Shumen as a Centre of Qur’an Production in the 19th Century

Tim Stanley

In 1995 an exhibition of Ottoman art was held at the Musée Rath in Geneva, to coincide with that year’s International Congress of Turkish Art in the city. The exhibition was drawn from the Khalili Collection, based in London, and it included a selection of 32 Qur’anic manuscripts dating from the 15th to 19th centuries. These included a significant group from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, and this later material helped to develop an important theme brought out by the exhibition. This was that, far from plunging into a headlong decline after 1600, the Ottoman artistic tradition remained dynamic, producing artefacts of aesthetic and historical interest during each of the subsequent three centuries. Indeed, in the 19th century, when the empire was supposedly reaching the lowest point in its decline in many spheres, Ottoman calligraphy reached what is arguably the zenith of its development. The main centre for this branch of artistic activity was undoubtedly the capital, Istanbul, but several other cities also played a role. An exceptionally fine 19th-century Qur’an on display in the exhibition suggests that one of the most important of these provincial centres was the town of Shumen in Bulgaria, known in the Ottoman period as Şumen or Şumnu.

1 Empire of the Sultans. Ottoman art from the collection of Nasir D. Khalili, catalogue by J.M. Rogers (Musées d’art et d’histoire, Geneva, 1995), nos. 10–41. I would like to thank Professor Rogers for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this article.
2 Empire of the Sultans, no. 23, 26–41.
3 Khalili Collection, Qur’an 343; Empire of the Sultans, no. 41. This and the other 19th-century Qur’ans from the Khalili Collection referred to below will be published in Maniheh Bayani and Tim Stanley, The Decorated Word: Qur’ans of the 17th to 19th Centuries, The Nasir D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, IV, Part Two, forthcoming. Figures 2–5, 8–9, 10
The Qur’an manuscript in question has six double-page illuminations, in place of the usual one or two, and this decoration is of superb quality, both in terms of its faultless execution and in the originality and vigour of its design. Indeed, it marks a highpoint in the development of a distinctive, eclectic style that was a feature of Shumen Qur’ans of the mid-19th century and later. The illumination is anonymous, but responsibility for the text is acknowledged in a long colophon in occasionally defective Arabic, which ends,

It was written by the slave who prays for the Exalted Ottoman State, the weakest of scribes, known as Seyyid Mehmend Nuri, a pupil of Hüseyin Veibi (May his Omnipotent Lord pardon him!), a resident of Shumen, in the year 1266 since the migration of him who possessed glory and honour [AH1849–50].

The Khalili manuscript was not unique. The library of the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul, for example, contains a copy of the Qur’an which was signed in a similar way four years later, in AH1270 (AD1853–4), and, although no illustration of it has been published, it appears that it too is lavishly illuminated. In addition, the Topkapi library and other public and private collections around the world contain other, less extensively illuminated Qur’ans signed by the same master, who was active between the 1820s, and the 1860s. Qur’ans signed by other scribes show that Seyyid Mehmend Nuri did not work in isolation but was an important member of a large school of scribes that flourished in Shumen until the 1870s, specializing in what was virtually the mass production of Qur’an manuscripts.

The importance of scribal activity in Shumen has not gone unrecorded. It is reported in the second edition of the Encyclopedia of Islam, for example, that “the calligraphers Nafif Ibrahim, Husayn Wannafi, Seyyid Amin Nażifi [sic], and the calligraphers of the Izar family (18th–19th centuries) were all born in Shumen.” Yet this information rarely matches that gathered here, so that, for example, only one of the calligraphers mentioned in the Encyclopedia of Islam article, Seyyid Ahmed Nazifi, re-appears in the list of Shumen calligraphers published below (see Appendix). This does not, though, negate the value of either set of information. Rather it shows that there is still a great deal to be learnt about this aspect of the town’s cultural life in the late Ottoman period, and that any conclusions reached at this stage must be treated with caution.

With this caveat in mind, the following outline of the history of the Shumen school of Qur’an production may be suggested. The first impetus for its emergence may have been the patronage of the 18th-century grandee Şerif Halil Paşa, who endowed a post for a calligraphy teacher in the religious complex he established in Shumen in 1744. The holders of this post may have trained the Shumen scribes such as Mehmend Nuri who were active in the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (1808–1839). These men certainly trained the much larger number of scribes who appeared in the reigns of Mahmud’s sons Abdülmejid (1839–1861) and Abdülmecit (1861–1876). The growth in the number of scribes over this period was sustained by the continued demand for manuscript copies of the Qur’an, which, as the Word of God, it was not considered seemly to reproduce by an industrial process. In the 1870s, however, this demand began to decline rapidly, as lithography had finally been sanctioned as a means of manufacturing copies of the Qur’an, and in Shumen this decline was hastened by the end of Ottoman rule over the town in 1878.

Shumen in the Standard Sources

References to Shumen as a centre of calligraphy in the 18th century are sparse. A major source for this period is the Tuğle-i Hatıbat of Müstakim-zade Süleyman Sa’deddin Efendi (d. 1788), a biographical dictionary devoted to the masters of this art, but it includes very few entries on scribes who were born or worked in Shumen. One concerns Şerif Halil Paşa, but, although he played an important role in the development of Shumen as a centre of Muslim culture, the pasha spent his working life in government service outside the city, and in that sense he cannot be counted as a Shumen scribe. This was not so in the case of two brothers called Seyyid Huseyin and Seyyid Mustafa, natives of Shumen who studied with Eşikpaşı Mehmend Rasim Efendi in Istanbul before returning to their home town. The first entry, on Seyyid Huseyin, reads, “He is a native of Shumen. He gained perfection in sülüs and nesih


Khalili Collection, Qur. 343, folio 307a.


calligraphy by studying with the master of established usage, the honourable Hoca Mehmed Rasim Efendi, and, having been granted a licence, removed himself to his home town." It ends with a cross-reference to the entry of Hüseyin’s brother Seyyid Mustafa. This second entry reads, “He came to Istanbul from Shumen and received a licence on account of the training he received from the namesake of Abu’l-Quasim [i.e. of the Prophet Muhammad], Hoca Mehmed Rasim Efendi. He settled back in his home town and is now resident there.”

We owe this information on the two brothers to the fact that Müştakim-zade also studied calligraphy with Mehmed Rasim and was careful to record other pupils of his revered master. Mehmed Rasim was indeed a calligrapher of the first rank: he was trained by Hafiz Osman’s best pupil, Yedikuleli Seyyid Abdullah, and in Ah1150 (AD1737–8) he was appointed to his teacher’s former post as writing master at the imperial court. There can be little doubt, then, of the quality of the training the two brothers from Shumen received, but we do not know to what purpose they put it when they went back to their native town. Their return there presumably took place some time before Mehmed Rasim’s death in Ah1169 (AD1755–6), and the implication is that they were still living there when Müştakim-zade finished his work in 1787. In any case, no further news of them had reached the author.

Other data supplied by Müştakim-zade show that in the 18th century Shumen was far from exceptional among Balkan provincial towns in possessing local masters who had been trained in Istanbul or other centres. Ali Rakim, for example, was a native of Caffa in the Crimea who trained with Mehmed Rasim in Istanbul before settling at Patras in the Morea, where he taught many pupils. One of these was Seyyid Hüseyin from Sofia, who subsequently returned to his home town, where he in turn established himself as a calligraphy teacher. An even greater number of calligraphers was trained in Edirne by a variety of masters, and in this case the local tradition persisted into the 19th century, when a distinctive form of calligrapher’s diploma developed. These documents were made larger than usual to accommodate the names of the large number of master scribes and others who were present at the candidate’s examination. They were also richly illuminated. As we shall see, the diplomas issued at Shumen in the 19th century were also large and had fine illumination in the local style. However, in place of a mere list of names of those present, the Shumen diplomas are surrounded by a series of supplementary licences issued by master calligraphers resident in the town.

No source as comprehensive as Müştakim-zade exists for the period after 1787, and the calligraphers of Shumen remained almost entirely outside the orbit of later writers on the subject such as Habib and İbnilemin Mahmud Kemal İnal. In İnal we find a Sunnuli Omer Rüşdi, who taught at the school founded in Istanbul by Topçubaşı Bağlı Suleyman Ağa, but there is no information given on where he trained. There is a more substantial reference to a calligrapher whom İnal called Ahmed Şikri, and who is the subject of a short entry of his own based on a notice in the Mir’ât-i Hatattân of Süleyman Efendi (died 1924): “Ahmed Şikri Efendi was one of the more famous Shumen calligraphers. He was called Topçu. He was an imitator of Ismail Zihdi. By command of Sultan Mahmud II he came to Istanbul and died here.” Despite its brevity, the entry on Ahmed Şikri is informative. Shumen appears as a centre where many calligraphers lived, if mostly in obscurity, at least from a metropolitan point of view. But this obscurity did not prevent at least one scribe from the town being the object of imperial patronage in the reign of Mahmud II. On the other hand, Ahmed Şikri’s training in Shumen may not have been sufficient to earn him his particular eminence, as he is described as a munâkâsî (imitator) of Ismail Zihdi, presumably the celebrated Istanbul calligrapher of that name who died in 1806. In this context the term “imitator” is by no means pejorative. Copying the work of a great predecessor—a process known as nukîl or takîl—was an important means by which Ottoman calligraphers improved their own

10 Müştakim-zade, Tuğfe-i Hatattân, pp. 465–70.
11 It is, of course, possible that one of them held the post of calligraphy tutor in Şerif Halîl Paşa’s foundation, referred to above.
12 Müştakim-zade, Tuğfe-i Hatattân, p. 320. Although Müştakim-zade usually refers to scribes training with Ali Rakim “in the Morea,” he is more precise in the case of Ibrahim Paşa İmam Ali Efendi, a resident of Anatolia (Nauplion), who was trained by Ali Rakim “in Bâlyabûda,” that is, Patras. See Müştakim-zade, Tuğfe-i Hatattân, p. 342.
13 Müştakim-zade, Tuğfe-i Hatattân, p. 183.

18 İnal, Son Hatattalar, p. 410.
in the Khalili Collection referred to above is by far the grandest Shumen Qur’an that has so far been published.

**Seyyid Mehmeh Nuri**

The earliest Qur’an that may be Mehmeh Nuri’s work is MS. H.3 in the Topkapi Palace Library, which was signed by a scribe called Seyyid Mehmeh Nureddin in AH1241 (AD1825–6). A second Qur’an, now in the Khalili Collection (QUR 23), was signed by him in AH1243 (AD1827–8), and the wording of its colophon is strikingly similar to that of Mehmeh Nuri’s Qur’an of AH1266 (AD1849–50), quoted above:

> It was written by the slave who prays for the Exalted Ottoman State, the weakest of scribes, known as Seyyid Mehmeh Nureddin, a pupil of Hüseyin Vehbi (May his Ominipotent Lord pardon him!), a resident of Shumen and a follower of Abu Hamişi in law and of al-Maturidi in theology, in the year 1243 since the Hegira [AD1827–8].

It would be tempting to conclude from this that Nureddin was an earlier form of Mehmeh Nuri’s second name, were it not for the existence of a Qur’an signed as Mehmeh Nuri in the previous year, AH1242 (AD1826–7). The stylistic evidence also provides little help in settling the issue. The hands of the Mehmeh Nureddin and Mehmeh Nuri Qur’ans in the Khalili Collection are very similar in many respects, but this proves nothing, since they were both working within a scribal tradition in which individual mannerisms were frowned upon. Two good pupils of the same master might well have produced work that is so closely related; but, at the same time, the hand of a single calligrapher might have shown this modest degree of variation over the twenty years and more that separates the two examples available for comparison. For these reasons it would be premature to include the Qur’ans of Mehmeh Nureddin with the ten copies signed as “Seyyid Mehmeh Nuri, a pupil of Hüseyin Vehbi” that have so far been identified:

- **AH1242 (AD1826–7)** Topkapi MS.H.133 Karatay, no.1512
- **AH1245 (AD1829–30)** Christie’s, London, 11 June 1986, lot 83

23 Karatay, Arağa Yatırmalar Katalogu, i, no. 1510.
24 Topkapı Palace Library, MS.E.H.133; Karatay, Arağa Yatırmalar Katalogu, i, no. 1512. The derivation of “Nuri” from “Nureddin” follows a standard pattern in Ottoman name formation.
25 It should be noted that none of the Topkapi manuscripts were illustrated in Karatay’s catalogue.

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22 Some Shumen manuscripts are anonymous; see, for example, Safwat, Golden Pages, no. 58, which was later attributed to Hayfiz Osman.
Mehmed Nuri appears to have been active for more than a decade after he produced the Qur’an of AH1270 (1853–4), since he added supplementary licences to two calligrapher’s diplomas issued in Shumen in AH1277 (AD1860–61) and AH1282 (AD1865–6) respectively (see below). It therefore seems likely that two Qur’an manuscripts from the 1860s which were signed simply as Mehmed Nuri are also the work of this calligrapher.

The number of Qur’ans by this scribe that were deposited in the various libraries within the Topkapı Palace is impressive. Even the eminent court calligrapher Ismail Züldü (the man whom Ahmed Şakir “imitated”) was responsible for only three Qur’ans in the collections held there,26 which can be explained in part by the fact that his work is represented by many non-Qur’anic examples. But no other calligrapher was responsible for more than two Qur’ans. This must indicate a certain eminence on Mehmed Nuri’s part in the context of contemporary Ottoman Qur’an production, and it suggests that he received the patronage of the sultan or other leading figures at court over several decades. Yet he was unknown to the likes of Habib and İnal, whose works provide information almost exclusively on calligraphers resident in the capital. We can conclude from this that Mehmed Nuri spent his life in Shumen, and that the phrase al-Shumenin maskanun ("resident in Shumen"), which he included in many of his colophons, after the name of his teacher, Hüseyin Vehbi, refers to Mehmed Nuri himself rather than to his teacher.

There is a faint possibility that Vehbi was the second name adopted by the Seyyid Hüseyin who was recorded by Mustafakım-zade as a calligrapher resident in Shumen before 1787. Otherwise we have no information on Mehmed Nuri’s teacher, and indeed on Mehmed Nuri himself, except for evidence of his activity as an instructor of calligraphers. As has already been noted, he was responsible for supplementary licences on two calligrapher’s diplomas from the 1860s, and four of his pupils are known from the colophons of Qur’an manuscripts. They are Seyyid Hafız Salih Rami, Ali Osman Hûmî, Seyyid Hüseyin Hânavî, and Halî Züldü (see Appendix for details).

The great majority of the Qur’an manuscripts produced by Mehmed Nuri and his pupils were decorated with illumination of a type that occurs only on manuscript material from Shumen, and which may therefore may be classed as examples of a Shumen style. The distinctive character of this ornament has not been generally recognized, so that one of the few recent articles on 19th-century Ottoman illumination, which is ostensively devoted to work done in the capital, begins with an illustration of the opening page of a Qur’an strikingly decorated in this Shumen style.27 The manuscript, which is in the Topkapı Palace Library (MS.M.57), was copied by a scribe called Mustafa Nûzhetî in AH1272 (AD1855–6),28 and it is probable that this man’s Qur’an was trained and worked in Shumen.

Shumen Illumination

The most striking feature of the Shumen style is its blend of Europeanizing elements with others drawn from the traditional repertory of Ottoman Qur’an illumination. In most Ottoman copies of the Qur’an, the first two pages of text (folios 1b and 2a) were the most extensively

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26 This may be the Qur’an of this date now in the Bayt al-Qur’an, Bahrein, MS.524; see Syrinx, Golden Pages, p. 284, n. 1; p. 252, n. 1.
27 This is a Qur’an section rather than a complete Qur’an manuscript.
29 Karatay, Arapça Tazmalar Kataloğu, i, no. 1485–7. We cannot be sure of the totals given here, as Sultan Abdülhamid II (c. 1876–1909) removed many manuscripts to his new palace in Yıldız, from where they were later transferred to the Istanbul University Library. Others may have been given away. A catalogue of the Yıldız manuscripts would be a great boon.
decorated, and the examples from Shumen follow this rule. In these manuscripts the overall layout of the opening pages is of a traditional type, but it is filled with a well-modulated combination of modified classical and novel European motifs. A second notable feature is the wide range of colours employed: white, pink, pale-blue, purple, orange and green are far more prominent than in the Qur’an illumination current in the 16th to 18th centuries, which was dominated by gold and mid- or dark-blue parti-coloured grounds. Large areas of gold ground were also used in the Shumen style, and on the opening pages of text the outer margins are often covered with gold or silver and burnished to enhance their brilliance, creating a dramatic and appropriately splendid setting for beginning of the holy text.

Although Shumen illumination of the mid-19th century shares these characteristics, it is not homogenous, and the extent of the variation suggests that individual illuminators or workshops developed their own sub-styles. In addition, there is clearly development over time. The opening pages of the earliest of the Khalili Shumen manuscripts—that

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**Figure 1:** Opening pages of the Qur’an copied by Seyyid Mehmed Nureddin in AH1243 (AD1827–8). (Khalili collection, QUR 23, f. 1b–2a.)

**Figure 2:** Opening pages of the Qur’an copied by Seyyid Mehmed Nureddin in AH1243 (AD1827–8). (Khalili collection, QUR 343, f. 3b–4a.)

copied by Seyyid Mehmed Nureddin in AH1243 (AD1827–8)—has illumination of an entirely conventional kind, with none of the Europeanizing exotica seen in later work. The only hint of what was to come is found on the last page of text, where a Baroque frame of multiple curves and angles surrounds the colophon. Here too, though, the remainder of the illumination is in the same conventional style as that at the beginning of the manuscript.

By the time that Seyyid Mehmed Nuri produced his superb Qur’an of AH1266 (AD1849–50), however, the eclectic Shumen style had come into being. Thus the ornament on the opening pages incorporates a number of novel elements, such as the frame of Rococo scrolls around the text and the bands of decoration that run parallel to the spine, which have something of the quality of Bizarre silks. It is also in the broad range of colours typical of Shumen work, with considerable use of pink and pale-blue. It is worth noting, though, that one of the more unusual motifs employed here—the pink cloud scrolls that supplement the gold palmette scrolls—was not derived from European models. The motif is found intermittently in Ottoman Qur’an illumination of earlier periods, but it is more characteristic of earlier non-Ottoman illumination, especially that
produced in 16th-century Shiraz. The overall effect is livelier than that of the traditional composition seen in the Qur’an of 1827–8, and the innovations are well-handled, so the juxtaposition of motifs from different sources is never incongruous.

The five other double-page illuminations in the manuscript of 1849–50 are not bound by tradition to anything like the same extent. The first four mark the beginning of surahs with special significance (Yāsin on folios 220b–221a; al-Fatḥ on folios 256b–257a; al-Mulk on folios 281b–282a; and al-Nāba’ on folios 293b–294a), while the fifth surrounds the end of the text on folio 307b and the colophon on folio 308a. Each has an elaborate ornamental frame set around two text areas of normal size, but the composition is very different in every case. One (folios 281b–282a) is very close to the traditional design seen on the opening folios, and the last retains many of these features but is interrupted in the middle of each side by a Baroque “entablature” of a type found in the illuminated head-pieces of non-Qur’anic manuscripts at an earlier date.22 In the others, though, only traces of the classical models remain, and most of the traditional

22 See, for example, Tim Stanley, The Qur’an and Calligraphy, Catalogue 1213 (London, Bernard Quaritch Ltd, [1996]), no. 33, which is dated 1809.
motifs have been swept away, to be replaced by baskets of flowers and in one case even plates of fruit.

In terms of the quality of its illumination this Qur'an more than matches metropolitan production of the period, and in the context of Ottoman provincial Qur'ans it is outstanding. Most of the elements found in later Shumen illumination are already present in its decoration, although the traditional component has not been transformed so radically as it is in examples from the 1860s, at least in terms of the illumination of the opening pages. The work of this later period is, though, rarely of the same exceptional standard. It tends to be more schematic in execution, and the colours are less gently modulated. Yet it still surpasses the illumination found in most other provincial Qur'ans of the 19th century.

Shumen and the Metropolitan Tradition

Although the Qur'ans produced in Shumen between 1840 and 1870 are notable for their distinctive style of illumination, in most other respects, including the styles of binding and calligraphy employed, they can be seen as part of the wider Ottoman tradition, which followed models developed in Istanbul. Three examples of the bindings on dated Shumen manuscripts from this period have recently been published in the catalogue of the collection of Ghassan I. Shaker,15 and these, together with the six specimens from the same period in the Khalili Collection, provide enough evidence to draw some preliminary conclusions. All nine books are bound in covers of brown morocco that are ornamented with light tooling and painting in gold, which had become the normal method of decorating bindings in Istanbul by the beginning of the 19th century. The most common design is a painted diaper pattern with a tooled gold dot or a group of tooled gold dots at the centre of each cell; there seems to be a correlation between the number of dots and the overall quality of the bindings, which varies considerably. This design fills the whole field on seven of the bindings (the three Shaker manuscripts, Khalili QUR 196, QUR 364, QUR 869, QUR 21) and the reduced field at the centre of the covers of QUR 343 (Mehmed Nuri's Qur'an of AH1266/AD1849–50). It is

15 Safwat, Golden Pages, no. 63, 64, 66.
also to be found on the binding of Qur 23, the Mehmed Nureddin Qur’an of AH 1243 (AD 1827–8). It may therefore be taken as characteristic of Shumen manuscript production, although it was never exclusive to this school.34

The calligraphy of the Shumen Qur’ans follows the same pattern of variation as the bindings: the quality of execution varies, but the model aspired to remains constant. In this case, the model was supplied by the Istanbul calligraphers of the 18th century, such as the two mentioned above, Yedikuleli Seyyid Abdullah and Egrikapılı Mehmed Rasim. The tradition to which these masters were heirs was first elaborated by Seyh Hamduallah in the late 15th and early 16th century and was revived and refined by the calligraphers of the second half of the 17th century, a process that culminated in the work of Hafiz Osman, Seyyid Abdullah’s teacher.35 In terms of Qur’an production this revival bequeathed the scribes of the 18th century the regular, well-proportioned nesb hand in which the main text was copied.36 The nesb hand was originally one of a series of calligraphic modes designed to present the Qur’anic text in an unambiguous a manner as the nature of the Arabic script would allow, but from the 17th century nesb was the only mode employed in Ottoman Qur’ans. This narrowing of the available options was not restricted to the type of script employed, and it is inevitable that the performance of the 19th-century scribes who worked in Shumen was strongly influenced by the remarkably standardized format of the Qur’ans they produced.

34 The doublures are all of paper. The Khalili doublures are either plain coloured paper (QUR 364, QUR 369, QUR 365), marbled paper (QUR 21), or coloured paper with painted designs (QUR 343, and QUR 23) or a tooled and gilded border (QUR 196). For descriptions of the Shaher doublures, see Safwat, Golden Pages, pp. 247, 251, 256.
36 The rika hand used for the surah headings was probably the preserve of the illuminator, who seems in most cases to have been a different person. This rika comes close to losing its identity: it is merely a form of nesb with a decreasing number of the unusual ligatures that distinguish this style of script.
nature of this standardization can be judged from the six copies made in Shumen in the period 1840–1870 that are preserved in the Khalili Collection.

The six manuscripts belong to a very distinctive sub-group of Ottoman Qur’ans, and it is clear that other published examples also fall within this sub-group.37 In these manuscripts there are always 15 lines of text to the page, and the text was always composed so that the end of the page coincides with the end of a verse, a pattern known as ayet ber kenar (“with a verse [ending] at the margin”).38 At the same time, the number of folios in a manuscript was always between 300 and 310, reflecting the conventional division of the Qur’anic text into 30 fascicules or ezza’, which were realized as gatherings of ten folios.39 The dimensions of the folios and the proportion of each page occupied by the ruled text area were also fairly standard (see table). As a result, a reader was able to find the same part of the text in approximately the same place in any copy of this type, which made such Qur’ans as much like printed books as manuscripts could be.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accession no.</th>
<th>Size of folio</th>
<th>Size of text area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QUR 196</td>
<td>309 folios</td>
<td>16.2 x 10.5cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUR 343</td>
<td>307 folios</td>
<td>17.1 x 11.7cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUR 364</td>
<td>306 folios</td>
<td>14.5 x 10cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUR 869</td>
<td>307 folios</td>
<td>14.5 x 10.1cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUR 365</td>
<td>303 folios</td>
<td>16 x 9.8cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUR 21</td>
<td>305 folios</td>
<td>19 x 12.7cm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ayet ber kenar format was probably developed to assist those training to be niffaz by memorizing the Qur’anic text by heart, and its origins may lie in the 17th century, since copies were certainly being produced by Istanbul-trained scribes as early as AH1124 (AD1712–13).40 Qur’ans of this type were produced in considerable numbers over the course of the following two centuries, and their quality was usually quite

37 See Salwat, *Golden Pages*, nos. 62–64, 66, for example.
38 Some Shumen Qur’an manuscripts are of the type with “rubricated symmetry,” in which groups of letters in the same position on opposite pages were picked out in red. See Salwat, *Golden Pages*, no. 64, 66; François Déroche, “The Ottoman Roots of a Tunisian Calligrapher’s Tour de Force,” paper given at the conference held in memory of Bedrettin Cömert at Hacettepe University, Ankara, in November, 1998 (*Süntaha Etkileşimler/Interactions in Art*, in press).
39 See Déroche, “The Ottoman Roots.”
40 For an ayet ber kenar Qur’an of this date, written by Ahmad ibn Mahmud, a pupil of Sayyolu-zade Mustafa Eyyubi, see Bayuni, Kontadinli, and Stanley, *The Decorated Word*, Part One, no. 27.
modest, indicating that they were intended for private use by Muslims of comfortable means rather than the very rich. Nevertheless, some Shumen Qur’ans, such as Mehmed Nuri’s manuscript of 1849–50, were of a very high standard. These examples seem to mark a change in the status of the *ayet ber kenar* format, which may have been due to contacts between the court in Istanbul and the calligraphers of this provincial town.

The parameters imposed by the 15-line, *ayet ber kenar* format, the modest size of the manuscripts themselves, and the relatively small proportion of the page occupied by the text had the inevitable result that the script was written very small. Despite this, the Shumen scribes maintained a remarkable degree of legibility, and their skill can also be judged by the consistency they were able to maintain while copying more than 600 pages of text. This consistency has several aspects. It is seen in the size of script, which should be the same throughout a manuscript; in the regularity of the letter forms, which should be the same in any example of a scribe’s hand; and in the system of proportions that connects the two, regulating the scaling of the letter forms within a text of a particular overall size. Despite the strict parameters established by their model, variations do occur between the hands of Shumen scribes. These are, though, the result of different levels of performance, which arise either from personal factors, such as the quality of a scribe’s training or his degree of experience, or from external pressures, such as the time allocated for the task. The best hands show themselves in the restraint and discipline of the scribe, who tied the text strictly to a regular series of horizontal base lines and eschewed all flourishes that gave unwarranted emphasis to particular letters or groups of letters.

**Calligrapher’s Diplomas**

The transmission of the skills needed to achieve this level of performance must have been an important activity in Shumen, given the number of scribes active there by the mid-19th century. Material evidence for it comes in the form of three calligrapher’s diplomas (*icdizet*), all dating from the 1860s and illuminated in the Shumen style. In the earliest, issued in AH1277 (AD1860–61), the motifs employed include vases of flowers, frames composed of Rococo scrolls, and floral scrolls that sport a mass of gold leaves, all executed in the more schematic manner found in Qur’ans of the 1860s. The main element in this type of diploma was a display

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41 Christie’s, London, 11 June 1986, lot 129; and again at Sotheby’s, London, 11 October 1991, lot 869.
AH1277 (AD1860–61), but three of the eight supplementary licences are dated AH1282 (AD1865–6), which suggests that the diploma was granted in two stages at least. The examinee was Seyyid Hasan Vehbi, and the teacher was Seyyid Hafiz Osman Hilmi. The third diploma is dated AH1286 (AD1869–70) and was granted by Ibrahim Felahi to a pupil called Seyyid Hüseyin Hamdi. In this case there are five supplementary licences. In all the three diplomas provide the names of 20 calligraphers who were active in Shumen in the 1860s, less than half of whom are known from other sources:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diploma 1</th>
<th>Diploma II</th>
<th>Diploma III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mehməd Şevki, Seyyid</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Examiner 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seyyid Mehmed Sadık Raif</td>
<td>Pupil</td>
<td>Examiner 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seyyid Hafız Osman Hilmi</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Examiner 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seyyid Hasan Vehbi</td>
<td>Pupil</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibrahim Felahi</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pupil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seyyid Hüseyin Hamdi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmed Zarrif</td>
<td>Examiner 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mehmed Nuri</td>
<td>Examiner 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mustafa Sarruri</td>
<td>Examiner 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yusuf Raza</td>
<td>Examiner 5</td>
<td>Examiner 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>İsmail Besim</td>
<td>Examiner 6</td>
<td>Examiner 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdurrahman Hilmi</td>
<td>Examiner 7</td>
<td>Examiner 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hacı Rüşdi</td>
<td>Examiner 8</td>
<td>Examiner 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seyyid Hasan Aşkı</td>
<td>Examiner 9</td>
<td>Examiner 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seyyid Haci Mehmed Ermin Faik</td>
<td>Examiner 10</td>
<td>Examiner 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necib Efendi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mustafa Fehmi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hüseyin Rüşdi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seyyid Ahmed Fuqad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mastafa Lutfi</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Some Preliminary Conclusions**

By collating the information provided by the three calligraphers’ diplomas with that found in the colophons of Qur’ans and other manuscripts from Shumen, we can identify the tens of scribes listed in the Appendix below.\(^{43}\) As we have seen in the case of Mehməd Nuri, many

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\(^{43}\) Christie’s, London, 11 June 1986, lot 128; Karimzadeh Tabrizi, *İzâyet Nameh*, no. 7.

\(^{44}\) Karimzadeh Tabrizi, *İzâyet Nameh*, no. 9.

\(^{45}\) No definite figure can be given, as several of the entries below may be duplicates, as in the case of "İsmail Necib" and "Necib Efendi." Such a figure would in any case be of very transient value.
scribes included the name of the master or masters who taught them in the colophons of their manuscripts, as Ottoman calligraphers had done intermittently since the 16th century. Such information on scribes trained and working in Istanbul has been matched with data from other sources to establish long sequences of master–pupil relationships, which have been expressed in the form of "genealogical" trees. The information on the Shumen calligraphers is not yet sufficient to allow the construction of such a synoptic "genealogy". There are, for instance, a number of isolated relationships, such as those between Abdurrahman Hilmi and his teachers, of whom nothing more is known. On a more positive note we may refer to three groups of calligraphers taught by the same master. The five pupils of Ertuğrul Ahmed Nazifi and the four pupils of Mehmmed Nuri have been mentioned above, while the third teacher was Ahmed Zarifi, six of whose pupils have been identified. We do not, though, know whether these three groups were linked, as we have the name of the teacher’s teacher only for Mehmmed Nuri. Our preliminary findings are, then, that at least 20 scribes—roughly two-thirds of those listed in the Appendix—belonged to one of these three sub-schools.

What is clear from the evidence collected so far is that an extraordinary boom in Qur’an production took place in Shumen in the mid-19th century: despite the very small proportion of 19th-century Qur’ans that have been published, it has been possible to identify more than 50 copies produced there. The town itself, with its considerable Muslim population and its relatively high level of literacy and learning, would have generated some demand for such manuscripts. But the level of output clearly outstripped local demand, and Shumen must have been a centre of production serving a clientele elsewhere in the Ottoman empire. Who these customers were, and why they chose to purchase manuscripts produced in Shumen are questions that cannot be answered in detail at this stage. The indications are, however, that the production of Qur’ans in Shumen was by no means isolated from metropolitan trends, and the capital may have been the main market for these manuscripts.

The Ottoman court’s interest in Shumen calligraphers is signalled by the report, going back to the Mi‘āt-i Hattatîn of Süleyman Efendi,

that the calligrapher whom we may call Topçu Süleyman Efendi was invited to the capital by Mahmud II. It is further supported by the presence in the former imperial libraries of three or four Qur’ans written by Mehmmed Nuri, the pupil of Hisayn Vehbi, in the reign of this sultan, and one each from the reigns of Mahmud’s two successors. What is more, in his colophons Mehmmed Nuri described himself inter alia as al-‘abd al-dîlî ‘l-lâ‘îlîyâh al-‘umânîyyâh, “the slave who prays for the Exalted Ottoman State.” In isolation the phrase can be seen as merely conventional, but the coincidence between its use in this colophon and the presence in the former imperial libraries of so many Qur’ans by the scribe in question suggests that Mehmmed Nuri’s use of the phrase was an acknowledgement of the court patronage he had received. Indeed, since Mahmud II is renowned for his aggressive centralization of power, and Ottoman loyalty was hardly a matter of mere convention in his reign, Mehmmed Nuri’s use of the phrase may even have been a declaration of allegiance to the new political order associated with Mahmud’s programme of centralizing reforms. The Tanzimat period, the more liberal phase of reform instituted after Mahmud’s death in 1839, coincided with the development of the Shumen style of illumination. The successful synthesis of classical Ottoman and Europeanizing elements that characterizes the Shumen style can be seen as an artistic expression of Ottoman imperial policy under Mahmud and his sons Abdülmecid and Abdüllaziz, which was designed to restore Ottoman power by employing new military and governmental techniques imported from Europe.

Appendix

Abdurrahman Hilmi. Seyyid, pupil of Hafiz Mehmmed Süleyman and of Topçu Mehmmed Süleyman (see Ahmed Şakir). He appears as the copyist of two sumptuously illuminated Qur’ans. This first, dated AH1262 (AD1845–6), was presented by Sultan Abdülhamid II to ‘Ali Re‘î Pasha on his accession as Khedive of Egypt in AH1302 (AD1884–5),45 while the second, dated AH1289 (AD1872–3), was given by the same sultan to al-Husayn, Sherif of Mecca, and remained in his family until they were overthrown as kings of Iraq in 1958.46 Abdurrahman Hilmi also appears as an examiner in two of the three Shumen diplomas.

Abdurrahman Tevfik, Seyyid. He is known from the colophons of three Qur’ans dated AH1256 (AD1840–41),47 AH1258 (AD1842–3),48 and AH1263

47 Khalili Collection, QUR 196.
(AD1846–7). In the colophons of these manuscripts he named his teachers. The first was the Shumen calligrapher Evliya-zade Ahmed Nazifi, and the second was the court calligrapher "Hoca-i Lâz Omem Vafi," with whom he had studied in Istanbul. Abdurrahman Tevfik was in Istanbul when he completed his Qur’an of AH 1256, but all three Qur’ans by him are decorated in the Shumen style.

Ahmed Fuad, Seyyid. He added a supplementary licence to diploma III.

Ahmed Nazifi, Evliya-zade. As noted above, he was one of the main teachers of Shumen calligraphers, whose pupils included Abdurrahman Tevfik, Mehmed Hikmeti, Mehmed Şakır, Mustafa Ru’atî, and Salih Namki. An undated Qur’an with illumination in the Shumen style (Christie’s, London, on 9 October 1990, lot 66) was, according to the sale catalogue, signed by Ahmed Nazifi, a pupil of Hafiz Mustafa Şükri, but this may have been the work of a later scribe of the same name.


Ahmed Şakır. Topçu. He is the subject of the only notice in İnâ’s Son Hatitâtât that explicitly refers to Shumen as a centre of calligraphy. According to İnâ, Ahmed Şakır bore the surname Topçu; he modelled his hand on that of İsmail Zühtü; and he was invited to Istanbul by Sultan Mahmud II and died there. The name given by İnâ may not be correct, however, since a Shumen scribe called Mehmed Şakır also bore the surname Topçu. Mehmed Şakır is known from the colophons of two Qur’ans by his pupil Abdurrahman Hilimi, and the pupil also had some sort of connection with the Ottoman court: the two Qur’ans in question were later given as diplomatic presents by Sultan Abdülhamid II. The coincidence of the names and of the court connections suggests that the Shumen calligrapher whom Mahmud II invited to Istanbul was actually Mehmed Şakır. Further information is required to clarify this point.

Ahmed Zarifi. He appears as an examiner in diploma I, and his importance can be judged by the appearance of his name in the colophons of his numerous pupils, who included Ahmed Reşif, Hasan Hamdi, İsmail Ammi, İsmail Necib, Mehmed Sabit, and Şaban Şevki.

Ali Osman Hilimi, pupil of Seyyid Mehmed Nuri. He produced two Qur’ans manuscripts in the collection of Ghassan I. Shaker (MS.35 and MS.13), which are dated AH1270 (AD1853–4) and AH1277 (AD1860). A third Qur’an is dated AH1272 (AD1855–6).

Hüseyin Hamdi, Seyyid. pupil of Ibrahim Felahi. He was the examiner in diploma II.

Hüseyin Hüsnü, Seyyid. pupil of Seyyid Mehmed Nuri. He wrote a copy of the Qur’an dated Shumen, AH1279 (AD1862–3) which is now in the Khalili Collection (QUR 365).

Hüseyin Rüdı. He appears as an examiner in diploma II. He may be the same person as Rüdı Efendi. Ibrahim Felahi. In diploma II he appears as an examiner, and in diploma III as the teacher of his recipient, Hüseyin Hüsnü Hamdi. Another pupil was Seyyid Mustafa Sâfvet, who was responsible for an undated Qur’an in the Khalili Collection (QUR 21).

53 Sotheby’s, London, 15 April 1985, lot 283.
55 For Ömer Vafi, see Habib, Hat ve Hatdülâ, p. 165; İnâ, Son Hatitâtât, pp. 259–61.
İsmail Azmi, pupil of Ahmed Zarifi. Responsible for a Qur'an dated AH1289 (AD1872–73).

İsmail Besim. He appears as an examiner in two of the diplomas noted above.

İsmail Necib, a pupil of Ahmed Zarifi. This scribe copied a Qur'an in Shumen in AH1264 (AD1847–8). Other Qur'ans by him are dated AH1260 (AD1844) and AH1268 (AD1852). The latter is decorated in a fully "Rococo" manner unrelated to the Shumen style of illumination, and the manuscript was either produced in Istanbul or sent there before it was decorated. The Necib Efendi, who appears as an examiner in diploma it may be the same person.

Mehmed Emin Faiik, Seyyid Hac. He appears as an examiner in diploma i.

Mehmed Hilmi, Seyyid, pupil of Evliya-zade Ahmed Nazifi. The colophon of a Qur'an by him dated AH1274 (AD1857–8) was published by Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh Tabrizi.

Mehmed Nureddin, Seyyid, pupil of Hüseyin Vehbi. He was responsible for a Qur'an of AH1241 (AD1825–6) in the Topkapı Palace Library (MS. M. 57), and for another of AH1243 (AD1827–8) in the Khalili Collection (QUR 23), where he describes himself as "a resident of Shumen, and a follower of Abu Hanifah in law and of al-Maturidi in theology". As noted above, it seems more than likely than Nureddin was an earlier form of the second name of Seyyid Mehmed Nuri, and that the two calligraphers were the same person.

Mehmed Nuri, Seyyid, pupil of Hüseyin Vehbi. His position as one of the most important Shumen calligraphers is established above. He was the teacher of Salih Rami, Ali Osman Hilmi, Hüseyin Hüsnü, and Halil Zübdi; and he appears as examiner in two of the Shumen diplomas discussed above.  

Mehmed Sabit, pupil of Ahmed Zarifi. He was responsible for a Qur'an dated AH1273 (AD1856–7).

Mehmed Sadık Raif, Seyyid, pupil of Seyyid Mehmed Şevki. He appears as the examiner in diploma i.

Mehmed Şevki, Seyyid. He appears as the teacher of Seyyid Mehmed Sadık Raif in diploma i and as an examiner in diploma iii.

Mehmed Şükri, pupil of Evliya-zade Ahmed Nazifi. He is known from a Qur'an in the Ghassan I. Shaker Collection (MS. 66) dated Shumen, AH1270 (AD1853–4), and from the notice in Son Hatılar quoted above, in which reference is made to two Qur'ans he copied in AH1276 (AD1859–60).

Mehmed Şükri, Topçu. See Ahmed Şükri, Topçu.

Mustafa Fehmi. He appears as an examiner in diploma ii.

Mustafa Lütfi. He appears as an examiner in diploma iii.

Mustafa Nüzheti. As noted above, he produced a Qur'an in the Topkapı Palace Library (MS. M. 57) dated AH1272 (AD1855–6) and illuminated in the Shumen style.

Mustafa Rıfat, pupil of Evliya-zade Ahmed Nazifi. He was responsible for a Qur'an dated AH1270 (AD1853–4).  

Mustafa Safvet, Seyyid, pupil of Ibrahim Felahi. He copied an undated Qur'an in the Khalili Collection (QUR 21).

Mustafa Süvari. He appears as an examiner in two of the diplomas noted above, and he can be identified with the scribe who copied a Qur'an dated AH1270 (AD1853–4).  

Necib Efendi. See Ismail Necib.

Osman Hilmi, Seyyid Hafız. He appears as the teacher of Seyyid Hasan Vehbi in diploma ii.

Osman Nuri. See Halil Zübdi, pupil of Seyyid Mehmed Nuri.

Osman Şevki. See Seyyid Hasan Aşkı.

Rüşdi, Haci. He appears as an examiner in diploma i. He may have been the same person as Hüseyin Rüşdi, who appears as an examiner in diploma ii.

Salih Namuki, Seyyid, pupil of Evliya-zade Ahmed Nazifi. Known from the colophon of an undated Qur'an.

Safiya, Golden Pages, no. 64.

Katayev, Arapça Yazarlar Kataloğu, i, no. 1551; Demiriz, “Kitap Sıslere Sanatı,” p. 115, fig. 1; pp. 116–17.


Sotheby’s, London, 1 June 1987, lot 127. His surname is transliterated as Aziznizadeh in the Sotheby’s catalogue.

Sotheby’s, London, 15 October 1984, lot 266.
Salih Rami, Seyyid Hafiz, pupil of Mehmed Nuri. His signature is found in three Qur’ans. The earliest, dated AH1270 (AD1853–4), was offered for sale in London in 1992, while the other two are in the Khalili Collection (QUR 364 and QUR 869). The first was completed on 8 Rabi’ al-Aakhir 1270 (8 January 1854), and the second is dated Shumen, AH1278 (AD1861–2).

Sa‘ban Şevki, pupil of Ahmed Zarifi, is known from a single undated manuscript.44

Yusuf Rashed. He was responsible for a Qur’an in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, Istanbul (MS. 469), which is dated AH1270 (AD1852–3). In the colophon he describes himself as a pupil of Haci Ahmed Nazif.45

Yusuf Riza. He appears as an examiner in two of the Shumen diplomas discussed above.

Yusuf Sıdıq, pupil of Talib Fa’iki. He was responsible for a Qur’an decorated in the Shumen style produced between 1863 and 1873 and now in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.46

Seçkin Bir Melevi’nin Tezhipli Kitapları
Zeren Tanrıddı

Ortaçağ Anadolu Türk kitap sanatının göz kamaştıran örneklerinin, Mevlâna Celâleddin Rumi’nin (öl. 1273) ve oğlu Sultan Veled’in (öl. 1312) eserlerinde yoğunlaştığı Konya Mevlâna Müzesi’ndeki eserlerden analiz edilmektedir.1 Bu eserlerin taşıdıkları kayıtlar seçkin melevilerin kültürel ve ekonomik zenginliklerini yansıtır. İnce zevkli sanatseverler olsun seçkinlerinki bir örnek olarak otuz çeşitli eserleri Mevlâna’nın türbesine vaktetmiştirler. Bu grup içindeki seçilen, ikisi Konya Mevlâna Müzesi’nde (No. 68–69, 1113), diğeri Viyana Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek’de (Mixt. 1594) olan üç kitap bu yazının konusu olacaktır.

Eserin ismi: Mesnevi-i Veled: Rebâbname ve İntihânâme.  
Yazar: Sultan Veled.  
Bulunduğu yer: Viyana Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek. Mixt. 1594.2  
Cilti: 34.5x28.5 cm. Özgün cilti çıkarılmıştır. Mitikleştiri olarak ciltin dış kapakları koyu yeşil kadife iç kapakları altı serpmele yeşil kağıt kâğıdı, 19. yüzyılda Türkiye’ye yapılmıştır.  
Yapıklar: 159 yaprak. Be yaz kalin kağıt. Mavi ve kırmızı celtelli yazı kalıbından (29.5x23 cm) nesli hatla dört sütun üzerine otuz üç satır.

2 D.Duda, Die illuminierten Handschriften der österreichischen Nationalbibliothek. Islamische Handschriften (Wien, 1983), c.l, s.219-221, res.297-303.