed by Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Zanki to the *madrasa* al-Ḥanafīyya in Damascus in 1167. Another manuscript from the estate of Nūr al-Dīn exists at the Damascus Museum. Although undated and not totally identical with Keir 27, it shares with it many paleographic similarities, and the two *juzʿs* may in fact belong to the same *mushaf*. The second group has long been identified by Richard Ettinghausen in “A Signed and Dated Seljuk Koran,” *Bulletin of the American Institute for Persian Art and Archeology* 4, no. 2 (December 1935). This manuscript is listed tenth in table 3 above.
57. Perhaps one of the latest and most spectacular manuscripts to emulate both the *nashh* and *thuluth* of Ibn al-Bawwāb and even the overall format of his unique Qurʾān is the Yāqūt al-Mustaʿsimi Qurʾān at the Bibliothèque Nationale (Arabe 6716). Although I have not examined this manuscript at first hand, the two recently illustrated folios in *Splendeur et Majesté: Corans de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe and Bibliothèque Nationale, 1987), 63, should suffice to underline the close similarity between the two manuscripts. This intriguing connection between the two greatest Muslim calligraphers has not yet been explored.
58. The *thuluth* of Ibn al-Bawwāb is challenged around the end of the twelfth century by a variant originating in Afghanistan and eventually spreading to India. The outstanding manuscript TKS EH 42, dated 573/1177 and signed by Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn ʿAbdallah al-Ghaznawī, which is otherwise written in an excellent Eastern Kūfic, contains at least two folios (fig. 7) in this new variant. The distinct features of this script are to be found mainly in its uprights, which tend to be tall, vertical, and unpointed—quite possibly influenced by the similarly exaggerated uprights of Eastern Kūfic. A very similar style occurs in some Ghaznavid and Ghūrid monuments in Afghanistan and northern India. See, in particular, Michael J. Casimir and Bernt Glatzer, “Šāh-i Mashad, a Recently Discovered Madrasah of the Ghurid Period in Gargistan (Afghanistan),” *East and West*, n.s., 21, no. 1–2 (March–June 1971), figs. 14–19. The style, which may have deeper roots in Ghaznavid epigraphy, can also be seen in the earliest Ghūrid monuments in India, in particular the Qutb Minār.
59. Rice, *Ibn al-Bawwāb*, 9–10.
60. E.g., *Dīwān of Salāma ibn Jandal*, TKS B-125; Rice, *Ibn al-Bawwāb*, 17–22.
61. Another copy of the same *Dīwān* (TIM, 2015), also bearing the signature of Ibn al-Bawwāb, has been dated by Rice to the second half of the fourteenth century; *Ibn al-Bawwāb*, 22–23. There are other more blatant forgeries of Ibn al-Bawwāb, one datable to the fourteenth century and the other even later; Rice, *Ibn al-Bawwāb*, 26–28.
62. Muhammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭṭbī, *Aḥsan Maḥāsīn Kitābat al-Kuttāb*, ed. Salahuddin al-Munajjid (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, 1967).
63. A. T. Welch, “Al-Ḳurʾān,” *EP* 5:409.
64. See Rice’s brilliant discussion of this manuscript in *Ibn al-Bawwāb*, 24–26.
65. François Déroche, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes I, 2: Les manuscrits du Coran* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1985), 121.
66. According to James, *Qurʾāns and Bindings*, 35, “The words ‘al-Kātib al-Malīkī,’ ‘The Royal Calligrapher’, imply that the calligrapher was the secretary or calligrapher of a Seljuk ruler, possibly Qillīj Arslān.”
67. The use of verse counts seems to stop sometime in the thirteenth century, by which time the thorny question of *qirʾāt* had presumably been settled. According to James, *Qurʾāns and Bindings*, 25, “By the fourteenth century . . . verse counts at the beginning of Qurʾāns in the Eastern Islamic world had almost entirely disappeared, and there are virtually no Bahri Mamluk Qurʾāns with verse counts at the front.”
68. Ernst Kühnel, *Islamische Schrifkunst* (Berlin: Heintze & Blanckertz, 1950), 23.
69. See, meanwhile, Johannes Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*, trans. G. French (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 59–67; and C. Huart and A. Grohmann, “Kāghid,” *EP* 4:419–20.
70. It is perhaps in this period that the seeds of discord between scribes and Qurʾān copyists were first sown, the latter perhaps feeling threatened by the unprecedented spread of literacy. On the distinction between scribe (*nassākh* or *warrāq*) and calligrapher (*khattāt*) see Pedersen, *Arabic Book*, 43ff. and 83ff. Whelan in “Writing the Word” has further explored this distinction between the two professions, relating it to their widely divergent intellectual backgrounds and religious inclinations.
71. Ṭṭbī, *Aḥsan*, 6.
72. One excellent example of this simultaneity occurs in the Almoravid restoration of the Mosque al-Qarawīyīn at Fez, 1135–40, where both *muqarnas* and cursive inscriptions are introduced for the first time. See Henri Terrasse, *La Mosquée al-Qarawīyīn à Fes* (Paris: Librairie Klincksieck, 1968), pls. 51–53. See also my “The Muqarnas Dome: Its Origin and Meaning,” *Muqarnas* 3 (1985): 61–74.
73. See, in particular, Arthur Jeffery, ed., *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾān* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1937), ix–x and 5–8. Jeffery (p. 8) seems to have been fully aware of the

- political implications of ‘Uthmān’s act, proposing that it was “no mere matter of removing dialectal peculiarities in reading, but was a necessary stroke of policy to establish a standard text for the whole empire.”
74. Welch, “Al-Ḳurʿān,” 407.
  75. Welch, “Al-Ḳurʿān,” 407. The so-called “Shi‘a readings” were considered the most objectionable.
  76. Welch, “Al-Ḳurʿān,” 407.
  77. Welch, “Al-Ḳurʿān,” 408–9.
  78. Welch, “Al-Ḳurʿān,” 408–9; Jeffery, *Materials*, 9–10; and especially Henri Laoust, “La pensée et l’action politique d’al-Māwardī (364/450–974/1058),” *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 36 (1968): 64–66. Ibn Muqla’s deep embroilment in the politics and statecraft of the time makes it more likely that he was less a calligrapher and more the innovator of a correct method.
  79. Paret, “Ibn Shanabūdh,” *EP<sup>2</sup>* 3:935–36.
  80. *Fihrist* 1:70–71.
  81. See Laoust, “Māwardī,” 50–50 passim, and George Makdisi, *Ibn ‘Aqīl et la résurgence de l’islam, traditionaliste au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle, V<sup>e</sup> siècle de l’Hégire* (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1963), 299–305.
  82. Makdisi, *Ibn ‘Aqīl*, 301, and Laoust, “Māwardī,” 236–37.
  83. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, ed. R. J. McCarthy (Beirut: Institut Français, 1957).
  84. Makdisi, *Ibn ‘Aqīl*, 305, and Welch, “Al-Ḳurʿān,” 409–10.
  85. Specimens of this dispersed Qurʿān exist in numerous collections, and these have been frequently published in a number of exhibitions. See, for example, Welch, *Calligraphy*. Unfortunately, no one has attempted to reassemble all the available folios and subject them to thorough analysis. See, meanwhile, Jonathan Bloom, “Al-Maʿmūn’s Blue Koran?” *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 54 (1986): 59–65, which argues against a Persian origin for this manuscript and affirms its early Fāṭimid status.
  86. Welch, *Calligraphy*, 48; James, *Qurʿāns and Bindings*, 27.