Bookbinders

The copyist of MS. Paris BNF arabe 6883 of 640/1242, a certain 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Majlisī, was undoubtedly a genuinely multitalented maker of books, like the men referred to in the preceding paragraphs. Manuscript copying must have represented a welcome complement to his bookbinding business, though it is not known whether he engaged in this sideline on a regular basis or only sporadically. In general, however, it is difficult to acquire a clear picture of the position of craftsmen binders: as will be seen in a subsequent chapter, they rarely signed their works, and available information about them derives primarily from literary sources. There is a paucity of information in the technical treatises too, since they are mainly late works devoted to calligraphers and painters, though in passing they may touch on an exceptional bookbinder.126

Of course, the craft did enjoy a certain status, and the passage in the Fihrist mentioning masters from the early era (such as ibn Abī l-Harīth, who worked for the 'Abbāsid caliph al-Ma'mūn) is well known.127 Yet, in the last analysis, the conditions under which its practitioners worked remain obscure. Were it not for the marginal drawings in the album of Jahāngīr,128 it would be well-nigh impossible even to visualise how the techniques were applied, since the very few miniatures specifically representing bookbinders provide no more than a superficial depiction of the workshops or the tools used.129


Scripts

"Apart from some remarks on the most obvious peculiarities of the scripts, I have had to refrain from giving a palaeographical analysis of these specimens. This is due to the fact that in this field even the most basic work still remains to be done. No adequate criteria for the description of Arabic handwriting do as yet exist. The mere fact that all scripts presented here may conveniently be called naskhi proves that this name is hardly of any use and might just as well be discarded. Nor even the roughest guidelines as to provenance and dating of Arabic manuscripts have been drawn, and this work can not be done without taking Persian and Turkish palaeography into account."

J. J. Winkam, Seven Specimens of Arabic Manuscripts (Leiden, 1978), p. 18

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, the palaeography of Arabic book hands cannot be divorced from codicology. We have yet to see, however, the development of a serious and coherent body of research in this field. Hence in this chapter we shall simply attempt to familiarise readers with the aims and methods of palaeography, to offer an assessment of existing research, and to indicate potential lines of further investigation.

The aims and methods of palaeography

The word palaeography is roughly contemporaneous with the birth of the field, defined as "the science or art of deciphering and determining the date of ancient documents or systems of writing."1 It was used, in fact, in the title of a book by a French Benedictine scholar, Bernard de Montfaucon, De palaeographia graeca.2 This work was published in 1708, some thirty years after Jean

1 As defined in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. 2 B. de Montfaucon, Palaeographia graeca, sive de origine et progressu literarum graecarum et de variis omnium saxorum scriptorum graecorum (Paris, 1708).
Empirical knowledge of scripts

Palaeography was nevertheless not a totally unknown practice prior to the publication of the books mentioned above. Reading or copying ancient manuscripts implied a practical knowledge of early scripts on the part of readers and copyists. This deciphering ability is attested to a certain extent, for example, by readers’ notes added at a date posterior to the manuscript itself. In a somewhat different way, a copy of the Qur’an (Istanbul TKS H.S. 17) demonstrates the existence of empirical palaeographical knowledge: the text has been transcribed in a modern hand in the margin. As Jan Just Wilkam has noted, the history of the text of Ibn Hazm’s Tarāq al-ḥamūma supposes that at some point a scribe transcribed an original Maghribī version of this work in an Oriental hand. Deciphering early manuscripts did not, on the whole, require particularly advanced technical knowledge, however. In particular, the fact that Arab and Muslim scribes generally made little use of abbreviations in their standard practice (and even then, only at the periphery of the text), obviated many difficulties in reading manuscripts despite the changes in book hands. Reading, in short, normally required nothing more than a good knowledge of the language or languages. Exceptions to this rule include texts written very poorly, whether because of haste or for other reasons (e.g. for the copyist’s own use), and those written without the dots by which various Arabic letters of similar form are normally differentiated.

Early ‘typologies’

Readers of manuscripts in archaic writing also possessed an empirical typology of early hands. On occasion they might give specific names to these hands, thereby doing the work of the palaeographer, although their meaning may not always be clear. The scribe of MS. Paris BNF arabe 167 specified that the text he copied was originally ‘in Iraqi script’ (h-khwāṭ šīṭh) Monitor. The compiler(s) of the mediaeval inventory of the library in Kairouan made a distinction between ‘Kufic’, ‘Sicilian’, ‘Nahārī’ and ‘Oriental’ scripts. Throughout all the various manuscript traditions, the technical nature of handwriting gave rise to treatises on equipment (reed pen, ink, preparation of the writing surface, etc.), and these treatises sometimes touched on the various kinds of hand in use. The special status of writing in Islamic civilisation favoured the emergence of texts that also discussed the practice of ‘calligraphy’, including not only the names of scripts but sometimes also examples. Some of these names referred to the hands used by contemporary scribes and calligraphers, and cannot therefore be associated with palaeographical knowledge; others, by contrast, referred to scripts that had fallen into disuse in the more or less distant past, thereby conforming fully to the ‘art of deciphering ancient systems of writing’.

At the same time, the production of forgeries of archaic scripts, as seen in the pseudo-al-Asma’ī (MS. Paris BNF arabe 6726), confirms that such knowledge was disseminated, a fact corroborated by the attribution of archaic Qur’āns or Qur’ānic fragments to leading figures of the early days of Islam. Despite the highly impressive nature of this traditional brand of typology, it does not represent an early form of empirical palaeography. Care should be taken when applying concepts generated by this practice, if only for reasons related to the transmission of texts, as will be discussed below; but some of them remain to a certain extent functional – the names Maghribī and nasta’līq, for instance, are still effective labels for scripts. Even a term as vague as naṣīḥīt provides an approximate idea of the type of script it relates to. The various names used in the Islamic world, long known to specialists in Arabic, make it possible to discuss these scripts, and can even serve as a typology, however imperfect, for anyone prepared to set aside the niceties of chronological or historical accuracy.

The palaeographic method

Compared to traditional knowledge of this kind, the breakthrough associated with the work of Jean Mabillon and Bernard de Montfaucon involved the introduction of expertise on scripts into the realm of the historical sciences in the form of an auxiliary branch of history. Palaeography, which partially...
adopted some of the aims of the empirical approach described above, gave a new and much wider scope to the study of ancient writing. Not only did palaeography endeavour to provide a solid basis for deciphering ancient handwritten texts; it also aspired to lay solid foundations for establishing their authenticity, age, and origin. This goal obviously presupposes that the script in question underwent evolution through time and across geographical distance, which is empirically acknowledged to be the case with writing in the Arabic alphabet.

A crucial first step in the methodology of palaeography must therefore be to establish a system of classification. In order to develop a typology of the various types of writing, palaeographers start by assembling a series of documents preferably dated or datable, displaying similar graphical features; ideally, these documents should also contain reliable evidence of their geographical origin. Once the documentation has been gathered, it must be critically examined with a view to eliminating any items alien to the group. Since this initial phase (the constitution of series) is conducted empirically, its results must be carefully screened. Once this stage has been completed, a palaeographer can define the characteristics of the script on the level both of overall appearance and individual letterforms. The next step is to set chronological – and, where possible, geographical – limits for each series of documents from clues supplied by colophons, notes (tawqīfīyya or deeds of endowment, reading certificates, etc.), or material details of the production of the manuscript. The scope of a given series has a bearing on its validity: the greater the number of manuscripts written at roughly the same time in the same region, displaying the same graphical features, the less ad hoc the set constituted. Scripts from periods and regions for which only limited documentation exists cannot be identified with the same degree of accuracy as those for which examples abound in various collections.

Applications of palaeography

Once a framework has been set up by this general palaeographic approach, the palaeographer is theoretically in a position to apply his or her expertise to early scripts. The first task is to assign a date and geographical origin to a document, x, that bears no direct information as to date or place of origin. The palaeographer must therefore first determine the type of script under study and assign it to a group, y, whose chronological and geographical parameters are already known; in theory, if document x displays graphical features identical to group y, then it also shares that group’s chronological and geographical characteristics. Conducting this comparative study with due care, however, requires that one consider the various factors that might militate against the validity of the theory. A scribe might have travelled from place to place, lived to a great age (thereby preserving a style that had otherwise fallen into disuse), or even revived other styles after a gap of generations (sometimes with fraudulent intent). A thorough comparative study must therefore include other aspects of codicology. To take an extreme – and perhaps overly simple – case, a palaeographer would note that the early ‘Abbāsid script found on ff. a and 5 of MS. Paris BNF arabe 580 is incompatible, from a chronological standpoint, with the writing material, namely a Western watermarked paper dating from the eighteenth century.

As the preceding paragraph makes clear, the palaeographer’s work is based largely on comparative analysis. The search for dated documents displaying the script under study is therefore of prime importance. Physical familiarity with manuscripts themselves is not to be underestimated, because it often helps to improve the precision of analysis, but any library’s collections has its limits; fortunately, technology that emerged during the nineteenth century has extended the amount of documentation available for the search for parallels and today the scope is even greater. No less than any other field, palaeography has benefited from technical progress, and is perhaps even more dependent than most on such advances, especially in the realm of the reproduction of documents and image processing. The two centuries since the birth of palaeography have witnessed the replacement of hand-made copies – sometimes the only visual record – by photographs, later abetted by photocopiers, and subsequently by computer technology (whose future benefit to palaeography remains to be seen). Thus the quality and quantity of documentation available to palaeographers has grown considerably, even though – as will be discussed below – the study of manuscripts in Arabic script is still a long way from having fully exploited this potential. Also worth pursuing are the laboratory techniques that have increased in number and reliability over the years.

Palaeographers, then, are specialists whose knowledge and methods should in theory make it possible to identify the date and origin of a given piece of writing. But their attributions are more wide-ranging, because they are also historians of writing. Part of their work involves intensive study of the evolution of scripts and placing them in their historical and geographical context, taking into account the various factors which may have influenced their development. The work of classification and analysis briefly described here thus serves as the basis for an historical overview.

Arabic book hands: preliminary observations

To a large extent, the theoretical and methodological process just described has not yet been applied to Arabic book hands.

Difficulties to date

Up till now, scholarship has been hampered by various obstacles, but only the most serious will be mentioned here: a lack of reflection on principles applicable to the analysis of Arabic writing; the difficulty of assembling substantial documentation; the complexity of determining the change from one style to another; the re-use of a given hand from an earlier period; the absence of clear-cut indications of dating (or the presence of fallacious indications, such as a colophon copied exactly as it appeared in an earlier original); and variations in writing style by the same scribe. Furthermore, the importance of calligraphy, and the far greater attention shown to this subject, have tended to blur the picture by stimulating research and publications in which aesthetic or subjective judgements are hard to reconcile with the exigencies of palaeographic rigour. These are all major stumbling-blocks, but whereas some are inherent in the documents themselves, others are simply the result of an apparent lack of interest and effort on the part of Islamicists and Arabists. To put it bluntly, the palaeography of Arabic scripts remains two centuries behind the work done on Latin and Greek manuscripts. To trace the history of Arabic palaeography is not the role of this handbook, but it is perhaps important to give a clear account of the lines of research followed hitherto, and of the solutions that have been put forward to fundamental questions raised by the study of ancient writing.

As was pointed out at the start of this chapter, palaeography made its appearance in the field of Arabic and Islamic studies a little over two hundred years ago. The Orientalists of the day, perhaps influenced by an awareness of advances in Greek and Latin palaeography, believed that traditional lore concerning scripts, as recorded by Muslim scribes and copyists, would enable them to develop an Oriental palaeography with relative ease. This initial, partial misconception led to later problems, because specialists relied on that lore for too long, while they turned to other urgent issues. The unsatisfactory situation was nevertheless obvious to the more farsighted experts in the field. As early as 1898 the great Spanish Arabist Francisco Codera noted gaps in palaeographical knowledge and suggested new lines of development. If palaeography still remains to be established, at least as far as manuscripts are concerned, what should specialists in Arabic do to guide themselves in this research? The most natural procedure, apparently quite simple today thanks to collopyte techniques, would be to reproduce the many reliably dated manuscripts, which might then serve as a point of departure for identifying the forms given to letters during successive periods and for defining the external auxiliary signs used in scripts from different regions and eras.20

The working tools: albums of examples in facsimile

The approach advocated by Codera was similar to the one followed by palaeographers in other domains and began tentatively with a series of volumes of facsimiles published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The most remarkable album of this kind was certainly the volume published by William Wright, which combined the reproduction of specimens of scripts with a meticulous description of the material appearance of the manuscripts.21 The title of another compilation, published by Bernhard Moritz, was perhaps overly ambitious—Arabic Palaeography22—and earned the author some harsh words from Josef von Karabacek.23 Nevertheless, a significant number of manuscripts held in Egypt were reproduced in Moritz's work, and they were to enrich the study not only of the writing but also of the illumination of Arabic books. Finally, it is worth mentioning the facsimiles published by Agnes S. Lewis and Margaret D. Gibson,24 as well as by Eugène Tisserrant,25 the latter designed more for educational use. These pioneering publications were followed by several anthologies of plates, compiled by the likes of Arthur J. Arberry,26 Georges Vajda,27 Salih Al-Din Al-Munajjid,28 and Jan Just Wittкам.29 Finally, mention should be made of the Fichier des manuscrits moyen-orientaux (FMMOD), a database begun in 1992 which consists of a descriptive file for every manuscript included (all being securely dated to before 1500 CE), and a reproduction of one page of text from the script and of the colophon.

These tools, crucial to the approach described above, are still insufficient in terms of quantity, especially given the enormous number of manuscripts written in Arabic script. True enough, catalogues of collections and of

numerous exhibitions contain many useful reproductions, but the basic data is all too often lacking, and their wide dispersal makes such material hard to consult. Nothing, in fact, can compensate for the deplorable dearth of catalogues of dated manuscripts.

Theoretical research

Meanwhile, theoretical studies—that is to say, works of scholarship devoted to the dating and classification of the graphic material of existing series of documents—have been largely dominated by an approach adopted by pioneering scholars. One major work, published on the eve of World War II, demonstrates the limits of this approach. Nabia Abbott, in The Rise of the North Arabic Script and its Karānic development, focused on a collection of seven folios and fragments of old Qur’ānic manuscripts (first/seventh to fourth/eighth centuries) held by the Oriental Institute in Chicago. She intended to address, once again, the issue of scripts in the early days of Islam.27 According to Abbott, the study of Arabic sources would allow her to identify and classify the different varieties of script found in the manuscripts. Exploiting the many texts published since the days of the great Danish scholar Jacob George Christian Adler, Abbott took Adler’s approach to a considerable level of refinement.28

But this approach raises a number of methodological problems. First of all, it presupposes that reliable editions of the texts in question had been established, although in fact the situation is far from satisfactory in this regard. Two examples illustrate the difficulties that can arise. The first concerns the transmission of texts: in his 1931, Ibn al-Nadim lists the names of early Arabic scripts including—in the edition of the text prepared in the nineteenth century by Gustav Flügel—mūṣafīn (= “slanted [writing]”). This descriptive label was adopted by most specialists to designate the script of certain manuscripts from the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries.29 But a new edition of the 1931, based on earlier manuscripts, corrects mūṣafīn to muqaddabiṭi (= “[script in which the letters are] divergent”). The second example concerns a brief treatise on calligraphy attributed to Ibn Muhja, a famous calligrapher of the early tenth century, and covers a problem of textual criticism.30 Even though the attribution has never been effectively authenticated, many scholars have based their arguments on the text without ever questioning its authenticity. The sphere of Oriental studies in general is aware of the basic methodological problems raised by the use of early sources. A specialist in Arab textiles has warned that in her field “the most difficult thing is to identify textiles in the context of the Arabic vocabulary used during the period in question; texts never supply descriptions that are sufficiently detailed to allow us to be certain that a given term applies to a given sample from a collection. We are forced to fall back on hypotheses.”31 It is unfortunate that a similar common-sense observation was not made earlier by those working on scripts, and that they remained unaware that in the absence of clear illustrations of the terminology used it was impossible to resolve the question of the attribution of a name to a given type of writing in anything other than an arbitrary way. Medieval writers wrote for their peers; they were not drafting treatises on palaeography.

Although we cannot rely on original sources to identify specific hands, the way medieval authors perceived the classification of scripts can provide palaeographers with valuable clues to criteria that might be used to establish relevant typologies. From this standpoint, Adam Gacek’s analysis of Al-Nuwayrī’s approach is extremely helpful.32 Studies devoted to early scripts, however, were not invariably based on early sources alone. Almost at the same time that Abbott’s book appeared, an article by Eric Schroeder purported to identify a series of coherent scripts, admittedly on a somewhat limited basis.33 In his desire to give the series a name he had picked up in a marginal note, he ventured into the field of philology armed with relatively weak arguments and he became the butt of some severe criticism from the likes of Abbott.34 This weakness apart, Schroeder’s contribution had the great merit of demonstrating that palaeographic methods could be applied to Arabic writing; unfortunately, it met with little response in its day. Since that time, scholars have tried with varying success to analyse the different scripts in a methodical way. Thus Nico van den Boogert has meticulously analysed the forms found in Maghrebī writing, and has published a rigorous analysis of its distinctive features.35 As regards the Qur’ānic scripts from the early days of Islam (primarily from the first/seventh to the fourth/tenth century), direct study of fragments in major collections is now producing findings in typology: as further discoveries are made, a chronology is gradually emerging, and the rules for the use of the


Future lines of research

Since the palaeography of Arabic scripts exists only in a fragmentary state, it would be presumptuous to do more than outline some of the findings of research to date and point out lines of research that might enable the field to advance further.

Problems of terminology

The study of Arabic book hands was born in the shadow of Western palaeography, and has been strongly influenced by it. This perhaps explains why the specificities of the Arabic system have received relatively little consideration and why concepts perfectly valid for Latin or Greek turn out to have little relevance to problems encountered in the analysis of Arabic scripts. The concept of 'cursiveness' provides a good example: in the Western sphere, 'cursive' refers to a hand in which the scribe produces more than a single part of a letter — indeed, more than one entire letter — without lifting the pen. This definition is useful in that it distinguishes cursive hands from scripts which require that each part of a letter be produced by a separate stroke of the pen. But in Arabic writing that distinction does not exist, strictly speaking, many letters are produced with a single stroke of the pen in any case, and the writing system itself requires certain ligatures, so that almost all varieties of script may be described as cursive. For this very reason the concept has proved of limited use.

By contrast, there has been little coherent application up to now of a fundamental distinction between 'calligraphic' hands employed by professionals with a concern for an even, elegant appearance, and 'casual'40 scripts used by individuals who either did not master penmanship sufficiently well or who felt no need to use a formal hand. In the former case, the present writer has suggested distinguishing two major types, called 'composed' scripts and 'chirodric' scripts. The distinction between the two is based on observation of the ligature line, which in the first case masks traces of the movement of the hand from one letter to another, while in the latter it leaves such traces apparent.41

On certain points, this distinction may dovetail with a concept well known to medieval theorists: a codification of the use of scripts was in fact gradually adopted at a very early date, most clearly in the realm of chancery documents but also in the domain of manuscripts. The situation seems relatively straightforward when it comes to Qur'anic manuscripts with their specific hands (khattul-masbīḥa), and Abbott has stressed the homogeneity of the scripts that appear in early Christian Arabic manuscripts.42 The question therefore arises as to the usefulness of approaching the palaeography of book hands by allowing ourselves to be guided by the content of the text. In other words, it might, for example, be revealing to carry out a methodical study of the hands used in medical manuscripts or in documents issued by the ḍāhīras.

Ligatures between letters are a fundamental component of Arabic writing, as is the spacing between letters of a word. The former are generally overlooked in analysis, despite major variations which are to be found both in the forms of connection and in the respective positions of letters that they join; closer attention is usually paid to unwarranted ligatures that connect two letters which should not normally be linked. Furthermore, an important role is played by spacing, designed sometimes to separate one word from another, sometimes to isolate an independent letter within a word (certain letters are not normally linked to the following letter). This spacing can be employed in various ways and become a characteristic part of the style of a given period.

Palaeographers need to pay attention to the particular features of letter forms, even though an adequate terminology for describing them accurately is still lacking. Specialists will surely have to come to some agreement on a vocabulary that takes into account the constituent elements. For example, vertical strokes of greater or lesser height might be described, in a decreasing order of size, as 'ascenders', 'stems', and 'denticles'. Given the extreme simplicity of the forms, it is often the minor details that serve to identify a style — the way the top of the letter ḍaf is handled is particularly representative of these subtle distinctions.43

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38 Déroche, Cat. E1; see also Déroche, Abū Bakr Thalāsīa and E. Whelan, 'Writing the Word of God I', Ars Orientalis 20 (1990), pp. 113-147. 39 This was notably the case with Abbott's book (see note 27 above). 40 To the best of the present writer's knowledge, Houdas was the first scholar to recognize the importance of this distinction, in his 'Études sur l'écriture maghrébine', Nouveaux mélanges orientaux (Paris, 1886), pp. 105 and 110. Abbott introduced a category which he termed masbīḥa to designate these casual scripts; see his Studies in Arabic literary pagans: historical texts (Oriental Institute publ. 75) (Chicago, 1937), vol. 1, p. 3. As a rule, albums of facsimiles have overlooked this distinction, although it is applied — without being made explicit — in books on calligraphy.

Defunct scripts from the early periods

Although no manuscript dated prior to the third/tenth century has been published to date,44 the early period has sparked considerable interest among palaeographers. Qur’ānic scripts, which constitute the bulk of surviving material, have salient characteristics that simplify analysis. For convenience’s sake, research has up to now been limited to the identification and dating of coherent groups of manuscripts. This work will need to be taken further as new collections are systematically explored while the identification of regional styles remains to be embarked upon.

Formative period

The oldest style, Ḥijāzī (see illus. 11 and 64), is easily recognisable thanks to its visual particularities, already noted by Ibn al-Nadīm in the fourth/tenth century.45 The precise nature of this script nevertheless remains hard to pinpoint once we go beyond the general criteria set out in Ibn al-Nadīm’s Fihrist – indeed, manuscripts display significant variations as to letter forms and mise-en-page.46

The Qur’ānic scripts of the second/eighth and especially third/ninth centuries are better known.48 They are clearly composed, the base line tending to become one continuous, straight line. These hands can be defined by both the size and shape of their letters,49 the latter displaying a considerable degree of unity with few variants for a given letter. Traditionally, these scripts have been given the name ‘Kufic’; despite the concreteness of this term, it seems dangerous to apply it to a script displaying such wide variation and broad dissemination, and it is therefore suggested here that they be labelled ‘early ‘Abbasīd scripts’ (see illus. 10a, 10b, and 41).


‘Abbasīd book hands

Even in the nineteenth century, Western specialists wavered between various names for the scripts forming this group, which shows just how complicated it was to identify them. Firstly, relationships existing between the various forms were not always noticed, so that related forms were often represented as being independent. Secondly, some of the labels employed reveal that classification was not made any easier by the hybrid nature often - and sometimes rightly - attributed to them.50

These scripts, attested outside the realm of manuscript books right from the second/eighth century on, are chiefly recognisable by the way they introduce, in varying proportions, sharp angles in features that in naskhī would be handled as curves; this is particularly true of the letter nūn in an isolated or terminal position, as well as the ‘heads’ of letters such as fā’, qāf, and mīm (see illus. 42). A greater number of examples survive from the third/ninth century, when the various versions – some clearly related to ‘composed’ scripts51 while others should be described as ‘chirodicular’52 – were in use throughout the world of Islam. With the exception of certain ornamental styles that have survived down to the present in what might be termed a fossilised form, ‘Abbasīd book hands are attested in dated manuscripts extending from the third/ninth to the seventh/thirteenth centuries.53

Although the main lines of the evolution of this group have been partly studied, its typology remains incomplete; major advances in this field are unlikely to occur until progress has been made in the systematic location of dated manuscripts copied in the given variations of ‘Abbasīd book hands. Furthermore, these scripts had an influence on the styles described below; indeed, manuscripts whose hand has been labelled naskhī raise the question of the existence of transitional forms.

Later chirodicular hands

Problems

As Jan Just Wittam has pointed out,54 the group of scripts most widely encountered is also the one most resistant to palaeographic analysis – or at least most successful in discouraging even tentative attempts at analysis. Yet this

immense category is ultimately the one to which we must assign the scripts of primary interest to publications dealing with calligraphy, where readers encounter various names designating scripts which imply that a basic typology has been established. The criticism made by A. D. H. Bivar with reference to inscriptions might be applied to manuscripts: 'Arabic manuals of calligraphy, followed by several recent commentators, apply special terms (ghulth, muhabbah, rayhān, rub'a and so on) to varieties of Nashī script; yet since the application of these terms to successive periods is inconsistent, and the categories appearing on monuments do not always correspond, it is safer to use only the more general term.' Apart from the bias introduced by the ahistorical nature of these terms, their major drawback is the absence of a clear, widely accepted definition of the styles to which they apply.

For the immediate future, we probably have to resign ourselves to a lack of a typology capable of accounting for the diversity of these scripts. The best method to follow is probably to establish coherent groups, even though this remains no easy task, owing partly to the dearth of catalogues of dated manuscripts and partly to the comparative rarity of indications of geographical origin in manuscripts.

Special domains

The use of one style in preference to another stems, as has been noted, from precise rules. This observation, which pertains to calligraphic scripts, should persuade palaeographers not to overlook approaches based on a specific domain of text. For page layout, analysis of the manuscript traditions for a given technical text in various languages suggests that the relationship between illustrations and text survived the changes wrought by translation. In the case of al-Nuṣayris Mushafas Kitāb Wasiyya al-Ra'īsyya fi masā'il al-Hiṣāyya, mentioned above, strong similarities between various versions emerge, which Rudolf Sellheim attributes to the influence of a model. Although continuities of this kind may be brought to light, we cannot exclude the possibility that the 'marker' role sometimes played by Arabic writing translated into the adoption, at a given moment, of a particular style for copies of a text or set of texts relating to the same sphere. The Qur'ān represents a particularly striking example of this tendency (see illus. 40 and 41); given the number of copies available for all periods combined, the Qur'ān constitutes a special palaeographical domain of its own. It is possible that the same approach could be extended to other fields.

Furthermore, one must remain alert to possible shifts from one use to another, sometimes outside the realm of manuscript books. Nashī', for example, refers to 'Egyptian nasīh', without specifying how it differs from 'Iraqi nasīh'. Special types and regional variants are not mutually exclusive, as seems to be demonstrated by bihaṭ, apparently a largely Qur'ānic script specific to Islamic India between the ninth/tenth and the tenth/sixteenth centuries.

Furthermore, groups of scripts that may display a strong identity, such as Māḥī, have not inspired further studies intended to identify major stages or variants; at best it has been suggested that technical particularities explain the various forms of this script. Nor has that suggestion, one linked precisely to the observation of a regional quality, spurred subsequent research, even though it might be profitably related to recent analyses of nastaʿlīq, according to which the structure of Persian and the sequencing of letters specific to it may have influenced the emergence of that specific style (see illus. 65 and 66).

Appendix: diacritical marks and orthoepic signs

The use of diacritical marks and other indications of pronunciation varies considerably from manuscript to manuscript, and from language to language. The text of the Qur'ān, however, was the object of special attention, and

surviving materials reveal the advances made during the early centuries of the Hijra. It is nevertheless difficult to resolve the thorny issue of when such marks were inscribed, especially notations made in a different colour from the main one in which the text is written.

Diacritical marks

Origins

Even the earliest known documents in Arabic script already have diacritical marks to distinguish homographs, although used sparingly, they show that this additional feature was known to Arab scribes from an early date and so may continue a tradition established in the Nabataean and Syriac scripts. The oldest Qur'āns confirm this observation, since the team of copyists who transcribed Paris fragment BNF arabe 328a inserted diacritical marks, though the copyists involved differed as to which letters required dotting.

These marks were considered to be part of the script and were therefore written in the same line as the text (exclusions exist, but are sometimes later additions). Their form varies; in early, thick-lined hands they may be rendered as fine strokes, but the scribes of the oldest extant Qur'ānic fragments, in Hājīrī style, used dots. When used in twos or threes, the respective position of the dots may vary: the three dots above alusūn may not always be placed in a triangle as is usual, but in a line so that each 'denticle' bears a line or dot above it, ʿalā and ʿāsi are topped by dots or lines in a vertical or diagonal column, and the same formation may also be found beneath the letter ʿadd.

The letters fāʿ and qāf

Finally, there are different ways to dot the letters fāʿ and qāf. In the Maghribi, it is still common to mark fāʿ with one dot below, qāf with one dot above. Early Qur'ānic fragments dating from the late first/seventh or early second/eighth centuries confirm the antiquity of this practice. Although the origin of these fragments has not been determined, it would seem that they were copied outside the Maghrib, which would imply that this dotting system was originally known well beyond the confines of the Islamic west. Other fragments from the same period use an opposite method, the dot being placed above fāʿ and below qāf. To this latter category one should probably add other early fragments in which only fāʿ had a diacritical mark – a line over the letter – so that qāf was recognisable by the absence of a mark.

Special cases

Apart from these well known practices, rarer or more complex systems may reflect either regional peculiarities or a concern for precision on the part of scribes. Such cases concern homographic pairs: dāl–ḥālā, nāʿa–ṣīn, sād–ṣadd, tāʿ–ṭā, ʾayn–gham and hāʾ–ḥāʾ (the letter fiʿl apparently remaining a case apart). The member of each pair that normally bore no mark might be indicated by a miniature version of the same letter placed above or below it, or by a special sign, or by inverting the position of the diacritical mark. These various systems were not mutually exclusive in so far as they appear to

67 Fragment from Egypt (and copied in Egypt?) reflect this practice; see Chicago Oriental Institute A 6969, A 6968, A 6992, and A 7001, reproduced in Abbott, op. cit., pp. 64-65, nos. 7, 8, 10 and 15; also Paris BNF arabe 328a, 330f, 332g, 739f, 794f, 795f, 797f, in Dīrēkhi, Cai, Si, trans. 68 Chicago Oriental Institute 6999, in Abbott, op. cit., p. 60, no. 1; Istanbul, CK 4 and M 1, in Karayi, op. cit., p. 7, no. 2; Paris, BNF arabe 328a, 330f, 332g, 739f, 794f, 795f, 797f, in Dīrēkhi, Cai, Si, trans. St. Petersburg IOS E 20, in E. Berezov, "The Qur'ān and its world. VI. Emergence of the Canon: the struggle for uniformity", Manuscriptus Orientalis 4/2 (1998), p. 24. For Istanbul TMS 3, in Karayi, op. cit., p. 3; Vienna ONB A Perg. 397 in H. Lobscheid, Keine Fragmente auf Pergament aus der Papierausstellung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek [Mittellungen aus der Papierausstellung der ÖNB, Neue Serie, XIV. Folge] (Vienna, 1962), pp. 42-43, no. 10. See also MSS. Istanbul Volviyazari E 319, dated 2893 AH, in R. Isem, "Les caractéristiques de l'écriture de quatre manuscrits du IVe. H.un. s. AD", Mos. du MO, p. 45, fig. 1, A and PI. IVa, Leipzig UB V. 505, dated 380/990, in Wright, op. cit., pl. VII and IAMMOD 94, Leipzig UB V. 510, dated 472/1080 (IAMMOD 153); Oxford Bodleian Hist. 228, dated 363/974 (2) in Wright, op. cit., pl. XII and St. Petersburg IOS B 876, dated 587/1919, in New York: 1995, p. 46. Gabriel Sionia and John Horsotnia describe this system in their Grammatica arabica Magrebicae... (Paris, 1646, p. 60), a reduced shape of the letter is written below the letter ʿadd, ʿin, ʿadd, ʿadd, ʿadd and ʿadd; the isolated or final ʿadd is differentiated from the feminine ending (ʿadd muṭriʿa) by a small ʿadd written above it. 71 In MS. London BL Add. 19357, dated 396/1008, a semi-circle is placed above the letters qāf, ʿayn, ʿin and ʿadd. See Wright, op. cit., pl. XLVII. Sionia and Horsotnia mention a sign looking like a short gama (ṣinu) the ʿadd and ʿin, less frequently above the ʿadd (ḥadd.). 72 The diacritical marks placed above a letter that was normally dotted would be placed below the analogous one that normally lacked them. See MSS. Istanbul Süleymaniye Gûrûlî 1508, dated 327/938, published in Şeney, op. cit., p. 46, fig. 1, B; Oxford Bodleian Hist. 228, dated 363/974 (2), in Wright, op. cit., pl. XX; Leipzig UB V. 595, dated 380/990, in Wright, op. cit., pl. VII and IAMMOD 94; London BL Add. 19357, dated 396/1008, in Wright, op. cit., pl. XLVII, and Berlin SB Sprunger 1184, copied in 502/1108 (IAMMOD 386). According to Sionia and Horsotnia, such a dot occurs below ʿadd, ʿadd and ʿadd. In the Yemen, inverted diacriticals of this type have been attested (see for example IAMMOD 333, Zabid 66/1214-15) and survived until a relatively late date, according to information supplied by G.R. Pinn.
be specific, at least in part, to given letters; thus a miniature letter sometimes accompanied ḍāʾ or āyn, while a subscript dot identified ḍāl, ṣāʾ or ḡāʾ. The dated manuscripts in which such marks appear enable us to assign these systems to the period between the third/ninth and fifth/eleventh centuries.

Vocalic and orthoepic signs

By the time Islam arose, the notation of vowels was a problem to which Syriac, a script similar to Arabic in some respects, had already provided some answers. Vocalisation was designed to meet the need to transmit the Qurʾān in manuscript form with precision, and signs foreign to the ṭirmān (or ‘consonantal skeleton’) had to be clearly distinguished from it.

Vowel points

The earliest system used red dots whose position vis-à-vis the base letter indicated the vowel quality: ḍafṣa was indicated by a dot above the letter, ḍarrā below the letter, and ḍammasa slightly to the left (see illus. 41); when duplicated, the dots note the tanwin (-an, -in or -an, according to case).77 It is hard to determine the period in which this innovation was introduced, because the use of red ink implies that the addition of vowel markings was a separate process from the copying of the consonantal text; and that makes it impossible to determine how much time elapsed between writing and vocalising the earliest Qurʾāns in which this system is found.78 The use of such a system does not appear to have obeyed fixed criteria: manuscripts in a palaeographically homogeneous group may vary considerably in the proportion of letters that are vocalised.79 A few marginal variants appear, mainly concerning the use of other colours including gold and silver.80 In one instance, three different colours are used, the dots being gold, green or red depending on whether they denoted ḍafṣa, ḍarrā, or ḍammasa respectively.77 A mark in the form of a more or less regular diamond appears in Paris fragment BNF arabe 334a; the vocalisation was written with the tip of a reed pen.82 Coloured vowel points, probably in use by the second/eighth century,83 were still being employed in the sixth/seventh century,84 and perhaps survived somewhat longer.85

Orthoepic points

The system was improved when different colours were assigned to the notation of other aspects of pronunciation. Thus ḍammasa was indicated by a dot that was usually green86 or, more rarely, yellow.87 Some manuscripts show that ḍammasa and vocalisation were combined by positioning the point according to the same rules used for vowels. Indications of shadda are less frequent, and that may account for variations in the colour of the dot representing it (which sometimes also had a vocalic value).88 Subhān (a sign representing the absence of any vowel) rarely figures in early Qurʾānic manuscripts.89 These more elaborate marks seem to have been employed less often than vowel points themselves, the reason for their lack of success being that competing systems, similar to the ones currently in use, were beginning to spread at the time. Furthermore, in early Qurʾānic manuscripts vocalised with points, ḍammasa and shadda may also be indicated by a coloured semi-circle,90 or by the symbol still current today.91

77 See Paris fragment BNF arabe 348e, in Deroche, Cat. II, p. 87, no. 71. MS. Istanbul TKS H.1.21 employs gold dots for a and i, while a gold sawe denotes u. See Karayi, op. cit., p. 23, no. 67. 78 Deroche, Cat. I, p. 79, no. 50. 79 Endress, op. cit., p. 179 points out that by the mid-second/eighteenth century letters and yamūd were being used to indicate the vocalisation of these vocalic signs; this would seem to corroborate the manuscript evidence. 80 So see MS. Paris BNF Smith-Lezay 214, dated 316/1213, in Deroche, Cat. I, p. 137, no. 247, and FUMMAD 2. The earliest dated Qurʾānic manuscripts in Maghribi script (993/1088 and 432/1040) are vocalised with red dots; see P. Deroche, Dix fragments consacrés maghribins anciens au Musée des arts turcs et islamiques d’Istanbul, RIS 59 (1993), p. 251. 81 A fragment from Yemen, published by J.J. Witak (‘Manuscrits & manuscrits [6] Qurʾān fragments from Dawārin [Yemen]’, AIME 4 [1989], p. 159, no. 19 and fig. 15), is noteworthy for its use of vocalisation points that seem similar to the system used in early Qurʾāns even though it is a late copy (sixteenth/seventeenth century ca). 82 It is in green in Paris fragments BNF arabe 322a, 359, 380d, 348a, 348d, 351, 182c, etc. See Deroche, Cat. I, passim. 83 As found in Paris fragments BNF arabe 348a, 698a, and 374d, in Deroche, Cat. I, p. 86, no. 67, p. 74, no. 43 and p. 140, no. 256. 84 It may be indicated by a dot in yellow (Paris fragments BNF arabe 347a and 377a, in Deroche, Cat. I, p. 153, no. 162 and p. 136, no. 342), orange (Paris fragment BNF arabe 332e, Deroche, Cat. II, p. 98, no. 113) or blue (Paris fragment BNF arabe 3170, in Deroche, Cat. I, p. 96, no. 110). 85 It appears in Paris fragment BNF arabe 356l in the form of a yellow circle when it occurs at the end of a word or as a yellow semi-circle when within the word. See Deroche, Cat. I, p. 117, no. 174. 86 A semi-circle might be used to note both ḍammasa and shadda (Paris fragment BNF arabe 349c, in Deroche, Cat. I, p. 73, no. 36) or shadda only (in red, as seen in Paris fragment BNF arabe 6982, or added in green, as in Paris fragment BNF Arabe 337c; see Deroche, Cat. I, p. 74, no. 43 and p. 109, no. 165). In MS. Istanbul Numunmasiya 23, written in Palermo in 572/1176–83, shadda is indicated either by a red semi-circle or by the modern symbol; see Deroche, Abūd bin Thabit Tradition, pp. 146-151. 87 See Loudon fragment N. D. Kholid Collection of Islamic Art (FTQ) 89, where ḍammasa and shadda have modern forms and are marked in green and blue respectively; Deroche, Abūd Tradition, pp. 109–110, no. 27.
Islamic Calligraphy: An Introduction to the Study of Manuscripts in Arabic Script

The modern system
The vocalisation system in use today was developed rather later on: it first appears during the third/ninth century, as exemplified by a manuscript dated 280/893 (Istanbul Süleymaniye Veliyedim Efendi 3139). In the Qur'an manuscripts this system was adopted in the following century. Its status as an appendage to the rasm was still strongly felt, for in many manuscripts from the Arab Muslim East vowels were still marked in red in the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries (see illus. 42), a tradition that endured longer in the Islamic west.

Other orthoepic signs were introduced in a progressive fashion, as evidenced by the many 'mixed' manuscripts, in which vowel points coexist with modern forms of hamza, shadda, and sukun. In the Maghrib, these signs sometimes retained the particular colours that had been assigned to them in earlier systems of vocalisation, an approach attested as early as the fifth/eleventh century in the famous Qur'an of the Nurse' (al-Hidah).

Books and their Ornamentation

The study of decoration: ends and means

Even before the advent of the Muslim religion, decorating manuscripts was already a well-established practice in the birthplace of Islam. Very early on, its practitioners were embellishing the books they copied, a habit that stirred up a lively debate in the community concerning what was permissible and what forbidden. The best-known facet of this argument concerns the representation of living beings: their prohibition did not in practice, however, altogether preclude manuscripts with paintings from being produced. This important question continues to be discussed today and is the object of a great deal of research that has thrown up some extremely interesting findings. It is important to note that whereas in the study of European manuscripts "illumination" often means (or includes) "illustration", in Islamic studies the two are invariably distinguished.

In line with the perspective of the present volume, the following account of illumination aims above all to aid description and further understanding. It is a subject that would benefit from greater uniformity in the application of technical terms. The usage of common expressions - frontispiece or of sarcophagi, for example - has not yet been fixed even among specialists; depending on the author concerned, the same word may denote something different. In future it would be helpful to establish conventions governing usage, but in the meantime the guiding principle must be for writers to try to ensure that they apply their own usage consistently.

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88 See, op. cit., p. 45 and pl. IV A. It is also found in MS. Dublin CIL 3494, dated 279/892; see A. J. Arberry, The Chester Beatty Library: a handlist of the Arabic manuscripts, vol. II (Dublin, 1956), p. 108 and pl. 68. 89 Later additions to early copies are always difficult to detect. This situation arises notably in MS. Dublin CIL 1417, written before 929/905, in which both vocalisation systems co-exist; see A. J. Arberry, "A Koran in 'Persian' Kufi", Oriental College Magazine 40/3-4 (1964), pp. 9-16, and James, Q. and R., p. 26, no. 12. Other examples appear in Paris fragments BNF arabe 332 and 542a; Dörnle, Car. I, p. 77, note 47 and p. 112, no. 150. 90 A fragment datable to the early fourteenth century, Paris BNF arabe 383a, bears modern signs in red, but it is difficult to tell whether or not they are later additions; Dörnle, Car. I, p. 137, no. 245. 91 See, for example, MSS. Paris BNF arabe 575, dated 1194/1780, BNF arabe 576, dated 1195/1781, and BNF arabe 589, circa 1242/1832-27; Dörnle, Car. II, pp. 44-45, nos. 325, 326 and 328. 92 The form and use of these symbols were somewhat unsystematic in the early days: Wright, op. cit. pl., XLVII, analyses these variations in his commentary on MS. London BL. Add. 19557.

1 This chapter was written by Muhammad Isha'at Waley, with contributions from François Desroche. 2 For an initial approach, see J. Weinstock, T. Pahl., E. IX, pp. 889-892, e.t. "Sûra". 3 This term should be reserved for a title accompanied by decoration, though the meanings given it by authors are much more varied. 4 Gacke, AMT, p. 67. Certain authorities hold that the sâbâhâb is a reasonably large illuminated panel placed at the beginning of a text or section of a text, it contrasts with "hārâf", a word applied to bands occupying less than a quarter of the surface area of the page. Here, the term sâbâhâb refers to a title band or heading.