A Copy of the Qasidat al-burda
Ascribed to the Famous Calligrapher Yaḥūd al-Mustaṣāmi

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Abstract
The Linden-Museum (Museum of Ethnology, Stuttgart, Germany) possesses an important collection of Islamic manuscripts. One of these (Ms. A 41878 I / L6328/0002) is ascribed to the famous calligrapher Yaḥūd al-Mustaṣāmi (7th / 13th). This manuscript was acquired in the nineties, when it was bought from an art dealer. Facing the situation that it is very difficult to attribute manuscripts to Yaḥūd and his school, the following survey aims to present this manuscript for further research on this key figure in the calligraphy tradition and to indicate some basic problems when dealing with Yaḥūd al-Mustaṣāmi.

Keywords
calligraphy, Yaḥūd al-Mustaṣāmi, Qasidat al-burda, Linden-Museum Stuttgart

The Linden-Museum (Museum of Ethnology, Stuttgart, Germany) possesses an important collection of Islamic manuscripts. One of these (Ms. A 41878

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L. / L4328/0002 is ascribed to the famous calligrapher Yaqūt al-Mustaṣimī (first decade 7th / 13th century-around 698 / 1298). The reputation of Yaqūt al-Mustaṣimī, both in his lifetime and amongst the generations of calligraphers who followed him, was such that over seven hundred years later his work continues to feature amongst the most sought-after calligraphic exemplars. The great quantity of forgeries produced in his name corresponds to this almost legendary reputation.1

Ms. A 41878 L. / L4328/0002 was acquired in the nineties, when it was bought from an art dealer. Facing the situation that it is very difficult to attribute manuscripts to Yaqūt and his school, the following survey aims to present this manuscript for further research on this key figure in the calligraphy tradition and to indicate some basic problems when dealing with Yaqūt al-Mustaṣimī.

In ms. A 41878 L. / L4328/0002 no title is given; the text is the so-called Qəṣīdat al-burda written by Shafī’ al-Dīn Abī ‘Abdallāh Muḥyīm ad-Dīn al-Būrī (608 / 1212-c. 694/6 / 1294-7) with inserted verses (waṣūlīḥ). Its real title is Al-ḥawāshik al-burda fi madāḥ khāṣr al-barīṣ (The Luminous Stars in Praise of the Best of all Creation).

The Description of ms. A 41878 L. / L4328/0002:

1) Content:
   f. 1r: Owner’s notes and stamps
   ff. 1v-27v: The Qəṣīdat al-burda without the verses 6, 7 (see ff. 2r-s) and 160 (see f. 27v); the verses 72-81 are inserted between the verses 87 and 88 (see ff. 13r-15v) [see fig. 1-2]
   f. 28r: Colophon [see fig. 3]
   f. 28v: Notes

2) Technique:
   - 35,5 x 27 cm, 28 sheets
   - A simple greenish-brown leather cover (Turkey 18th century); the manuscript is newly basted with older and newer repairs.
   - Paper: The three-way-arrangement of the fibre construction is characteristic for Egyptian-Syrian paper. The paper’s properties such as fibre preparation,

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1 D. James, Qur’ans of the 10th and 14th centuries AD (London: Nour Foundation, 1992), 58-59. In 2002 a manuscript attributed to Yaqūt al-Mustaṣimī (April 02) and another said to belong to his circle (October 02) were offered by Sotheby’s London. In the catalogue descriptions the problems about identifying Yaqūt’s writing are largely discussed, see Sotheby’s, Arts of Islamic World: auction 25 April 02, London: Sotheby’s, 2002 (lot 20) and Sotheby’s, Arts of Islamic World: auction 16 October 02, London: Sotheby’s, 2002 (lot 15).
Figure 2. f. 2r (detail)

Figure 3. f. 28r (colophon)
paste application, surface polishing and colander structure do not contradict a dating in the 7th / 13th century. However, as the properties of this paper type tend not to alter significantly over the centuries a precise dating based on the paper is difficult. In principle, this difficulty relates to the larger problem of the reliability of paper analysis; when the method of paper production is taken into consideration, it becomes clear that the end product contains a varying amount of recycled materials, although the quantity varied depending on the quality of the paper. Alongside flax and hemp old rags would also be torn up and shredded in the large paper mills in the Orient. Given the important raw material that it represented, paper recycling had a long history. A chemical or photo technical analysis does not differentiate between recycled and "new" raw materials. So the conclusions that the examination of paper composition offer must always be subjected to further analytic criteria.3

- Script: Mushqiq in black, blue, green and red ink, golden frames and rosettes; the colophon is written in red Thuluth.
- The colophon (f. 28r) is probably a later addition (see below). It is in the form of a medallion. Lapis lazuli is overlaid onto gold leaf and the script is written in red lead (minium). Unfortunately not only the script but also the lapis lazuli have partly flaked away. There are therefore no traces of a script which we could try to reconstruct using various technical methods such as infrared-photography. The colophon gives the calligrapher's name Yaqūt al-Mustaʿṣimī and a dating of the seventh century hijri (see fig. 3):

The poem:
The Qisīdat al-burda is very famous throughout the Islamic world from Morocco to Indonesia, not least due to its use as a prayer of supplication against illness. We have relatively little information about its author, the Egyptian official, teacher and calligrapher Sharaf al-Dīn Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad al-Baṣīrī. He spent about ten years of his life in Jerusalem, Mecca and Medina and the Qisīdat al-burda is thought to have been written during this time. For the last years of his life he came back to Egypt; and is probably buried in Cairo. The title of his poem "Ode of the Cloak" is explained by the following legend: Following an attack of paralysis al-Baṣīrī dreamed that the prophet Muḥammad spread his cloak (Arabic: burda) over him. Upon waking he found that he was cured. As an expression of thanks to the Prophet he composed the poem Qisīdat al-burda, which consists of 162 verses.4

There are over 90 commentaries in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Berber. The subsequent number of tasīb (the adding of three inserted verses per verse), tākhūnīb (the adding of five inserted verses per verse) and tasībir (the adding of half-verses) is innumerable.5

The calligrapher:
Three important calligraphers should be mentioned when describing the development of Islamic calligraphy: Ibn Muṣṭafā (272 / 886-328 / 940),6 Ibn al-Bowwāh (died 413 / 1022)7 and finally Yaqūt al-Mustaʿṣimī (first decade 7th / 13th century- around 698 / 1298).8 All were working at the Caliph’s court in Baghdad.

An investigation into Yaqūt al-Mustaʿṣimī’s background reveals a number of open questions. His place of birth is recounted as being Amasya (in central Anatolia), but he may also have been born in Abyssinia. He was brought to Baghdad as a eunuch whilst still in his early years and received instruction from Sālī al-Dīn al-Muʿźīn al-Urmaʿī, the court calligrapher for the last Abbasid caliph and the Mongol conqueror Hūlegū. As indicated by his niṣba, Yaqūt al-Mustaʿṣimī was probably a slave at the court of the last Abbasid Caliph al-Mustaʿṣim. However, the fact that he signed his works with the niṣba al-Baṣīrī, too, may also mean that he was a free man. It is also possible that he used the latter signature during the period before al-Mustaʿṣim became Caliph. Whether as a free man or a slave, it is in any case clear that Yaqūt al-Mustaʿṣimī was employed at the court as official secretary and chancery scribe (kāṣīb al-dīwān), both before and after the Mongol invasion.

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3 See note 4.

4 G. S. Colin, "Burda," EI 1 (1960), 1314-5. Often the sixth verse is lacking (so for example in our manuscript as well as in the edition Tibetan, 1961 / 1982, edited by Muḥammad Shakkī al-Islāmī).

5 For more details as well as for the numerous editions of the Qisīdat al-burda see ibid. and E. Seigné, Geschichte des Arabischen Schriftums II (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 235.


7 Grabmann, Arabische I, 19.

8 Ibid., 22.
of 1258. He was also the librarian of the famous Mustanṣīrīya college in Baghdad.7

Yaqtī al-Mustaṣīrī's fame does not only rest on his masterwork of "Six pens", the calligraphic styles recognised during that period.8 He is also remembered for the contribution that he made to the development of the Naḫḳī and Thulūdī styles by introducing the slanting pen point (qalam). This was to have extraordinary consequences for the further development of Islamic calligraphy. Yaqtī al-Mustaṣīrī's biography as reported in the beginning of the 11th / 17th century by Qādī Ahmad ibn Mīr-Munṣīr al-Ḫūṣaynī tells us almost everything which is known about Yaqtī's person.9 The biography offers the following details about the reforms that Yaqtī al-Mustaṣīrī introduced; the section also gives a characteristic insight into the form of discussions about calligraphy and the way in which these were often conducted.10

In the art of writing he followed the traditions of Ibn al-Bawwāb, but in the trimming of the qalam and in the clipping of its nib he altered the manner of the earlier masters, while he drew his guidance from the marvellous words of His Holiness the Shāh, the Refuge of Sanctity [i.e., 'All] – God's peace be on him! – namely: 'Cut the qalam so that its point be long, and leave it thick; cut the end of the qalam at an angle, after which it should ring like the ringing of Masbūqī's sword.' And this Masbūqī, they say, was a man who made sword blades known for their excellence and quality; when someone trying out his blade struck something, he cut it in two, and if the blade was set in motion, it vibrated and there was heard a ringing of extreme acuteness. Therefore it is best that the end of the qalam should be cut at an angle, and the point of the qalam be long and flexible, and when it is put to paper it should vibrate and a ringing be heard. Ibn al-Bawwāb did not cut the end of the qalam, and for this reason his writings is neither fine nor elegant. The cursive of calligraphers (Yaqtī al-Mustaṣīrī) cut the end of the qalam. Thus he altered both the rule and the writing, because writing is subordinate to the qalam. For this reason his writing is preferred to that of Ibn al-Bawwāb for its fineness and elegance, and not for the sake of the basic rules; for the essence of writing, it is the same as invested by Ibn Munṣīr from the circle and the dot, and he took the foundation from the dot and adopted it. In these styles of writing Yaqtī showed solidity, beauty, and clarity – none better than he was ever found!11

1 See note 9.
2 Huart. Le calligraphes, 89-90. Minorsky, Calligraphes, 60, note 153 gives the information that a Koran copied by this calligrapher in 718 / 1318 is preserved in the Ayasofya Library in Istanbul.
3 Died 744 / 1343-44. See Huart. Le calligraphes, 88.
4 Minorsky, Calligraphes, 62.
5 Huart. Le calligraphes, 88-87.
6 Minorsky, Calligraphes, 57-62, for Yaqtī's students 60-62. On information about Qādī Ahmad see the introduction to Minorsky's translation written by B. N. Zakhoder.
7 Arabic sīra – English life.
8 See note 14.
9 Died 744 / 1343-44, see Huart. Le calligraphes, 88.
10 A. K. Markov, Katalog Ełżanırückeh mona (A catalogue of the coins of the Ełżanırückeh dynasty) (Sadat Petersburg: Jabbedeh, 1897), xii-xvii. This sovereign ruled 760/1358-776/1374 and practised himself as a calligrapher.

Yaqtī al-Mustaṣīrī was known as a strict teacher, who demanded constant practice from his students. He himself records that he copied two sections from the Koran each day and that even the Mongol conquest of Baghdad did not distract him from this routine. He continued his calligraphic exercises at the top of a minaret whilst the battle raged beneath him. He died in Baghdad around 698 / 1298 although the exact date is not known. He was buried close to the grave of the famous jurist Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal.15

In Yaqtī's biography the students are named who he expected to achieve fame for their calligraphic skill after his death. These include 'Abd Allah al-Ḥāmid al-Suhrawardi,16 Arghun al-Kamili17 and 'Abdullāh al-Ṣayrafi.18 The exact identity of the other students varies with the sources.19 The passages on the students in the Yaqtī-Biography reveal certain difficulties, which already at this date, prevented any categorical identification of his hand. Given their significance, it is helpful to cite here the relevant passage of Qādī Aḥmad's work in full:20

Of his [Yaqtī's] pupils six were outstanding and earned the right to sign the name of Yaqtī on their calligraphic works. They are called masters of the sīra.21

1. The first of them was the son of Shaykh Suhrawardi,22 born in Baghdad. The inscriptions on buildings there are mainly his works; he wrote the entire sīra al-Kafif [Sīra 18] in the cathedral mosque of Baghdad, and the stonemasons reproduced it in relief, without embellishments, merely with baked bricks.
2. The second was Arghun al-Kamili,23 who is also one of the celebrities. In Baghdad there are two madrasas, both faced with glazed bricks [one is the 'Marjān', the other is 'beside the bridge'] in both there are his writings.
3. The third pupil was Nasrullah, a doctor of medicine; the inscriptions on some buildings in Baghdad are of his work.
4. The fourth was Muḥārak-al-Ṣ̄arīn-qalam. He wrote with great delicacy and purity. It is reported that when Sultan Uways the Djalāyi'dī24 had erected
buildings in the revered Najaf, he dreamed one night of His Holiness the Shah, the Refuge of Sanctity [i.e., `Ali], who deigned to command him: `Direct Mubarak-shah to write in the buildings.' For this reason he was nick
named zafrin-qalam (`golden pen'), and under this name acquired wide repute. He was a native of that pleasant country, the God-protected and famous Tabriz.

5. The fifth was Yusuf Mubarak, who served Yaqut for a long time, and toward the end of his life left Iraq for Azerbaijan, where he took up residence in Tabriz, the capital, and spent the remainder of his days in practicing calligraphy and writing. Abdullah Sayrafi was his pupil.

6. The sixth calligrapher was Sayid `Ali, known as `Ali-i-Shah, and/or `Ali-i-Shah and Khwaja Chiyiyah al-`Amir Muhammad ibn Rashid.26 Both were his pupils, both became masters of calligraphy, attained the highest ranks and dignities and achieved every kind of success. But Allahul Sayrafi would not teach everybody.

[... After the masters of the sitra come their pupils. Among them are [...]

The `Yaqut' signature in the colophon:

As Qaji Ahmad writes, Yaqut al-Musta'si's allowed six of his students to sign their works in his name. In later times a calligrapher could achieve no greater praise than to say that "he was able to sell his own writings for a piece of Yaqut's." The problem that arises for manuscript researchers today, is, that, owing to a lack of comprehensive studies on Yaqut al-Musta'si, on the one hand, and to the outstanding skill of calligraphers in copying his style on the other, few scholars would have the courage to attribute a "Yaqut" signature to the master himself. A careful comparison of the Linden-Museum manuscript with other copies ascribed to Yaqut al-Musta'si leads to the results, however, that this manuscript can be traced back to the circle of Yaqut al-Musta'si and his tradition [see fig. 1-3]. This result is supported by the fact that the paper very probably comes from the Egyptian-Syrian region — where both al-Busi and Yaqut al-Musta'si lived — and that it can be dated to the 7th / 13th century (see above).

Finally, in the colophon [see fig. 3] we find an ascription of the work to Yaqut al-Musta'si. The colophon was probably — according to what was then common practice — added as a bibliographic detail in the 14th / 15th century CE.28 Whatever the purpose, the reconstructed reading of the partially destroyed colophon corresponds well with the conclusions reached thus far. It offers the following information: Kuttabahu Yaqut al-Musta'si fi san'at [...]/na wa wa sita mi`atin / This wrote Yaqut al-Musta'si in the year six hundred and [...]-ij. Taking into account the dating of the Middle Eastern manuscripts, the text suggests that the colophon on the colophon manuscript which is given in the colophon is the year 680 (1281-2).

In conclusion: Characteristics of the script, technical details and also the information given by the colophon support the argument that this manuscript was written by Yaqut al-Musta'si or by one of his students in the 7th / 13th century. If this conclusion is incorrect, then the later calligrapher did a very good job of imitating not only the style but also the paper of his teacher and master Yaqut al-Musta'si.

Abbreviations


fig. = figure

i.e. = that means

Bibliography


I am grateful to Prof. Dr. Claus-Peter Hase for this reference.

26 Died at about the same time as Yaqut, see Huart, Le calligraphes, 88-89.

27 Mitrosky, Calligraphers, 62.

28 Huart, Le calligraphes, 87-88.

29 The two men named here were waistics to the Timurids; see Mitrosky, Calligraphers, 61, notes 159, 160.

25 Schimmel, Calligraphy, 21-22. On forgery see also above note 2.

27 For other examples claimed to have been written by Yaqut al-Musta'si see Schimmel, Calligraphy, 21-22, see the Sotheby's Catalogue (as cited in note 2), see M. Linay, Splendeur of Qur'an calligraphy and illumination (Vaduz: Thimmeurs Islamica Foundation, 2005), fig. 23, 26-28. Another supposed example for Yaqut al-Musta'si is given by A. Khairi and M. Sieli

Lithographed Editions of Firdawsi's Shāhnāma: A Comparative Study

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Abstract
In the second half of the nineteenth century, lithography became the main means of printing books in Iran. Both in Iran and India about thirty lithographed editions of Firdawsi's Shāhnāma were published. Their set-ups all resemble Macan's first typographical edition of 1826. Macan's appendix includes three stories from the Persian epic cycle, poems written by later authors in imitation of the Shāhnāma. Although the lithographed appendices each contain a number of variant readings to Macan, thus reflecting the proximity between the lithographic and the manuscript traditions, they also represent a step towards a more modern approach to reproducing the Shāhnāma.

Keywords
lithography, Shāhnāma, Macan, Persian epic cycle, manuscripts

The research that resulted in this article was conducted as part of the Leiden University project "The Persian Epic Cycle and the Shāhnāma of Ferdowsī." The Shāhnāma, often referred to as the Iranian national epic, was composed by Abū l-Qāsim Firdawsi around the year 1000 AD. It is a poem of some fifty thousand couplets, narrating the mythological and semi-legendary history, from the Creation until the coming of Islam in the early-seventh century AD, of the Iranian kings and their warriors. The best known hero of the Shāhnāma is a warrior of super-human proportions and strength, called Rostam. From the mid-eleventh until the early-fourteenth century a number of often anonymous authors, with the intention to both emulate and complement Firdawsi's poem, composed a series of epic poems. The greater majority of these later epics deal with characters that do not appear or are only dealt a
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Since its foundation in 1948 by Hellmut Ritter as a journal of the International Society of Oriental Research, Oriens has been dedicated to studies extending our knowledge of the languages, literatures, political, religious and intellectual history of what was once labelled as the Orient: the Ancient Near East, the World of Islam, Iran and Central Asia, and South, Southeast, and East Asia. The opening up of the sources, and the pursuit of philological and historical research based on original source materials has been the main focus of interest of its editors and contributors. Due to the principal fields of its long-time editors (after H. Ritter, Rudolf Sellheim was editor from 1967 to 2001), the Islamic Near East has been taking some precedence over the remaining regions of the ‘Orient’, but the journal will continue to encourage contributions concerning the literary and intellectual exchange between all regions ranging from the Mediterranean to the farther regions of the Asian continent.

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