Taxonomy of scribal errors and corrections in Arabic manuscripts

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It goes without saying that no modern critical edition of a text can ever be published without thorough knowledge not only of the subject matter of the work in question but also a good understanding of the codicological and palaeographical phenomena encountered in Arabic manuscripts. This knowledge should include familiarity with the way manuscripts were transmitted, and the types of errors committed, as well as correction methods used by scribes and scholars. Furthermore, a good grasp of the various abbreviations used in the text and marginalia is fundamental to the correct understanding of the transmitted text. Unfortunately, there exists as yet no systematic study of scribal errors and corrections in Arabic manuscripts, while the information on this subject is scanty and dispersed throughout various works dating from the manuscript age to the contemporary era. What follows therefore is a preliminary survey of scribal errors and corrections in Arabic manuscripts. Before entering, however, into this short analysis it is necessary to recall three important points.

1. Arabic literature, especially the literature on 'ulum al-hadith and adab al-'ulum wa-al-mu'aširat al-ulum provides us with a very interesting picture of how to copy and correct manuscripts. Some of this literature was exposed and surveyed by F. Rosenthal and myself. One important element that emerges from the gathered data is that the collation of the text and the construction of a critical apparatus was deemed essential for the soundness of the transmitted text. The other thing is that medieval scholars could not always agree on the meaning of some of the abbreviations used in manuscripts. For example: the letter َج used to separate one ismā from another was thought by some to have stood for َجَلَل or َجَلَل (‘separation’) and by others for َجَلَل and even َجَلَل. Some scholars even thought that the letter َج should be pointed َجل (kha'1)


2 The soundness or correctness of the text is expressed in Arabic by the word َجَلَل, as opposed to َجَلَل or َجَلَل, faultiness; thus maqāmah َجَلَل (codex sanus) and maqāmah َجَلَل (codex vitiosus).

3 Gacek 1989c, "Technical practices," 56. al-Ja'barī, Rasūl al-tahdīth, 69. The َش can either be understood as the verb َشَجَل (it is sound, correct) or an abbreviation of َشَجَل (Gacek
mu’ānádh) to stand for isnád ákbar (‘another isnád’). The contemporary scholar may face a similar dilemma.

2. Abbreviations in manuscripts are often unpointed and appear sometimes in the form of logographs. Here the context, whether textual or geographical, is of great importance. Thus, for example, what appears to be the letter š may in fact be a š and what appears to be an ‘ayn or ghayn, in its initial (e) or isolated form (ê), may actually be an unpointed sûn and kha’ (for muskhab akhrâ, i.e., ‘another copy’). Similarly, the same word or abbreviation can have two different functions and/or meanings. For example, the words hāshiyah and fas’idab can stand for a gloss or a side-head (noto bene), while the ş or š can be an abbreviation of sahîh (when used for an omission/insertion or evident correction) or asl (‘the body of the text’), or it can stand for dāhhab (‘door-bolt’) – a mark indicating an uncertain reading, and, having, for all intents and purposes, the function of a question mark or sic. Also, the abbreviation š may stand for bayân (‘explanation’) or muskhab akhrâ, the latter often found in manuscripts of Persian/Indian provenance.

3. Apart from the advocated methods of corrections we find a number of systems of abbreviation, which were introduced by individual scholars or came into use in different scholarly circles, periods of time and/or geographical regions. For example, Maghribi scribes and scholars developed a number of features unique to manuscripts of that region. We notice a similar situation in manuscripts produced in central Arab lands in the Ottoman period (10/16th century onwards), as well as in manuscripts produced in the Shi‘ite (i.e., Imani and Zaydî) milieu. Observing the methods employed for the correction of manuscripts can thus be very helpful in determining their provenance.

Collation of the text (mu‘arađah, muqáblâlah)

The critical apparatus in manuscripts is a direct result of the collation of the text. This was done either directly against the exemplar or against both the exemplar and one or two other copies (or more) in the presence of the author/teacher or without it. Some manuscripts, especially from the medieval period, exhibit many characteristics of primitive editions. Depending on the mode of collation Arabic manuscripts may contain a variety of marks and statements. Apart from the words širida (abbrev. š) and qahîla (‘it was collated’) we find in this context a large number of expressions and statements, many of which begin with the word balaqsha (‘he/she reached here’) or balîqsha (‘this point was reached’) or ankabûn/âhâ

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2001, Arabic manuscript tradition, 82; Sellheim 1976, Materialien, 1: 21, 174, 225 and 2: 73. For the sake of uniformity I have used it as sahîh throughout.

4 Ibn Kathir, ḍalîl al-khalîlî, 139.


8 See e.g. Mahâdi 1995, “From the manuscript age,” 10-11.
Abbreviations, logographs and other marks

Abbreviations (‘alamūt, runūz, muṣṭalabāt, istilāḥūt, mukhtāṣarāt) in Arabic manuscripts fall into four main categories: contractions, suspensions, sigla, and abbreviations (logographs). All four types can be found in the body of the text and marginalia. Perhaps the most interesting is the case of suspensions which look like, or were considered by some, as numerals. It has been suggested by some scholars that the figure ‘ stands for the numerical value of al-khali (‘end’, ‘terminus’) or represents a quotation from a work by a Shi‘ite Imam. However, this is not the only combination of ‘signs’ encountered at the end of glosses, as well as the fact that they are often provided with a tilde-like mark (sign of abbreviation), the most likely origin of such ‘numerals’ as ‘, ‘, ‘, ‘ and ‘, which stands for istilāḥ (‘it is a finished’). In other words, they represent unpointed and suspended forms of this phrase. Another case involves the ‘numeral’ ‘, which may (if not a reference mark) actually represent an unpointed and suspended form of the letter ‘, abbreviated form of the letter ‘, comment’. The circular device (dārūd, dā‘irāt), although often just a paragraph mark (divides), and therefore a synonym of istilāḥ, should also be considered carefully. Arabic texts on the written transmission of hadith mention the use of the circle as a collation mark. It appears that sometime in the 5/11th century the circle was used to separate individual hadiths. Arabic sources associate this phenomenon with the Khātāb al-Baghdādi (d. 463/1071) who regarded the existence of the circle in the text as a proof of its having been collated and therefore approved for transmission (al-dārūd al-fakhrāt - ‘the circle is the licence’) and who advocated leaving the circle empty so that when the hadith was collated the second time (or subsequent times) a dot (or dots) or another mark (such as a short vertical line) could be placed inside it. This recommendation is repeated in many books on the transmission of hadith. Hūsayn al-A‘mili al-Hārithi (d. 984/1576), for example, states that each time a collation is made and a dot is placed in the circle this results in greater confidence in the copy. A good illustration of the use of the circle and dots as collation marks may be a 6/12th century copy of al-Waqāžī by al-Qazzāzī (d. 505/1111). Here, at the end of a chapter we find three or possibly four marks consisting of a closed dotted circle, a superscript open dotted circle, three dots, a circle with an inner vertical line and a subscript dot (Fig. 7a).

10 Gacek 1985, Catalogue, xiii. 11 This word is also quite often seen in the form of a logograph (Gacek 1985, Catalogue, 68).

Logographs are a category of symbols (graphs) representing words. Probably the best example of a logograph is a horizontal stroke (sometimes hooked at the end), which represents the word sunah (‘year’). Other examples, in the context of marginalia, include such words and expressions as sharh, fāṣṣiyy (‘only’, ‘that is all’), and nāshīd al-Lilāh (‘may God have mercy on him’). Here of special interest are tilde-like marks used over abbreviations, especially at the end of glosses. It is very likely that these marks are either overlines or originated from the overlines used in the text for drawing attention to a word or a group of words. Apart from a horizontal stroke, we encounter two distinct types of overlines: Figure 1 and Figure 2 (see below). The origin of the first one is most likely the word ‘ (qif - ‘stop here’), or the abbreviation ‘ for fa-ta‘ammalubhi - ‘reflect on it’). The second type may have originated either from ‘ (possibly for tanbih - ‘warning’) or ‘ for fa-ta‘ammalubhi.

Reference marks or correction signs (Fr. "signes de retenue", 'appels') are known as khārj al-takhrījī, wa‘ādāt al-takhrījī, takhrījī (hurūbi) and ‘afāf. They are placed in the body of the text over the word to be corrected or glossed or in the case of omissions between words. The latter practice is almost always respected. In some manuscripts the reference mark in the text can be repeated next to the word in the margin (see ISL, MS 95). In medieval manuscripts the most often used mark is a curved line ( or ) or - ( ‘afāf) (see e.g. Figs. 1a, 1b, 1d, 5e). It was used predominantly, but not exclusively, for omissions. Omissions were also indicated by a continuous or a dotted line linking the place of omission with the omitted word (insertion) inscribed in the margin. The inverted caret (Lat. ‘it needs’, ‘is lacking’), i.e., a mark in the shape of (sometimes with its extended arm pointing to the margin in which the omission is placed), is another sign used mostly for omissions, but also for corrections, variants and glosses (Figs. 1g, 3g, 4h, 5g). Sometimes it is seen with a dot in the middle (Gacek 1991, fig. 54; Gacek 1985, xiii). The numeral ‘ (ba‘ Hindiyūs) is used for omissions, corrections
Typology of scribal errors

In the Arabic context we encounter the following types of scribal errors:

i. Omissions. They are the most common errors in Arabic manuscripts. Here mention should be made of haplography, which is the error of writing a sequence of letters (or a word) once, when they should have been written twice. A similar omission known as saut du même au même occurs when a word or group of words is repeated at a short distance (proximity) from each other. The scribe then copies what follows the first occurrence after the second occurrence.21 Omissions also take place when two words in close proximity have the same ending or beginning. These mistakes are technically called homoioteleuton (homoeoteleuton) and homoiooarcton (homoeoarcton) or homoeoarch, respectively.

ii. Cacography (or cacographical errors). These errors occur when the word is written illegibly, or smudged due to too much ink at the tip of the calamus.

iii. Tašrif. Errors resulting from erroneous letter-pointing.

iv. Metathesis or transpositions. These errors fall into two categories: tašrif and al-taqdim wa-al-ta’khir. The tašrif is an error resulting from transposition of letters because of their close similarity or similar shape or spelling or bad vocalization.22 The taqdim wa-ta’khir, also known as al-qalib al-mukânî, is a transposition of words in a sentence.

v. Additions (ziyâdat). These can be of two kinds: a repetition of a few letters or a word or a group of words (known as ditography or double writing) or interpolation, that is an introduction of an extraneous element from elsewhere (e.g. variant tradition or version) or a more substantial segment of the text in the form of explanatory or illustrative matter (e.g. interlinear or marginal gloss). The extraneous elements can derive from deliberate activity of the scribe who tried to emend the word or passage, which he thought difficult or corrupt.

vi. Substitutions. Errors resulting from alteration of words by their substitution on the basis of conjecture or from a different tradition (especially when collapsing the text on the basis of a number of manuscripts). This action may result in the contamination of the text and prevent the establishment of a genealogical tree.

Corrections of involuntary mistakes

In order to remedy the errors committed in the process of transcription the scribe had recourse to a number of techniques, which sometimes differed from region to region and period to period.

a) Omissions

In Arabic technical literature an omission is traditionally referred to as saqâb (saqib), nasaq (nasagin, nasiq), takhir and labaq (labaq). This type of error was very common in manuscripts. Omissions are either placed in between lines (if the space allows) or in the margin. In some old manuscripts we find full expressions which indicate an omission. For example, saqâta or saqata minbus or saqata min sama’îna (‘it was omitted from our audition’). There is a great variety of practices which we encounter in this connection. The omitted word(s) (to be inserted in the body of the text) are usually clearly marked by writing at the end or above the omission the word saqib or its abbreviation –m (often in its suspended form) (Gacek 1984, 123; Gacek 1987, 132; Figs. 1b, 1d, 1e, 1g). Sometimes the saqib is written twice or three times. Among other practices we find: saqib and the next word in the text;23 sâb and the next word(s) in the text (deleted) (Fig. 1a); the next word in the text plus lib (= ilâ ihibirih); the next word in the text plus asl (or umm or mawd); saqib ru’i’a (or ru’i’as); ru’i’a on its own; intibâ al-labaq; saqib and asl (or aslan, see Gacek 1985, no. 143); asl and saqib supersect (often in Maghribi manuscripts); asl or mawd supersect with sâb at the end of omission (Fig. 1b); and saqib plus mawd. An interesting example of marking omissions and evident

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23 Both the tashrīf and tašrif were well-known to the Arab scholars in the manuscript age and Arabic literature includes a number of compositions on this subject. F. Rosenthal, however, argues that there was no difference between these two terms (see Rosenthal 2000, "Tashrīf," 347).
24 Al-Ja‘bari, Rasm al-tahdhib, 70.
errors is found in ISL, MS172, where omissions and other corrections found in the model copied from are marked with the word asl and those omissions made in the surviving copy are marked with the asb.

b) Cancellations, deletions (dalb)25

One of the ways to delete a word or a group of words was to draw a continuous or interrupted line (often consisting of dots)26 or a line with slightly curved ends (like an inverted ꞌ), above the main letter shapes. Other methods included the use of round brackets (tawriq) or drawing a circle (siff, dāʾirah) at the beginning and the end of the words or a line around the phrase to be cancelled, as well as writing the number of words to be deleted in the alpha-numeric system (abjad) in the margin.27 In addition to the above we find the use of a few expressions or symbols above the line (at its beginning and end) la...ila, ila min...ila, min...ila (Fig. 7e), mutkarar min...ila, mutkarar...sabru sabru sabru (repeated...[by] negligence)30, zaʿid (or sādi) ... ila (additional...put to this point) (Fig. 7f).29 Cancellation by mistake was traditionally indicated by writing the word asb (sometimes written several times) above the cancellation line.

c) Cacographic errors (cacography)

Here we find a number of possibilities such as the spelling out of the affected word in the margin by writing it out in isolated letter forms, repeating the word in the margin and writing under each letter of the word its miniature forms or writing the words bayan or buayinuhu (or their abbreviations: ʿ or ꞌ) (Figs. 7a-d) above the restored word in the margin.30 In Shiʿite Imami manuscripts these errors are often corrected by using the word badal ( substitution ) or its abbreviation ʿ (see below).31

26 The practice of using dots as a means of deletion has a parallel in Western manuscripts. Known as subpunctuation, in that context the dots are placed under the word to be deleted and not over it.
28 Al-Mashūkhi 1994, Ambaq, 283, 284. This type of cancellation has a parallel in the Western practice in what is known as vacation, i.e. the writing of the verb muqaddam instead above a word or a string of words in the text in the margin or in the text.
31 Al-Mashūkhi (Ambaq, 71) links the abbreviation ʿa with badal, which appears to be unlikely.

d) Metathesis (word transposition)

Transposed words may be indicated by writing above them in full yuʿakkabhu min... ila or yuqaddahu min... ila.22 Other practices include the use of abbreviations placed above the relevant words. For example, ʿe = muʿakkabhu; ʿe = muqaddam or yuḥab; ʿe = muʿakkabhu muqaddam; ʿe = muʿakkabhu muqaddam (Fig. 7g); ʿe = muqaddam; ʿe = muqaddam; ʿe = muʿakkabhu muqaddam; ʿe = baʿda.31

Deliberate emendations and annotations

a) Lacunae in the text

When copying from a faulty exemplar the scribe would normally draw the reader’s attention to the blank spaces or gaps in the text. Larger missing portions of the text are usually indicated by the word bayad or bunā bayad.24 If the gap is there by mistake and nothing is missing the usual expression is (al-)bayad ʿabīb (his nobil defectus est) or sabīb al-bayad or bādha its bayad sabru (“this lacuna is by mistake”). Blanks often involve unfilled rubrics. This is for example the case of ISL, MS 226 (Gacek 2002) where we find such expressions as bayad and taraka bunā bayadʿ. The last phrase estimates the size of the gap (20 words). Sometimes the abbreviation ʿa is used for bayad.35

b) Sic/thus (asb, kadhā, ʿabbah)

In order to show that a given word was copied faithfully, the scribe had at his disposal several devices. One of these methods, known technically as tāsib, involved the word asb being inscribed above the relevant word in the text to mean ‘thus’ or ‘sic’ (Figs. 2d-f, h-i).36 The marking of the word with asb in the text usually indicates that the reading of the word (as far as transcription is concerned) is correct even though there may be some doubt about it. Another, similar method was to use the word kadhā (or bakdahā) (“thus,” “sic”), known as takdīr-yah (abbrev. ʿ, Fig. 3e). The takdīr-yah can be inscribed in the text (Fig. 3h) or, as often is the case, in the margin (Figs. 2b, 2c, 3b-g). Among the marginal takdīr-yah statements we find: kadhā fi al-amn wa-fi ummm ukhrād... (“thus in the model

22 Al-Mashūkhi 1994, Ambaq, 72.
24 See, for example, an interesting collation note in Husaynī 1395/1975, Fāṭirī, 13: 25.
25 Gacek 2001, Arabic manuscript tradition, 16.
26 Gacek 2001, Arabic manuscript tradition, Gacek 1989c, “Technical practices,” 57; al-Jaʿbū, Rasūlim al-tābih, 71. It is worth noting that the tābih of kadha is sometimes written without the horizontal line (shagh) and with a yāʾ as opposed to the alif of prolongation (Figs. 2e, 3c, 3d, 3f).
and in another copy,...) (Fig. 2b); hadhā fi al-wa al-ṣabīb... (thus in the exemplar but the correct [version] is...) (Fig. 3b); hadhā wāq'a 'a fī nukhbat al-sama' wa-aṣyunnah... (thus found in the audition copy but I deem it to be...) (Fig. 3c); hadhā nqūultum bi khatṭī 'i (thus I copied from his holograph) (Fig. 3f); hadhā wa-bi-khatṭī bi al-bāṣtibāh... (thus, but in his own hand in the margin...) (Fig. 3d); bāṣtibāh nāsīḥat al-ṣafādi (thus [in] al-ṣafādi's copy); bāṣtibāh wa-qūna bi khatṭ al-ṣafādi (thus we found it in the hand of al-ṣafādi); bāṣtibāh bi-khatṭ al-ṣafādi al-qārī 'alā al-maṣṣanif (thus in the hand of al-ṣafādi, read in the presence of the author).37

The following is an example of a samāʿ-note originally written by Muhammad al-ʿĀmilī, known as al-Ṣāḥib al-Awālī (d. 782/1380), which mentions the use of the taddālīyyah in the text. It reads as follows:

(... The afore-mentioned copy contained many misreadings (tashīrūt) marked with the word hadhā and the copy made from it contained additional linguistic errors (ghalaf fi al-Manšūbūt) and these were also marked with hadhā (...).38

Another way of marking uncertain or doubtful readings in the medieval period was by using a sign called dabbab (also referred to as 'alimāt al-taddālītūt or al-tamrīd or tashīkūh), which resembles the initial form of the letter sīd (sīd).39 The word in the text marked with the dabbab was often repeated in the margin in the same form or a different form also accompanied with the dabbab. This practice implied that doubt as to its corrected reading still persisted. Later the → came to be regarded as an abbreviation of sakab and correctors were instructed to add it (i.e. the sīd) the letter ی (bā) if the reading was confirmed or the correct version was to be inscribed in the margin. Other scholars used → as an abbreviation of dabbabātūt (I have locked it, i.e., I have put a dabbab over it). The use of the dabbab-mark is attested in many corrected medieval manuscripts (see e.g. Figs. 2a, 2b, 2g, 2i, 3a, 3b, 3e). 40 The afore-mentioned Shīʿite author Husayn al-ʿĀmilī al-Fārābī tells us that in his time the mark of taddālītūt in the form of a small sīd was little used. As an alternative practice, scholars employed the figure ٗ (bāʾ Hindiyyah) both in the body of the text and in the margin next to the corrected word (see e.g. Fig. 6d). Furthermore, some used three dots (...) for this same purpose.41

Correction of the words marked with sakab, hadhā and dabbab was usually done in the margins, where the corrected forms were accompanied by such expressions as: sakab, sawāblūbi;42 nuskhāba, azynnūba and  laʿalabā (Figs. 2c, 2g, 2h, 3a, 4d, 4e). Some scribes and correctors, however, preferred to place the more correct word in the body of the text and relate the rejected word from the exemplar to the margin (Figs. 2f, 2i). This is also often the case with variants, which are incorporated into the text and the rejected word (with the superscript al or →) placed in the margin (see below).

c) Conjectures

Most corrections or emendations are in a sense conjectural. They are intelligent guesses, which may or may not be, strictly speaking correct. In other words, what a given scribe or corrector regards as a certain (obvious) emendation may not actually be sound. Some scribes or correctors emend the text in a manner that seemingly points to their linguistic and scholarly confidence and command. This is seen clearly in manuscripts in which the reader or copist is directed to substitute one word for another or is told flatly that a given word is more correct than another. These corrections are accompanied by such words and/or abbreviations as sawāblūbi (Fig. 6a), sakab or asakab (Fig. 6c), badal (Fig. 6h), 3 (for badal, Fig. 6f) or J 4 (Fig. 6g) (see below).

The more cautious scribe marks the doubtful words by using such words as: laʿalabā (perhaps), azynnūba (I think it to be), ʒawm (opinion), and zāhir (alleged, presumed) (Figs. 4a-b).43 The word laʿalabā is quite often abbreviated as 3 (paʿāʾ al-ṣayn) or sometimes as 4.44 The words azynnūba, and zāhir can be abbreviated as 3 (either pointed or unpointed). The latter abbreviation is almost always used in the Persian/Indian context.35

d) Textual variants (khilāfāt, ikhilāfāt)46

A common source of textual variations are misreadings in transcription, as well as the introduction into the text of words, phrases or short paragraphs, which were only marginal notes on the parent text; the new copyist, in doubt, would incorporate these notes into his text.

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37 Witkam 1989, De egyptische arts, 139.
39 Gacek 2001, Arabic manuscript tradition, 96; Al-Jaʿbari, Rasūm, 3.
41 Gacek 2001, Arabic manuscript tradition, 96. The 3 or 4 may also stand for šīr maṣṣīr, i.e., 'it requires consideration by reason of its want of clearness or perspicuity' (Lane 1984, Arabic English Lexicon, 2: 2812). This abbreviation usually stands on its own (without a suggested reading) (al-Mashikhūkī 1994, Ṣawmā, 71; Al-Thālūtī, Khatā bi-līf al-ṣawīl, vii, 92, 99, 102, 116),
Variations also result from the existence of several versions (recensions) of the same work (naskhab, raqiṣṭub) made either by the author himself during his lifetime or by the compiler/transmitter. These may include oral additions made during the reading to the author/teacher. In well-executed manuscripts these are listed in the margin and indicated by such expressions as fi al-samāʿ ("during the audion"); asl al-samāʿ ("in the audion copy"); or min samim al-muṣafarī ("from the lips of the author"). Yet another source of variants are blank spaces in the works of scholars left for a later insertion by themselves or others, of data which were not known to them at the time of writing.

The author's work could have a number of versions which he put out himself or recensions which came about as a result of dictating the original work and transmitting it through different reading sessions (samāʿ). In the case of different versions of the same work, medieval scholars advocated the copying of the text based on one particular recension, and in the case of variants, indicating the name of the transmitter and/or additions and omissions using red, green (or other coloured) ink or round brackets (taqadduy).48 This can clearly be seen in a copy of al-fāsiḥi by Abū Allāh ibn Wabih (d. 197/813). Here for example we find the following marginal comments: mādrīṣa ʿalā hādiḍ al-badīth fi kitāb Ḣadīṣ ("this hadith in brackets is in the copy of Ḣadīṣ"); kāhadā fi kitāb Suhaylīn wa-Is Ḣadīṣ biḥāṣa ʿala hādiḍa ("this copy in the copy of Suhaylīn but in the copy of Ḣadīṣ it is in brackets"); lūṣa ʿalāṣyā tafaṣṣal fi kitāb Ḣadīṣ (there are no brackets in the copy of Ḣadīṣ).49 It was common to employ siḥṣa for various transmitters (rāwi). Thus for example in connection with the Ṣahih of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) we may find the following: ʿalā = al-Sarakhshi, ʿalā = al-Ḥamāni, ʿalā = the Kūshmāni, ʿalā = and ʿalā (some times superscript) for both al-Sarakhshi and the Kūshmāni (Fig. 5a). Other abbreviations are: ʿalā Abū Dharr al-Ḥarawi, ʿalā = Abū Ṭabī, ʿalā = Ibn al-ʿĀṣikir al-Dīnishqī, ʿalā = Abū al-Waqṭ, ʿalā = al-Mustamili, ʿalā = al-Ḥamāni and al-Mustamili, ʿalā = al-Ḥamāni and al-Kūshmāni.50 Another example may be the Kitāb of Sibawayh (d. ca. 180/796). Here among the abbreviations we find: ʿalā = naskhab al-Mubarrad, ʿalā = naskhab Abī ʿĪsāq al-Zajjājī, ʿalā = naskhab Abī al-Ḥabīb, ʿalā = fassarībān anā (min kalām Abī Ḥabīb) and ʿalā = min naskhab kānaʿ inda Bani Tāhir.51

Non-specific variants (usually from another copy) may be indicated as follows: naskhab, naskhab ukhrā, fi naskhab, fi naskhab ukhrā, fi naskhab. These expressions are very often abbreviated in a variety of ways and may be pointed or unpointed. For example, ʿalā, ʿalā, ʿalā, ʿalā and ʿalā (mainly India). Both ʿalā

49 Ibn Wabih, al-ʿAṣirī, ff. 2h, 3b, 6a. See also Murawy 1999, Die Rodtschöber, 56, 71, 84, 86.
50 See e.g. Fieck 1938, "Beiträge," and Quring-Zoeche 1998, "How al-Buhārī's 'Ṣahih' was edited."
51 Sibawayhī, Le livre de Sibawayh, 1: vi-xii.

and ʿalā often look like the letter ʿalā or ʿalā or ʿalā while the initial form of ḥāʾi when unpointed may look like ḥāʾ ( ).52

We notice also an interesting use of the word ḥāʾ (no) in conjunction with variants. Al-Maḥmaṭī shows for example the expression ʿalā which means that a particular word or phrase is omitted in the copy of Ibn ʿAsikir.53 Sellheim notes the existence of the combination ʿalā... ʿalā to mean that the given passage is not in the Ṣahih of Ibn Abī Ṣaqa.54 Also, in a copy of al-Ḳīṣaṣ by Ibn Bābawayh (d. 381/991) we come across an interesting note, which illustrates another way of using this expression:

It (the text) was collated with corrected copies, one of which was characterised by having been written in an ancient hand and containing numerous collations marks and statements. I selected this copy as my base-copy ( ). And what was in other copies I transcribed by marking it with the sign of taṣḥīḥ (i.e. saḥīḥ) if two or more copies agreed on the same reading. And if the words were identical they were not marked. What was in the base-copy I marked repeatedly with ʿalā and what was in the base-copy but was not in most of the other copies I wrote above it ʿalā.55

Variants can be evaluated by the teacher or corrector or scribe. When the variant was selected as the more correct and written in the body of the text, it was accompanied by the ʿalā (for naskhab ukhrā) and the rejected word was then written in the margin accompanied by the word ʿalā or the sigillum ʿalā (Figs. 5b-d). In manuscripts of Persian/Indian provenance we often see the word ʿalā (substitute) or ʿalā (most probably buddhī, i.e. replace it) (Gacek 1991, nos. 12, 145; Fig. 6h). This word can be abbreviated as ʿalā (Figs. 6f, 6g; Gacek 1985, nos. 55, 118) or sometimes as ʿalā (Gacek 1985, 108). When used on its own it points to an unspecified variant, which is preferred to the word in the text, or it represents a substitute for an evident mistake such as a cacographical error (see e.g. ISL, MS 31). The ʿalā often however appears with the ʿalā (for naskhab ukhrā) i.e. ʿalā (Fig. 5g) (sometimes ʿalā) or ʿalā. The combination ʿalā may stand either for a simple variant (ʿalā ʿalā) or a variant, which is deemed to be more correct. In this case, the ʿalā can be read as an unpointed and suspended ʿalā ( ). Similarly, ʿalā might represent the word ʿalā itself (with an unpointed ʿalā) or the reference mark ʿalā ( ).56

52 Gacek 2001, Arabic manuscript tradition, 140.
53 See his Maṣṣūm, 344.
54 Sellheim 1976, Materialien, 1:337.
56 Sellheim 1976 (Materialien, 2: 73, 412) is of the opinion that the abbreviation ʿalā stands for ʿalā. Although it is possible, it is unlikely that it was used in this way in the Persian/Indian context. The usual abbreviation of the word ʿalā is ʿalā (See e.g. Sellheim 1976, Materialien, 1:244).
assumed that the word in the margin is thought preferable to the word in the text. Informed judgement may be the only criterion in this context.

e) Gloses and scholiad

Gloses and scholia were usually written in a smaller script than omissions or the main text. It is interesting to note that in the Mamluk period calligraphers distinguished between the naskh script of the main text and the naskh used for glosses, by calling the former al-matn and the latter al-farzah. The usual way to introduce a gloss was to write the word bihiyay above the gloss in full or in the form of an abbreviation. Throughout the manuscript age different abbreviations for this word were used. Thus, we find خ، ح، جي، ه، خ، ح، جي، ه، خ، ح، جي، ه، خ، ح، جي، ه، خ، ح، جي، ه، خ، ح، جي، ه، خ، ح، جي، ه، خ، ح، جي، ه، خ، ح، جي، ه، خ، ح، جي، ه، خ، ح، جي، ه، خ، ح، جي، ه، خ، ح، جي، ه， Apart from this word other words were also used. For example, ta’lafi (abbrev. 3 or 4), tafsir, shahr (abbrev. 6 often unpointed and suspended or logographed), faddat (abbrev. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8) – the last two for faddat al-aq, tarab (abbrev. 36) and baimab (abbrev. 6 or 8).

An important category of glosses constituted annotations and comments, which in most cases can be traced to the author himself. They are usually signed with the expression minhu (minshu), hence sometimes referred to as minshash. This expression may be followed by a pious invocation (da’ira). The most common invocation is the tairam (ruminah Allah), but other supplications are also encountered. For example, zallamahu, gymadu, madda or dama zilluwa or zewahu, all used for authors who were alive at the time of copying. Other expressions used in this connection are min (bi) khatth (Gacek 1985, no. 104A), min lafi (or min fann al-musannaf). The tairam is often expressed in the form of a logograph (Gacek 1985, no. 113; Gacek 1991, fig. 9; ISL, MS 83 and 85). For other types of glosses either a short title (including the word shahr, often in the form of a logograph) or short note (or sigla for these) are used. Thus for example we read on a copy of makeup ‘al-mashlah by Ahmad al-Muyan (518/1124):

This expression, as well as the other glosses, may be found in various manuscripts.

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58 al-Amili al-Harithi, Wusāli al-abkār, 197.


60 Quiring-Zecke 2006, Arabische Handschriften, 5 xi.

61 Winkam 1989, Die ägyptische arz, 131.

62 See also Sellheim 1976, Materialien, 2: Taf. 16, 17, 19.

63 Arberry 1955, Handlist, 1: pl.3 (no. 3017).

64 See also Husayni 1395/1975, Fihrist, 13: 81.

65 See e.g. Gacek 1981, Catalogue, fig. 5.

66 Shafi‘ al-adl by al-Nawās (Gacek 2002, ‘Yemeni codex’).

67 Not to be confused with the abbreviation of al-Nihayah (the title of a book) (see e.g. Gacek 1991, Arabische Handschriften, 79).
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