CHAPTER ONE

Penmanship and Painting in Early Qur’āns

Almost all early surviving Qur’āns are written in square scripts, the most famous of which is known as kufic, after the Iraqi city of Kufa. Early kufic is characterized by its horizontal emphasis, with few strokes taken below the base line. Kufic was used by calligraphers to copy out the text of the Holy Qur’ān until well into the tenth century in most parts of the Islamic world. A later variant, known as eastern kufic, introduces oblique elements, and makes considerable play of the contrast between thick and thin pen strokes. In Iran various forms of eastern kufic continued in use until the twelfth century. However, more cursive styles were to become standard for writing the main body of the text of the Holy Qur’ān from the eleventh century onwards.

Although there is little doubt that Qur’āns in cursive scripts existed in the tenth century, our earliest example still remains the Ibn al-Bawwāb Qur’ān, copied in Baghdad in 901. This complete Qur’ān, together with its addenda which enumerate the number of verses, letters and other details in the Qur’ān, shows how single-volume Qur’ān manuscripts of the period looked in terms of their page organization, illumination and marginalia. The manuscript was the subject of a detailed study by D.S. Rice, whose conclusions have never been seriously challenged. We can therefore take it as a firm point of reference from which to begin studying the Qur’āns in cursive scripts before the Mamluk period. Here we shall use it to establish the basic vocabulary of our survey.

Scripts

The manuscript is written in Ibn al-Bawwāb’s inimitable Nashīr hand, using a calamus with square-cut nib. There are no impressed lines on the page to act as guide-lines for the calligrapher, but some aid must have been used to measure the lines of text. It was usual, certainly in later times, for paper to be pressed on to a misharah (a sheet of thick paper

Fig. 1. CB 1431, folios 28r.

Frontpiece of the Ibn al-Bawwāb Qur’ān. These pages occupy an intermediate stage in the development of Qur’ān illumination, introducing some new colours such as red, and new motifs, like the palmette-tree shapes, but essentially reproducing the older designs of kufic Qur’ān frontispieces in vertical rather than horizontal format.
Naskh is one of the hands for which Ibn al-Bawwāb was renowned, and the nasikh of this, his only surviving Qurʾān, is of a distinctive type which can be identified in manuscripts over the next two hundred years or more. It is not the type used in Mamluk naskhi Qurʾāns of the fourteenth century, which appears to have originated in twelfth-century Syria. Instead, the nasikh of Ibn al-Bawwāb seems to be associated with areas east of Baghdad, of which there are several examples in manuscripts produced during a period stretching from 1001 to 1195.3

In Syria, on the other hand, we have a nasikh hand of a bold, compact type with deep sweeping curves below the line of script, especially in the case of the letter mān. We can see it in a Qurʾān in the Keir Collection, bequeathed by Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Zakki to the

threaded across with thin cord] which left a faint impression of guide-lines on the page. The text itself is fully vocalized throughout, using a system attributed to Khalīl ibn Ahmad (d.786), which is still in use today. In addition to this, the unpointed letters of the Arabic alphabet are accompanied by smaller versions above or below—a convention which continued for several centuries—these should not be confused with letters written in ink of a different colour and employed as an aid to correct recitation, which do not appear in this Qurʾān.

At this point we should take note of the various Qurʾānic calligraphic hands that were used in the eastern Islamic world and Egypt from the time of Ibn al-Bawwāb to the end of the fourteenth century. We can divide these into two groups: those that were used for copying out the text of the Holy Qurʾān—nasikh, muhaqqaq and rasūl; and those that were used for inscriptions such as sūrah headings, colophons and all other complementary written material—tawqīṭ, ṭiğā, thuluth and kufic. Each of these main Qurʾānic hands existed in several forms; taking Ibn al-Bawwāb’s in the 1001 Qurʾān as the “norm” for nasikh, we should point out that smaller and lighter types exist, such as the nasikh of the Yaqt Qurʾāns, as well as more cursive ones such as those to be found in Cat.4, and a manuscript in the Keir Collection dated 1169.2
Kufic
A "classic" example of this bold, imposing script in which the width of the strokes is constant throughout. The alif sweeps back to the right while diacritics are in the form of short strokes and vowels in the form of coloured dots.
Near East, 10th century. Chester Beatty Ms. 1422.

Decorative Kufic
Kufic used in the fourteenth century has more diagonal movement and employs the same diacritics and vowel system of the cursive hands. Baghdad, 1302-6. Cat. 39.

Naskh
i) The hand of ibn al-Bawwab. Naskh is basically cursive, though here the semi-circular strokes are flattened out slightly in the manner of muhaqqiq. Baghdad, 1001. Chester Beatty Ms. 1431.

ii) Mamlûk naskh. In the first two decades of the fourteenth century manuscripts in Egypt and Syria were often copied in a robust, fully-developed cursive hand, of which this is an excellent example. Cairo, circa 1310. Cat. 4.

Rayhûn
An example of medium rayhûn by Arghûn âl-Kâmîlî, one of the recorded masters of this hand. Verticals are long and thin, tapering to a point in the case of final fâns, kaf and alif. The uprights of the definite article—alif- láw—usually end in pronounced spikes. Vowels are finely written in a different pen. Cat. 66.

Muhaqqiq
The main Qur'anic hand, in which all semi-circular letters are entirely flattened out. Cairo, circa 1370-75. Cat. 13.

Muhaqqiq Gâfî
The same characteristics as muhaqqiq but much larger in size and often outlined in gold. It did not appear in Mamlûk Qur'âns until the second half of the fourteenth century. CB 1628.

Thulût
A cursive hand, usually found in large format, though small varieties occur. It is rarely used for the main body of the Qur'anic text, and this example is the best known. It is a variant described as thulût arâkîâ, that is, thulût outlined in hair-lined strokes. Cairo, 1304-6. Cat. 1.
Fig. 5: Keir VII 3-4, Sūrah V, Al-Mī'ādīth (The Table), Juz' 123. Sūrah VI, Al-Asr'ām (Cattle), Jawwāf, Damascus, 1167.

Niṣrāb of a distinctly cursive type which appears to have endured well into the Mamlūk period and is found both later Egyptian and Syrian Qur'āns. The marginal medallion marks 2 decades of verses in the text.

Madrash Ḥanāfiyyah in Damascus in 1167. The same calligrapher produced a Qur'ān commentary, now in the National Library, Cairo, the script of which resembles muḥaqqaq, but whose certificate of endorsement is written in the same niṣrāb as the Keir manuscript. It is this type of script that we find used in Mamlūk Qur'āns during the first half of the fourteenth century. The Keir manuscript is the earliest example, while the latest is found in a Qur'ān copied in 1338, now in the Iran-Istanbul Museum (Cat. 20).

In the second half of the thirteenth century a number of Qur'āns in rayḥān appear, all associated with the famous master Yāqūt al-Mustaṣfī who died in 1298. It is as yet impossible to say how many are in fact by the great calligrapher, but several are illuminated in an unquestionably thirteenth or early fourteenth-century style. The scripts employed in these Qur'āns are either small rayḥān (rayḥān daqiq), or niṣrāb. Both small and large rayḥān hands are employed in later fourteenth-century Iranian Qur'āns, though scarcely ever in Mamlūk ones. Rayḥān, in any shape or form, does not seem to have been popular in Mamlūk Egypt or Syria. Of the handful of manuscripts known to us in “Mamlūk” rayḥān, at least one was produced by an illuminator who had strong links with Iran.

In addition to niṣrāb and rayḥān, the monumental scripts thulth and muḥaqqaq appear in Qur'āns surviving from the middle of the twelfth century. The earliest example of a Qur'ān in muḥaqqaq would appear to be one in the National Library, Cairo, which Lings and Safadi associate with Baghdad because the family of the calligrapher, Mas'ūd b. Muhammad al-Khānī b. al-Ḫafṣaynī, was living there in 1166 when the Qur'ān was completed. Muḥaqqaq is employed together with a smaller, rayḥān-type script in a Qur'ān, now in the Chester Beatty Library, which was completed somewhere in Iran in 1186. This is the first example of the large and small script combined on the same page. It was a technique that became increasingly popular in Iran and then in Turkey, but rarely in any Arabic-speaking country. By the beginning of the fourteenth century muḥaqqaq had become the main script used for copying the Holy Qur'ān in most parts of the Islamic world, but in Mamlūk Egypt it did not come into its own until after the second half of that century, although scattered examples occur as early as 1320.

The superbly-written examples of the Holy Qur'ān in monumental scripts which appear first in Iraq and Iran, and more hesitantly in Egypt, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, reach their apogee in Cairo during the second half of that century, and belong to the Mamlūk, Il-Khāniḍ and, to a lesser extent, Timūrid periods. In the east, many of these examples are associated with various pupils of Yāqūt, though strangely not a single example is dated before the death of the great master in 1298. Examples of distinctive monumental hands which can be traced from the thirteenth century into the fourteenth are extremely rare, and occur only in the case of a small number of unusual types. The thulth-ṣāb' of Ibn al-Walīd in the Baybars al-Jahānghīr Qur'ān, copied in Cairo in 1304-05 (Cat. 1), was never again used for a Qur'ānic text, as far as we know, though it was frequently employed for sīrah headings. There is, however, another example in a fine multi-part Qur'ān which is now dispersed. This employs an identical thulth-ṣāb' in miniature. The surviving portions are unsigned and undated, but their illumination suggests an Iranian, rather than Egyptian provenance. There are also examples of thulth and thulth-muḥaqqaq written large but with a narrow calamus of a vibrant, animated, if ungainly, appearance. The earliest manuscript of this type is a Qur'ān in the Bibliothèque Nationale, made in Ḵezrābād between 1320 and 1325. Later examples are undoubtedly of Eastern Anatolian origin, though Iranian and even Indian provences have been suggested.

Divisions of the Text

From earliest times the Qur'ānic text was divided into thirty sections, aṣṣā' (sing. aṣṣa'). A aṣṣa' is therefore one thirtieth part of the text of the Holy Qur'ān. As the text contains both long and short sūrah, some aṣṣā' contain many sūrah while others may consist of only part of a sūrah. In the Ibn al-Bawwāb manuscript these divisions are clearly marked in the margin by spidery inscriptions in gold thulth stating the number of the aṣṣa' in both thirtieths and sixtieths. Each seventh division of the text, sub (pl. asḥāb), is also marked. Halves and quarters of each thirty-part division are not marked, though it later became common practice to do so. By far the most popular form of the Holy Qur'ān was the single volume. The majority of Mamlūk Qur'āns are of this type. But Qur'ānic texts were frequently divided into sections forming separate volumes. The most common format was one of thirty, which were usually boxed in a container, asḥāb; next was one of quarters; and lastly sevenths, though these are rare. Very occasionally Qur'āns were divided into two equal halves, or even into sixtieths. Whenever they were produced in separate parts, each one
opened with a double-page of illumination. In the earliest examples the opening pages of the first volume.

The Ibn al-Bawwab Qur'an is copied out using fifteen lines to the page. Cursive Qur'ans are always copied in odd numbers of lines, usually eleven, thirteen or fifteen, though sometimes as few as three. In earlier times kufic Qur'ans were copied in both odd and even numbers of lines. The text is divided into ayat which may consist of several sentences in the Holy Qur'an, alternatively a sentence may be divided into several ayat. Thus ayah does not have exactly the same meaning as "verse" in English. The ayat in the Ibn al-Bawwab Qur'an are separated by dots in clusters of three, an archaic habit which goes back several centuries. In later times it became customary to use a small rosette or shamsah. Every fifth ayah ends in a gold letter ha, the sign for the numeral five, and each tenth ayah in a circle bearing the letter which is the decimal equivalent. The use of a gold letter ha in the text of later Qur'ans to indicate the end of five ayat is relatively frequent, but the use of decimal letters is much rarer. Nevertheless, it occurs in one outstanding fourteenth-century manuscript which was also produced in Baghdad (Cat. 49).

In the Ibn al-Bawwab Qur'an the end of every tenth ayah is also marked by a circular ornament in the margin, bearing the relevant number written in kufic script on a coloured ground with white dots. Each ornament has a gold border divided into segments with a final outer border of hair-lines radiating outwards. Circular medallions to indicate each tenth ayah, or multiples of ten, are common in most Qur'ans from the eighth century onwards, and it was usual to employ kufic script within them, especially for those indicating the fifth and the tenth ayah. By the end of the tenth century the text of the Holy Qur'an was written everywhere, except in Iraq, in cursive scripts, but kufic was retained for saurah headings and marginal ornaments until the sixteenth century. Circular medallions bearing the word sajda recorded at points in the text where ritual prostration is required. No standard symbol was ever adopted for the sajda mark, and illuminators either used variants of the ayah-marker medallions, or devised their own.

**Illumination**

The Ibn al-Bawwab Qur'an follows the pattern established in previous Qur'ans by illuminating the beginning of each surah. The Holy Qur'an is divided into 114 surahs, the meaning of which is not "chapter" but "degree" or "step". In earliest times the individual surahs were unmarked, but before the end of the first Islamic century the close of a surah was shown by a band of crude decoration. Manuscripts recently discovered in Spanish suggest that this decoration had become extremely elaborate by the end of the Umayyad period, at one time with an emphasis on architectural features but without inscriptions, which came later. In the Ibn al-Bawwab Qur'an, surah titles are in gold thuluth and written on an unadorned ground with only a palmette medallion in the margin. The inscription, in each case, gives the name of the surah, the number of ayat, and place of its revelation, Mecca or Medina. There were two methods of presenting surah headings, and both seem to have gone back to at least the ninth century. One was to write the title and verse-count with only a palmette, or similar piece of decoration, in the margin. The other was to set the title into a band of decoration stretching across the page and finishing with a palmette. The titles, whether framed or not, were always in kufic, usually in gold. The Ibn al-Bawwab Qur'an is the first example of surah titles in a cursive script. The script is thuluth, but with many of the ligatures found in scripts such as tawqi and riqa. Both kufic and several varieties of thuluth continued to be used in surah headings for a few hundred years, the former gradually dying out in the eastern Islamic world by the sixteenth century. Considerable freedom was permitted with kufic after it had ceased to be used for the text of the Holy Qur'an, and in Mamluk times it became increasingly more idiosyncratic.

The text of the Ibn al-Bawwab Qur'an begins in a simple manner. Suraat al-Fatiha is written at the top of folio 10 verso in four lines of script. This is surmounted by the surah title over a band of arabesque scrolls and surrounded by a strapwork border. Suraat al-Baqarah begins immediately underneath, with its title presented in a similar way. The idea of devoting an entire page to al-Fatiha and another to the opening five ayat of al-Baqarah seems to have arisen in the tenth century, but Ibn al-Bawwab did not adopt it. A somewhat earlier Qur'an in Eastern kufic script illustrates this alternative. In the first quarter (ninth) of a manuscript in the Chester Beatty Library, dated 972, the first two surahs of the Qur'anic text begin on opposite pages with a decorated title above each. In the eleventh century an entirely new format for the opening pages came into existence where they were elaborately framed on all sides. Sometimes the two systems were amalgamated, as we can see in a Qur'an dated 1036. There the pages are laid out after the manner of the Ibn al-Bawwab Qur'an but framed on all sides with a large inscription at the top of the left-hand page to counterbalance the title of al-Fatiha. This method continued until the end of the thirteenth century, and can be seen in some of the manuscripts bearing the name of Yaqt al-Musta'jin. By the beginning of the fourteenth century the format of opening pages was largely standardized. The texts of al-Fatiha and the opening verses of al-Baqarah were written in rectangular panels over decorated grounds with panels above and below, the
upper ones bearing the titles and verse-counts. The vast majority of fourteenth-century manuscripts use this format for the opening pages of both single and multiple volume Qur’ans. However, it took some time for this to develop, and one can still find archaic methods of presentation in the fourteenth century.

One area where a change did occur was in the presentation of the verse-count or numbers of āyāt in the Holy Qur’an, which was often written at the beginning of a manuscript. The verse-count given in Ibn al-Bawwāb’s Qur’an is that of Kūfah, which had the authority of ‘All ibn Abī Tālib. Several others existed, which took their names from various cities: Kūfah, Baṣra, Damascus, Medīnah, Mekka, but it was that of Kūfah which obtained the widest acceptance.7 The Ibn al-Bawwāb manuscript opens with two decorated panels containing, in fourteen separate sections, the verse-count plus the numbers of words, letters and diacritical points, i.e., 114 sūratā, 6,236 āyāt, 77,686 words, 331,230 letters and 156,055 points. These two pages are followed by another two which state that the method of counting follows the manner of the Kūfahs on the authority of the Commander of the Faithful, ‘All. Rice suggested that these pages were devised by Ibn al-Bawwāb, since before his time the verse-count and that of the letters and points were incorporated into the opening pages of illumination. There is at least one kufic Qur’an on vellum where the verse-count is given on the opening illuminated folios. This is an undated manuscript in the British Library.8 The next manuscript we know is the earliest Qur’an on paper, the Chester Beatty manuscript dated 972; here the verse-count is given in two circular insets on the opening pages of illumination. Part of the Ibn al-Bawwāb verse-count is distributed in twelve octagonal rounds. This arrangement, which has parallels in Byzantine and Syriac manuscripts, was extensively employed in Qur’ans in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. By the fourteenth century, however, verse-counts at the beginning of Qur’ans in the Eastern Islamic world had almost entirely disappeared, and there are virtually no Bahri Mamluk Qur’ans with verse-counts at the front.9

The illumination of opening and closing folios took a long time to develop, since the addition of any unnecessary decorative material was opposed by the more orthodox. By the end of the tenth century, however, as the Ibn al-Bawwāb manuscript illustrates, the inclusion of a frontispiece and even of a finispiece had gained acceptance. The designs of frontispieces in Qur’ans of vertical format tended to follow those of earlier horizontal-format kufic Qur’ans until the eleventh century. Colour schemes consisted initially of the same gold, sepia and blue, but by the turn of the tenth century other colours had been introduced, so that the palette of Ibn al-Bawwāb is quite an extensive one, including brown, green, crimson and white. During the next few centuries the number of colours increased, as did their areas of application. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, ɪ̇l-Khānīd Qur’ans are alive with brilliant colour (Cat.39). In Mamluk Egypt and Syria it took rather longer for this to occur, but by the second half of the fourteenth century vivid colour schemes made their appearance.

The frontispiece underwent considerable change between the ninth and fourteenth centuries. That of the Ibn al-Bawwāb Qur’an represents, in many ways, an intermediate stage in which the older designs used in horizontal-format kufic manuscripts are still being employed, but in a new vertical book-shape. As verse-counts gradually ceased to be incorporated into the frontispiece, certain Qur’anic āyāt began to be included. Most popular were al-Waqī’ah (LVI, 77-80), and al-Burāq (LXXV, 21-22), the former, by tradition, often being stamped on the outsides of book-covers.

Documentation

Ibn al-Bawwāb ends his Qur’an with a colophon in which he gives his name, the date and the place of production. In early times there was no hard-and-fast rule about colophons: indeed, signed and/or dated examples are unknown before the tenth century. Even when it became relatively common for such information to be given, the place of production was hardly ever mentioned. This scarcity of basic data has always hampered the study of manuscript illumination in the Islamic world before the Mongol invasion, although to some extent certificates of commissioning and endowment compensate for this. In the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries there are several examples of illuminators as well as scribes signing manuscripts. In the Chester Beatty Ms 1430, for example, the name of the calligrapher, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Jabālī al-T (the latter part of the name is indecipherable), and the illuminator, Ṭād al-Raḥīm ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣūfī, are written in imposing panels above
CHAPTER TWO

The Baḥrī Mamlūks

The Mamlūks were the rulers of Egypt and Syria from 1250 until the Ottoman conquest in 1516-17. The period of their rule is usually divided into two: that of the so-called dawlat al-turk, the Turkish State, and that of the dawlat al-jurjās, the Circassian State. In reality there was little difference between them. The Mamlūks of the former were nizāmīs al-baḥrīyyah, the Baḥrī Mamlūks, whose name was derived from their barracks on the island of Roda on the Nile, known in Egypt as al-baḥr, literally “the sea.” They were Kipchak-speaking Turks originating from the area around the Caspian, with a mixture of Mongol, Greek and Slav, and had originally been the elite corps of the Ayyūbīd army, acquired mostly through purchase.

The Mamlūks seized control of Egypt and then Syria in 1249, after the death of the last effective Ayyūbīd ruler, al-Ṣāḥīḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb. They accepted no system of hereditary succession which meant that each new ruler was preceded by a struggle for power often involving considerable violence between rival factions. Nevertheless, in the early years, at least, this principle of the “survival of the fittest” brought a number of extremely able rulers to the fore. Three in particular stand out: Baybars I (1260-77), Qalāūn (1279-90) and al-Nāṣir Muhammad (1293, with two short breaks, until 1341). Between the death of Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb and the accession of al-Nāṣir Muhammad the Mamlūks stopped the westward advance of the Mongols and totally defeated the last of the Crusaders in Palestine. Both of these events were extremely important for the future history of the Islamic world. In addition Baybars re-established the Ḥābībī Caliphate in Cairo, and obtained suzerainty over the Holy Places of Mekka and Medīnah, which, together with their control of Jerusalem, gave weight and credence to the claim of the Mamlūks to be the champions and protectors of Islam. It was Baybars who laid the military and administrative foundations of the state, but it was his trusted aide and successor Qalāūn who established the dynastic foundations, for although hereditary succession had not hitherto been accepted among amir Mamlūks, they placed Qalāūn’s son al-Nāṣir Muhammad on the throne after his father’s death. Despite being forced off the throne twice, al-Nāṣir Muhammad returned in 1310 and ruled until 1341, longer than any other Mamlūk Sultan. Moreover, he was followed, admittedly in quick succession, by all but one of his nine sons, a grandson, and two great-grandsons.

By and large, the reigns of al-Nāṣir Muhammad and his descendants were times of