PAGE-SETTING IN LATE OTTOMAN QUR’ANS.
AN ASPECT OF STANDARDIZATION

The purpose of this paper is twofold. The primary aim is to account for the types of standardized page-setting that occur in Ottoman Qur’ans manuscripts of the 16th and 19th centuries. But this aspect of the later Ottoman Qur’an has to be seen in the context of a wider process of standardization that affected all aspects of Qur’an production after 1600, and which resulted in the production of copies that are immediately recognizable as Ottoman. The main evidence for the discussion comes from the very large number of Qur’an manuscripts that survive from the last centuries of Ottoman history, since the literary and other sources available are limited.

In the 16th century there was considerable variety in Ottoman Qur’an production, both in terms of styles of script, illumination and binding and in terms of the format of the manuscript, the page layout and the programme of decoration. This variety reflected the wide range of sources for Ottoman material culture in this period, and it was sustained by the great wealth accrued by the Ottoman elite as their empire expanded: as the century progressed, an increasing number of fine Qur’ans and other religious manuscripts were commissioned both for newly founded institutions and for personal use. By 1600, however, the pace of the empire’s growth had slowed almost to a halt, and it became necessary to devote resources to the maintenance of what already existed rather than to the creation of new institutions. This change was accompanied by a series of political, social and economic crises, and it resulted in the initiative in Qur’an production passing to a larger group of less wealthy patrons[1].

The events of the late 16th century and the early 17th are mirrored in a crisis in Qur’an production, which may be detected, for example, in the disappearance from the capital of all but one school of calligraphy, that of Seyh Hamdullah (see p. 1520). This development goes almost unremarked in Ottoman sources of the 18th and 19th centuries, who take the innate superiority of Hamdullah’s style for granted. But it is striking that just one individual, Hasan Eski Kilic (d. 1614 or 1615), was responsible for the transmission of this style to the scribes working in Istanbul in the 17th century. Even the school of Hamdullah, then, seems to have come close to extinction [2].

The same process of selection, by which all but one of a range of alternatives was eliminated, may be seen occurring in other aspects of Qur’an production and associated arts in this period. Seyh Hamdullah and the Ottoman calligraphers of the 16th century practised the six styles of calligraphy known as the Six Pens. In later centuries, though, this was the exception, so that the great 18th-century biographer of calligraphers, Mustakim-rade Suleyman Sa’addin Efendi (d. 1788), consistently refers to later members of the school of Seyh Hamdullah being trained in husnu-i hamza, sahas-ı nesih (thuluth) and nask calligraphy. Thus the Six Pens had become two, one for large-format work and one for small. What is more, the main text of the standard later Ottoman Qur’an was always written entirely in nask, so that in this case the Six Pens were reduced to one[3].

The decoration and binding of Qur’ans manuscripts were subject to the same shrinking of the available options, which equated to standardization. Thus, the principal areas of illumination in most fine copies of the 17th century have gold and blue parti-coloured grounds, which are overlaid with scrolling tendrils set with diminutive floral motifs. These same copies are usually bound in morocco covers with recessed centre — and corner-pieces of a standard type, filled with pressure — moulded and gilded decoration. These were, of course, precisely the styles of illumination and binding found in copies of the Qur’an written by Seyh Hamdullah for Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481—1512) [4].

The way that the illumination was used to articulate the divisions of the text also became standardized. The double-page illuminations found in the best 16th-century examples were eliminated, and the beginning of the text was marked by a wide ornamental frame surrounding the first sura, which was always confined to the left-hand page, and the beginning of the second sura, which was always confined to the left-hand page, the composition of this frame also became very standardized. In the remainder of the manuscript, sura headings were placed in a band the width of the text area, which is usually decorated, and gift whorls or segmented discs set off with red and blue dots mark the conclusion of each verse [5].

There was more variety in the occurrence and design of marginal devices. These could be used to mark the division of the text into as many as 120 equal sections (juz’ and baiib), to signal the points in the text where the reader has to make a prostration (saffah), and sometimes to divide suras into groups of verses. The device usually includes a short inscription indicating what the device refers to (i.e. the word juz’, baiib, saffah, etc.), but otherwise no formal distinction was made between devices serving different

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Fig. 1
purposes. Nevertheless, a range of designs, apparently selected at random, was used for the devices in any one manuscript.

The size of the 17th-century Qur'ans was usually relatively modest, although there are exceptions. The character of one such exception is telling. The manuscript, which is dated 1694 and was copied in gold by an illuminator called Seyyid Abdullah, measures 43.6 by 28.5 cm when closed, but the model chosen by the copyist-urn-illuminator was clearly a standard Qur'an that was about a quarter this size. The result is that the illumination of the opening pages resembles a blow-up photograph of a copy of normal dimensions. Given its large format, Seyyid Abdullah's Qur'an manuscript must have been intended for a public institution, while the smaller copies of the period were probably made for use by individuals, although we cannot know this for certain as so few contain documentation relating to their owners.

The text in these smaller copies is always presented in the same manner. It fills a rectangular area that is off-centre with regard to the page as a whole and is surrounded on three sides by wide margins. The text area is defined by a substantial frame composed of gold bands and coloured rules, and at first, it accommodated a varying number of lines of text. In the second half of the 18th century, however, this situation changed, and 15 lines of text to the page became the standard pattern. Qur'ans in this 3-line format, which remained standard in Ottoman Qur'an manuscripts until the end of manuscript production on a mass scale in the late 19th century, may be divided into several groups.

In one, the scribe reproduced the text in the normal manner, taking care to fill each line so that the text was presented in as regular and well-balanced a manner as he (or she) could manage. The huzurnah at the beginning of all but one saha always fills a complete line, and the text in the last line of a saha had to be modulated more carefully, as the leading that followed always filled a complete line. Otherwise, the text flows from line to line and from page to page in a relatively free manner.

In the second group, the setting of the text was pre-determined by another factor, which has been described most eloquently by François Deroche [7]. In Qur'ans of this type, the physical structure of the manuscript was adapted to reflect the traditional division of the text into 30 equal sections known as juz', creating a "perfect adequacy between text and quire structure". In other words, one gathering of ten folios was allocated to each juz', with the result that manuscripts of this type are always composed of slightly more than 300 folios.

Once this degree of co-ordination had been achieved, it was possible to divide "the text of each juz' into twenty segments, so that each page should always bear the same part of the text. Theoretically, those page units are interchangeable between any Qur'anic manuscripts produced under these conditions." [8] The result of such a division of the text is that each page ends with a complete verse, and this is presumably why in Ottoman and post-Ottoman literature on calligraphy such systems are given the name ayet ber kerār (perhaps, "with freestanding verses") [9].

The term ayet ber kerār was employed by Müstakim-zade when referring to the Istanbul calligrapher called Baki-zade or Yağcı-zade Mustafa. Mustafa was a pupil of Müstakim-zade's own master, Əğrikapı Mehmed Rasim (d. 1756), and "he possessed such a fine copying hand even before he received his licence that, while his master's son Mehmed Reşit was still an infant, he wrote a new copy of the Qur'an and made [the child] a present of it when he gained his licence" from the child's father. Mustafa was a mu allūdīn by profession, but after receiving his licence he found time to make "many ayet ber kerār copies of the holy text" and to write myriad other works before his early death in 1778/1776—7 [10].

The meaning of the term ayet ber kerār is transmitted to the 18th century as part of calligraphic lore, and when, for example, Şevket Rado published a précis of Müstakim-zade's entry on Baki-zade (Yağcı-zade) Mustafa, he glossed the term as follows:

"Aytlerin çokluşunun biriltimini suretiyle yazılan Kur'an-ı Kerim'le 'Aşsenterkan Kur'an'ı dörtte, hafız, olmasa izin verince ezberleri bu invite Kur'an'ları hafızlarınca".

"Qur'ans that are written so that the verses end at the foot of the page are called 'ayet ber kerār Qur'ans'. Those who wish to become a hafız use this type of Qur'an when they are learning (the text) by heart." [11].

The connection with hafız is supported by a rare ownership note in an unpublished ayet ber kerār Qur'an in the Khalili Collection (see QUR.35). The manuscript was copied, perhaps for his own use, by an Istanbul schoolteacher called Haci Abdullah and completed on 9 Jumâdî I 1316/17 September 1800. Later the manuscript came into the possession of one Hafiz Nazmeddin, who added an undated note in Ottoman Turkish on folio 1a, which reads

"Bu Kur'an-i a'mâl ve delillerde hafız cem'et'inde olduğu için oymadık hafızlar vermişler dir".

"My father gave me this Glorious Qur'an as a gift on the day when the hafız assembly took place."

The hafız assembly was presumably the occasion when Nazmeddin was examined on his knowledge of the Qur'anic text, and his status as a hafız approved.

Deroche comments that the elaboration of the ayet ber kerār system "was certainly completed during the 18th century" [12], but the recent publication of fully formed examples from the same century shows that the system was already in existence by 1700. One of these examples, dated 1171/1757—8, is by a pupil of Mehmed Rasim called Yakakç ez-Imam Muṣṭaṣusa Efendi [13], but the earliest is a specimen in the Khalili Collection (see QUR.10), which was copied by Ahmad ibn Mahmud in 1124/1712—3 [14]. Ahmad ibn Mahmud was a pupil of Sayıcuzade Muṣṭafa Efendi (d. 1685 or 1686), according to Muṣṭakim-zade, who had seen a Qur'an written by him in 1099/1687—8, while Şevket Rado published the last page of a Qur'an by him with a colophon dated 1115/1703—4 [14].

Ahmad ibn Mahmud's master, Sayıcuzade, was a member of the inner circle of leading calligraphers who were responsible for the revival of thuluth and cauli calligraphy in Istanbul in the second half of the 17th century. We may speculate, then, that the 15-line ayet ber kerār Qur'an was cultivated in this milieu in the years following the crisis of the early 17th century. As already mentioned, this was a time when Qur'an patronage had passed to a larger number of less wealthy clients. Indeed, the social level of
the hafiz who were the clientele for such Qur’ans was not necessarily very high, and the Khaliqi manuscripts of 1712—3 and 1801, and five other examples in the Collection produced in the intervening years [16], are not of outstanding quality. They are "working manuscripts" used by religious men of modest means rather than great works of art. A further common feature of the seven Khaliqi "qur’er ber kendir" Qur’ans from the period 1712—1803 is that the scribe followed more or less the same template in terms of which verses fell on which page. The result is that folios 149b—150a of Ahmed bin Mehmed’s Qur’an of 1712—3 (fig. 1) bear exactly the same text as folios 149b—150a of another Qur’an in the Khalil Collection (ms. QUR 33), written in 1704—5 (fig. 2) [17]. In both cases, verses 28—34 of the sura al-Kahf (XVIII) are written on the right-hand page, and verses 35—45 are written on the left-hand page.

Nevertheless, the function of an "ayet ber kendir" Qur’an did not require that the scribe always follow the same template exactly, and it was possible for variants to creep in, and even for different "ayet ber kendir" templates to be devised. One variant of the original system is shown by the Khalili ms. QUR 8, which was written in 1201/1786—7 [18], folios 149b—150a of this manuscript, for example, contain verses 25—31 and 32—43 of al-Kahf rather than verses 28—34 and 35—45, which we find on these pages in the standard version. The variance is relatively minor, and it is clearly the result of the slippage of verses from one page to the next as the scribe progressed in copying a manuscript, since the variance increases gradually through the manuscript.

The "ayet ber kendir" system was invented because of the need for "hafiz" to learn the text of the Qur’an by heart. Many aspired to the visual memorization of the holy text, and it seems that its presentation as a series of 600 or so discrete groups of verses was considered helpful in achieving this end. The link between this type of Qur’an and visual memorization is illustrated in a very graphic manner by the development of an even more controlled version of the "ayet ber kendir" system, in which "reiteration of coincidence" occurs. In manuscripts that display this more developed system, which are called tevifanda (from tevifad, "coincidence"), parts of the text were written in red to show which group of letters are in the same position on facing pages.

The development of the tevifadlul variant of the "ayet ber kendir" system had occurred by 1780—90, when the Khalili ms. QUR 33 was copied (fig. 2). This manuscript shows that the rubrications were added after the text had been manipulated to produce as many coincidences as the originator of the scheme could manage within the "ayet ber kendir" system. The result is, what, in the context of the deeply conservative late Ottoman tradition of Qur’an production, are some extraordinary page layouts. The high-point of this manipulation occurs in the openings at the end of the sura al-su‘arâ (XXVII) (figs. 3, 4). Here the originator of the scheme was prepared to dismantle the standard template in order to maximize the coincidences in the text on facing pages.

As a consequence of the re-arrangement of the text on these pages, the "interchangeability" of this manuscript (ms. QUR 33) with ms. QUR 10 seen from folios 149b—150a (figs. 1, 2) is not apparent when we examine, say, folios 222b—222a. In ms. QUR 10 these pages contain verses 27—60 of the sūra Sālih (XXXVIII), while in ms. QUR 33 they contain verses 127—82 of the sūra al-Sūfīl (XXXVII). All that has happened, in fact, is that the text in ms. QUR 33 has been pushed three pages forward by the redesign of folios at the end of al-Sā‘urâ, and in ms. QUR 10 we find verses 127—82 of al-Sūfīl three pages back, on folios 220b—227a.

Like the sūra ber kendir system as a whole, "reiteration of coincidence" remained popular in the 19th century. Déroche has discussed it in connection with a Qur’an in the National Library of Greece, which was copied in 1858 by a Turkish mamluk called al-Hajjuz Herainat [19]. Déroche showed that the manuscript was a reworking of the tevifadlul form in the Maqāribī style of script, and its production was a symptom of the continuing power of Ottoman models in Turkish society in the 19th century. As his comparative material, Déroche used a Qur’an in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul (ms. 469), which was copied in 1270/1852—3 by Yusuf Rasih, a pupil of Ahmed Nazif. Now Ahmed Nazif was a resident of Shumen in north-west Bulgaria, which was a flourishing centre of Qur’an production between the 1820s and 1878, when the city was incorporated into the new Bulgarian kingdom [20]. Yusuf Rasih must have studied with Ahmed Nazif in Shumen, and he may well have still been living there when he produced this manuscript, especially since all the Shumen Qur’ans I have been able to examine were produced according to variants of the "ayet ber kendir" system.

Although the Shumen manuscripts are distinguished from their 18th-century predecessors by a completely new style of illumination, their reliance on 18th-century tradition in other matters and their consistency as a group marks them out as a provincial apocryphal of the "standard Ottoman Qur’an". What is more, the lavish quality of some examples, such as ms. QUR 343 in the Khalili Collection, which was produced by Seyyid Mehmed Nuri in 1266/1849—50 [21], suggests that by this time ayet ber kendir Qur’ans had found a wider market. This in turn presages the use of the "ayet ber kendir" format in many printed Qur’ans produced in the 20th century, some of which are of very high quality.

Indeed, the "interchangeability" of "ayet ber kendir" Qur’ans makes them as much like printed books as a manuscript can. It is certainly possible that there was some connection between an increased familiarity with printing and the development of a system where the same text appeared in the same place on the same page in an impressively large number of manuscripts. Perhaps, in the debates over the legitimacy of printing texts in the Arabic script, some author took this advantage forward as an argument in favour of introducing printing, and the "ayet ber kendir" Qur’an was invented as a response. It has to be admitted, however, that the link with printing is not needed to explain the development of the "ayet ber kendir" system, which fitted the needs of a particular segment of Ottoman society [22].
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Back cover:
Plate 2. No. 13-34/398. Iblad, "A visit to a Shinto shrine", Life of Japanese people, Edo Period (19th c.). Painting unformatted (album folio), colour on silk, gold, 25.1 x 46.3 cm (whole), 39.3 x 44.3 cm (painting), no seal, no signature.
Plate 3. No. 13-34/398. Iblad, "Wedding ceremony", ibid. Edo Period (19th c.). Painting unformatted (album folio), colour on silk, gold, 32.5 x 44.5 cm, no seal, no signature.
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