

# Qur'anic Orthography: The Written Representation Of The Recited Text Of The Qur'ân

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"Quick! Help the Muslims before they differ about the text of the Qur'ân as the Christians and Jews differed about their scriptures".

Thus demanded Hudhayfa bin al-Yamân of ʿUthmân, the third Caliph, on returning from battles in Azerbaijan (25/645). Hudhayfa had become perturbed when he saw Muslim soldiers from different parts of Syria and Iraq meeting together and differing in their readings of the Qur'ân<sup>[1]</sup>, each considering his reading to be the correct one. Up to then the only full official written copy which was made under Abu Bakr (d.13/634) had remained unpublished, kept first with Abû Bakr, then with ʿUmar, and after his death with his daughter Hafsa, a widow of the Prophet<sup>[2]</sup>. Responding to the urgent demand for help, ʿUthmân sent word to Hafsa, asking for the copy in her possession to be sent to him so that a number of copies could be made of it, to be publicised and followed as the only authorised Qur'ân in the different parts of the Muslim world. This prevented the possibility of different versions evolving in time, as Hudhayfa had feared, when he urged ʿUthmân to guard against it.

In the ʿUthmanic copies, the Qur'ân was written in a particular *rasm* (orthography) which became known as *al-rasm al-ʿUthmânî* (the ʿUthmânî way of writing the text of the Qur'ân) also referred to as *rasm al-mushaf*. As the copies made at his orders and distributed to various parts of the Muslim world were meant to be authoritative, it is no wonder that their *rasm* assumed authority as the correct way of writing the Qur'ân. Arabic orthography at the time was not yet developed in the way we have known for centuries, particularly in two important areas. There was no distinction between letters of the alphabet of similar shape and there were no vowel marks. This may now give the impression that such a system must have given rise to great confusion in reading. This was not actually the case because the morphological patterns of words in Arabic enable readers to read even very unfamiliar material without the short vowels being marked. More important, however, as far as the Qur'ân was concerned, was the fact that learning and reading relied above all on oral transmission. In the Islamic tradition, writing remained a secondary aid; nevertheless, to ensure correct reading of the written texts of the Qur'ân, particularly for those coming after the first generation of Muslims, steps were taken gradually to improve the orthography. This started with the two above mentioned areas by introducing

dots to indicate different vowels and nûnâtion and these were put in different coloured ink from that of the text. There were also dots to distinguish between consonants of similar shape. This work was carried out chiefly by three men: Abû-l-Aswad al-Du'alî (d. 69 / 688), Naṣr Ibn ʿAṣim (d. 89 / 707) and Yahya Ibn Yaʿmur (d.129 / 746). Understandably there was some opposition at first to adding anything to the way the Qur'ân was written. Ibn ʿUmar (73/692) disliked the dotting; others welcomed it, clearly because it was, in fact, doing no more than ensuring proper reading of the Qur'ân as received from the Prophet, and this view was accepted by the majority of Muslims throughout the different parts of the Muslims world, from the time of the tâbiʿûn. The people of Madinah were reported to have used red dots for vowels - tanwîn, tashdîd, takhfîf, sukûn, waṣl and madd and yellow dots for the hamzas in particular. Naqt<sup>[3]</sup> (placing dots on words in the muṣḥaf), became a separate subject of study with many books written on it.<sup>[4]</sup>

Al-Khalil Ibn Aḥmad (d.170/786) introduced the traditional vowel signs into Arabic orthography instead of the dots, but the dotting system continued in writing Qur'ânic material. Eventually the traditional vowel signs were adopted for the Qur'ân.<sup>[5]</sup>

It was thus in order to serve the Qur'ân that Arabic orthography was developed. After all, the Qur'ân, as collected under Abû Bakr, became the first book in the Arabic language. It was in order to serve the Qur'ân that more and more people began to learn reading and writing; that the art of calligraphy was developed, which became one of the chief arts of Islam. The Qur'ân, which unified the Arabic literary language and spread it into areas far beyond Arabia, was in fact the starting point of all Islamic and Arabic subjects of study<sup>[6]</sup>, One of these subjects in particular has important bearing on Qur'ânic orthography: that is, Arabic phonetics, which was developed in ʿilm tajwîd al-Qur'ân, the science of the proper articulation and reading of the Qur'ân. Among other things, this has minutely described and definitively prescribed for posterity the articulation of consonants and vowels singly and consecutively: the way of reciting the Qur'ân as received from the Prophet. This requires a degree of exactitude unmatched in reading any other material in Arabic. Qur'ânic orthographic signs had to be used with the Qur'ânic rasm and developed to a higher standard of representation than is known or needed in ordinary Arabic orthography.

Alongside the development of studies in Arabic grammar, Arabic orthography also developed for linguistic and literary material, and although the ʿUthmânic rasm was one of the sources of ordinary orthography<sup>[7]</sup> the latter began to differ from the ʿUthmânic rasm of the Qur'ân. The question was asked whether it was admissible to write the Qur'ân itself in the new orthography. Mâlik (179/795) was asked and said: No, the Qur'ân should be written only in the way of the first writing. He was also asked whether the additional wâw and alif (as in the word اولوا) should be deleted since they

were not pronounced and said no. Similarly Ibn Hanbal (244/858) said it was unlawful to deviate in writing the *mushaf* in wâw, yâ, alif or any other way.<sup>[8]</sup> In line with such views, it will be seen that adherence to the Qur'ânic *rasm* has persisted up to the present.

Along with numerous other aspects of the Qur'ân, its orthography was singled out as a separate branch of study known as *‘ilm al-rasm*.<sup>[9]</sup> Abû ‘Amr Al-Dânî (444/1052) examined in detail the characteristics of this *rasm*. His book *al-muqni‘*<sup>[10]</sup> remained an important authority - Sûyutî (909/1503) reduced the rules of Qur'ânic *rasm* to 6 as follows: \*

1. The rule of deletion, *hadhf*
2. The rule of addition, *ziyâdah*
3. The rule of substitution, *badal*
4. The rule of the hamza,
5. The rule of joining and separating, *al-wasl wa-l-fasl*
6. The rule of cases where there are two canonical readings but the text is written according to one of them, *ma fihi qirâ'atan fa-kutiba ‘alâ ihdâhumâ*.

## I. Deletion (*hadhf*)

This involves deletion of an alif or yâ' or wâw or lâm.

Alif

is deleted after vocative yâ' as in **يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ**

after na of the plural as in **أَنْجِيْنِكُمْ**

in demonstrative pronouns as in **هَؤُلَاءِ ، هَذِهِ هَٰذَا**  
etc.

in names of God as **الرَّحْمٰنُ ، اللّٰهُ**

after lâm as **خَلْفَ**

between two lâms as in **كَلِمَةٌ**

in proper names of more than three letters - **اسْمُعِيلُ ، اِبْرٰهِيْمُ**

in dual of a noun or verb if it is not at the end of the letter, as  
in **يَعْلَمٰنِ ، رَجُلٰنِ**

in sound masculine and feminine plural as **وَالصّٰدِقِيْنَ وَالصّٰدِقٰتِ**

unless it is followed by hamza as in **والصائمين والصائمات**

or shadda as in **الضالين**

in plurals on the pattern, **مفاعل** as in **مَسْجِد**

or a similar pattern as in **مَسْكِين ، نَصْرِي**

in adjectives like **عَلِم**

in the number **ثَلَاث**

in nouns with two or more alifs as in **أَخْر ، أَدَم**

in **بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ** and in the imperative of **سَأَل** as in **وَسئَل**

It should be noted here that normal orthography has retained the Qur'ânic rasm in many of these cases as in the demonstratives, and that Qur'ânic rasm, in some cases, caters for more than one qirâ' a as in **خَلْف** which could be read as khilâfa or khalfa.

yâ'

yâ' is deleted if it is a first person pronoun at the end of a

vocative noun as in **يَا قَوْمِي** instead of **يَا قَوْمِي**

at the end of a word as a preceding kasra is deemed a

sufficient indication of it, as in **إِذَا يَسْتَرْ ، فَارْهَبُونَ ، وَوَلِي دِينِ** instead of **فَارْهَبُونِي ، وَوَلِي دِينِي ، إِذَا يَسْرِي**

where it is following another yâ' in the same word as ,

**الْحَوَارِيِّينَ ، النَّبِيِّينَ** instead of **الْحَوَارِيْنَ ، النَّبِيْنَ**

in Sura 2 where it is written **إِبْرَاهِيمَ** which suggests a special reading; at the end of every noun with a weak third radical in

the nominative or genitive case as in **غَيْرِ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ** and this is also deleted in normal orthography.

wâw

is deleted when preceded by another wâw (to avoid repetition)  
as in فَاوُوا instead of فَاوُوا and دَاوُود instead of داوود

In the last example it is also deleted in ordinary vocabulary;

wâw is also deleted as the chair of the hamza with words of رُؤْيَا  
and تَوْوِيه as in الرُّؤْيَا instead of الرُّؤْيَا and تَوْوِيه instead of تَوْوِيه

It is deleted as the third radical in certain verbs (four) in the  
indicative mood as in يَدْعُ الْاِنْسَانَ سِنْدُغَ الزَّبَانِيَه instead of  
سِنْدَعُوا ، يَدْعُو

lâm

is deleted when preceded by another lâam in اللَّيْل ، اللَّيْلِي ، اللَّيْلِي  
instead of اللَّيْلِي ، اللَّيْلِي ، اللَّيْلِي

nûn

is deleted when repeated in نَجِي instead of نَجِي and نَجِي instead  
of نَجِي

Avoiding repetition of the same shape is clearly an important factor in the  
rule of deletion.

## II. Addition (ziyâdah)

This applies to three letters, alif, wâw and yâ' where the letter is written but  
not pronounced.

Alif

is added at the end of a word after the wâw of the plural as in  
قَالُوا ضَرَبُوا

This is also added in normal orthography to distinguish the plural from the  
singular;

after the wâw in الرُّبَا instead of الرُّبَا;

after a final hamza written as a wâw as in يَبْدُوا ، تَفْتُوا

Some Kufan scholars used to add this in normal orthography<sup>[1]</sup>.

in ماتتين ، مائة

in لشي instead of لشي (18: 23)

in لأذبحته ، لأضعوا instead of لأذبحته (27:21) instead of لأضعوا (9:47)

between the jîm and yâ' in جى in (39:69; 89:23) instead of جى

in the word نبيوا instead of نبا , in تاييسوا (12:87), ياييس (13:31)  
instead of تياسوا ، تياس

It should be noted that apart from the first 3 words here, in the examples given for the addition of alif, a hamza is adjacent to the alif which suggests that the addition has to do with the pronunciation of hamza. Al-Dânî suggests that alif is added to hamza to strengthen it<sup>[12]</sup>.

wâw

is added after the hamza as in ساؤريكم ; (7:145) instead of ساريكم  
in اولئك ، اولات ، اولوا

This is also added in normal orthography. Again, a hamza and damma are adjacent. A variant pronunciation and a desire to avoid confusion of some words of similar shapes account for the addition<sup>[13]</sup>.

yâ'

This is added in nine places<sup>[14]</sup> in the Qur'ân, as in  
أفان instead of أفان ، أفان من نبى  
and again in all the nine places it is adjacent to a hamza which suggests that the hamza, and the various ways it is pronounced in Arabic, accounts for the addition.

It has been observed that alif, wâw and yâ' are involved in the rules of addition and deletion and will also be involved with the rule of hamza. This should not be surprising in view of the fact that in grammar the way they behave is responsible for such classes of verb as the hollow, the weak lâm and the hamzated.

### III. The Hamza

Hamza is peculiar in Arabic in many respects. A glottal stop as it is, it is deemed more difficult to pronounce than other consonants. Accordingly it takes one of four forms: distinctly pronounced, taḥqîq;<sup>[15]</sup> lightened, talyîn;

changed, *ibdâl*; or deleted altogether, *hadhf*. These different ways are observed in *qirâ't* and the various Arab dialects. Hamzated verbs are also treated in a separate section in grammar. It is no wonder that it affects the pronunciation and orthography of adjacent letters in the various sections dealt with so far. In the writing of the hamza itself, Qur'ânic and normal orthographies are similar in many ways. In some aspects, however, Qur'ânic *rasm* differs as in the following cases:

- A medial hamza preceded by a *sukûn* is written without a chair  
يسأل instead of يسأل , سؤا , سؤا in normal orthography.

It should also be noted that a middle hamza with *kasra* is written *under* a chair of *yâ'* as in السراير instead of السرائر.

- A hamza is not written with an *alif* if preceded or followed by *alif* as in شنان , أمنوا instead of شنان , أمنوا. Avoiding repetition of shape is the factor involved here; in normal orthography this is achieved by writing a *madda*, i.e. (~), but the *madda* sign is reserved in Qur'ânic orthography for further extending a long vowel as will be seen later.
- It is not written a *yâ'* when preceded or followed by *yâ'* as in خاسئين , متكئين instead of خاسئين , متكئين; nor is it written as a *wâw* when preceded or followed by a *wâw* as in يؤوسا , يؤوده instead of يؤوسا , يؤوده. Again, avoiding repetition of shape is involved here and in general appears to carry more weight in Qur'ânic than in ordinary orthography.<sup>[16]</sup>

#### IV. Changing

This affects changing *alif* into *wâw* or *yâ'*; changing *nûn* into *alif*, and changing the final feminine *ha* (*tâ' marbûta*) into an ordinary open *taa'*:

In this connection it should be remembered that changing is an important feature of Arabic morphology dealt with under the title *al-'i'lal wa-l-'ibdâl*).

*alif*:

the *alif* is written *wâw* for velarisation (*tafkhîm*) in some *qirâ't* in حيوا , ربوا (without *idafa*) instead of حياة , صلاة ربا , زكاة and of غدوة , مشكوه , نجلوة , منلوة instead of مناة , نجاه مشكاة , غداء

It is written  $y\hat{a}'$  if it has been changed from an original  $y\hat{a}'$  as in  $يتوفاكم$  instead of  $يتوفكم$ .

The energetic lighter  $n\hat{u}n$  of  $tawk\hat{i}d$  is written  $alif$  in  $ليكوناً$  (12: 13).  $أذن$  (47:8) and  $لنسفعا$  (96:15). The  $nun$  of  $أذن$  is written  $alif$  and pronounced  $alif$  in pausing.  $إذا$  as in 17:73. This is in line with Basran grammarians; the Kufans write it as  $n\hat{u}n$ .<sup>[17]</sup>

The feminine  $ha'$  at the end of a noun is written  $t\hat{a}'$   $marb\hat{u}ta$  except for the following words:  $رحمة$  instead of  $رحمة$ ;  $نعمت$  instead of  $نعمة$ ;  $سنت$  instead of  $سنة$ ;  $امرات$  instead of  $امراة$ ;  $كلمت$  instead of  $كلمة$  (in four cases it is actually the  $ta'$  of the plural in some  $qir\hat{a}'at$ )<sup>[18]</sup>;  $مرضات$  instead of  $مرضاة$ ;  $لفنت$  instead of  $معصية$ ,  $لفنت$  instead of  $معصيت$ ,  $مرضاة$  and in isolated cases  $ثمرت$ ,  $شجرت$  instead of  $شجرة$ ,  $ثمر$  but this could also as the ordinary  $ta'$  of the plural in some  $qir\hat{a}'at$ ;  $فطرت$ ,  $جنت$ ,  $بقيت$  instead of  $جنة$ ,  $فطرت$ ,  $بقية$ .<sup>[19]</sup> According to Al-D\`an\`i, in the above cases the  $ta'$  is written in regard to the fact that this is its origin  $\text{'al}\hat{a}-l-asl$ .<sup>[20]</sup>

## V. Joining And Separating

This involves a number of short particles when preceded or followed by another short particle. In this respect, joined words resemble inseparable pronouns and prepositions like  $bi$  and  $li$ . It includes such words as:

→  $غَمْن$  (إن ما) إنا (من ما) ميا (أن لا) ألا (في ما) فيما (إن لم) ألم (أم من) أمّن (لكي لا) لكيلا (أين ما) أينما (كل ما) كلما (إن ما) إنما (حيث ما) حيثما (عن من) (أن لن) ألن (يوم هم) يومهم (أن لن) ألن

There are exceptions with some of these words fully suveyed in the Qur'\`an and detailed in books and chapters on  $rasm$ ; but some important factors have to be borne in mind in this connection. It should first be observed that even in normal orthography there are, in some cases, more than one opinion.<sup>[21]</sup> It is also observed that in the words  $إن$ ,  $أنا$ ,  $من$ ,  $عن$  there is a  $n\hat{u}n$  with  $suk\hat{u}n$ ; when added to many of the above words this incurs assimilation which strengthens the case for joining. The normal practice of joining, however, is sometimes set aside for such considerations as similarity to a case of separation in the same verse showing contrast in meaning.

Thus the joining of  $غَمْن$  is set aside in  $يصيب به من يشاء ويصرفه عن من يشاء$  (24:43).  $أمّن$  is replaced by  $من$  in four places in the Qur'\`an as in  $أفمن يلقى في النار خير أم من يأتي أمنا$  (41:40).

Moreover in the examples cited for discussion, we find that various

grammatical functions of words similar in sounds, entails different shapes. Thus we find in **إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ** (18:110) but **إِن مَّا تُوْعَدُونَ لَاتٍ** (6:134) *ma kâffa* in the former and a relative pronoun in the latter; **يَوْمَهُمُ الَّذِي يُوعَدُونَ** (43:83) and **يَوْمَ هُمْ بَارِزُونَ** (40:16). The first means their day and the second the day when. Without taking such principles into account, hasty conclusions in regard to consistency can be reached about Qur'ânic orthography in the area under discussion.

## VI. Variant Canonical Readings

Uthmanic orthography made it possible from the beginning for some words to be read in more than one way, and the copies of the Qur'ân written and distributed according to the order of Uthmân are reported to have contained all the seven canonical readings of the Qur'ân. In numerous cases, a word was written in such a way as to be suitable to more than one reading. Thus **مَلِكٌ** in Sura 1 could be read as *malik* or *mâlik*; **وَعَدْنَا** (2:51); *wa'adnâ* or *wâ'adnâ*; **الْغُرُفَاتِ** (34:37) is *al-ghurfati* or *al-ghurufâti*; **فَكَهِنِينَ** (52:19) is *fakahîn* or *fâkihîn*.<sup>[22]</sup>

In some other cases the variant readings could not be contained in a single shape of a word and accordingly different forms were distributed in the Uthmânic copies. Thus, **وَأَوْصَىٰ** (2:132) is written *wassa* according to Hafṣ reading and *awasa* according to Warsh; **وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى الْعَزِيزِ . وَأَوْصَىٰ** (26:217) *wa-tawakkal* was written **فَاتَوَكَّلْ** *fa-tawakkal* in the copies sent to Madina and Syria.<sup>[23]</sup>

These are the six rules of Qur'ânic *rasm*. Rule VI of Variant Readings is exclusive to Qur'ân in Arabic because of the canonical *qirâ'at* which were accommodated in the *rasm*. The five other rules of addition, deletion, hamza, change and joining and separating are not in fact exclusive to the writing of the Qur'ân; they constitute normal chapters of books on *imla'* in Arabic.<sup>[24]</sup> The difference lies in the fact that the features are much more limited in ordinary orthography: the Qur'ânic *rasm*, as we said, was one of the sources for ordinary orthography.

In addition to the abovementioned traditional six rules of *rasm* I would add one more feature which has for long become a rule of writing the Qur'ân, that is:

## VII. Full Vocalisation

This is done to an extent unknown in the writing of any other material in Arabic. As Al-Dânî stated: Every letter should be given its due signs of vowel, *sukûn*, *shadda* and other signs.<sup>[25]</sup> This becomes immediately obvious to anyone who opens the pages of the *mushaf* and will be treated later under

*istilahât al-dabt* (conventional signs determining the proper pronunciation of Qur'anic material).

The Qur'ân is unique in Arabic and is treated as such in various respects. It is prescribed for anyone, when touching the text of the Qur'ân, to be in a state of ritual ablution. The way of reciting the Qur'ân is different from reciting any other text, including that age-old and most cherished art of the Arabs - poetry. When the Qur'ân is read, Muslims are enjoined to listen to it and keep silent so that they may obtain mercy (7:204). The Qur'ân is also written in a unique, fully-vowelled, calligraphic *naskh*, different from writing even hadîth material. Each chapter begins from the first verse and the material follows to the last without any paragraphing or blank spaces to exclude the possibility of adding any non-Qur'anic material. The traditional division into thirty parts (for the benefit of those who wish to follow the tradition of reciting the entire text within a month) half, quarters and eighths of each are marked without interrupting the flow of the material.<sup>[26]</sup>

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## **A Fine Example**

The application of the above rules of *rasm*, is best exemplified in an edition of the Qur'ân which maintains the tradition more than any other and now has more widespread circulation than any other edition. This is the Egyptian edition, printed originally in 1337/ 1918. Far more than any other editions, it has been adopted in the most important centres of publishing the Qur'ân in the Middle East: Egypt, Saudi Arabia (especially the King Fahd Complex for printing the Qur'ân in Madina<sup>[27]</sup>), Beirut and Turkey. This particular edition is, moreover, the one normally used as a base for translation of the Qur'ân into English<sup>[28]</sup> and is the one whose orthography I will discuss below.

Unlike other editions, the Egyptian states its credentials for the reproduction of the text of the Qur'ân. It was produced in 1337/1918 not by an individual, but by a committee of four, which appears more authoritative, headed, as it was, by the principal of the Egyptian Qur'ân reading Institution Shaykh al-maqâri al-misriyya. In 1342/ 1923 it was adopted by a committee set up by King Fu'ad I under the supervision of the Azhar authority, and was printed at the Official Bûlâq Press. It became known as the *an Amîrî mushaf* and became the model to be followed in Egypt and outside. It contained an appendix, *tarîf bi-hâdha mushaf al-sharîf*, an explanatory statement on this noble *mushaf*, which falls in three sections ending with the names and positions of members of the committee who checked it (in later editions given as *lajnat murâja'at al-masâhif* - the committee for checking copies of the Qur'ân) under the supervision of the Supreme Council of Islamic Research and Culture in Al-Azhar.

**The first section** of the Appendix cites in detail the authorities relied upon in the writing of the *mushaf*. It was written, we are told at the beginning, according to the reading of Hafs as taken from ʿAsim, as from Ibn Habīb, as from the Companions ʿUthmān, ʿAlī, Zayd ibn Thābit and Ubayy as received from the Prophet.

**The Spelling** was reproduced in accordance with what ʿulama' al-rasm (scholars of Qur'ānic orthography) determined to be the system used in the personal copy of ʿUthmān and the copies he sent to different Muslim cities, all as reported by the eminent authorities - Abū ʿAmr Al-Dāni (444 / 1052) and Sulayman ibn Najah (496/1103), giving the traditional authorities for this.

**The specific way of vocalisation** - *tarīqat al-dabt* in writing the *mushaf* was the same as specified by scholars of *dabt* citing the traditional authoritative texts.

**Places to pause** in reading the verses of the Qur'ān are an important aspect of recitation. Commenting on Q. 73:4 *ورتل القرآن ترتيلا* (And recite the Qur'ān in slow, measured tones) the Caliph ʿAlī is reported to have defined *tartīl* as proper pronunciation of letters and knowing the places of pausing.<sup>[29]</sup>

Traditional authorities are given in the *taʿrīf* for determining places to pause as well as for the conventional signs for the different types of pause. Related to this is a statement on places of ritual prostration *sajda* on reading certain verses of the Qur'ān. The system of numbering the verses in the Qur'ān is given as the *Kufan* system taken ultimately from ʿAlī ibn Abī Tālib, according to which the total number is 6236 verses, and traditional authorities are cited.

Determination of the beginning of each of the 30 sections *juz'* of the Qur'ān, their halves (*ahzâb*) and quarters (*arbâʿ*), is a traditional aspect of the writing of the Qur'ān which is observed in the edition. So is a statement at the head of each *sura* as to its title, whether it was wholly or partly revealed at Makkah or Madinah, and number of verses. Traditional authorities for this are given.

**The second section** of the Appendix is dedicated mainly to a detailed specification and explanation of the conventional signs of vocalisation to ensure proper articulation *istilahât al-dabt*. This is in fact a most important aspect of Qur'ānic orthography. Here we see the basic *rasm* which was sufficient to those early Muslims who knew the Qur'ān by heart anyway, augmented to become a highly developed written system of representation, more exact than anything known in Arabic.

The section on *istilahât al-dabt* in the Appendix includes 18 items, 14 of which are diacritical signs that affect the way words are pronounced.<sup>[30]</sup> We


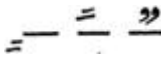
have seen earlier that the rules of *rasm* included addition, deletion and substitution of letters for certain reasons; signs in the present section ensure, nonetheless, the correct pronunciation in those cases.

**1.** placing a small circle (°) above a weak letter - *harf'illa* - indicates that such a letter is additional and should not be pronounced either in connection or pause position, e.g. قالوا qâlûu; أولئك ulâ'ik; نبيّ المرسلين naba'i-l-mursalîn. It should be noted that in ordinary orthography, additional letters are retained with nothing to indicate that they should not be pronounced; thus here the Qur'ânic orthography is seen to be more consistent and more precise.

**2.** placing an oval sign (°) above an *alif* followed by a vowelled letter, indicates that it is additional in consecutive reading but should be pronounced in a pause. e.g. أنا خير منه pronounced ana and anâ respectively; لكننا هو الله pronounced lâkina and lakinnâ.

**3-5.** placing (ح) above any letter indicates that it is unvowelled and should be given a full, distinct pronunciation, e.g. من خير; whereas writing the letter without the sign and placing a *shadda* on the following letter indicated that the two are fully assimilated e.g. يلهث ذلك yalhadhdhalik. i.e., th has become dh. On the other hand, if it is removed from the first letter and then the *shadda* is removed from the second, this indicates masking - *ikhfâ'* - or nasalisation, of the first letter so that it is neither distinct nor fully assimilated into the second, e.g. من ثمرة min thamaratin - or is partially assimilated into the second, e.g. من وال min wâlin.

**6.** placing a small *mîm* instead of the second vowel of *tanwin* or instead of a *sukûn* above a *nun* without a *shadda* on a following *ba'* indicates changing the *tanwin* or *nûn* in to a *mîm*: e.g. علم بذات - alimuun becomes alimum; من بعد min becomes mîm.

**7-9.** placing the two vowel signs of a *tanwin* one on top of the other  indicates that it should be distinctly pronounced: سمع علم samî'un; إلا شراباً sharâban; قوم هاد qawmin. Placing the two signs in succession with  a *shadda* on the following letter indicates assimilation of a *tanwin* e.g., in خشباً مُسندة khushubumusanadah - n became m. On the other hand, placing them in succession without a *shadda* on the following letter indicates nasalising/masking or partial assimilation; thus: شهابٌ ناقب bunth becomes bunth, and the same with *tanwin* with *fatha* and *kasra*. It should be indicated that in normal orthography the *tanwin* signs, like all short vowels, are dropped, and if at all written they will be in the first shape only and the fine distinctions in sound quality reading in the Qur'ân are

obliterated in reading other material.

**10.** The small letters ا ر ء respectively indicate those omitted in the ʿUthmânic copies of the Qur'ân and should be pronounced, thus ذلك dhâlika, داود dâwûd and ولي waliyyi. Before the printing era these small letters used to be written in normal size but in red; smaller size now replaces the red colour. It should be noted that in normal orthography, the first two words are written in the abbreviated forms but without any sign to indicate the omitted letter. Qur'ânic orthography is thus more consistent and precise. If the omitted letter has a replacement in the word in the normal size it is still the added small letter that should be pronounced, thus: الصلوة is pronounced as-salâh and زكوة as az-zakâh.

**11.** placing this sign ~ above a long vowel indicates that it should be lengthened more than its normal length. This is done before a hamza and an unvowelled letter as in 'قرو' qurû': qurûu', 'سى' sî: sîi. σ|εα β|ηιμ: σ|ιεα; μ@ευνζιλαε: μ@εαυηzila.

The Signs 6- 11 are particularly significant because they relate to two important features of Qur'ânic recitation: nasalisation and vowel length. Some manuals of tajwîd deal exclusively with al-nûn wa-l-tanwîn wa-l-mudûd. The Qur'ân has a high frequency of nûn and tanwîn and they have, when adjacent to other letters, different degrees of assimilation and nasality. In Sûra 19 (chosen at random), the frequency of assimilation in nûn and tanwîn is about 6 times as great as without assimilation. This is important because assimilation increases the nasality which has an emotional effect. The signs add extra length to vowels as required in certain situations. Prolongation is achieved not only by adding a madda to a long vowel before hamza or suknuh, as mentioned earlier, but third person masculine pronouns, with a damma or kasra, are followed by a small wâw or yâ' respectively, which gives them a length peculiar to the recitation of the Qur'ân. For example, Q. 86:8: انه و على رجه ے لقادر. The two features of assimilation and prolongation are characteristic of the Qur'ân and are not heard, to any similar extent, in recitation of Arabic poetry. The nun, tanwin and mudûd, together with the higher relative frequency of occurrence of the letters alif, lâ, mî, wâ and yâ' in the Qur'ân<sup>[31]</sup> all have a slowing effect on the reading, more likely to make the reader and listener absorb the material, and they contribute a high degree of sonority to the recitation of the Qur'ân.

**12.** placing a small circle under in بسم الله مجراها indicates that the fatha should be inclined to a kasra and the alif to a yâ'. Thus instead of majraha it becomes majraiha (as in 'rays' in English). This is known as imâla and normal Arabic orthography has no sign to represent it even though this sound is common in some Arab countries; Qur'ânic orthography

is thus more developed in this respect.

**13.** placing the same sign at the end of m in **تَانِنَا** indicates *ishmâm* - giving the consonant a trace of the pronunciation of *damma* according to Hafs *qirâ'a*.

**14.** placing a dot above the second *alif* in **أعجمي** indicates that the second *hamza* should be pronounced lighter - *tashîl*. Thus instead of a '*a'a°jamiyyun* it becomes almost like '*â°jamiyyun*. These last three features are important in some *qirâ'at* which explains an important function of Qur'ânic orthography.

**15.** The ornamental circle indicates the end of the verse which is different from a sentence in Arabic and affects the stress patterns in reading. Inside the circle is written the number of the verse always at the end (i.e., the full completion) and not at the beginning as in normal Arabic (and English) material.

**16.** \* indicates the beginning of *rub° al-hizb* (an eighth of a *juz'*).

**17-18.** placing a line above a word indicates that a ritual prostration is required by the reader/listener on reaching the end of the verse which is further marked by an ornamental sign after the verse number and a further

sign in the margin. e.g. 96:19  **اَكْلًا لَا يُطْنَهُ وَأَنْجِدْ وَأَقْرَبْ**

N.B. This edition uses one further sign, which is not listed here, that is, placing a **س** above the end of a word to indicate *saktah* (hiatus or slight interruption of reading), to separate two words, such as **ولم يجعل له عوجا س قِيمًا** "and has not made in it [the Qur'ân] any crookedness straight, to give warning..." (18:1-2). Without the hiatus, the meaning would be distorted.

**The third section** of the Appendix deals with the various signs for pauses *°alâmât al-waqf*. This is another area in which the writing of the Qur'ân is distinguished from the writing of any other Arabic material. Modern punctuation marks became known in Arabic only last century, and up to now they are not universally adopted in a systematic way. In any case, none of these marks appear in the writing of the Qur'ân. Six pausal signs, *°alâmât al-waqf* - are used in the *mushaf*, placed higher than all other signs as follows:

—

sign for a mandatory pause *al-waqf al-lâzim*. e.g.,

إِنَّمَا يَسْتَجِيبُ الَّذِينَ يَسْمَعُونَ - وَالْمَوْتَى

"... only those can accept 'who hear'. As for the dead, Allah will raise them up." (6:36).

The mandatory pause comes after who hear in Arabic. This is followed by wa, a conjunction which generally means and; it retains the same form even in contexts where it means as for. Without the mandatory stop, a reader may read the statement as: ... only those can accept who hear and the dead... which would corrupt the sense.

لا

sign for prohibited pause - al-waqf al-mamnu<sup>c</sup>. e.g.

الَّذِينَ تَتَوَفَّاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ طَيِّبِينَ لَا يَقُولُونَ سَلَامًا

"Those whose souls the angels take while they are goodly, to them they say: 'Peace be on you! Enter the Garden'" ( 16:32)

It is prohibited to pause at 'goodly' which would leave the sentence unfinished and impair the sense.

ح

sign of optional pause - waqf jâ'iz jawâzan  
mustawiya '-l-tarafayn. e.g.

نَبَأَهُم بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّهُمْ فِتْيَةٌ

"We shall narrate to thee their story with truth. They were young men who believed in their Lord" ( 18: 131).

The optional pause comes after truth.

صل

sign of preferred non-pause al-waqf jâ'iz ma'a kawn  
al-wasl' awlâ. e.g.,

إلا هو <sup>س</sup> وإن يمسسك

"If Allah touches thee with affliction none can remove it but He; and if He touches thee with Good, He is powerful over everything (6:17).

This kind of pause comes after but He, but in order to give a fuller meaning it is preferable, in Arabic, to pause at the end of the verse.

قل

sign of preferred pause - al-waqf jâ'iz wa awlâ. e.g.

ما يعلمهم إلا قليل <sup>س</sup> فلا تُمار

"None knows them [the seven sleepers of the cave] save a few. So contend not concerning them except ..." (18:22).

It is preferable to pause after a few.

\*\*

Sign of selective pause - ta'ânuq al-waqf. If you pause at either of the two places you may not pause at the other. e.g.,

ذلك الكتاب لا ريب <sup>س</sup> فيه <sup>س</sup> هدى للمتقين

can be read, pausing to make the meaning either as:

"This is the Book - no doubt. In it there is guidance for those who ..."

or

"This is the Book wherein is no doubt, a guidance to those who.." (2:2)

If you pause at both places, the material following the first pause will read in it, which would disrupt the sense.

The underlying principle in all these is whether the sense has reached final

completion or is not complete; has reached an acceptable stage of completion; or would be more fully expressed if carried into a further stage.

\* \* \*

## Tradition or Change

It was understandable that the Uthmânic *rasm* should be given such a high status through the ages. Indeed some people took an extreme view that there were esoteric reasons for everything in it which could be grasped only by the very few endowed with esoteric knowledge. In the same way as there is *i'jâz* (inimitability) in the linguistic structure of the Qur'ân, they argued, there is also *i'jâz* in its *rasm*. Thus mystic explanations have been given, represented by such people as Abû-l-Abbâs al-Marâkishî (721/1321)<sup>[32]</sup>. It is clearly such views that led Ibn Khaldûn (808/1405) to castigate those holding them:

Do not pay attention to what some stupid people think that the companions of the Prophet were masters of the craft of writing and what we find in their writing different from systematic orthography is not actually as we imagine but there is an explanation and wisdom behind it. Thus they argue that the additional *alif* in *لَا أَذْبَحُهَا* (27:21) is there to indicate that Solomon did not slaughter the hoopoe, and the additional *yâ'* in *بَابِئِنَّ* (51:47) indicates how complete divine power is in building the sky.

Such people were led to this view in Ibn Khaldûn's opinion by a desire to put the Companions above lack of knowledge in writing when in fact this was a craft, the knowledge of which is relative and not necessarily indicative of innate perfection or otherwise. The Arabs at the time of writing the *mushaf* were still closer to the Bedouin state which did not perfect crafts, and this, in Ibn Khaldûn's opinion, appeared in their writing of the *mushaf* which was written by a number of people whose knowledge of writing was not excellent and they followed various orthographies.<sup>[33]</sup> It is understandable that Ibn Khaldûn should have been so incensed by the imaginary and far-fetched explanation of al-Marâkishî; what he said about the early stage of writing may also have some justification but, on the other hand, he clearly did not pay regard to considerations of phonetics and *qirâ'at*, and how they affect various aspects of *rasm*. For instance in the very examples he quotes (and we have seen many other instances earlier), he overlooks the fact that additional letters come only after a *hamza*; the real explanation here has to be sought there, and in the desire of orthographers to ensure specific pronunciation as explained above, not for esoteric reasons as argued by al-Marâkishî nor simply on the ground of inconsistency and lack of mastery of craftsmanship on the part of early scribes, as argued by Ibn Khaldûn. His own views came to be dismissed out of hand by a modern authority on Qur'ânic *rasm* on the ground that he was a loner and not a *mujtahid* in the field.<sup>[34]</sup>

In the past and present<sup>[35]</sup> some people (the non-traditionalists) have argued that there is nothing sacred about that particular Qur'ânic *rasm*. There is nothing in the Qur'ân or Hadith to make it obligatory or recommended. The Muslims could use any specific system for writing the Qur'ân. The objective of writing the Qur'ân is surely to enable people to read it correctly and learn it correctly. Indeed, some argued that there was no reason that it should be written in an orthography that is not used for writing any other book of the time.<sup>[36]</sup> Desire to facilitate the reading and learning of the Qur'ân to each generation according to their contemporary orthography is an argument non-traditionalists have always repeated. They regard traditional orthography as inadequate in this respect, citing especially the seeming inconsistency in the way some words are written in the ʿUthmânic *rasm*.

They were obviously unsuccessful, however, in citing such examples as **لأذبحته** and **بأيدي** (always cited and highlighted in criticism of the *rasm*) linking they were two isolated examples of this feature. Critics do not seem to have noticed that such examples consistently have a hamza in them and no one asked whether this factor had any effect on the *rasm*. They were also unsuccessful in citing **بسم** written normally without an alif, but with an alif in Q. 56:74, 69:52, 96:1, because in these three instances it is **بسم ربك** whereas in all others (115 places) it is **بسم الله**; abbreviation (by omitting the alif) was clearly intended with the one most frequently used and with the name of Allah. Nor should critics have an argument in the numerous examples where various *qirâ'at* are involved or in examples where there is an intention of pointing out a contrast as explained earlier; this is a valid consideration in normal orthography.<sup>[37]</sup> However, they had a better argument in examples where there does not seem to be an obvious consideration of phonetics or *qirâ'at* for variations. For instance, **سبحن** is written normally without an alif but in 17:93 it is written with an alif **سبحان ربي**; similarly, **الليل** is written with one lâmm but **اللهم واللعب** with two.

In such examples the explanation might legitimately be sought, not in mystical considerations nor necessarily in simple inconsistency but in the fact that Arabic orthography even after the period of ʿUthmân - as can be witnessed in older books on *imlâ'* - knew more than one way of writing some letters within words. There were Kufan and Basran opinions and there was the question of *jawâz* - optional ways - in many cases.<sup>[38]</sup> Just as there were options in grammar, there were also options in orthography, but what was optional at an early stage of *rasm* became fixed because of the special status of things Qur'ânic.

Understandably the traditionalists have always had strong arguments for maintaining the status quo. After all the early *rasm* was set by the Companions of the Prophet and sanctioned by no less figures than Abû Bakr,

ʿUmar, ʿUthmân, ʿAlî and others, it was adopted by their followers in what amounts to an *ijmâʿ*, so that Mâlik, Aḥmad and other imams<sup>[39]</sup> held that it should not be altered in any way. Great care were also taken to keep the Qurʾân as it originally was in pronunciation of the words and writing at that time. If the gate were to be opened, the traditionalists argue, to what was deemed desirable in *rasm* it might in time become open to pronunciation. Thus the juristic principle of *sadd al-dharaʿiʿ* (blocking the way for unlawful or undesired things) was invoked. If changes in *rasm* are conceded, it is not unlikely that some might consider it desirable to write the Qurʾân in the Latin alphabet or write abridgements of it, or write it in Arab dialects which the non-traditionalists could argue would make it more accessible or such hocus-pocus and absurdities.<sup>[40]</sup> Abandoning the *rasm* might also lead to abandoning many of *ʿulûm al-adâʿ* (sciences of recitation). There are, moreover, many benefits in the ʿUthmânic *rasm* which should not be sacrificed:

- (a) It indicates the origin of certain letters, as in *زكوة ، صلوة* written with *wâw*;
- (b) It indicates some *fusha* versions of Arabic such as that of Tayyî in writing the feminine *ha* as an ordinary open *taʿ*; the deletion of the final *yâʿ* of the indicative verb in *يوم يات* (11:105);
- (c) It indicates a different meaning of a word in a certain context: thus *أم من* is written as two words in (4:109) to indicate that *أم* here is in the sense *بل* of (rather) unlike in 67:22;
- (d) It indicates various *qirâʿat* of the same word - many examples can be cited here,<sup>[41]</sup> to quote but two: *يخدعون* (2:4) is written without *alif* and there are two *qirâʿat* as of it - *yakhdaʿdna* and *yukhâdiʿûna*; (6:115) is written with a *tâʿ marbûta* and there are two *qirâʿat* as of it - *kalimât* and *kalimat*.

Traditionalist further argue that rules of ordinary orthography are themselves open to differences and changes and Qurʾânic *rasm* should not be made to follow them. Besides, it is not necessary in ordinary orthography that the writing of words should coincide with the pronunciation, thus we have words like *داود ، يرى ، اولئك هؤلاء ، لكن* to give but a few examples of 'irregular' writing, where the orthography does not reflect the pronunciation and this is perfectly accepted by the non-traditionalists. Nor is this peculiar to Arabic: it is far more extensive and accepted in English and French for instance. And, whereas the pronunciation of such irregular words is not indicated by any signs in modern Arabic, all cases of additions, deletions or substitution of letters in the Qurʾânic *rasm* are indicated by signs of *istilahât al-dabt* to guide the reader to their correct pronunciation. It should also be remembered that the ʿUthmânic *rasm* was one source of ordinary orthography<sup>[42]</sup> and came

to differ from it only in certain aspects, all of which have been identified in detail, including every single exception from the rules, in a way not surprising from scholars of the Qur'ân who counted even the occurrence of every single letter of the alphabet in the entire text.<sup>[43]</sup> They also supplied signs to guide the reader to pronounce every word, making the *rasm* a uniquely precise system of representation. This has always been supported by a tradition and an educational system, that considers reception by word of mouth is - as it was at the time of the Prophet - the primary way of teaching and learning the Qur'ân. In any case, in addition to *istilahât al-dabt* and the guide printed in the Appendix of the *mushaf*, some *mushafs* are now printed with a further guide at the foot margin of every page containing the Qur'anic and the modern orthographic ways of writing words where the two systems differ; but Muslims have evidently insisted that the text of the Qur'ân itself should remain written in the ʿUthmânic *rasm*. They apparently consider that this *rasm* has been an important way of ensuring that successive generations of Muslims have been faithful to the original writing and reading of the Qur'ân, ever since Hudhayfa Ibn al-Yamân urged ʿUthmân: Quick! Help the Muslims before they differ about the text of the Qur'ân as the Christians and Jews differed about their scriptures.

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## Footnotes

[1] Bukhâri: *Sahih*, fada'il al-Qur'ân, 3.

[2] Al-Dânî, Abû ʿAmr, *Al-Muqni' fimarsum wa-masâhif ahl al-amṣâr ma' kitâb al-naqt*, Damascus, 1983, pp. 124-5.

[3] Al-Dânî, *op. cit.*, p. 125-6.

[4] Such as those by Abû Hâtim al-Sijistânî (248/826) and Al-Dânî (444/1502)

[5] Sûyutî, *Itqân*, I, Beirut, 199?, p. 484.

[6] Sûyutî, *Itqân*, II, p. 348-56.

[7] Wâlî, H., *kitâb al-implâ'*, Beirut, 1985, p. 41.

[8] Sûyutî, *Itqân*, II, Beirut, 1987, p.470.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

[10] Dar al-Fikr, Damascus, 1983.

[11] Wâlî, H., *ibid*, p. 101.

\* Irqam, 11, pp. 471-82

[12] *op. cit.*, p. 140.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 108-9.

[14] Sûyutî, *Itqân*, n p. 475.

[15] Wâlî, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

[16] But it does sometimes carry weight in normal orthography. See Wâlî, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

[17] Wâlî, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

[18] Al-Dânî, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

[19] For details see Sûyutî, *Itqân*, II, p. 477.

[20] Note that in modern Arabic *tâ' marbûâtâ* is pronounced and written an ordinary *ta'* in names like: *رأفت ، مدحت ، حياة*; in languages like Turkish and Urdu, they say *salat* and *zakat*.

[21] Wâlî, *op. cit.*, p. 143-151 .

[22] For further examples see Al-Dânî, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-92.

[23] See Al-Dânî, *op. cit.*, p. 106 and Sûyutî, II, p. 497.

[24] See H. Wâlî, *op. cit.*, p. 173-5.

[25] *op. cit.*, p. 130.

[26] In some earlier and current editions, a mark is added, showing the end of ten verses to be read in prayers.

[27] See Appendix pp. p-ج of copies printed - 1405/1984. The *mushaf* printed in the King Fahd Complex is called *Mushaf al-Madîna al-nabawiyya*.

[28] Arberry's translation is an exception.

[29] H. S. ʿUthmân, *Haqq al-tilâwa*, Jordan, 1901/1971, p. 14.

[30]. See *istilahât al-dabt*, Egyptian *Mushaf*, Appendix and Al-Dânî, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-143.

[31] See ʿAbd al-Rahman Ibn al-Jawzi, *Funûn al-afnân fî ʿUlûm al-Qurʿân*, Baghdad, 1988, pp. 104-106.

[32] He still has followers now. See S. al-Salih, *Mabâhith fî ʿUlûm al-Qurʿân*, Beirut, 19??, pp. 276-7.

[33] The *Muqaddima*, Dar al-Shaʿb, Cairo, n.d.; pp. 377-8.

[34] Hifni Nâsifi: *Al-Muqtataf*, vol. 83, Cairo, 1933, p. 206.

[35] See S. al-Salih, *Ibid.*, pp. 287-9; L. al-Saʿid, *al-jamʿ al-sauti liʿl-Qurʿân al-karîm*, Cairo, 196?, pp. 291-2.

[36]. al-Saʿid,, *ibid.*, p.292.

[37] Wâlî, *op. cit.*, p.94.

[38] See Wâlî, *op. cit.* pp. 147, 157-8 and *passim*.

[39] See L. al-Saʿid, *ibid*, pp. 297-300.

[40] H. Nâsifi, *op. cit.*, p.206.

[41] al-Saʿid, *ibid*, pp. 304-6.

[42] Wâlî, *op. cit.*, p.44.

[43] See ʿAbd al-Rahmân Ibn al-Jawzî, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-6.