

## One: Dotting the Quran

### *Arabic Writing during the Islamic Period and afterwards*

When the Islamic Ummah appeared in Makkah, the Muslims who used to write arabic were 14 people, most of whom were from the Sahabah, and they were:

‘Ali ibn Abee Taalib  
‘Umar ibn al-Khattab  
Talha ibn ‘Ubaidullah  
‘Uthman ibn Saeed  
Abban ibn Saeed  
Zayeed ibn abee Sufyaan  
Khaatib ibn ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd Shams

Al-‘Alaa’ ibn al-Hadramee  
Abu Salamah ibn ‘Abd al-ash-hal  
Abdullah ibn Sa’ad ibn Abee Sarah  
Huwaytib ibn ‘Abd al-Azzaa  
Abu Sufyaan ibn Harab  
Mu’aawiyah ibn Abee Sufyan ibn Harab  
Juhaym ibn as-Salt ibn Mukhrimah

After the hijrah to Medina, and the battle of Badr, the Ansar took prisoner 70 members from the tribe of Quraysh, and put a ransom up for every prisoner, and whosoever was unable to pay the ransom was made to teach ten of the citie’s youth how to write, for writing was not present at that time. By this means, writing increased and began to spread to every area conquered by Islam in the time of the Messenger of Allah (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and after his death. The Emirs of Islam set about spreading it until it spread widely and progressed fully, especially after the scholars fixed its rules and balances which were a strong reason for it reaching the heights to which it reached today, in terms of the beauty of its calligraphy, perfection of its writings and the excellence of its order/arrangement.

The credit in that was attributed to the scholars of Kufa for they were the first who entered the element of beautification into writing, to the extent that the Kufic script was in reference to them.

After that the scholars of Basra used to write with different pens in various shapes , but it wasn’t to the desired perfection, until *Ibn Muqalla* the minister of al-Muqtadir Billah, one of the Caliphs of the Abbasid Empire was a genius in that he changed with his skill the nature of writing from its Kufic form to its present form.

Abu’l Hassan ‘Alee ibn Hilaal al-Baghdaadi, famous as Baabin al-Bawwab followed in his footsteps, and many scholars continued in this modification and improvement until Arabic writing reached the state it is at now in terms of beauty and form.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from ‘*Sameer at-Taalibeen fee Rasm Wa Dabt Al-Kitaab al-Mubeen*’ by Ali Muhammad ad-Dubbaa’

### **Writing the Revelation**

- The first to write the revelation in Makkah was ‘Abdullah ibn Abee Sarah, but he apostated after the hijrah and fled from Madinah to Makkah, then returned to Islam on the Day of Fath.
- The first to write the revelation in Madinah was Ubayy ibn Ka’b (may Allah be pleased with him), and the one who persevered with it the most after the hijrah was Zayd ibn Thaabit, then Mu’aawiyah ibn Abee Sufyaan, after the conquest of Makkah.

## An-Naqt

An-Naqt has two meanings:

1. That which refers to those things which are applied to letters, such as *fatha*, *dumma*, *kasra*, *sukoon*, *shadda*, *madd*, and the like. Some refer to this kind of Naqt as 'Naqt al-I'raab'
2. That which refers to the dots which belong to the letter and distinguish the letters with dots from the letters without dots, such as the dots which are placed on the letters Baa', Taa', and Thaa'. Some refer to this kind of Naqt as 'Naqt al-I'jaam'

### One: Naqt al-I'raab

During the reign of Mu'aawiyah ibn Sufyaan, who was a Caliph, a letter was sent to Ziyad ibn Abeeh, who was a custodian of Basra, from Mu'aawiyah asking for 'Ubaidullah ibn Ziyaad. When he came to him, Mu'aawiyah spoke to him, but found him committing errors in his speech, so he sent him back to his father, and proceeded to write him a letter blaming him for his sons' errors. So Ziyad ibn Abeeh sent for Abu'l Aswad ad-Du'ali<sup>2</sup> and said to him: 'These non-Arabs have corrupted the language of the Arabs, so I ask you to devise something by which the people can rectify their speech and express the words of Allah (subhanahu wa ta'aalaa)'. Abu'l Aswad refused the task (it is said that this was because he was from Ali's followers, so was in contempt of Mu'aawiyah and his followers – and others have different opinions on the matter). Ziyad understood what Abu'l Aswad was thinking, so he devised a strategy to arouse the feelings of Abu'l Aswad in order that he may comply with his request.

He called upon a man and told him to sit in the path of Abu'l Aswad ad-Du'ali, and said that if crossed your path, then read a passage from the Qur'an, but make a mistake when reading it on purpose. The man did so, and when Abu'l Aswad crossed his path, he read the statement of Allah (subhanallahu wa ta'aalaa),

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ ۚ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ۚ <sup>3</sup> 'Allah is free from (all) obligations to the Mushrikeen, and so is His messenger.'

But he read the last word with a kasra (ie **لَا**) meaning 'Allah is free from (all) obligations to the mushrikeen and to His messenger.' When Abu'l Aswad heard this he regarded it as tremendous and said, 'Glorified be the face of Allah that He would be free from obligations to His messenger,' then he returned directly to Ziyad and said to him, 'I am responding to what you asked me, and I have seen it correct to begin with the syntax of the Quran, so send me thirty men from which I will choose only one'. Ziyad did so, and Abu'l Aswad began to test them until he finally chose a man from the clan of 'Abd al-Qayyis, to whom he said, 'Take this copy of the Quran, and some ink which is a different colour to that in which the quran is written, and listen to me. If you hear me pronouncing a fatha after a letter, then place a dot above it , and if you hear me

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<sup>2</sup> Dhaalim ibn 'amr ibn Dhaalim

<sup>3</sup> Surah at-Tawbah, verse 3

pronouncing a dummā after a letter, then place a dot after it , and if you hear me pronouncing a kasra after a letter then place a dot under it , and if you hear the sound with a tanween, then make the one dot into two dots , and if the letter is vowelless (ie with a sukoon) then place no dots.'

Whenever one page of the Quran was completed in this manner, Abu'l Aswad checked it with him, until they had completed the entire Qur'a in this manner. The different scribes after Abu'l Aswad diversified in their dotting, some made the dot into a square ( ) and some made it a filled-in circle ( ) while others made it a hollow circle ( ). The people of Madinah added a symbol for the letters with a shadda, in the form of a semi-circle ( ), then other symbols were added, such as the sign for a sukoon became a horizontal line above the letter ( ), and these were the symbols of vowelless which occurred during the Ummayyad rule. After this came al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Faraaheedi<sup>4</sup> in the Abbasid period. When al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Faraaheedi came, and he was one of the major scholars of the Abbasid period, he made the symbols clearer. He made the basis of the vowelless a smaller version of each letter from which the vowel is born. In total, he devised eight symbols, all of which were small letters or parts of letters, and each symbol would indicate the sound it made clearly, in this way different to the symbols which Abu'l Aswad and his student devised which were only convention (in that a dot above a letter bore no correspondance to the 'a' sound which it indicated). Al-Khalil also devised a symbol for the shadda and hamza which were not known beforehand.

Al-Khalil's method was as follows:

- 1) **The Fat-ha** was a slanting alif above the letter. Its present form is a dash above the letter, and if it has tanween then two dashes.
- 2) **The Kasra** was a letter yaa' under the letter. Its present form is a dash under the letter, and two dashes if it has tanween.
- 3) **The Damma** was a letter waw on top of the letter, for in the 'five nouns' it is a sign of the nominative case. If it has tanween then the waw is doubled.
- 4) **The Sukoon** was a circle similar in shape to the head of the letter meem from the word *jazm*, and this circle was then called a *jazmah*. Alternatively, the head of the jeem of *jazm* was also used.
- 5) **The Shadda** was the head of the letter sheen, an indicator of the word *tashdeed* ??? ?
- 6) **Hamzat-ul-Qat'** was the head of the letter 'ain on top of or under the alif, because its makhraj is very close to the makhraj of the 'ain in the voice box, as a symbol that it is ???t ??.
- 7) **Hazat-ul-wasl** was the head of a small saad on top of the alif as a symbol that it is ??? ?.
- 8) **The Madd** was the two letters meem and daal (??) on top of the letters of madd. Presently, the circle of the meem has been obliterated and the high part of the daal, so it has become (a). Then these symbols were exposed to being transformed and bettered until they became how they are now.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Faraaheedi



and he recited while his father was listening, **لَا تَقْرَأُ** instead of **لَا تَقْرَأُ** so his father said to him, ‘put down the mus-haf and learn from the mouths of the men.’

6. It was narrated that Hamaad ibn az-zabarqaan had learnt the qur’an from the mus-haf, and did not read it to anyone, so he committed mistakes in some of the words of the qur’an, from which were **لَا تَقْرَأُ** instead of **لَا تَقْرَأُ** <sup>7</sup> and **لَا تَقْرَأُ** instead of **لَا تَقْرَأُ** <sup>8</sup>.
7. It was narrated that a sheikh continued reading in his mus-haf for forty years .....**لَا تَقْرَأُ** <sup>9</sup>
8. It was narrated that ‘Uthman ibn Abee Shayba (one of the teachers of al-Bukhari) read:
  - **لَا تَقْرَأُ** instead of **لَا تَقْرَأُ** <sup>9</sup>
  - **لَا تَقْرَأُ** instead of **لَا تَقْرَأُ** <sup>10</sup>
  - **لَا تَقْرَأُ** instead of **لَا تَقْرَأُ** <sup>11</sup>
  - **لَا تَقْرَأُ** so someone corrected him and said, **لَا تَقْرَأُ** <sup>12</sup> so he said, ‘My brother Abu Bakr and I do not read by ‘Aasim.’

### **Two: Naqt-ul-A’jaam**

In the Umayyid period and during the rule of the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwaan, it so happened that when the non-Arabs who entered Islam increased, many distortions happened in the language of the Arabs, and it spread to many people’s tongues, so there was fear that this frivolity would extend to the Qur’an, so the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwaan ordered al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafi – who was a governor of Iraq before that – to strive to distance the causes of distortion away from the arena of the Qur’an. So al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf appointed in his place Nasr ibn ‘Aasim al-Laythee<sup>13</sup> and Yahya ibn Ya’mar al-‘Adwaani<sup>14</sup> to undertake the task instead of him, and some people tried not to but al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf ath-Thaqafi with his influence and authority and subjected everyone to his opinion, and the non-Arabs

<sup>7</sup> Surah Saad verse 2

<sup>8</sup> Surah ‘Abasa verse 37

<sup>9</sup> Surah al-Baqarah verse 265

<sup>10</sup> Surah al-Maa’idah verse 4

<sup>11</sup> Surah ash-Shu’araa’ verse 130

<sup>12</sup> Surah Yusuf verse 70

<sup>13</sup> Nasr ibn ‘Aasim al-Laythee

<sup>14</sup> Yahya ibn Ya’mar al-‘Adwaani

Nasr ibn 'Aasim and Yahyaa ibn Ya'mar undertook the task of arranging the Arabic alphabet and dotting the letters. The first thing they established were the dots on the baa', the taa' and the thaa'. They placed a single dot under the baa' as it was the first letter, two letters above the taa' as it was the second letter, and three letters above the thaa' as it was the third letter. They then placed every two letters which looked similar next to one another, and left the first letter without any dots, but placed a dot on the second letter, as follows: **ب** **ت** **ث** **ا** **ب** but they found that with the letter sheen there may arise confusion between it and the noon when it is in the middle of a word, so they put on it three dots since it had three teeth. When it came to the letters jeem, haa' and khaa', they agreed that the first letter would be with one dot in the middle of it, the second would be free of dots, and the third would be with one dot above it.

Regarding the faa' and qaaf, it was agreed that the dot of the faa' would be underneath the letter, and the dot of the qaaf would be above it, and the mushaf's of the Western Arabs to this day remain with this form of writing, in the form ( **ف** ). As for the Eastern Arabs, they placed one dot above the faa' and two dots above the qaaf ( **ف** ).

The order of the letters of the alphabet which Nasr ibn 'Aasim and Yahyaa ibn Ya'mar established were based on their arrangement in terms of the words **ت س ج ه ز** or in terms of their arrangement in terms of their place of origin (*makhrāj*) (i.e. **ت** then **ث** then **ج** and so on).

#### **SUMMARY:**

The first development which came about in the mus-haf was the *naqt al-I'raab*, devised by Abu'l Aswad ad-Du'ali. Then came the *naqt al-a'jaam*, devised by Nasr ibn 'Aasim and Yahyaa ibn ya'mar. After which came the form of *tashkeel* created by Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Faraaheedee, in place of the *naqt* which was there at the time.

The *naqt* and *tashkeel* of the mus-haf had the best influence and benefit in preserving the noble Qur'aan and protecting it from any kind of defacement.