TWENTY-NINE RULES FOR QUR'ÂN COPYING
A SET OF RULES FOR THE LAY-OUT OF A
NINETEENTH-CENTURY OTTOMAN QUR'ÂN MANUSCRIPT

Jan Just WITKAM

Introduction

That Ottoman Qur'anic manuscripts of the 13th/19th century have developed into standard products can escape few observers. When one opens one, the style of calligraphy and lay-out are immediately and at first sight identifiable as coming from a common concept of how the Qur'anic text should look like. In addition, it is evident that the Ottoman copyists and calligraphers strove to attain perfection in the production of Qur'an manuscripts. This they did certainly for its own sake, but one may assume that they also felt the competition from the technical perfection of typography, an invention that in Turkey and Egypt was firmly establishing itself in the first half of the 19th century, and that they made an effort to prove their own superiority. It may be an additional explanation for the dazzling achievements of the Ottoman calligraphers in that time.

The standardization of Qur'an manuscript production cannot easily be pinpointed to one or another feature. It is rather the complex of conventions involving the choice of paper, lay-out, script, illumination, and sometimes binding as well, which leads us to such a conclusion. At a closer look, when one tries to corroborate the first impression by finding well-definable and objective criteria for such a statement, it proves to be a more complicated matter, however. Analysis of codicological features in these manuscripts yields some result, e.g. about the coinciding of the aḡzâ and the quires (in fact rule number one in the text which follows here), but otherwise it is difficult to reconstruct more such rules. Yet they have doubtless existed, but probably were seldom committed to writing.

While describing the Leiden Qur'âns I came across a number of such features, and my search for more of these rules was stimulated by Tim Stanley’s research on the standardisation of manufacture of Ottoman Qur'âns based on manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin. I will give an account of such rules and copyist’s habits in the catalogue of the Leiden Qur’âns, both manuscripts and printed editions, which Arnoud Vrolijk and I are preparing. It is by mere good luck, as it often happens, that I found, as a loose addition to a manuscript volume in the Leiden collection, a set of twenty-nine rules which were at least applied by one copyist or author, but which may have been, certainly in part, in wider use among Ottoman copyists.

* Leiden University Library
The present text

The present text of these twenty-nine rules was incidentally found as a loose insert in a collective volume with Arabic and Turkish texts in Leiden University Library, Or. 11.701. It is part of several shipments of manuscripts from Turkey which arrived in Leiden in the late 1960’s and which were purchased from the Egyptian antiquarian and collector A.A. Fatatri, who was, and still is, based in Leiden. The manuscript consists of 106 folios, plus several unnumbered loose inserts, the texts being written in naskh script by several different copyists. The volume has a half-leather Islamic binding with flap, with pasted boards. From the contents it is evident that is a collection of texts which was brought together by someone whose interest laid in technical matters concerning the Qur’anic text. He may have been a Qur’an copyist himself.

In order to show in what sort of scholarly environment the present Rules were found I will give a summary description of the contents of magnü’a Leiden Or. 11.701:

(1) ff. 1b-57a. Kitāb al-Waqf wal-Ibtīdā, by Muhammad b. Ṭayfur al-Ḡaznawi al-Ṣağawandi (d. c. 560/1165), GAL G I, 408. This is not a composition, but a long list of words from the Qur’ān showing their exact spelling, arranged according to the sūra’s. Dated 17 Raḡab 1240 AH.

(2) ff. 57b-58a. List of first words of the aḡzā’ and aḥzāb of the Qur’ān.

(3) f. 58b. Turkish. A count of the sūra’s and aḥyāt of the Qur’ān, followed by a count of the letters of the Qur’ān, apart for each letter of the alphabet.

(4) f. 59a. List of abbreviations used to refer to the canonical Qur’ān readers and their transmitters.


(6) f. 87b. Indication of how to divide the Qur’anic text into seven equal parts, for recitation of one text on each day of the week. This was apparently abstracted or quoted from a commentary by Sayyid ‘Alizada on Shir’at al-Īslām by Sayyid Ṭabīb al-Ṣarġī (d. 573/1177), GAL S I, 642.

(7) ff. 90a-92b, loosely added. Šarḥ Qawā’id Tis’a wa-Īṣrūn, on leaves measuring 16.5 x 10.5 cm, with fifteen lines of text to the page. These are the twenty-nine rules which are herewith published.

(8) ff. 95b-106a, loosely added. Kitāb al-Qawā’id al-ʿUtmāniyya fil-Rusūm al-Qur’āniyya, apparently taken from a Mushaf. Dated 1252 AH, copied by the copyist Sayyid ‘Umar al-Fariq (so spelt, but possibly meant to be al-Faruq), who professes to have copied and gilded already sixteen Qur’ān manuscripts.

(9) Loosely added: 2 + 2 ff., damaged. Two copies of the beginning only of a work on Qur’ān reading by Ṭabīb b. Hamza al-Kisā’ī (d. c. 189/865), GAL G I, 115, one of the seven canonical readers.

(10) Loosely added: 2 ff. Kitāb al-Wuqūf by Muhammad b. Ṭayfur al-Ḡaznawi al-Ṣağawandi (d. c. 560/1165), GAL G I, 408, where this text is not mentioned.
TWENTY-NINE RULES FOR QUR'ĀN COPYING...

At the end there are more loose inserts, which seem to have no great significance. The volume has not yet been described in any of the Leiden catalogues.

All texts in the volume belong to the Qur'ānic sciences, and were copied, as far as could be ascertained from the few that are dated, around the middle of the 13th century AH, coinciding with the first half of the 19th century. The present text, which at the end bears the date 1279 AH, was not copied as part of the mağmū'a but was apparently removed from a Qur'ān, or, more likely, copied from one, and then loosely put into the volume by an owner, reader or collector. For convenient reference it was included by me in the continuous folio numbering of the volume, where it now occupies, as the 7th text, ff. 90b-92b. The loose insert on which the present text was written in fact occupies ff. 90a-94b in the volume, but it is, apart from these twenty-nine rules, and a short phrase on 90a, blank.

That texts were and are added to the Qur'ānic text in a manuscript or edition is not uncommon. Often one sees a Duʿa' Katm al-Qur'ān, a prayer to be said at the conclusion of the reading of the Qur'ān. One can find other texts as well. An explanation of the reading signs used by the copyist is a distinct possibility. Lists with such explanations have become particularly widespread in printed editions of the Qur'ān. Another sort of text regularly encountered at the end of the holy text is an instruction about performing divination with the Qur'ānic text (Fāl al-Qur'ān'). That the twenty-nine rules here discussed were added to a Qur'ānic manuscript is therefore nothing exceptional. only I had never seen such rules before, when I first found the present text, and that was reason enough to devote more attention to it.

The way of editing

With only one manuscript witness there is no stemmatic work involved, and my work done on this text can be called an intelligent transcription, rather than a critical edition in the true sense of the word. I have faithfully transcribed the text as I found it, but I consciously deviated in four ways from the original. Firstly, I did not follow the full vocalization which the copyist or author used. That vocalization is in fact a flawless addition to the consonant text, but for practical purposes I did not maintain it as the Arabic is perfectly understandable without it. The copyist or author probably gave the text a full vocalization in order to show off his ability to do so, or, in order to make it similar to the outward appearance of the Qur'ānic text to which these leaves once must have belonged. He may also have applied a full vocalization to the text because of the considerable amount of Qur'ānic phrases which it contains. Further I have conformed the defective spelling of several words, especially derivates of the word ẓalāt, to the plene writing which is usual nowadays. Thirdly, I have added the hamza wherever modern usage would require this. I have done this for practical, or actually cosmetical reasons only, as these alterations make reading more convenient. They are features of spelling in the handling of which I, as the editor, felt I had a certain freedom of action.

---

1 Tim Stanley in his lecture in the Bologna conference on Manuscripts of the Middle East in October 2000, mentioned the feature of Fāl specifically. Standardization in manuscript production is, he said, important for divinatory operations with the Qur'ānic text, if one wishes to have a standard outcome as a result of a standardized way of handling the Holy Book.
Another, entirely cosmetic, intervention which is entirely mine is that in my edition each of the twenty-nine rules starts on a new line, whereas the manuscript gives the rules continuously, albeit divided by a small space.

One observation should be made and one instance be pointed out where I did not feel that same freedom of action. It is evident from the text that the author knew Arabic grammar quite well, but only as far as īrab is concerned. He is conspicuously awkward in connecting words in order to make composite phrases or real sentences. I even doubted whether I should not read an Ottoman ezāfet between the words of the title. The author's use of numerals is far from faultless, nor is his concordance of gender. From this it is obvious that he is not an Arabophone. In view of the provenance of the manuscript one may assume that he had enjoyed an Ottoman Turkish education, and a calligraphic craftsman at that, but certainly not a scholar. There is an interesting feature which one can often observe with non-Arabophone copyists of Arabic texts. As far as assiduity, accuracy and calligraphy are concerned, they can copy, vocalize and present a text almost to perfection, but once they start to write on their own account, and that is usually the case in the colophon which is their personal addition to a text, the language suddenly becomes simple, almost reduced to an enumeration of detached words, with hardly a full-fledged sentence in it. At best formulaic niceties are given in such places, or the colophon is adorned with copyist verse, but well-made compositions are avoided, consciously in my opinion. It makes one think about the degree of literacy of the copyists, but that is a matter which goes beyond the present subject. As one may see in the present text, not even a copyist of the Qurʾān is automatically exempt from such limitations.

The present enumeration of rules is not an intricately formulated essay, so the damage done by the author's imperfect ability to compose Arabic is not considerable nor is it very conspicuous. Yet, an editor should not try to make a text better than the author himself has made it. Hence I have left these features unchanged. I will point to some of them in due course, and I will translate the text ad sententiam, with disregard for the imperfect form in which he has occasionally moulded it.

هذا شرح قواعد تسعة وعشرين

الحمد لله الذي أنزل القرآن بلسان عربي مبين والصلوة والسلام على من أرسل بشيراً ونبيناً كافكاً للعالمين، محمد وآله وصحبه أجمعين، بعدم الموجودات التي يوم البث والدين، وبعد فان هذا الصحف المعبد جامع لكلام الله تعالى مكتوب على تسع وعشرين قاعدة

الأولى أن كل جزء من أجزاء الثلاثينين مكتوب على عشر قواعم إلا الأخيرتين فإن كل واحدة على زيادة لأجل التسهيل

الثانية أن أول جزء من أجزاء الثلاثينين أول الصفحة

الثالثة أن أول كل صفحة أول الآية وآخرها آخر الآية

الرابعة أن أواخر السور أواخر الأسطر

الخامسة أن جميع الآيات التي في أوائلها لنقطة في القرآن العظيم في ثلاثين موضوعاً وجميعها أواخر الأسطر

السادسة أن الآيات التي في أوائلها الحمد لله في ستة موضوع وجميعها أواخر الأسطر

السابعة أن مسحان في ستة موضوع ومسحان في ثلاثة موضوع وجميعها أواخر الأسطر

TUBA 26/II, 2002 : 339-348
Translation

This is the enumeration of the twenty-nine rules.

Praise be to God, who sent down the Qur’an in clear Arabic language, and blessing and peace be on him who was sent as a messenger of joy and warning to all the worlds, Muhammad, and on his family and his companions, (blessings) in as many numbers as creatures, till the Day of Resurrection and Judgment.

This Qur’an contains the word of God, He be exalted, written according to twenty-nine rules.

Rule one: Each guz’ of the thirty ağa’a’ is written on ten leaves, except the two last ağa’a’ which occupy more space, as they have more gilding.2

---

2 Meant is that the latter two quires contain a relatively large number of illuminated sūra titles, which occupy extra space. The author of the rules forgets that the same goes for the first quire, because of the illuminated double opening page.
Rule two: The beginning of each ǧuz’ of the thirty aḡza’ coincides with the beginning of the page.
Rule three: On the beginning of each page is the first word of the āya and at the end of each page is the end of the āya.
Rule four: The end of the sūra coincides with the end of the lines.
Rule five: All āyāt which have at their beginning the phrase fi al-Qur’ān al-’Azīm (in thirty places) start at the beginning of the line.
Rule six: All āyāt which begin with the phrase al-Ḥamdu lillah (in six places) start at the beginning of the line.
Rule seven: All words subḥana (in six places) and fa-subḥana (in three places) are at the beginning of the line.
Rule eight: All words tabāraka (in five places) and fa-tabāraka (in one place) are at the beginning of the line.
Rule nine: The āyāt which have at their beginning the letter ʾin, ʾahida Allāhu, Šahru Ramadāna, ṣākiran li-An’umihī, šara’a lakum min al-Dīn (in four places) are all at the beginning of the line.
Rule ten: The phrase bismillah, except when it occurs in the beginning of the sūra’s (in two places) is at the beginning of the line.
Rule eleven: All phrases ya ayyuha al-Rasūl (in two places) and ya ayyuha al-Rusul (in one place) are at the beginning of the line.
Rule twelve: The phrase ya ayyuha al-Nabī (in thirteen places) is always at the beginning of the line.
Rule thirteen: The phrase yā ayyuha al-ṣaḥīfa (in ninety-one places) is always at the beginning of the line.
Rule fourteen: The phrase ya ayyuha al-Insān (in two places) is at the beginning of the line.
Rule fifteen: The phrase ya ayyuha al-Nās (in twenty places) is always at the beginning of the line.
Rule sixteen: The phrase yas’alunaka (in nine places) is always at the beginning of the line.
Rule seventeen: The words Muḥammad (in four places) and Aḥmad (in one place) are all at the beginning of the line.
Rule eighteen: The phrase kun fa-yakun (in eight places) is always at the end of the line.
Rule nineteen: The phrase Gafir Rahīm (in forty-three places) is always at the end of the line.
Rule twenty: The Saḥadāt (in fourteen places) are all at the end of the line.
Rule twenty-one: The phrase Sami’ ‘Alīm (in twelve places) is always at the end of the line.
Rule twenty-two: The phrase ‘Azīz Ḥakīm (in thirteen places) is always at the end of the line.
Rule twenty-three: The phrase turqa’u al-Umūr (in six places) is always at the end of the line.
Rule twenty-four: The phrase bi-Kulli Sayt ‘Alīm (in eleven places) is always at the end of the line.
Rule twenty-five: The phrase tasīra al-Umūr (in one place) is at the end of the line.
Rule twenty-six: The phrase ‘Alīm bi-Ḍat al-Ṣudūr (in twelve places) is always at the end of the line.
Rule twenty-seven: The words yatawakkalina (in five places), al-Mutawakkilīna (in three places) and al-Mutawakkilīna (in one place) are always at the end of the line.
Rule twenty-eight: The phrase ‘Allām al-Ḡuyūb (in four places) is always the end of the line.
Rule twenty-nine: In this noble Qur’ān there is no word cut in two, one part being at the end of the line, the other part at the beginning of the (next) line, and everything that must be observed is written in red ink. Let the noble and blessed places be seen.
(Copied in) the year 1279.

TUBA 26/II, 2002 : 339-348
Commentary

One may roughly divide this set of twenty-nine rules into four categories of prescriptions which are (or must be) followed while making the lay-out of a Qur'ān manuscript. Category 1 concerns the entire book, categories 2 and 3 concern the lay-out by the line, and category 4 gives instructions on the level of the words. I distinguish these categories as follows.

Category 1 (rules 1-4). These are general rules for the entire book. Firstly, the aḡzā' should be written on quires of ten leaves, the beginning words of the aḡzā' should begin on top of the page (of the new quire), and each page should begin with the first word of an āya, and therefore, also ending with the last word of an āya. The end of the sūra must coincide with the end of a line.

Category 2 (rules 5-17). This set of rules is in fact a list of Qur'ānic phrases and words which must always be written at the beginning of a line.

Category 3 (rules 18-28). This is a similar set of rules, now containing a list of Qur'ānic phrases and words which must always be at the end of a line.

Category 4 (rule 29) stands by itself, and is twofold. It forbids breaking off words at the end of a line, and prescribes the writing of reading signs in red ink.3

What about the applicability of these rules? Twice in the text, in the introduction just before rule 1, and in the text of rule 29, there is a reference to ‘this Qur'ān’. That cannot but mean that the present text was part of a Qur'ān manuscript. What we cannot know for sure is whether the loose leaves on which the text of the twenty-nine rules are written were removed from a Qur'ān manuscript, or that they were just copied from the Qur'ān manuscript to the writing of which these rules were in fact applied. Personally I opt for the second possibility, since the paper on which the rules are written is uncoloured which would be unusual for an Ottoman Qur'ān manuscript of the 19th century, nor is there a visible ruling which the text might have had if it had been part of a larger manuscript. But the wording of the text ultimately must mean that the twenty-nine rules were written in a copy of the Qur'ān.

About the function of the text we remain unsure as well. The twenty-nine rules are no doubt inspired by awe and respect for the holy text. But are the twenty-nine rules a mere description by one copyist of the limitations he has imposed on himself, as a sort of lüzüm mā lā y'alzamu, making necessary what is not necessary, in order to enhance the quality of his achievement? Or are they rules that should be integrally applied by other copyists as well, and that on a wide scale? The answer to this question can be gained, of course, by a survey of 19th-century Qur'ānic manuscripts of Ottoman manufacture.

Looking at manuscripts of the same era and region region, one may observe that categories 1 and 4 of the rules are commonly observed, whereas groups 2 and 3 are not necessarily followed, and certainly not all rules at all times. So one may look at the twenty-nine rules which are here presented, partly as a prescription for copyists, and partly as a description of one copyist's remarkable lay-out abilities. It is regrettable that we only have a

3 Would the author consciously have limited his list of rules to twenty-nine, although he could have made two rules from this last one, just to avoid to make full the number of thirty? And if this is so, would he have done that in order to not emulate the number of aḡzā' in the Qur'ān?
copy of these twenty-nine rules at our disposal and that is like looking for a needle in a haystack if we wish to know the present whereabouts of the Qur'ān manuscript from which the rules originate and in which they were integrally applied.

The question should also be asked why these rules would have been devised at all. For the rules in categories 1 and 4 this is clear enough, and these have apparently gained a wide-spread acceptance. They do indeed enhance the quality of the calligraphed product, the Mushaf for the luxury market, and the author of the twenty-nine rules here discussed may have adopted them from accepted usage among calligraphic craftsmen. For several of the rules in categories 2 and 3 this self-evidence is far less. Again, they may have been devised as an extra, self-imposed limitation by which the calligrapher would prove the total mastery of his pen. But they are not randomly chosen words by which he would show this, so more speculation (by lack of concrete evidence) is necessary. There are several rules that seem to defy a rational or even speculative explanation, however.

Rule five is indeed problematic. The word 'azīm occurs 85 times in the Qur'ān, with or without the article, but almost exclusively as a rhyming word at the end of an āya. The word Qur'ān, with or without the article, occurs 58 times in all. The combination of the words al-Qur'ān and al-'Azīm occurs only once, and then without the preposition fi, and not at the beginning but at the end of an āya (15:87). So the problem is only that there are no instances where the rule can be applied, a fact which must have been known to the author of the rules. Then arises the question why he would formulate a rule which is nowhere applicable.

Rule seven presents another as yet unsolved problem. The word subhāna, including the composites with the particles wa- and fa- occurs eighteen times in the Qur'ān. If one only takes into account those instances in which subhāna and fa-subhāna occur at the beginning of an āya (an extra requirement which the author of the twenty-nine rules does not mention, but which he may have meant and which he did in fact mention for rules 5 and 6), it can be observed that fa-subhāna does indeed occur three times, but that the word subhāna occurs only five times at the beginning of an āya, instead of the six times mentioned in rule seven. This slight difference could have been caused by a miscount by the author of the rules.

Looking at Ottoman Qur'ān manuscripts of the nineteenth century we can observe that these were evidently made according to elaborate sets of rules. Their copyists followed conventions that were part of their craft, which, however, have largely remained unwritten. By sheer good luck such a set of rules and conventions, has surfaced. There remain questions to be answered, whether they are prescriptive or descriptive, and for some of them, whether they can, at all, be applied. Nor was the Qur'ān manuscript located in which they must have been applied. Yet, those of the twenty-nine rules, which are applicable in practice, have now been herewith made explicit.
The twenty-nine rules. MS Leiden, Or. 11.701, ff. 90b-91a
The twenty-nine rules. MS Leiden, Or. 11.701, ff. 92b-93a
BARBARA FLEMMİNG ARMAĞANI

Yayına Hazırlayan
Jan SCHMİDT

Harvard Üniversitesi Yakın Doğu Dilleri ve Medeniyetleri Bölümünde yayınlanmıştır
2002
İÇİNDEKİLER • CONTENTS

TÜRKLUK BİLGİSİ ARAŞTIRMALARI 26/II (2002)
JOURNAL OF TURKISH STUDIES

BARBARA FLEMMING ARMAĞANI - II

Mark HOOS, The Unknown Treasure: The Metaphysical Aesthetics of Ibn ‘Arabî (1-14)

Colin IMBER, The Origin of the Janissaries (15-19)

Barbara KELLNER-HEINKELE, Von Geistreichen Köpfen und Seltsamen Käuzen (21-30)

Machiel KIEL, Traces in Stone, Some Notes on A 16th Century Ottoman Poet From The Balkans, Vâlihi-i Üskübî and The Background of His Life and Work (31-41)

Klaus KREISER, Public Monuments in Kemalist and Post-Kemalist Turkey (43-60)

Remke KRRK, Sharaf ul-Insân: An Arabist's Questions (61-68)

Cemal KURNAZ - Mustafa TATCI - Halil ÇELTIK, Manzum Bir Şâtiiyye Şerhi: Mehemd Nesim Efendi'nin Tuhfe-i Verdiyye'si (69-95)

Nedret KURAN-BURÇOĞLU, Matbaacı Osman Bey: Saray'dan İlk Defa Kur'an-ı Kerim Basma İznini Alan Osmanlı Hattat'ı (97-112)

Şefika KURNAZ, Cumhuriyet Öncesinde Türk Ayrınların Kadınlarla İlgili Düşünce ve Önerileri (113-129)

Jacob M. LANDAU, Atsiz and Türkeş: A Note on The History of Pan-Turkism in Turkey (131-133)


Hannah NEUDECKER, A 17th Century Jew Demanding His Due (155-158)

Bernd RADTKE, Birgiwîs Tariqa Muhammadiyya Einige Bemerkungen und Überlegungen (159-174)


Jan SCHMIDT, Ottoman Autobiographical Texts by Lāmī’ī and Others in the Collection of Turkish Manuscripts at The Leiden University Library (195-201)

Sytske SÖTEMANN, Two Poems on Istanbul, Highlights of Turkish Poetry in The First Half of The Twentieth Century, Translated Into Dutch, and Followed By Some Comments on The Poetics of Their Authors (203-214)

Willem STOETZER, Über Ägyptisch-Arabische Metrik Anhand Einiger Vierzeiler von Salâh Jâhin (1930-86) (215-229)

Annemarie StREMMELAAR, The Islamic Ethic and The Spirit of Modernity, The Protestantisation of Islam According to Islamist Intellectuals in Turkey (231-244)

Harry STROOMER, The Cat in Tashelhiyt Berber Texts (245-251)

Gönül Alpay TEKİN, Lâmîî Çelebi’nin Gûy u Çevgân Mesnevisinin Tasavvufî Yorumu (253-274)

Gönül Alpay TEKİN, The Mystic Interpretation of Lâmîî Çelebi’s Mesnevi Gûy u Çevgân (English by Jan Schmidt) (275-280)

Nuran TEZCAN, Lâmî’în Bazı Eserlerinde Kadın Tipleri ve Kadınla İlgili Düşünceler (281-294)

Nuran TEZCAN, Lâmî‘îs Ansichten Über Die Frauen Frauenbilder aus Einigen Seiner Werke (295-310)

Arnoud VROLIJK, No Conscripts for The Nizâm, The 1850 Events in Aleppo as Reflected in Documents From Syrian and Dutch Archives (311-338)

Jan Just WITKAM, Twenty-nine Rules for Qur’ān Copying, A Set of Rules For The Lay-out of a Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Qurʾān Manuscript (339-348)

Christine WOODHEAD, The History of An Historie: Richard Knolles’ Generall Historie of The Turkes, 1603-1700 (349-357)

Erik-Jan ZÜRCHER, Two Young Ottomanists Discover Kemalist Turkey, The Travel Diaries of Robert Anhegger and Andreas Tietze (359-369)

TUBA, v/c. 26/I. 2002