The Neglect Neglected. To Point or Not to Point, That is the Question*,**

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Abstract

*Ihmāl*—meaning “neglect”—is the technical term in Arabic grammar for omitting the dots from certain letters of the Arabic alphabet. It also refers to the use of a whole range of signs (the *ʿAlāmāt al-Ihmāl*) to indicate that certain letters of the Arabic alphabet do not carry dots. *Ihmāl* was first developed in the so-called “new style” of Arabic script that emerged as a bookhand in the 3rd/9th century. “The neglect neglected” refers to the fact that the description and the use of the *ʿAlāmāt al-Ihmāl* have rarely been object of scholarly research. The subject is treated here according to a historical timeline. A short history of dotting is followed by a description of *Ihmāl* in full swing; then, variations on the theme are shown; and finally, the gradual disappearance *Ihmāl* and the shift in function, from orthographical auxiliary sign to ornamental element, are given attention. Several ideas on *Ihmāl* that have been articulated by scholars of the classical period are quoted.

Keywords


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Introduction

Ihmāl—meaning “neglect”—is the omission of dots from certain letters of the Arabic alphabet. It applies specifically to those letters that are not provided with punctuation, as opposed to the letters that carry dots. The opposite of Ihmāl is Iʿğām. The maṣdar Ihmāl as a technical term is probably rather modern as it is not found in the earliest sources. Letters without diacritical dots are called Muhmala, “neglected” or “undotted”. The word Ihmāl also refers to the writing of marks on top and underneath Arabic letters in order to indicate that they are undotted, i.e. that the dots have not accidentally been omitted. This should exclude all possible confusion between morphemes that are based on one and the same grapheme but only distinguished from one another by dots. The phenomenon of Ihmāl has received little to no attention in Western scholarship. This is surprising given that it is abundantly present in Arabic manuscripts from the 3rd/9th century onwards. One can speak, therefore, of “the neglect neglected”. As far as I am aware, Adam Gacek is the only author to mention Ihmāl and to treat it in its proper perspective.1 The more general works leave the phenomenon unmentioned.2

Because the notation of the absence of dots is the subject of the present research, it seems appropriate to precede this with a short overview of the his-


2 There is no lemma Ihmāl in Kees Versteegh (ed.), Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics. Leiden (Brill), 2006–2009, in which writing is treated in a perfunctory way anyway. The reference grammar of W. Wright, A Grammar of the Arabic Language. Translated from the German of Caspari and Edited with Numerous Additions and Corrections. Third edition, revised by W. Robertson Smith and M.J. de Goeje. Cambridge (CUP), 1896–1898 (reprint 1962), does not mention it in the indexes of technical terms and Arabic words at the end of volume 2. Wright does describe the phenomenon, however, in vol. 1, p. 4. Sheila Blair, Islamic calligraphy. Edinburgh (Edinburgh University Press), 2006, does not identify Ihmāl although it has played an important role in the ornamentation of Arabic manuscripts. Another large encyclopedia, Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān. Leiden (Brill), 2001–2006, especially Efim Rezvan, art. “Orthography” (vol. 3, pp. 604–608, but an electronic search through the entire Encyclopaedia was also conducted), devotes little attention to the written aspect of God’s word, and it does not treat Ihmāl as a separate issue. The list of Ihmāl al-Ihmāl could be made much longer. As a phenomenon, Ihmāl has sometimes been described, by Wright in his grammar and by myself in my Seven Specimens of Arabic Manuscripts Preserved in the Library of the University of Leiden. Leiden (Brill), 1978.
tory of dotting Arabic letters. In the oldest forms of Arabic writing in copies of the Qurʾān, not all phonemes had a grapheme of their own. The resulting homography must have caused difficulties in reading and understanding the holy text. One needs only to look at MS Paris BnF Arabe 328a to understand these difficulties,3 and this manuscript is just an example. Even if one is accustomed to the ductus (Rasm), the reading of a text such as the one in this Paris manuscript remains a hazardous affair for all those who do not already know the text very well. This particular Qurʾān, which is arguably datable to the end of the 1st century AH (early 8th century CE), is almost entirely devoid of diacritical dots, which implies that only a limited number of graphemes is in use.4 Let us, with reference to the Arabic script of today, examine the graphemes. Fourteen can be distinguished:

1. (ا) alif (which is not really considered as a letter by the grammarians, but rather as a seat for the hamza, which in written Arabic has no consonant form of its own, and which in writing is treated as an accent);
2. (ب، ت، ث، ن، ي) bāʾ, tāʾ, thāʾ, nūn, yāʾ (the latter two differ in their final and their independent position from the former three);
3. (ج، ح) ḥāʾ, khāʾ;
4. (د، ذ) dāl, dhāl;
5. (ر) rāʾ, zāy;
6. (س، ص) sīn, shīn;
7. (ث، ذ) ṣād, dād;
8. (ط، ظ) ṭāʾ, ẓāʾ;
9. (ع، غ) ʿayn, ghayn;
10. (ف، ق) fāʾ, qāf;
11. (ك، ل) kāf, lām;
12. (م) mīm;
13. (و) wāw;
14. (ه) hāʾ.

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3 Published in facsimile by François Déroche & Sergio Noja Noseda, Les manuscrits de style Ḥiǧāzī. Vol. 1. Le manuscrit arabe 328 (a) de la Bibliothèque nationale de France. Lesa (Fondazione Ferni Noja Noseda), 1998. And, on this manuscript, see also by François Déroche, La transmission écrite du coran dans les débuts de l’islam. Le codex Parisino-petropolitanus. Leiden (Brill), 2009.

4 See the inventory of the repertoire of letter forms of the five different hands that can be distinguished in MS Paris BnF Arabe 328a, as given by Déroche, La transmission écrite du coran, pp. 185–194, and where there is no Iʿğām.
One may consider the ligature lām-alif as the twenty-ninth letter of the Arabic alphabet, as is often done, and also as the fifteenth grapheme; but for the subject of dotting this is not relevant. The homographs in groups 2–10 are nowadays distinguished by punctuation in principle (dots or no dots: groups 3–9), or by variation in punctuation (one dot or more than one dot: groups 2, 10\(^5\)), written on top or underneath the ductus (Rasm). Dotting is not relevant to group 11, but the distinction between kāf and lām works with a system borrowed from the one devised for Ihmāl. A similar reasoning exists, as we will see, for the distinction between mim and wāw (groups 12, 13). Grapheme No. 14 also has in its final and its detached forms two variants: undotted and then it is the hāʾ, and provided with two dots on top, in which case it is the tāʾ marbūṭa. The two variants of this grapheme will be treated at the end of this article.

Writing such dots is called Iʿğām, “to punctuate”, “to provide with a diacritical dot”, and a letter onto which Iʿğām is applied is called Muʿğama. The terms Naqṭ and Tanqīṭ (literally: ‘pointing’, ‘dotting’) are also used, but these words have a much wider meaning. Not writing such dots is called Ihmāl, meaning “to neglect”, “to omit”, “not to provide with one or more dots”. The marks, which serve to indicate the absence of dots, are the focus of my attention. Ihmāl is directly relevant to seven of the above groups (Nos. 3–9) only, whereas group 11, and also groups 12, 13 and 14 have somehow borrowed from Ihmāl conventions.

A Very Short History of Dotting

The obvious place to look for a history of the Arabic script, and of all scripts of the world as it was known in 10th-century Baghdad, is al-Nadīm’s Fihrist. His list is impressive if only for its cosmopolitan outlook. However, as detailed as it is—with its mixture of legend and fact, with his mention of numerous scripts from all corners of the world, which already in his time had become extinct and forgotten except for their names—it is remarkable how little al-Nadīm says about the structure of Arabic script. According to the legend, the inventor of the diacritics, long before the advent of Islam, was an inhabitant of al-Anbār by the name of ʿĀmir b. Ǧidhra. Secondly, al-Nadīm mentions the script of Sind in which dots are used. From the specimen that he shows of this Sindi script, it is evident that he gives the Indian numerals 1–9 (plus the zero, which does not count), which are provided with one dot for the following nine letters,

\(^5\) Group 10 also has the variation of position: on top or underneath the ductus. For simplicity’s sake this feature omitted from consideration here.
and with two dots for what remains of this “alphabet”. And he mentions the Ethiopian script, which does not distinguish, he says, between тaʾ and thāʾ, ḥaʾ and khāʾ, rāʾ and zāy, ʿayn and ghayn, and ṭāʾ and ẓāʾ.\(^6\) And that is about all. Naqt is not wholly absent from the Fihrist, however, since two persons with the professional surname “al-Nāqīṭ”, performer of Naqt, are mentioned. Their Naqt is not further elaborated by al-Nadīm, however.\(^7\) His short chapter on dotting and vocalizing the Arabic script gives bibliographical information on early books on the subject, but next to nothing about their content.\(^8\)

There is an extensive survey by Andreas Kaplony about dotting in early Arabic writing.\(^9\) Kaplony goes into great detail, with an extensive count of occurrences of dotting and not-dotting. He does not mention Ihmāl, however, and it is not evident that signs that indicate not-dotting occur in Kaplony’s material. They may not yet have existed in the early period from which Kaplony’s documents date. The emergence of Ihmāl practices seems to coincide with the Arabic bookhand from the early 3rd/9th century onwards. A bookhand is the style of writing by a professional or scholarly copyist, who produces a copy of a text for “public” use, so that that copy may, in turn, serve as the next phase in the chain of transmission of a particular text. The extent to which Arabic bookhands are similar or different from the writing of professional scribes of documents remains to be established. The function and purpose of chancery and notarial scripts are different from those of the copyists of books. There is also a difference in time between Kaplony’s specimens and the emergence of the “new style” to be taken into account. The Arabic script in the few papyri that I am familiar with, and which date from the 1st/7th and 2nd/8th centuries, already shows forms that would only come into use in bookhands much later. Predecessors of “round script” or “new style script” can already be seen in papyri of the first century AH, and some of these forms were eventually adopted as

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\(^7\) Either one is a Qur’ānic scholar. They are Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Nāqīṭ and Ṣāliḥ b. ʿĀṣim al-Nāqīṭ, see al-Nadīm, Kitāb al-Fihrist, edition Ayman Fu’ād al-Sayyid, vol. 1/1, pp. 56, 77, and translation Dodge, pp. 45, 67, respectively.

\(^8\) Al-Nadīm, Kitāb al-Fihrist, vol. 1/1 p. 92, and translation Dodge, pp. 78–79.

bookhand. It is as if they were suddenly discovered from an existing reservoir of graphemes for everyday use for letters and documents, and then incorporated into the canon of the “new style” of Arabic script that developed in the 3rd/9th century. It makes sense to assume that there were predecessors in script forms from which the “new style” would develop, rather than to think of the “new style” as the spontaneous generation of a new script. The absence of Ihmāl in early documents on papyrus may be caused by the fact that Ihmāl is typically an issue that concerns the makers of books, much more than that it affects makers of documents, who have no responsibility for the transmission of a text, and who, in order to guarantee the authenticity of a document, would execute it with a certain degree of illegibility, which is difficult to imitate or counterfeit.

Al-Dānî on Naqṭ

The Andalusian Qurʾānic scholar al-Dānî (d. 444/1053) has written on Naqṭ. For him, Naqṭ is the application of a variety of auxiliary signs or markers added to the Qurʾānic text. In his al-Muḥkam fī Naqṭ al-Maṣāḥif10 he starts by providing a historical overview: how the early Qurʾān manuscripts were originally devoid of Naqṭ (ʿĀriya min al-Naqṭ),11 how certain scholars of the Salaf were against adding punctuation, and how other scholars permitted it. The word Naqṭ in this context has a wide semantic range; its meaning is not limited to vocalization and the distinction between homographs, it is also used in the wider sense of Āya dividers. It refers to all human additions to the Rasm, the skeleton text of God’s word. As al-Dānî tells us, it is considered by the early scholars as an enlightenment to the Qurʾānic text (huwa Nūr lahu). Al-Dānî also treats the permissibility of other “modern” human additions to the original Qurʾānic text, such as the marginal Āya counting by ten (Taʾshīr) and by five (Takhmīs), the Sūra headings, and a whole range of other, useful subjects. However, al-Dānî is

10 Abū ʿAmr ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-Dānî, al-Muḥkam fī Naqṭ al-Maṣāḥif. Ed. ʿIzzat Ḥasan. Damascus (Wizārat Al-Thaqāfa wal-Iʿlām), 1379/1960. The edition is based on a manuscript dated 741/1341, which is kept under the class-mark 348 in the collection Muṣṭafā Chun in the library of the Faculty of Languages and History of the University of Ankara. Al-Dānî’s Muḥkam is far from the only work on the subject, but it is a comprehensive and accessible text, much more so than the older work by Ibn Abī Dāwud al-Ṣiǧistānī, Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif. Ed. Arthur Jeffery. Cairo (al-Maṭbaʿa al-Raḥmāniyya), 1936/1355. Published as part of Arthur Jeffery, Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾān. The Old Codices. Leiden (Brill), 1937.

11 Al-Dānî, al-Muḥkam, p. 2.
not precise in his terminology and he uses the word *Naqṭ* and its derivations in a broad sense. Only in the case of vocalization, which in the early Qur’ānic context was a process of dotting, is he clear and outspoken. The invention of the vowel notation (*Iʿrāb*) is traditionally attributed to the grammarian Abū al-Aswad al-Duʿalī (d. 69/688).\(^\text{12}\) Al-Dānī mentions how the vowels were added to the written Qur’ānic text and he provides stories, which are full of topical elements, about the encounter between Abū al-Aswad al-Duʿalī and the Umayyad governor of ‘Irāq and the Eastern provinces, Ziyād (best known by his derogatory patronym Ibn Abīhi), which ultimately led to the vocalization of the *Qurʾān*. Abū al-Aswad is quoted speaking to governor Ziyād:

“I have in mind to begin with the *Iʿrāb* of the *Qurʾān*, so send me thirty men.” Ziyād brought him thirty men. Abū al-Aswad chose ten from their midst. Then he continued the selection, till finally he chose one man, from ‘Abd al-Qays. He said: “Take the *Muṣḥaf* and a colourant (*Ṣibgh*) that is of a colour different from that of the ink. When I open my lips with the sound *a*, write one dot on top of the letter, when I pronounce a *u* write a dot next to the letter, and when I say *i* write a dot underneath the letter, and when I lengthen something of these vowels, by way of humming (*ghunna*), write two dots.” He began with the *Muṣḥaf* till he arrived at the end, and then he compiled the compendium devoted to the subject.\(^\text{13}\)

In a comprehensive chapter on *Naqṭ*, al-Dānī once more sums up the development of additional signs in copies of the *Qurʾān*. This gives the impression that the longer the *ʿAṣr al-Faṣāḥa*, the “era of the purity of language” or “era of eloquence”—by which he means the early period during which knowledge of good Arabic was supposed to be widespread—was behind them, the more scholars needed additional help in determining the correct pronunciation of God’s word. In this ongoing search for meaning, new signs were increasingly being devised.\(^\text{14}\) An important subject for al-Dānī is the *Iʿğām*, dotting, but the notation of the *Hamza* is particularly problematic and issues connected with it occupy half of his text. For writing *Iʿğām* al-Dānī also uses the word *Naqṭ*. Further on in *al-Muḥkam*, al-Dānī proceeds to treat the 29 letters of the Arabic alphabet (which includes the *lām-alif*), letter by letter, more or less in the same way as in the list of the 14 graphemes above.\(^\text{15}\) This order, *alif, bāʾ, tāʾ, ṭhāʾ*, etc.,

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had by then become the alphabetical order of the Arabic letters. The grammarians of Arabic had relinquished the old Semitic order of the letters, like the one in use in Hebrew and Syriac, in favour of a sequence based on letter forms. The old Semitic Abǧad order remains discernible in graphemes Nos. 1–4 and 11–12, however.\textsuperscript{16}

The Emergence of \textit{Ihmāl}

The one thing that al-Dānī does not mention is \textit{Ihmāl}. This is not because he does not find this important, but it is simply that \textit{Ihmāl} is not found in the early “Kufic” scripts. In the practice of copying manuscripts, and not only that of \textit{Maṣāḥif}, dotting is a serious issue. For the transmission of the Qurʾān this has resulted in a well-organized corpus of variant readings of the text, the \textit{Qirāʾāt}, and if one looks at what these variant readings actually are, one sees that many are based on differences of dotting (and vocalization). When a skeleton script is properly provided with dots and vowels, the reading is unequivocal. But when dots are absent, which occurs frequently, this opens up two possibilities: Either the letter must be interpreted as \textit{Muʿḏama}, whereby a scribal omission or oversight is the cause of the absence of the dots, or the letter must be understood as \textit{Muhmala}, the dotless variant of the grapheme. To be absolutely sure of a correct reading, a set of signs or markers was devised to write over or underneath the dotless variants of the graphemes in order to indicate their being dotless. It is not known who started doing this and when exactly this practice came into use. There are no interesting narratives, such as the one of Ziyād and Abū al-Aswad, about this. Looking at the images of dated Arabic manuscripts of the 3rd/9th century, which have been collected by François Déroche,\textsuperscript{17} one can conclude that in a few manuscripts the \textit{Iʿǧām}, which by its very nature precedes \textit{Ihmāl}, was not yet firmly established. At least three manuscripts of Déroche’s survey also seem to show \textit{Ihmāl} signs. Maybe there are more, but the reproductions in Déroche’s article are not always clear.

The oldest of these three manuscripts is MS Leiden Or. 298, a manuscript, on paper, of Abū ʿUbayd’s \textit{Gharīb al-Ḥadīth} and dated Dhū al-Qaʿda 252 (866 CE).\textsuperscript{18}


\textsuperscript{17} François Déroche, “Les manuscrits arabes datés du 11\textsuperscript{e}/10\textsuperscript{e} siècle”, \textit{Revue des Études Islamiques} 55–57 (1987–1989), pp. 343–368 (plus figures and tables).

\textsuperscript{18} P. Voorhoeve, \textit{Handlist of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Leiden and Other Collections in the Netherlands}. Leiden, etc. (Leiden University Press) 1980\textsuperscript{2}, p. 95.
On the small reproduction in Déroche’s survey, the Ihmāl notes cannot easily be distinguished, but other images of the same manuscript show a complete system of Ihmāl in action. Some caution is necessary with this manuscript, however. Its unequivocal dating is on the basis of the colophon on f. 241b.19 But the leaves before f. 241 may be part of another manuscript as they seem to be of a different type of paper and they have a lay-out that differs from that on ff. 241a–b. Although there may be an explanation for this difference of lay-out and script, it means that most of the manuscript cannot automatically and unreservedly be dated to 252/866. Only the text on ff. 241a–b is dated beyond doubt. F. 241a, the page preceding the page with the colophon, is a full text page and on it one can observe a complete system of Ihmāl in operation: under the dāl a dot; under the rāʾ a dot; under the ḥāʾ a small stylized ḥāʾ; under the šād a dot; under the fāʾ a dot; and under the ʿayn a small ʿayn. [Fig. 1] From the point of view of Iʿǧām, this manuscript is also interesting because it writes the fāʾ with one dot on top (which is nothing new) but the qāf with one dot underneath (which is less usual).20 Alain George seems to interpret the abundantly present Ihmāl signs in this manuscript as vowels. He writes: “In this text, vocalization is indicated by small signs inspired by Arabic letter shapes—a convention which became increasingly widespread from the tenth century onwards. This, together with the complete notation of diacritics and the use of paper, makes the manuscript a precursor of tendencies that would gain momentum in the following decades”.21 This misrepresentation of Ihmāl is an additional argument for studying this phenomenon for what it really is.

Déroche’s second specimen indicating Ihmāl is a manuscript the present location of which is unknown, although it may be somewhere in Saint Petersburg. It is a fragment on parchment with Christian legends and it is dated 272 (885–886 CE).22 In the three lines of text given by both Fleischer and Déroche, 

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20 The most complete description of this manuscript is still M.J. de Goeje, ‘Beschreibung einer alten Handschrift von Abū “Obeid’s Ġarib-al-hadīṭ’”, ZDMG 18 (1864), pp. 781–807. De Goeje (p. 781) describes the Ihmāl peculiarities in the manuscript, but he does not provide a name for it. See Déroche, “Les manuscrits arabes”, p. 346, No. 6, and figure 3.
FIGURE 1  Gharib al-Ḥadīth by Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Salām, manuscript on paper dated 252/866. A manuscript fully provided with Ṭumāṣīl signs.  
MS Leiden Or. 298, f. 241a  
PHOTOGRAPH BY JAN JUST WITKAM
one sees a small šād underneath the šād and a stylized ‘ayn under the ‘ayn. The image of these three lines and Fleischer’s dating is all we have of this manuscript, but from the two İhmāl notations in the third line of the fragment, we can postulate the existence of more. The copyist of that manuscript of 272 AH probably had a complete repertoire of İhmāl signs at his disposal.

Déroche’s third specimen that seems to show İhmāl, although this is not easily visible on Déroche’s fragmentary image, is an Islamic manuscript (whether it was written on paper or parchment is not indicated) with a clear dating of Muḥarram 279 (892 CE). It is MS Dublin, Chester Beatty Library No. 3494. According to Arberry, it contains the second volume of the Gharib al-Ḥadīth by Ibn Qutayba. On the full-page reproduction that Arberry provides of f. 136* of the manuscript, at least two letters with İhmāl can be distinguished: a ħāʾ with a small sign underneath, and an ‘ayn with a small stylized ‘ayn underneath. [Fig. 2]

These three examples adduce enough material to justify the conclusion that halfway through the 3rd/9th century a full-fledged system of İhmāl was operative, both in Islamic and in Christian Arabic manuscripts. A review of Déroche’s specimens also shows that İhmāl is not applied in older Qur’ānic scripts, but only in the newer, round scripts, for which the 3rd/9th century gives the first examples as a bookhand, albeit in a still intermediate form between the edgy Qur’ānic script (“Kūfī”) and the later round scripts. We see the round scripts (“new style”) fully develop in the 4th/10th century, culminating in an elaborate masterpiece as is Ibn al-Bawwāb’s Qur’ān of 391/1000–1001. This manuscript shows fully developed systems of Iʿǧām, Tashkīl and İhmāl. Here is the explanation for the absence of mention of İhmāl in al-Dānī’s al-Muḥkam fi Naqṭ al-Masāḥif. His Maṣāḥif may have shown Naqṭ, but İhmāl was not applied to them. Al-Dānī may have known İhmāl in contemporary manuscripts, but for his discussion on the development of Qur’ānic scripts the issue of İhmāl was not relevant.

İhmāl in Action

In Maṣāḥif and other manuscripts written in the “new style” of Arabic script, we see İhmāl being applied. The Khalili manuscript KFQ26 is such a Qur’ānic

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FIGURE 2  Ihmāl signs in a manuscript of Gharīb al-Hadīth by Ibn Qutayba, dated 279/892. MS Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, No. 3494, f. 136a

IMAGE TAKEN FROM ARBERRY’S HAND-LIST
manuscript (on parchment) and it shows *Ihmāl*. [Fig. 3] Scrutinizing the illustration of this manuscript in Déroche’s catalogue, which shows two pages with Qurʾān 70:44–71:7, we see several types of *Ihmāl*, next to diacritics (dots) and vowels (strokes). The *Ihmāl* concerns: ḥāʾ (small ḥāʾ underneath); ẓāʾ (dot underneath); rāʾ (dot underneath); sīn (three dots underneath); ṭāʾ (dot underneath); and ʿayn (small ʿayn underneath). In this *Muṣḥaf*, one may also assume *Ihmāl* for the ṣāḍ, but the sample shown in the Khalili catalogue does not contain this letter. Judging from the colour of the ink, these *Ihmāl* signs appear to have been added by a later hand. This can be the result of a division of labour during the production of the manuscript, but it can also point to a later addition to the manuscript. Leaving this aside, one sees from this Qurʾān, and similar ones, that the use of *Ihmāl* is not limited to non-Qurʾānic manuscripts, but that it is a feature of the “new style” in Arabic script and which, we can postulate, emerged as a bookhand from the first half of the 3rd/9th century onwards. From the point of view of *Ihmāl*, MS Leiden Or. 298 of 252/866 is no

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longer in an experimental phase, as it shows a fully developed set of Ihmāl signs. The Qurʾān of Ibn al-Bawwāb, written in the closing year of the first millennium (391/1000–1001),25 shows a complete set of Ihmāl signs, alongside a complete system of diacritics, vowels and marginal notations. Its full set of Ihmāl marks concerns all seven homographs to which Ihmāl can be applied: ħāʾ: small ḥāʾ underneath; dāl: dot underneath; rāʾ: small rāʾ underneath; sīn: three dots underneath, or, alternatively, a little v-shape on top; šād: small šād underneath; ẓāʾ: small ẓāʾ underneath; and ‘ayn: small ‘ayn underneath. All Ihmāl marks seem to have been written by the copyist. It shows that Ihmāl as a system had become an accepted feature, but that the shapes of the signs could vary. This remained so in the centuries to follow.

Al-Dānī does not treat Ihmāl. It is not relevant to the Maṣāḥif before the development of the “new style” of Arabic script. We can therefore ask: if the Maghribi script has directly developed from the old style—the “Kūfī” style of writing—without being part of the revolution of the “new style” that took place in the Mashriq in the 3rd–4th/9th–10th centuries, has it then, by implication, ignored Ihmāl? A quick overview of a random selection of Maghribī manuscripts26 makes this clear. Ihmāl does not belong to the repertoire of forms that a Maghribī copyist had at his disposal. Any inclination on the part of Mashriqi copyist to use Ihmāl was apparently absent in the Maghrib.

However, in Andalusian manuscripts Ihmāl can be observed. The fully vocalized Latin-Arabic Mozarabic glossary (MS Leiden Or. 231)27 that has been arguably dated to c. 1175 CE in Toledo, occasionally shows a few: a small ḥāʾ underneath ḥāʾ and a small ‘ayn underneath ‘ayn. The older parts of the Leiden manuscript of the Kitāb al-Mustāʿīnī, the tabellaric pharmacopeia by Ibn Bak-

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26 This search comprised the six Maghribi specimens in my internet course in palaeography: http://www.islamicmanuscripts.info/courses/arabic_manuscripts/index.html (accessed on 24 April 2013), and the reproductions of René Basset’s manuscripts as described in J.J. Witkam, Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Leiden and other collections in The Netherlands. Fascicule 1. Leiden (Brill), 1983.

lārish (Or. 15), occasionally show *Ihmāl* marks and then almost exclusively in the headings of the tables: a small ḥāʾ underneath the ḥāʾ; a zigzag sign underneath the sīn and the ṣād; and a small ‘ayn underneath the ‘ayn. An undated fragment from an unidentified biographical dictionary, written on parchment, which might originate from al-Andalus (MS Aix-en-Provence, Bibliothèque Méjanes, 1362) shows a full-fledged *Ihmāl* notation, though not at all consistently applied: a small ḥāʾ underneath the ḥāʾ; a zigzag sign underneath the dāl, the rāʾ, the sīn and the ṭāʾ; a small ṣād underneath the ṣād; and a small ‘ayn underneath the ‘ayn.

Al-Sarrāǧ and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ on *Ihmāl*

In the Mashriq the phenomenon of *Ihmāl*, writing a sign in order to mark an undotted letter as being undotted, did not escape the attention of the early grammarians. There exists a short treatise by Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn al-Sarī al-Sarrāǧ (d. 316/928), entitled *Risālat al-Naqṭ wal-Shakl*. Among other things, al-Sarrāǧ treats *Ihmāl*, although he does not refer to it by that name. Al-Sarrāǧ is an almost contemporary witness of the writing conventions that we see

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30 *Risālat al-Naqṭ wal-Shakl*. Taʾlīf: Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Sarī al-Sarrāǧ. Taṣḥīḥ wa ṭarḡuma: Ḥamīd Riḍā Mustafīd. *Nāma-yi Bahāristān* 10 (1388/2009), pp. 5–66. Al-Sarrāǧ is mentioned in *G A L G* 1, 112 and 8, 1, 174, as a pupil of Mubarrad, but without mention of a text preserved. Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. 9 (Grammatik), pp. 82–85, calls him Ibn al-Sarrāǧ, but this is not confirmed by the present text. Sezgin mentions manuscript references to a number of his texts, among which figures his *Kitāb al-Khaṭṭ* (‘The Book of the Script’), which is mentioned on pp. 10–11 of Mustafīd’s edition. The title *Risālat al-Naqṭ wal-Shakl* was given by Mustafīd, and for practical reasons this is followed here. Sezgin gives the title as *Kitāb al-Shakl wal-Naqṭ* and *Kitāb fi ’Ilm al-Naqṭ wal-Shakl*. Mustafīd’s triple rendering of the text (facsimile, remarkable diplomatic edition, and Persian translation) was made on the basis of MS Ankara, Faculty of Letters and History, Ismā’īl Şā’īb, No. 547(3), the one mentioned by Sezgin, who adds that this third text in MS 547 counts 16 ff. In Mustafīd’s facsimile edition the manuscript counts pages 1–29 (new pagination imposed), from *Basmala* to colophon. The Ankara manuscript is dated 26 Rabi’ 11 581/1185 (colophon at the end, Mustafīd’s edition, pp. 64–65).
employed in the manuscripts of the second half of the 3rd/9th century, and his
text documents these conventions. The opening passage of al-Sarrāǧ’s treatise
discusses Ihmāl:31

(8–9) In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Thus speaks Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn al-Sarī al-Sarrāǧ. In this book I
have elucidated the science of Naqṭ (dotting) and of Shakl (vocalization).
And he continues: the matter that has called [me] to dotting is the confu-
sion in writing (Taṣḥīf) in the similarity of the letters that presents itself
to the reader, so that he cannot distinguish between Ğamal (camel) and
Hamal (lamb). What is most in need of vocalization is the change in end-
ing of the word and the vocalization. This makes that one cannot know
whether Bakr (young camel) is written or Bikr (first-born), nor whether
ʿŪd (wood) is written or Āwd (return). When the writer of script (Wāḍiʿ
al-Khaṭṭ) draws one form for two or more letters, he is obliged to use Iʿğām
(dotting). And if he draws a [single] form for each letter, he cannot do
without dotting. This is present in the scripts of the Persians32 and of the
Arabs. There is a method (Madhhab) in how he does that, and that is that,
when he keeps a few forms and gives them shape by hand, this is easier
than to be engaged in many forms and to remember these. So he assem-
bles twenty-nine letters in ten-and-a-few forms.

The hamza, (10–11) and the alif, which is nothing but a silent one, are
one form, and he is obliged to distinguish between these two with a dot
(Nuqṭa), as he does that with the other letters, but he finds that the Arabs

31 Translated here directly from the facsimile edition, as the manuscript is clear and almost
complete in its additional markers, Iʿğām, Shakl and Ihmāl. [Fig. 4] As such, it is the perfect
element of its own subject. As the edition has not preserved the original foliation or
pagination of the manuscript (if there was any), the pagination of Mustafīd’s edition is
referred to. Text between round brackets is added for explanation. Text between square
brackets are additions given in order to make the text more readable.

32 Ihmāl is not an exclusively Arabic affair. MS Vienna, National Library, A.F. 340 is the
oldest known dated manuscript in Persian (447/1055). It contains Abū Mansūr Muwaffaq
b. ʿAli al-Harawī’s Kitāb al-Abniyaʿ an Ḥaqāʾiq al-Adwiya. From the facsimile edition with
contributions by Iraj Afschar, ʿAli Ashraf Ṣadīqi, Bert G. Fragner, Nuṣrat Allāh Rastegār, Karl
Holubar, Eva Irblich and Mahmud Omidsalar, published in Tehran (Miras Maktoob) 1388 /
Wien (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften) 2009, it is evident that a complete
system of Ihmāl was operative in Persian manuscripts at the time.
FIGURE 4  First page of the Risālāt al-Naṣṭ wal-Shakl by al-Sarrāḡ. The text in the manuscript, which is dated 581/1185, is fully provided with dotting, vocalization, reading marks and Ihmāl signs. Ms Ankara, Faculty of Letters and History, Ismail Saib 547(3)

image taken from mustafīd’s edition
have different ideas about the hamza. Some of them pronounce it really, and others pronounce it softly. This we have already explained in the “The Book of the Script” (Kitāb al-Khāṭṭ). As this [hamza] is not pronounced in [only] one way, it cannot be left in one form, and therefore there must be made a distinction between the hamza and the alif by way of dotting (Naqṭ).

Bāʾ, Tāʾ, Thāʾ. The bāʾ, tāʾ and thāʾ are one form, and in the connected form the nūn and the yāʾ are added to them. The distinction between them is that one dot is placed underneath the bāʾ, two dots above the tāʾ and three dots above the thāʾ (just as the three stones on which one cooks), and above the nūn one dot and underneath the yāʾ two dots. And if [the writer] makes the yāʾ without dot underneath then that is sufficient because of the things that are agreed in [one] form. If he has a letter that comes in three forms, and when he has two forms, it is sufficient that one of the two is known (12–13) so that it becomes the distinctive sign for the other which has no sign. The same goes in case he has to distinguish between three: if he knows two of them, then the third one is the letter without the sign. This is the case in everything. The writer of this script has done so later on, and maybe he is bound to analogy, but people make changes.

Ǧīm, Ḥāʾ, Khāʾ. The ġīm, the ḥāʾ and the khāʾ are one form. Underneath the ġīm is a dot, underneath the ḥāʾ there is no sign (Ghufl) which is its sign, and on top of the khāʾ is a dot. There are people who confirm the ḥāʾ [as a ḥāʾ] by writing a ḥāʾ underneath, and every writer (Kātib) has the right to do as he chooses, as can the writer of script desist from this.

Dāl, Dhāl. The dāl and the dhāl are one form. On top of the dhāl is a dot, whereas the dāl is not provided with a dot. There are people who place a dot underneath the dāl, and that is more certain. There are Ḥadīth scholars who write a dāl underneath the dāl.

Rāʾ, Zāy. The rāʾ and the zāy are one form. The dot is on top of the zāy, and the rāʾ is not provided with a dot. There are people who place underneath (14–15) the rāʾ a dot, as they do with the dāl. Among the authors on grammar (Lugha), [there are people] who place a v-like sign on top of the rāʾ, which is an inverted rāʾ.
**Sīn, Shīn.** The *sīn* and the *shīn* are one form. On top of the *shīn* are three dots placed in a row, and the *sīn* is devoid of a sign. There are people who write one dot underneath the *sīn* and one dot on top of the *shīn*, and there are people who place something that looks like a line on top of the *sīn*.

**Ṣād, Ḍād.** The *ṣād* and the *ḍād* are one form. The dot is on top of the *ḍād* and the *ṣād* has no sign. There are people who place a dot underneath the *ṣād*, and there are many authors on grammar who confirm this by writing a *ṣad* underneath the *ṣād*. Several well-known authors on grammar write underneath the *sīn* a *sīn* and underneath the ‘āyn a complete ‘āyn.

**Ṭāʾ, Ṭāʾ.** The *ṭāʾ* and the *ẓāʾ* are one form. The dot is written on top of the *ẓāʾ*, whereas the *ṭāʾ* has no dot. There are people who place a dot underneath the *ṭāʾ*, and among the authors on grammar there are people who place a *ṭāʾ* underneath the *ṭāʾ*, and they do similarly with the ‘āyn and the ghayn.

**Fāʾ, Qāf.** In their connected position the *fāʾ* and the *qāf* are one form, but they are distinguished from one another (16–17) by one dot on top of the *fāʾ* and two dots on top of the *qāf*. If one does not write a dot on the *fāʾ*, but leaves it undotted, then it is sufficient to dot the *qāf*. Among the authors of old times are people who write one dot underneath the *fāʾ*. There has been made a distinction between the *fāʾ* and the *qāf* in their final and detached forms, whereby the *qāf* has a curved stroke, whereas the *fāʾ* has a flat extension.

**Kāf, Lām.** The *kāf* and the *lām* are not in need of dots, because their forms are different.

The difference between the final or detached *mīm* and the *wāw* is that the *mīm* has a small circle pasted on top of the curve that is as a back to it, whereas the *hāʾ* and the *wāw* have a small circle on top of the curve, which is as a belly to it.

The difference between the *hāʾ* and the *mīm*, although their basic form is that either one is a circle, is that the *hāʾ* is split with a line when it is in the beginning of the word, or as a filling inside it, so that it cannot be confused with the *mīm*. In its final form the curve is a distinction between the *hāʾ* and the *mīm*. 
The difference between the yāʾ and the nūn is made in the final form, as the yāʾ regresses and the nūn has a round curve. The difference (18–19) between the zāy and the nūn, when they have a curved shape, is made by writing the nūn wider than the zāy, according to what the writer does and as is his habit in this.

Know that the writer of these forms has taken these out of a line, a circle and a bow of a circle. When you think further about it, you will find it [to be true]. Then he has mixed these three with one another and then this comes out of it.33

And when a student wishes to put the position of the letters, in which there is confusion when dotting is absent or when dotting is present, in a different place, then he can do so, as do those who write letters which they call “interpretation” (Tarğama).34

In this introductory discourse, al-Sarrāǧ gives a fairly complete overview of what we call Ihmāl, only he does not use that word. For the not-writing of a dot he uses the word Ghufl (‘unmarked’) and for it being applied to a letter he uses the passive of form IV of the verb of the root ughfila (“to be neglected”). Ighfāl is evidently a synonym of Ihmāl, but it has not become the generally accepted term for indicating that a letter is dotless. Apart from Ghufl and ughfila al-Sarrāǧ does not use other derivations of the root gh-f-l. Al-Sarrāǧ’s main chapter, which is much longer than his introduction, mostly treats vocalization and the orthography of the Hamza. For the present subject it contains little of relevance.

Is dotting the script really so important? The lack of dotting, a reduction of the script to its 14 basic forms, or instances of highly incomplete dotting, can also be seen in manuscripts, and not as a symptom of negligent copying. This frequently concerns scientific manuscripts, where the learned copyist apparently is of the opinion that complete Iʿğām is unnecessary. Franz Rosen-
thal, who extensively quotes and follows the 16th-century author al-ʿAlmawī (d. 981/1573) on scribal conventions, does not mention this scientific preference for fewer, and not more, additional signs. Al-ʿAlmawī gives a great amount of useful information, but his is basically a prescriptive work that should not be confused with a descriptive survey of copying practices. In the prescriptive universe there is no place for leaving clarifying signs left unwritten, but the willful omission of dots is common. It is a choice of the copyist and should not be confused with the incidental or unintentional omission of Iʿğām. An example of this is ms Leiden Or. 166, which contains the Arabic translation, ascribed to Yaḥyā b. al-Bīṭrīq, of two zoological works by Aristotle. This undated manuscript, the age of which has in the past been somewhat exaggerated, but which may date from the 6th/12th century—an age in which all additional reading marks were in full use—is fairly devoid of dotting. [Fig. 6] An explanation of this may lie elsewhere. Would it perhaps serve the exclusivity of the text and would it keep the text reserved for the competent few who are able to read without dots? We are not told, but, especially in manuscripts with subjects the understanding of which requires high expertise, there is a tendency to omit dots. Yet, also in such manuscripts one can observe Ihmāl, even if it is an entirely redundant feature. Sometimes later scholars would add dots to such undotted manuscripts (as may be seen from the different colour of the ink), but that is not always an improvement.

The idea of Ihmāl has indeed an element of redundancy in it. If one assumes that a good copyist diligently copies his text, he has no need of Ihmāl at all. And the Maghribī copyist does not need it, which is the best proof of Ihmāl being superfluous. Is it the supposed horror vacui of the Muslim scholar that makes him embrace this system, even when he has no need of it? Whatever it may be, the system has become widespread, and not only in calligraphic manuscripts.

38 ms Leiden Or. 166, f. 3b, line 8, has a small ḥāʾ underneath the ḥāʾ of the word al-Ḥayawān, which, being the main subject of the text, runs no risk of being confused with another word.
 Moderate dotting in an old manuscript of the Kitāb al-Hayawān, the zoology of Aristotle. An instance of Ihmāl can be observed. Ms Leiden Or. 166, f. 3ª

PHOTOGRAPH LEIDEN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
There seem to be regional preferences in the acceptance and continuation of the use of Ihmāl. In manuscripts from the Yemen Ihmāl is widely used, even till recent times, not always for all nine possibilities in which Ihmāl can be used, but for a few at least.\textsuperscript{39} Where, how, and till when Ihmāl was used remains to be established in further research. One wonders, for instance, whether it is still being taught in the traditional curriculum in the Yemen. The two sorts of Ihmāl that in the past few centuries have been in use in the Yemen have recently been described by me.\textsuperscript{40}

The Ḥadīth scholar al-Rāmahurmuzī (d. 360/970–971) gives the matter only summary attention and, contrary to al-Dānī in his Muḥkam, he does not focus on old Maṣāḥif. He mentions dotting, which he calls Tāʿijīm, and vocalization. Matters of Ihmāl do not exist for him. But that Naqṭ and Shakl are important to him is beyond doubt. How could one otherwise have the orthography of proper names correct? He also mentions different opinions on the degree of Naqṭ and Shakl that one should apply. Should this be done completely (that is, in a mostly redundant way) or only when necessary?\textsuperscript{41} The later Ḥadīth scholars give the matter of Ihmāl more attention, not for ornamental but for utilitarian reasons. In his “Introduction to the Science of Ḥadīth”, the Damascene scholar Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī (d. 643/1245) has a paragraph on the necessity of Ihmāl. He writes:

\begin{quote}
Just as the letters with diacritical points are made clear by pointing, so should the letters without diacritical points be fixed with a sign to indicate the absence of pointing. The way that people clarify there letters varies. Some invert the points, putting the points which belong above the pointed letters under the analogous unpointed letters. So they place points under rāʾ, sād, tāʾ, ʿayn and the other unpointed letters like them. One of the practitioners of this said that the points under the unpointed sīn should be spread out in a row while those which are over the pointed
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{39} See the example from the Yemen, dated 1350/1931–1932, in MS Leiden Or. 23.447, in which a limited system of Ihmāl is still operative. Images of the manuscript are in my Het einde van het islamitische handschrift. Leiden (Ter Lugt Press), 2012, pp. 14–15.


shīn should be arranged like a tripod. Some people make the sign indicating the absence of pointing over the unpointed letters in the shape of a nail paring resting on its back. Some put under the unpointed ḥāʾ a small unconnected ḥāʾ, and do the same under the dāl, tāʾ, sād, sīn, ʿayn and the rest of the ambiguous unpointed letters. These are the widespread and well-known forms of the signs indicating that a letter is unpointed. There are also signs found in numerous books which many people do not understand, like the sign of those who make a small line over an unpointed letter and that of those who put something shaped like a hamza under an unpointed letter. God knows best.42

One of the reasons for the popularity of Ihmāl with copyists and calligraphers may have been that it opened up an entirely new repertoire of additional forms of ornamentation and of space fillers. One sees that already in the Qurʾān of Ibn al-Bawwāb. Now that copyists, from the first half of the 3rd/9th century onwards, had a full set of Ihmāl signs at their disposal, one wonders, whether they actually used them. The answer is yes and no. Not only in the sacred text, where even the slightest misunderstanding should be avoided, but also in literary, mostly poetical texts, the Ihmāl signs found introduction and acceptance. A glance at Ibn al-Bawwāb’s Qurʾān of 391/1000–1001 shows that Ihmāl has gained a place in the copyist’s repertoire of forms, alongside other explicatory signs that, in course of time, had been invented for the fixation of the sacred text. But also in less sacred, yet no less important texts this is the case. An example, one of many, is the Luzūm ma lā yalzam by Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī (d. 449/1057), in MS Leiden Or. 100,43 which has its pages well-filled with signs of Ihmāl. Each part of the ductus has been completely provided with


reading signs: vocalization, dotting, indication of not-dotting. [Fig. 5] In quite a
different context, dotting or not-dotting is a game played by poets, who in order
to show their mastery over the language, would compose poetry consisting only
of undotted letters. It is a popular genre in the Dīwāns.

Intentional scarcity of diacritics, sometimes combined with extremely
cursive and dense writing, is not limited to scientific texts. It can be seen in numer-
ous Hadith manuscripts as well. This is remarkable since most information
about how texts should be written comes from Ḥadīth scholars such as Ibn
al-Ṣalāḥ, who advocate clarity and who abhor ambiguity. It shows that their
texts are prescriptive and that they may have aimed at altering the practice of
the contrary among their peers. An example from the realm of Hadith of such
cursive writing, with an almost total lack of diacritics, is what I designate as
the Ibn al-Lubūdī papers, a collection of 38 shorter Aḡzā’, study notebooks,
autographs, Samāʿāt, Qirāʿāt, and copies, on all sorts of subjects of Ḥadīth, all
in the hand of the Damascene scholar ʿAḥmad b. Khalīl b. ʿAḥmad b. Ibrahim al-
Lubūdī al-Atharī (d. 896/1490). When Ibn al-Lubūdī treats his reader with the
odd vowel or sukūn, it is not usually necessary for a better comprehension of the
text; it is simply redundant. It is astonishing how easily understandable a barely
punctuated text is, especially when one has become an insider on the subject.
[Fig. 7] In scientific texts as well as in Ḥadīth texts the absence of diacritics and
vowels has as effect certain exclusivity; they are not meant to be widely accessi-
ble. That does not serve to exclude scholars, but it must prevent beginners from
working above their level. That one should not overstep one’s level in scholar-
ship (Martabat al-ʿIlm) is an educational adage. In the Indo-Persian realm the
ideas on difficulty of content go hand in hand with difficulty in form. The poetry

44 His ʿUrf so given by al-Sakhawī, al-Ḍawʾ al-Lāmi’, vol. 1, p. 293.
45 The collection of Ibn al-Lubūdī papers is described together by Carlo Landberg, Catalogue
de manuscrits arabes provenant d’une bibliothèque privée à El-Medīna et appartenant à la
Maison E.J. Brill. Leiden (Brill), 1883, pp. 26–32, Nos. 82–119. They are registered in the
Leiden library as MSS Or. 2455–2492. Brockelmann, GAL S 1, 624 (where he is erroneously
called al-Labbādī); s 11, 73; s 11, 85, mentions Ibn al-Lubūdī shortly, with five titles, but
without reference to the large collection of autographs in Leiden, nor does he give a precise
life date; s 11, 225. He is mentioned, however, in al-Sakhāwī, al-Ḍawʾ al-Lāmi’ li-Aḥl al-Qarn
46 Ibn al-Akfānī in Irshād al-Qāṣid ilā Asnā al-Maqāṣid, in Jan Just Witkam, De Egyptische
arts Ibn al-Akfānī (gest. 749/1348) en zijn indeling van de wetenschappen. Editie van het Kitāb
Irshād al-Qāṣid ilā Asnā al-Maqāṣid met een inleiding over het leven en werk van de auteur.
Leiden (Ter Lugt Press), 1989, Arabic section p. 17: وأما مربة العلم فهو متي يجب أن يقرأ هل يبدأ بأو أ: 
ينتقد عليه غيره.
Routine use of reading signs, including Ihmāl marks, in a literary text. The final page, with the colophon dated 577/1123, of Luzūm mā lā yalẓamu by Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī. MS Leiden Or. 100, p. 263

Photograph Leiden University Library
Scarce dotting and cursive script in a Ḥadīth notebook from the fourth quarter of the 9th/15 century, containing parts from al-Mustadrak by al-Nisābūrī. Ms Leiden, Or. 2455, f 1r (from the Ibn al-Lubūdī papers)

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAN JUST WITKAM
of Bīdil (d. 1721), to name but one example, is for the advanced student only who has arrived at the final stage of the curriculum of Persian literature. Hence the manuscripts, and later the lithographs for that matter, of Bīdil’s poetry are often written in the most difficult handwriting, the Shekaste script.

Some Unexpected Consequences

A coherent use of Ihmāl can have curious consequences. It may strike a reader that, especially in Yemeni manuscripts, the little v-like sign (al-Sarrāǧ: an inverted rā’ on top of the rā’; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ: “the shape of a nail paring”) is written in such a minute way that it can hardly be distinguished from the same grapheme with a dot on top. So here the system that has as its purpose to distinguish between letters such as the rā’ and the zāy ends up with writing them in an almost identical way.

In manuscripts in which Ihmāl is in use, it sometimes takes preference over other notation systems, although it is a system that is additional and subservient to the scripts in which it appears. So it can happen that when there is no Ihmāl sign, and a letter remains undotted, it means that the undotted letter without Ihmāl marking should be read as a dotted letter, precisely because of the absence of Ihmāl. In this way of thinking ẓ forcibly becomes ġīm, ẓ forcibly becomes zā, precisely because they are without Ihmāl marks. So here we are even a step further: the absence of Ihmāl, which in itself is the notation of an absence, becomes meaningful. These are pitfalls that the palaeographer should be very much aware of.

Double application of Ihmāl signs is far from rare, and a sīn with three dots underneath plus a v-like Ihmāl sign on top can be seen frequently. The kāf and the lām are both undotted letters and they fall outside the categories of graphemes that need Ihmāl, at least in the “new style”. Sometimes they are similar to one another, especially in their final and detached forms, and this might create confusion. Several strategies were developed to distinguish between them. The ascender of the kāf would often be written in a crooked way, whereas the lām would retain a vertical shape. Once the system of Ihmāl was well established, kāf is often provided with a small kāf (which nowadays


48 In the “Kufic” scripts kāf and lām are two distinct graphemes, and the problem of confusion does not present itself.
is called *hamzat al-kāf*, quite inappropriately) indicating that this is a *kāf*,\(^{49}\) and *lām* with the little v-sign, indicating that the small *kāf* is absent. Al-Sarrāġ mentions, under the *ṣīn*/*shīn* grapheme, the small line over the letter as an *Ihmāl* sign.\(^{50}\) Is it possible that such a line on top of the *kāf* is that same sign? These two signs, the minute *kāf* and the line in and/or on forms of the letter *kāf*, could be old *Ihmāl* signs. If they are, they are the only ones, together with the tiny *kāf*, that have remained in use till today. *Alif* and initial and medial *lām*, which are practically indistinguishable, are distinguished by being not connected (*alif*) and connected (*lām*) to the following letter. However, in the cursive scripts, which is used in *Qirāʾāt*, readers’ protocols and *Waqfiyyāt*, donation deeds and the like, this rule is simply ignored especially in the case of the article *alif-lām*. Here, the context must determine the choice of the reader.

In calligraphic scripts one can often observe a connection between *alif* and *lām* between the tops of the two ascenders, and not a connection on the baseline. There is one more grapheme with a dotted and an undotted variant, the final and detached *hā*’; No. 14 of the list of graphemes above, to which so far little attention has been given. Without dots it is the *hā*’, with two dots on top it is the *tā’ marbūṭa* and the word which has this dotted *tā’ marbūṭa* is in the construct state. Neither al-Sarrāġ, nor Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ mentioned the *tā’ marbūṭa* as a problem for which some sort of *Ihmāl* is necessary. Al-Sarrāġ mentions the possibility of confusion between the *hā*’ and the *mīm*, not between *hā*’ and *tā’ marbūṭa*. In Mamlūk manuscripts one may encounter a sign that looks like a small *hā*’ with a short tail (ه) or followed by a short final *yā*’ (ي), which is written above the undotted final and detached *hā*’ in order, apparently, to indicate that this is not a *tā’ marbūṭa*. It has the same dynamics as a regular *Ihmāl* notation but it is, of course, not really an *Ihmāl* mark. The fear that the dotted and undotted variants of the final and detached forms of this grapheme could be confused is largely theoretical, even imaginary, and in practice such confusion rarely happens if at all. In manuscripts in which it is used, it can be seen written on the final *hā*’ of the word “*Allāh*”, as if there is a danger that that *hā*’ could be an undotted *tā’ marbūṭa*. Applying it is, therefore, yet another act of redundancy in which copyists and calligraphers so eagerly indulge.\(^{51}\)

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49 Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts*, p. 286, calls it “superscript hamzah (*nabrah*) (especially for the medial *kāf*”). *Nabra* is “each elevated object” (A. de Biberstein Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire Arabe-Français contenant toutes les racines de la langue arabe, leurs dérivés, tant dans l’idiome vulgaire que dans l’idiome littéral, ainsi que les dialectes d’Alger et de Maroc*. Paris (Maisonneuve & Cie) 1860, s.v.)

50 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ mentions this line as well, see the quotation from his “Introduction”.

51 Especially Mamlūk Qur’āns in *Muḥaqqaq* script are full of *Ihmāl* marks, to name just a few
The Final Stages of Ihmāl

Already in the time that Ihmāl was an important means to exclude the ambiguities that are inherent to the Arabic script with its multiple use of a limited number of graphemes, there were copyists who made a mockery out of it and who filled the interline between their Rasm with many vowels and Ihmāl marks, even when this was by no means appropriate or even downright wrong. An extreme case in this respect is ms Münster Orient. 11, already mentioned. It is a short anthology of Hadīth on shooting with bow and arrow. According to its ex-libris on the front page, it was made for the Khizāna of the Mamlūk Sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Abū al-Naṣr Qāyit Bey (reigned 872–901/1468–1496), which places it in time. It is not impossible that the copyist, al-Mamlūk Yūsuf al-Muḥammadī min Ṭabaqat al-Hawsh, a pupil of Muḥammad al-Wafāʾī (colophon on f. 45a), is also the author of the anthology. The status of this booklet52 is uncertain and it could well be that it was just meant as an apprentice’s proof.53 However, the little book obtained the status of a bibliographical rarity when, in 1015/1606–1607, it reached the collection of the Ottoman poet and bibliophile Waysī.54

examples that came to my attention recently: ms Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, Māṣāḥif 7, a monumental copy of the Qurʾān with a Waqfiyya of Sultan Shaʿbān 11, dated 15 Shaʿbān 770/1369, and ms Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, Māṣāḥif 13, another huge copy of the Qurʾān (weight 97 kg). Another example is ms Münster Orient. 11, Tadhkirat ʿUṭi al-Albāb fī Faḍīlat Ramy al-Nushshāb, an anonymous anthology on archery with an ex-libris of Sultan Qāyit Bey, who reigned 872–901/1468–1496. Ms Münster Orient. 11 is as yet undocumented. A catalogue by myself of the collection of Islamic manuscripts in the Münster library is in preparation.

52 The Arabic text counts some 2600 words in all, a considerable part of which is used for eulogies.


54 This is the pen name of Uways b. Muḥammad (d. 1037/1628 in Üsküb, present-day Skopje in Macedonia). His ex-libris is a warrant for a bibliographical curiosity. After his death his books apparently disappeared in the antiquarian book trade in Constantinople and some were purchased by the European collectors who were then bringing together the first collections of Middle Eastern manuscripts in Europe. As a result, books from Waysī’s collection can now be found in a number of European libraries: ms Basel 159 (also with date 1015); ms Leiden Or. 370, Or. 560, Or. 640 (also with date 1015), Or. 766 with an ex-libris dated 1013 when Waysī was a Qāḍī in Üsküb, all collected in Constantinople by Levinus
It is neither the ductus (Rasm), in what seems to be a mixture of Naskh and Muḥaqqaq script, nor the vowels (Shakl), nor the punctuation (Iʿğām) that attract attention in the Münster manuscript. All these have been added in an accurate way. Rather the copyist’s unfettered use of Ihmāl marks is remarkable.

[Fig. 8] The Ihmāl forms in use in the Münster manuscript are: 1. for ḥāʾ a small ḥāʾ written underneath; 2. for the dāl, rāʾ, sīn, ṣād a small v-like sign is used, written on top, though hardly in a consistent way; 3. for ‘ayn a small ‘ayn underneath, though not consistently, and the small v-like sign is also used on top of the ‘ayn, though rarely. No Ihmāl signs seem to have been employed by the copyist to distinguish ṭāʾ from ẓāʾ. In addition, the copyist makes a clear distinction between final or end-kāf and final or end-lām. In the former he writes the small kāf (which he also uses for intermediate kāf), and in the latter he writes the small v-like sign that he also uses over rāʾ and sīn.

He seems eager to transgress the rule. One example of such transgression is the use of the small ḥāʾ underneath the ḥāʾ, which is correct, but the copyist

Warner (1619–1665); MS Utrecht Or. 42, collected by Christian Rau (Ravius, 1613–1677) in Constantinople, etc.
of the Münster manuscript equally uses it underneath the ġīm and the khāʾ. By doing so the copyist makes the use of Ihmāl meaningless. He thus detaches the Ihmāl signs from their original function and changes them into ornamental elements on his page. The copyist’s use of the small v-like sign is even more outrageous. It can be seen on top of bāʾ, final kāf (even when provided already with small kāf), mīm, nūn, wāw, and even on kashida, which is not a letter but an auxiliary form. The v-signs truly have become ornaments and look like little birds that freely fly over the hilly landscape of the copyist’s Rasm. This copyist also uses the small hāʾ connected with a short tail, just described, but he sometimes also uses it when the tāʾ marbūṭa is left without dots. We have here an early example (late 15th century) of the total deconstruction of the Ihmāl system and of the ornamentalization of its signs.

In the Mashriq, and certainly in the Ottoman Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries, this was the road which Ihmāl was to follow anyway. While copyists in the Yemen faithfully kept writing their Ihmāl signs in order to make their texts as clear as possible, the calligraphers of Constantinople incorporated the Ihmāl signs into their repertoire, not as the reading signs they were originally devised for, but as extra ornamental elements to fill up the space between the lines and within the Rasm of their graphical masterpieces.

Later use of Ihmāl can be seen in numerous calligraphic specimens. In a short piece, Qiṭʿa, by the Ottoman calligrapher Ḥāfiẓ ʿUthmān (d. 1110/1698), we can observe Ihmāl, although only four possibilities of Ihmāl out of the maximum of nine are used: ḥāʾ, sād, tāʾ and ʿayn. One specimen is too short to exclude Ḥāfiẓ ʿUthmān’s use of Ihmāl with the other undotted letters, but the numerous specimens given by Ömer Faruk Dere taken together show that the Ihmāl signs have become part of the calligrapher’s repertoire of forms. An example of the expansion to mīm of the Ihmāl system is shown in a cal-

55 But he may have confused it for a sīn (f. 33a, line 2, on the kashīda between the yāʾ and the lām of Ismaʿīl). Marking the kashīda as a non-letter can already be seen in al-Muʾarrī’s Luzūm, MS Leiden Or. 100, a manuscript dated 517/1123, e.g. p. 263, line 7: wa-qāla (fig. 5).
56 As an interlinear sign it can be seen in MS Leiden Or. 92, Kitāb al-Ḥiyal wal-Ḥurūb, a work dedicated to the arts of war, mainly sword fighting, archery and pyrotechnics, ascribed to Alexander the Great (see Voorhoeve, Handlist, pp. 116–117). This manuscript, which is undated, makes the impression of having been copied in the Mamlūk period. As a mere space filler Ṯ occurs often (ff. 2b, 7v, and passim) together with several other graphical signs, but it is not used as a quasi-Ihmāl sign.
57 MS Istanbul, Collection Kerem Kıyak No. 4. See the reproduction in Ömer Faruk Dere, Hattat Hâfiz Osman Efendi. Hayatı—sanatı—eserleri. İstanbul (Korus Kültür Sanat Yayın-cılık), 2009, p. 188, No. 209.
igraphic panel written in 1233/1818 by Mahmud Celâleddin (Maḥmūd Ǧalāl al-Dīn, d. 1829). This can be a novelty, but it may also be a late echo of al-Sarrāǧ’s concerns about possible confusion between wāw and mīm. Many more examples in Ottoman specimens show that among the calligraphers Ihmāl was fully adopted. That was not for its original purpose, namely to clarify the meaning of a text, but in order to beautify its outward appearance.58

In the later manuscript production of the Mashriq, till well into the period of transition between writing and printing in the 19th century, Ihmāl slowly disappeared from manuscripts, although not categorically. With typographical printing, one could say that there would be no necessity for Ihmāl anymore, as a printed text could never cause the ambiguities that a negligent copyist might create. In typesetting, a dot is a dot, and when there is no dot, then there is really none. A remnant of Ihmāl has survived in an early example of Arabic printing, the Venice edition of the Qurʾān of 1537, which was probably designed after a Mamlūk manuscript.59 The small v-sign is used there as an accessory written over the sīn of the word Sūra, but only in the large font that is used for the sūra headings. The main text of the Venice Qurʾān is devoid of any such subtleties. But that was exceptional and typographical printing effectively proved to be the end of the Ihmāl system as applied to texts. At the same time, Ihmāl has remained part and parcel of the repertoire of forms of the modern graphic artists of the Arab and Islamic world.

58 See ms Istanbul, Topkapı Museum, gy 147, as reproduced in Ali Alparslan, Osmanlı hat sanati tarihi. Istanbul (Yapi Kredi Yayınları), 20075, p. 131.