Early Qur'anic Fragments

by Adam Gacek

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

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

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

QUR’ANIC HANDS

This small collection of fragments represents a variety of scripts and styles. Even so, many a scholar, contemporary or not, would term most of them as Kāfi or Kafic. This tendency resulted from a lack of any satisfactory system for the correct identification of Arabic scripts. Even though many names of these early scripts have survived recorded in various Arabic sources, with perhaps one or two exceptions they do not tell us anything about the real characteristics of these scripts. In this seemingly hopeless situation, a glimmer of light has been found by using an approach based on a classification which groups these scripts according to a very specific palaeographical method consisting of data which relate to the shape of such letters as alif, ayin, mim, nün, ká and lam-alif. This new approach found its expression in several recent publications by E. Deroche and, in particular, in his catalogue of a large collection of Qur’anic fragments preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

Having said this, however, and with full awareness of the importance of this approach, it seems to me that the palaeographer cannot entirely abandon the written Arabic tradition concerning the development of the Arabic script and its calligraphic manifestations. True, many errors have been committed by relying solely on this classical Arabic tradition, but one still hopes that a discovery of yet another unknown text or even a passage will elucidate an unclear and ambiguous appelation. For after all, it is much more satisfactory and easier to use a concrete label such as Hijājī or ‘Itrālī rather than an invented system of classification consisting of letters and numbers. The label, however, has to be clearly defined.

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

I. There seems to be no doubt that the early development of the Arabic script followed two somewhat different paths. The simultaneous existence of curvilinear and rectilinear ḥamza had been primarily caused by two major needs of the Arabic state and society; namely, the need to issue state documents and conduct correspondence, on the one hand, and the need to copy the Holy Writ, on the other. The divine message, in the eyes of Muslims, could not be copied in just any script. It deserves nothing but a hieratic and majestic. This, however, does not mean that the Qur’an was not copied in scripts which exhibited curvilinear features. On the contrary, we find that some of these early Qur’anic scripts were not as “angular” as they are often portrayed and that they were influenced by Syriac. This influence has already been pointed out by Nabi Abbo, among others. This influence must have been quite considerable and strong that in the time of Muḥammad, copies of the Qur’an were not infrequently produced by Christians. Abū Ḥāmil ibn Abī Dīdā (d. 275/890), for example, mentions that Abū al-Rahmān ibn Abī ‘Awī (d. 320/633) paid sixty dirhams to a Christian from al-Ḥirāḥ for a copy of the Qur’an and “Abū Jahl ibn Abī Laylā” (d. 405/665) paid seventy dirhams. A copy of the Qur’an was also made by a Christian for a certain “Aqlamū.” The Syriac influence is traceable not only to the ḥamza, but also to the ṣāḥib (ṣēṭ) and Nestician varieties. In this short overview, I will concentrate on one letter in particular, the alif. The characteristic alif in ṣēṭ has a wavy shaft and a left-sloping barbed (or knobbled, hooked) head (known in Mamluk literature as taṭāṣ). This script is recognizable in an entire group of Arabic scripts which Fransois Déroche classifies as NS and proposes to call “broken cursive” (fa cursive brisée).

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We read in Kitāb al-kuttāb of Abū ʿAbdāl l-Baghdādī (fl. 359/760 C.E.) that the people of al-Ḥāṯim used a script called ʿallaq, which was then learned by the people of al-Kūfah. If Abbo’s proposed explanation of ʿallaq as coming from the Syriac geze and meaning “cut rods” (a possible reference to the straight strokes in early scripts) is true, then it is no reason not to accept it, then the Kitāb proper (i.e. the script used by the people of al-Kūfah) must have been heavily influenced by the somewhat stiff appearance of this script. Al-Baghdādī also tells us that the people of al-ʿĀmar used a script called al-Musayq and explains that it was characterized by lightness (ḏībi ḳhafīf). He goes on to say that masbaḥ in the phrase masbaḥa bi-āl-ramūb means “I preceded him with a spear in a nimble and uninterrupted stroke” (aṣanūba tu’nūw khaṭṭan mutaṭḥābat). Moreover, Ibn Abī Dīdā in his Kitāb al-maslahī tells us that to write in masbaḥ, characterized as ʿāl al-masāḥ (“extra flowing”), was disliked and when Ibn Sirin was asked why, he answered “there is in it an imperfection” (maṣq), do you not see how the alif is plunging (drowning), it should be brought (thrown) back, fixed.” This script is therefore ʿal-tarā al-alif yāsaṯa yuḥarribūn yābaḥi ʿāl taraddā. The definitions of al-Maslah as given by al-Baghdādī and Ibn Abī Dīdā appear to be substantially different from the features attributed to it by Nabi Abbo. The fact that these authors wrote that ṣāḥib was disliked is significant, for it implies that this script was not considered worthy of the Qur’an. This would, therefore, assume that it was not considered as hieratic, and that the script was not in use. It is true that the recommendation was to copy the Qur’an in large forms and a large format would require a script of a particular size. Nabi Abbo tells us even though recognizing the fact that using masbaḥ was disliked, says “yet it is not at all impossible to eliminate the evident faults of hasty writing and to produce a boldly expanded yet carefully written script.” The Masbaḥ script is characterized by N. Abbo as an elegant script, using large and bold letters.

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The above description of the alif is also of significance. For in al-Maslah script used by the people of al-ʿĀmar and if it was a light script, with the “plunging” alif it is likely to have been heavily influenced by ṣēṭ and Nestician. If this is the case, should we not expect to find in it the characteristic hooked alif? Furthermore, if these influences existed simultaneously one should be able to see the characteristics of ʿāl al-masāḥ is true of both the ṣēṭ and Nestician in the specimens of this early period. One such early specimen can be found in al-Muḥammad’s Dīrāṣ, featuring a copy of the Qur’an transcribed by Ḥudayj ibn Muḥammad ibn Maslama al-Anṣārī for “Uqba ibn Nāfi’ al-Fahri (the founder of the city of Qayrawān) and dated 49 ʿA.H. (660 A.D.). If the date of this copy is authentic (and there is no reason to believe otherwise), it is very likely that the NS category is much earlier than hitherto recognized, and that this NS category is directly linked to the ṣēṭ and Nestician scripts.

II. We are told by ʿAbd Allāh al-Baqhdādī that after the calligrapher Yūsuf Ṭaqwah “invented” from al-Fajl a much lighter (ʿakṣāf) and more slender (ʿaṣāf) script, so pleased the vizier Dhu al-Riṣāṣayn al-Fajl ibn Sahl (d. 208/821) that he ordered his secretaries to use it as the script of his chancery. The script consequently acquired the name al-Riṣāṣ. Furthermore, Ibn al-Nadim informs us that a smaller version of this script called al-Mudawwar al-Kabīr (as opposed to al-Mudawwar al-Kahīr, being al-Riṣāṣ) was used for writing in registers (dated) and for the copying of hadith poetry. If this “small round script” was a roundbook of the day we should look for it in the extant non-Qur’anic codices of this early period. It is interesting to note here that most of these codices were written in scripts which share several common features, including the characteristic Syriac alif. During my work on Mamluk texts on calligraphy I found a specimen of the Riṣās script in the work of al-Tābi and the first thing which struck me was that, unlike other scripts, the alif has a tail which protruding to the right. This important feature makes it stand out from among the other scripts. Naturally, the Riṣāṣ of this late Mamluk period must have been quite different from the Riṣāṣ of the late second/eighth century. However, it seems to me that such an important element as taṭāṣ would have been the characteristic of all Riṣāṣ-type scripts. If this indeed is the case, we have here a direct connection between the Riṣāṣ family and the Syriac ṣēṭ and Nestician scripts. What a coincidence, therefore, that the name Riṣāṣ should be derived from the same root as taṭāṣ, its main characteristic!

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

But, according to our sources, al-Riṣāṣ was primarily a chancery and “secular” (non-Qur’anic) hand. However, this does not mean that this script, being already an established bookhand used for the transcription of prophetic sayings, could not have been used for the copying of the Qur’an for more private purposes. Ibn al-Nadim informs us that some of the scripts used for the copying of the Qur’an (presumably in his time) was al-Qirā’āt (read Pirāmiz or Pirāmīz), from which it is derived al-Mudawwar (round) and al-Nāṣirī varieties. These scripts are usually associated with Persia. It is not likely that these Qur’anic hands are “dressed up” and/or later versions of the Masbaḥ-Riṣāṣ family.

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

POINTING AND VOCALIZATION

The early Arabic script was a very defective medium of communication. It was devoid not only of vocalization but also lacked diacritical marks to distinguish its various identical letter shapes. Arabic tradition is not unanimous as to who introduced the system of pointing and vocalization (naqż). Abu al-Aswad al-Du‘ali (d. 69/688) is usually credited with the introduction of vocalization by means of red dots based on the system used in Syriac. Nasr ibn ‘Asim al-Laythi and Yahya ibn Ya‘mur al-Adwani (the pupils of al-Du‘ali) are said to have been involved in the introduction of diacritics (tajwid) using dots of the colour of the main script. The system of al-Du‘ali consisted of the use of one or two red dots (depending on whether the word was defined or not). Thus fatihah was represented by one dot placed above a letter, kasrah by a dot below a letter, dhammah by a dot before the letter and tanwin by two dots. The system in use in the present day is credited to Khalil ibn Almad al-Farahsi (d. 173/794). The vocalization of the text of the Qur‘an was originally disapproved of but later accepted, even in the mosque copies (‘ammahat).  

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

WRITING SURFACES AND FORMATS

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

INKS AND DECORATION

The main letter shapes (excluding chapter headings) of most of the fragments are written in brown or dark brown ink. Nos. 2, 6 and 9, however, are mainly in a black or almost black ink. The other pigments used are red, yellow, green and blue. These pigments are mainly used for vocalization, although yellow gouache is used for decoration (including surah-headings) (see nos. 6, 9, 10 and 13), red for a surah-heading (no. 10) and blue can be seen as part of the medallion or palmette (nos. 11 and 13). The gold ink is entirely associated with surah-headings, ornaments (discs, roundels, rosettes etc.) indicating verse divisions, marginal medallions and palmettes.
DATING

None of the extant leaves is dated or bears any external evidence such as a bequest note (waqfiyya) to allow us to date them with any degree of confidence. One thing which can be said, however, is that the fragments on paper cannot go back to the period earlier than the middle of the second/eighth century, as the traditional date for the introduction of paper to the Arab world via Samarraq is 133/751. And it was not until the end of the second/eighth century that it was used in any large quantity in the Arabic chancery. Qur’ans began to be written on paper much later, most probably as late as the third/ninth century. Also, the pointing and vocalization are not always reliable factors as these were often added by later hands. As far as the red dot system is concerned, it was in use long after the system of Khalili ibn Ahmad was introduced. Finally, parchment, even though in common use before the introduction of paper, continued to be used in the Eastern Lands of the Islamic Empire for Qur’anic production as late as the fourth/eighth century, and in the West (Maghribi) well into the eighth/nineteenth century. Thus we can only say that our specimens nos. 2, 6 and 9 are not earlier than the third (less likely) or fourth (more likely), i.e. ninth or tenth century.

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

DESCRIPTION OF THE FRAGMENTS

1. AC 151 (Figure 6)

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


Déroche BII (pl.XI). 28

2. AC 153 (Figure 10)

Bifolios: 164 × 110 / 105 × 65 mm., 6 lines per page. Written on laid paper, with laid lines clearly visible, in a script derived from the NS category (without tawwâbîn), in deep-brown ink. Khalîl ibn Ahmad’s system of pointing; vocalized by means of red dots. No verse division.

S. 7 (al-Arz), v. 115-119 and 133-135 (incipit: yâ-Mâna ìnnu an tauqîya... [115]... explicit: wa-‘aasusulahu nâsiratu muna... [133]... explicit: ‘âidu bhum yawkathânâ fa-l).

The first leaf bears the name F.C. Morgan impressed with a die stamp.

3. AC 166 (Figure 8)

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

S. 22 (al-‘Ajih), v. 60-70 (incipit: buqayya ‘alayhī... [60]... explicit: fi kitâbni inna).

Déroche NSI (pl.XXI).—Purchased from A. Khan Monif in 1938 with the funds provided by the Friends of the Library.

4. AC 175 (Figure 2)

One leaf, 185 × 263 / 125 × 264 mm., 15 lines per page. Written on parchment in dark-brown ink. Unpointed, vocalized by means of red dots. Sâ‘arab-heading on the hair side in gold outlined in black. Next to it is the letter jîm (or jâ?) with the number 17
to indicate the beginning of the 17th part (later addition). The letter bāʾ in gold is used to mark the end of a group of five verses. A larger medallion is used at the end of v. 133 (S. 20) to mark the end of a group of ten verses.


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

5. AC 181 (Figure 5)

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

S. 12 (Yūsuf), v. 74-76 (incipit: kintum kahbūba [74]... explicit: akhišt kaddālība’t)

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

6. AC 182 (Figure 9)

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

1) S. 5 (al-Māʾūdah), v. 13-29 (incipit: fā’-mah naqūlim... explicit: wa-ballāku jāta’u al-zālimīna).
2) Last word of S. 14 (Ibrāhīm) and S. 15 (al-Hijr), v. 1-49 (incipit: al-ḥalāb [52]... explicit: nābbī ḫabīd).
3) S. 19 (Maryam), v. 7-43 (incipit: yā Zawarīya... explicit: anša’ abīyān [42] yā abāti).
4) S. 41 (Hūd-Mūm), v. 50-end and S. 42 (al-Shāhār), v. 1-17 (incipit: hādā bi waw-mā ajūnu... explicit: al-niṣān waw-mā).

Another leaf from the same codex is preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art (see Eric Schroeder, "What was the badd script". Manuscripts in the Museum of Islamic Art, Ar’is Islamiya 4, 1937, pl. 5). Leaf no. 1 bears the name F.C. Morgan (die-stamped).

7. AC 183 (Figure 9)

Bi-folio; 163 x 154 / 120 x 90 mm., 7 lines per page. Written on parchment in An-Gulaskan script, in dark-brown ink. Pointed and vocalized (using Kahlil Ibn Ahmad’s system). The final wāw and fāʾ are pointed. Hamza indicated by a yellow dot (often oxidized). Tashbul and sukūn in blue. The text is divided by means of golden rosettes and three-petalled florets.

S. 6 (al-‘Anṣām), v. 39-43 and 66-70 (incipit: man yathal Allahu... explicit: fa-la waw al丈夫 jā’ūna and incipit: lāstu alaykhum bi-wa-kilīn... explicit: wa-dharru alladnina itkhabadhu’u).

Acquired from Kūr̄m Minassian in 1938.

8. AC 184 (Figure 4)

Two leaves; 156 x 197 / 115 x 165 mm., 15 and 16 (no. 1 recto) lines per page. Written on parchment in brown ink. Pointed by means of oblique strokes and vocalized with red dots. Sārah-heading (leaf 2, hair side) in red. Verse division indicated by means of three oblique strokes. The end of v. 50 (S. 33) indicated by two discs with four semi circles in green and red inside. Similar ornaments can be seen at the end of v. 60 and 70. Damaged by acidic ink, borders uneven resulting from damage. The rule of Gregory applied (verso of the first leaf and recto of the second leaf are both flesh side).

1) S. 33 (al-‘Abdāb), v. 50-59 (incipit: kha-liṣtan laha ... explicit: yā ayyūba al-wab-paying).
2) S. 33 (al-‘Abdāb), v. 59-73 through S. 34 (al-Sābāh), v. 1 (incipit: ḫarwaṭuḥa wa-bar-nātika ... explicit: al-bākīna al-bahāra).
Notes

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


2. One of the earliest accounts of the various Arabic scripts can be found in the Fibrist of Ibn al-Nadim (d. 380/990) (see e.g. the Cairo edition of 1348 A.H., 8). The only scripts in any way characterized are al-Makkhi and al-Madani. They are described as having an alfik with a slant to the right and elongated ascenders (sa`i al-fa'isihi tay' fi-sama matn al-`aswad laila li-saybi war-ghi shaklbih mitti` ya-`sir). This has been understood as a script whose more extreme version is al-Maliki. The whole Makkhi/Madani family is conveniently termed al-Hajjasi (see in particular F. Dereco, Les manuscrits du Coran, Paris: Bibliotheque Nationale, 1983, I: 35-36, pl. V-VII). It has to be noted, however, that the Makkhi/Madani script as illustrated in the oldest surviving manuscript of the Fibrist of Ibn al-Nadim and apparently collated with the b holograph has all the characteristics of the so-called "Eastern Kufic" or "broken cursive" (2); see The fibrist of al-Nadim, ed. and translated by Bayard Dodge (New York/London: Columbia Univ. Press, 1970), I: xxiv-xxvii, 10. For an argument against such a possibility see N. Abbott, "Arabic paleography," Ars Islamica 8 (1941), 70-71.


11. Ibn Abî Dzâ'îd, Kitâb al-masâkib, 149-150. Ibn Sirîn is also ascribed the following saying: "copying the Qur'an in masâkib was disliked because there is in it tawajjuf (carelessness, awkwardness) and khurja (luminescence or khurja 3 (tearing, disruption, violation): see Abî Hayyân al-Tawhîlî (d. after 400/1000), Risâlah fi 'ilm al-kitâbih, Thalâth ra'a'in, ed. Ibrahim al-Kaylânî (Damascus, 1951), 46. It is interesting to note here that the word masâkib is very often used in manuscripts as a synonym of nasâk (i.e. transcription, copying) and in the Persian context it is employed by students of calligraphy for signing their practice pieces.


15. Ibn al-Nadîm, Filbar, 12.

an early and little known Arabic script called 
Firāmūṣ (sic), an unpretentious cursive script which was apparently in use until the early ninth century. The general opinion, however, is that Tālīq only became established as a defined script after the invention of Riyāsī (sic) in the ninth century. For examples of the script labelled as Pīrāmūṣ see Badrī Atībāy, Fīrāz Qurānīyy-ī khātā Kībhākhāb-ī Sālāmatī (Tehran, 1531 A.H.), 219-309 and Fakhr al-Dīn Nāṣirī Aminī Fakhrī, Gannāhī-ī khātātī-ī ʿalāmāt-ī al-dāwīmī-dasmādānī i-kīrām... (l.l., 1409 A.H.), 2: 1510-11, 1516-19, 1521, 1525, 1528, 1530-31, 1539-40, 1545. Another name which seems to be associated with the Rīsālī family is al-Rayḥānī apparently named after ‘All ibn ʿUbayyād al-Rayḥānī (d. 219/834). This name is mentioned by Abū ʿAbdālīn al-Tawhīdī in his Risālah fī ʾilm al-kītābah (p. 30) as one of the so-called “Kūfī” scripts; see also E. Rosenthal’s translation Abū Hayyān al-Tawhīdī on penmanship.” Four essays on art and literature in Islam (Leiden: Brill, 1971). 24. It is interesting to note that Muhammad Tāhir al-Kurdī links it with al-Dirāsāt: see his Tavākb al-khāṭṭ-ī al-ʿArabī wa-ʾdālāhānu (Cairo, 1358/1939), 121. See also my The ancient script of Qurayshān, MELA Notes 46 (1989), 27.


26. This apparent similarity has already been pointed out by E. Dérôche in his “Collectors of manuscripts ancients”, 160. For an overview of Maghribī scripts see O. Houdas, “Essai sur l’écriture maghrébine,” Nouveaux melanges orientaux (Paris, 1886), 88-95. Houdas uses, as a point of departure for his analysis, a copy of Ibn Sahnūn’s al-Mudawwun fī going back to the early fourth/ninth century and written in what he calls a “cursive Kūfī” (coutique cursif).


25. Compare with the findings of Dérôche in his Manuscripts of the Coran, I: 19-43.

26. For a survey of writing materials see e.g. Muhammad Faris Jamal, Islamic wraqāb “stationary” during the Early Middle Ages. Ph.D., University of Michigan, 1985 (UMI, 1988), 70-147.

27. For a survey of dated early Qur’āns see Dérôche, Manuscripts of the Coran, I: 50-51.

28. Whenever appropriate references are here given to Dérôche’s Manuscripts of the Coran.

by Stanley Brice Frost

The following account of the principal years of Frank Cyril James, the term of which ran from 1940-1962, is based almost entirely on the James Papers in the McGill University Archives. These papers have been fully described by Dr. Faith Wallis for the publication A Guide to the Archival Resources at McGill University, Vols. 1-3, 1985. Volume 1, pp. 10-11, lists the records of the Principal’s Office 1940-1962, which are generally restricted as to access, though some items include published materials which are available elsewhere, while Volume 2, pp. 40-43, describes the deposit of private papers. In the latter entry, the headings are ‘Private and Autobiographical Records, 1903-1971’, ‘Research, ca. 1870-1970’, ‘Teaching, 1924-1959’, ‘Addresses, 1939-1967’, ‘Pictorial Materials, ca. 1925-1970’ and ‘Miscellaneous, 1900-’. There are, in addition, the original manuscript of The Growth of Chicago Banks, and two drafts of Dr. James’ account of his visit to the USSR in 1959. The extent and complexity of the papers is indicated by the fact that in total they occupy over 100 metres of shelf space. This paper was initially read to the James McGill Society in October, 1989. An earlier paper ‘The Cyril James We did not Know’ had given the Society an account of Dr. James’ family background, his education and his remarkable career in the United States, the manner of his coming to McGill and how he found himself most unexpectedly promoted to principal. The present paper proceeds from that point and attempts to identify and assess James’ major achievements during the years he held office. A biography, The Man in the Ivory Tower: F. Cyril James of McGill has been completed and publication is expected early in 1991.

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Cover Illustration: Trotter weathervane of hammered copper with zinc head
from Murray Bay, Quebec, late 19th century. (Photograph by Marilyn Aitken.
deVolpi Collection, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal.)