FORGOTTEN WITNESS: EVIDENCE FOR THE EARLY CODIFICATION OF THE QUR’ĀN*

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Three kinds of historical evidence are examined here that have not previously been seriously considered in relation to the question of codification. The Umayyad inscriptions from the Dome of the Rock have generally been ignored or dismissed because of apparent departures from the “canonical” text, as represented by the Cairo edition; here they are analyzed for the evidence they nonetheless provide for the state of the Qur’ānic text toward the end of the first ḥijrī century. Equally informative are al-Walid’s inscriptions at the Great Mosque of al-Madīnah, datable about twenty years later; they were described by eyewitnesses in the first half of the tenth century, when they were still partly visible. Finally, from scattered indications it is suggested that there was a group of professional Qur’ān copyists at al-Madīnah at the end of the first and the beginning of the second century.

† Estelle Whelan died on 13 October 1997 (ed.).

IN THE LAST TWO DECADES a controversy has arisen over the period in which the text of Muslim scripture became codified. The traditional Islamic view can be summarized as follows.1 Both Abū Bakr (A.H. 11–13/ A.D. 632–34) and ʿUmar (13–23/634–44) made efforts to gather together the scraps of revelation that had been written down by the faithful during the lifetime of the Prophet, on bones, on palm leaves, on potsherds, and on whatever other materials were at hand, as well as being preserved in “the breasts of men.”2 But it was the third caliph, ʿUthmān (23–35/644–61), who first charged a small group of men at al-Madīnah with codifying and standardizing the text. Alarmed by reported divergences in the recitation of the revelation, he commissioned one of the Prophet’s former secretaries, Zayd b. Thābit, and several prominent members of Quraysh—ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, Saʿīd b. al-ʿĀṣ, and ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. al-Ḥārith—are those most often mentioned—to produce a standard copy of the text, based on the compilation in the keeping of Hafṣah, daughter of ʿUmar. If there was disagreement over language among members of the commission, it was to be resolved in accordance with the dialect spoken by Quraysh. Once the standard text had been established, several copies were made and sent to major cities in the Islamic domain, specifically Damascus, al-Baṣra, al-Kūfah, and perhaps others. Although there are variations in detail, for example, in the list of names of those who served on ʿUthmān’s commission and in the list of cities to which copies were sent, this basic outline is not in dispute within the Muslim world.

Oral recitation nevertheless remained the preferred mode of transmission, and, as time passed, variant versions of the text proliferated—the kind of organic change that is endemic to an oral tradition. In addition, because of the nature of the early Arabic script, in which short vowels were not indicated and consonants of similar form were only sometimes distinguished by pointing, writing, too, was subject to misunderstanding, copyist’s error, and change over time. In the early tenth century, at Baghdad, Abū Bakr Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936) succeeded in reducing the number of acceptable readings to the seven that were predominant in the main Muslim centers of the time: al-Madīnah, Makkah, Damascus, al-Baṣra, and al-Kūfah. Some Qur’ān readers who persisted in deviating from these seven readings were subjected to draconian punishments. Nevertheless, with the passage of time, additional variant readings were readmitted, first “the three after the seven,” then “the four after the ten.” The modern Cairo edition, prepared at al-Azhar in the 1920s, is based on one of the seven readings permitted

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by Ibn Mujāhid, that of Abū Bakr Āṣim (d. ca. 1277/1445) as transmitted by Hafs b. Sulaymān (d. 180/796).

Early efforts by Muslim scholars to establish the sequence of the revelation, particularly the verses revealed at Makkah and those revealed at al-Madīnah, were emulated by European scholars, who focused on similar problems, though often adopting somewhat different criteria for determining solutions. Nevertheless, already in the early twentieth century Alphonse Mingana seriously challenged the entire historical framework outlined here. Mingana, whose approach was patently tendentious, argued that the Qurʾān had not been codified in book form until several decades later than was generally accepted, in the reign of the fifth Umayyad caliph, ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān (65–86/685–705). In the 1970s John Wansbrough went much farther, concluding, on the basis of textual and linguistic analysis, that there is no evidence for a “canonical” version of the Qurʾānic text before the very end of the eighth century at the earliest.6

Wansbrough argued that the nature of the text itself presupposes “an organic development from originally independent traditions during a long period of transmission . . .” juxtaposition of independent pericopes to some extent unified by means of a limited number of rhetorical conventions.”7 In support of his conclusion he noted that Muslim traditions about early revelation, indeed about the life of the Prophet and early Muslim history as a whole, are known only from later Islamic literature; Qurʾānic exegesis, for example, first evolved in the late eighth and ninth centuries.8 Nor can most early Muslim traditions be confirmed in contemporary non-Muslim sources. Wansbrough’s entire analysis was based on the assumption that the “canonization” of the Qurʾānic text and its role in the development of the Muslim community followed a trajectory similar to that of Hebrew scripture. For example, in connection with “exegetical” (Wansbrough’s characterization of much of the content of the Sirah of Ibn Iṣḥāq, ca. 85–150/704–67, edited by Ibn Hishām, d. 218/833) reports of material that also appears in the “canon,” he declared: “For Hebrew scripture the priority in time of such reports over the actual reproduction in literary form of prophetic utterances has been established. To postulate a similar, if not identical, process for Muslim scripture seems to me unjustified, though in this particular instance complicated by the redaction history of the Sirah itself.” He also cited “the likelihood of a Rabbinic model for the account of an authoritative text produced in committee, namely the Jamnia tradition on the canonization of Hebrew scripture.”9 The vastly different historical contexts in which these supposedly parallel processes took place were not explicitly recognized or taken into account in Wansbrough’s literary analysis. In fact the results of this analysis were frequently cited as grounds for rejecting the supposed historical evidence presented in such texts as the Sirah. By means of this reasoning Wansbrough arrived at the conclusion that “concern with the text of scripture did not precede by much the appearance of the masoretic [exegetical] literature as it has in fact been preserved”: that is, in his view the Qurʾānic text assumed its canonical form more or less simultaneously with the appearance of commentaries on it (tafsīr).10 He took as confirmation of this view Joseph Schacht’s conclusion

3 See Welch and Pearson, 416–19, especially p. 411, referring to Gustav Flügel’s edition of the Qurʾānic text.
5 His bias is apparent in statements like the following: “In considering the question of the transmission of the Qurʾān according to Christian writers, the reader will feel that he is more in the domain of historical facts than in that of the precarious Hadith . . .” (Mingana, 34).
6 J. Wansbrough, Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation (Oxford, 1977); cf. J. Chabbi, “Histoire et tradition sacrée: La biographie impossible de Mahomet,” Arabica 43.1 (1996): 190–94. In a recent article Y. D. Nevo (“Towards a Prehistory of Islam,” Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam 17 [1994]: 108–41) has attempted to confirm the interval suggested by Wansbrough by tracing the gradual evolution of rock-cut inscriptions in the Negeb from “basic” (pre-Islamic) to “Muhammadan” to “Muslim” religious texts. Aside from the fact that these terms are not clearly defined, Professor Donner has noted (personal communication) that Nevo’s argument can be taken equally well to support the traditional view that early Islam and the Qurʾānic text evolved primarily in al-Madīnah and other urban centers, to which the Negeb was entirely peripheral. The author is grateful to Professor Donner for calling this article to her attention.

7 Wansbrough, 47; cf. pp. 12, 18–20, 44–45, 49.
9 Wansbrough, 42, 45.
10 Wansbrough, 45.
that the Qurʾānic text did not serve as a basis for Muslim law before the ninth century.\textsuperscript{11}

Particularly crucial to Wansbrough's argument is the term "canonical," for which he assumes a high standard of precision. It is clear that even in the Muslim tradition the fact was acknowledged that readings of the Qurʾān continually diverged from a supposed original; it is clear also that steps had repeatedly to be taken to impose or protect a unitary text of revelation—in the time of ʿUthmān, again in the time of Ibn Mujāhid, and even as recently as the 1920s, when scholars at al-Azhar prepared the currently most widely used edition. This edition is nonetheless not treated as uniquely "canonical" in parts of India and North Africa, where versions that differ in titles of the sūrah, divisions between ʿayūt, and occasionally vocalizations are in use; furthermore, it is clear from surviving manuscripts that such variants have persisted through the history of Islam.\textsuperscript{12} Wansbrough's difficulty appears to be that these divergences are not substantive but rather involve details that he perceives as formalistic, perhaps even trivial.\textsuperscript{13} Yet there is abundant evidence from the relatively well-documented period of the ninth and tenth centuries that such divergences were not perceived as trivial within Islam itself.

Perhaps the most valuable results of Wansbrough's study for the historian are his analyses of aspects of the text that, though already familiar, had not previously been so carefully delineated or explored in all their implications. One of these aspects is the polemical character of much of the Qurʾān, which, as Wansbrough convincingly demonstrates, was focused on Jewish scripture and tradition, implying an important Jewish opposition as one of the motivations behind the "canonization" of Islamic scripture. A second is the nature of the text itself, a series of "independent pericopes" placed side by side but expressed in a unified language and style.

The essential challenge to historians of the early Islamic period is to reconcile these undeniably useful observations with historical evidence that Wansbrough has not admitted into his analysis. Because of the relentless opacity of his own writing style it is tempting to ignore this challenge, but the implications of his argument are too far-reaching to permit such self-indulgence. It is important to recognize that his analysis was guided predominantly by generalizations drawn from the history of the biblical text, which were then applied to Muslim scripture. Most formidable is the conclusion, not stated explicitly but inescapable from Wansbrough's analysis, that the entire Muslim tradition about the early history of the text of the Qurʾān is a pious forgery, a forgery so immediately effective and so all-pervasive in its acceptance that no trace of independent contemporary evidence has survived to betray it. An important related issue involves the dating of early manuscripts of the Qurʾān. If Wansbrough is correct that approximately a century and a half elapsed before Muslim scripture was established in "canonical" form, then none of the surviving manuscripts can be attributed to the Umayyads or even the very early ʿAbbāsid period; particularly, one controversial manuscript discovered in Sanʿāʾ in the 1970s, no. 20-33.1, for which a date around the turn of the eighth century has been proposed,\textsuperscript{14} would have to have been copied at a much later period.

The purpose of the present study is to call attention to some types of evidence that Wansbrough did not take into account and that seem to contradict the historical conclusions that he has drawn from his essentially ahistorical analysis.

\textbf{Qurʾānic Inscriptions}

Primary documents for the condition of the Qurʾānic text in the first century of Islam are ʿAbd al-Malik's two long inscriptions in blue-and-gold glass mosaic, which encircle respectively the inner and outer faces of the octagonal arcade at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. They are still preserved in their entirety, except for the substitution of the name of the ʿAbbāsid al-Maʾmūn (198–218/813–33) for that of ʿAbd al-Malik; al-Maʾmūn did not, however, change the foundation date included by his predecessor, 72/691–92, which thus ensures that the inscriptions were actually executed in the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik. The main inscription consists of brief invocations combined with a series of passages taken from what are now various parts of the Qurʾān, all concerned

\textsuperscript{11} Wansbrough, 44.


\textsuperscript{13} See, e.g., Wansbrough, 45.

with a single theme—challenging Christian dogma in the main Christian pilgrimage city.  

The text was originally read as a single inscription by Max van Berchem, who began with the outer face of the arcade and thus located the foundation notice in the middle, supposedly followed by the Qur’ānic verses on the inner face of the same arcade; this sequence has been accepted without question by most subsequent scholars. Van Berchem’s arrangement contradicts the normal sequence of Islamic foundation inscriptions, in which the foundation notice occurs at the end. In fact, this mosaic text should be recognized as comprising two distinct inscriptions. As Christel Kessler has transcribed them, it is clear that the band on the inner face of the arcade contains the main message. The outer inscription is experienced first by those entering the building, who may read only the proximate segment, but the main text, on the inner face of the arcade, was meant to be read in its entirety by those who were returning as they had entered, which involved circumambulation of the middle ambulatory.  

It begins on the south side of the octagon with part of the shahādah, the declaration of faith, in the same form in which it appears on the reform coinage of ‘Abd al-Malik introduced five years later, and is followed by a series of excerpts from different parts of the Qur’ān as it is now constituted:

“In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associate” [beginning of the shahādah]. “Unto Him belongeth sovereignty and unto Him belongeth praise. He quickeneth and He giveth death; and He is Able to do all things” [a conflation of 64:1 and 57:2]. “Muhammad is the servant of God and His messenger” [variant completion of the shahādah], “L/0! God and His angels shower blessings on the Prophet. O ye who believe! Ask blessings on him and salute him with a worthy salutation” [33:56 complete]. “The blessing of God be on him and peace be on him, and may God have mercy” [blessing, not in the Qur’ānic text]. “O, people of the Book! Do not exaggerate in your // religion (dini/kum) nor utter aught concerning God save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of God, and His Word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers, and say not ‘Three’—Cel/ase! (it is) better for you!—God is only One God. Far be it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And God is sufficient as Defender. The Messiah will never scorn to b/e a servant unto God, nor will the favoured angels. Whoso scorneth His service and is proud, all such will He assemble unto Him” [4:171–72 complete]. “Oh God, bless Your messenger and Your servant Je/sus son of Mary” (interjection introducing the following passage). “Peace


18 The basic text presented here is that given by Kessler. The recent publication for the first time of a complete and clearly readable set of photographs (though misidentified and presented in incorrect order) has, however, necessitated a few corrections and alterations in her version; for the photographs, see S. Nuseibeh and O. Grégoire, The Dome of the Rock (New York, 1996), 82–105. The translations of the Qur’ānic passages are those of M. M. Pickthall, with substitution of “God” for “Allâh” and “Book” for “Scripture.”

19 This rendering seems more appropriate than “slave,” given by Pickthall.
be on him the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he shall be raised alive!” [19:33 complete, with change from first to third person]. “Such was Jesus, son of Mary, (this is) a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt. It befitteth not (the Majesty of) God that He should take unto Himself a son. Glory be to Him! Wh/en He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! and it is” [19:34-35 complete]. “God (Himself) is witness that there is no God save H/im. And the angels and the men of learning (too are witness). Maintaining His creation in justice, there is no God save Him, the Almighty, the Wise. Lo! religion with God (is) The Surrender (to His will and guidance). Those who (formerly) received the Book differed only after knowledge came unto them, through transgression among themselves. Whoso disbelieveth the revelations of God (will find that) lo! God is swift at reckoning” [3:18–19 complete].

The outer inscription also begins on the south side:

“In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associate” [beginning of the shahadah]. “Say: He is God, the One! God, the eternally Besought of all! He begetteth not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him” [112 complete except for the introductory basmalah]. “Muhammad is the Messenger of God” [completion of the shahadah], “the blessing of God be on him” [blessing]. //

“In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associate. Muhammad is the Messenger of God” [shahadah, complete]. “Lo! God and His angels shower blessings on the Prophet. O ye who believe! Ask blessings on him and salute him with a worthy salutation” [33:56 complete].

“In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One” [beginning of the shahadah]. “Praise be to God, Who hath not taken unto Himself a son, and Who hath no partner in the Sovereignty, nor hath He any protecting friend through dependence. And magnify Him with all magnificence” [17:111 complete except for the initial “And say”]. “Muhammad is the Messenger of God” [completion of the shahadah], “the blessing of God be on him and the angels and His prophets, and peace be on him, and may God have mercy” [blessing].

“In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associ- ciate” [beginning of the shahadah]. “Unto // Him be- longeth sovereignty and unto Him belongeth praise. He quickeneth and He giveth death; and He is Able to do all things” [conflation of 64:1 and 57:2]. “Muhammad is the Messenger of God” [completion of the shahadah], “the blessing of God be on him. May He accept his intercession on the Day of Judgment on behalf of his people” [blessing and prayer]. //

“In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God. He is One. He has no associate. Muhammad is the Messenger of God” [the shahadah complete], “the blessing of God be on him” [blessing].

“The servant of God ²A/ibd [Allāh the Imām al-Ma’mūn, Commander]²⁰ of the Faithful, built this dome in the year two and seventy. May God accept from him and be content with him. Amen, Lord of the worlds, praise be to God” [foundation notice].

With minor variations, these Qur’ānic passages reflect the text as known from the standard Cairo edition, and it is possibly the existence of these inscriptions that led Mingana to propose that the original codification of the Qur’ān had taken place during the caliphate, not of ʿUthmān, but of ʿAbd al-Malik.

It is, in fact, puzzling that, although the inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock have been known to scholars for more than a century and have repeatedly been the subject of interpretation, little attention has been paid to the elements from which they were composed. On the inner face of the octagon the declaration of faith is followed by conflated verses describing the powers of God. Next the Prophet is introduced, with a blessing that, though not directly quoted from the Qur’ān, was clearly already in use in 72/694. Then comes an exhortation to Christians that Jesus was also a prophet and mortal, followed by the claim that God is sufficient unto Himself. Finally comes a command to bend to His will and the threat of reckoning for those who do not. The inscription on the outer face consists, as Kessler²¹ has pointed out, of six sections set apart by ornaments, the last being the actual foundation notice. Each of the other five sections begins with the basmalah. In each of the first four it is followed by the Umayyad shahadah and a Qur’ānic verse arrayed in such a way as to form a self-contained and coherent statement, followed by a blessing on the Prophet. The fifth section is the complete shahadah alone. Each of these

²⁰ Brackets enclose the substitution by al-Ma’mūn.
²¹ Kessler, 11.
sections is thus a miniature composition encapsulating the major themes of the inscription on the inner face.

Within this context it is clear that the minor textual variations noted have been introduced to fit the sense. Such alteration of the standard Qur’ānic text in order to express a particular theme seems always to have been acceptable in Islamic inscriptions, however rigidly the actual recitation of the Qur’ān may have been regulated; even inscriptions of much later dates, when there is no question that a “canonical” text of the Qur’ān had been established, embody such variations. It is difficult to believe that the selection and coherent arrangement of passages in the time of ʿAbd al-Malik would not have influenced the “canonical” arrangement of the text had codification taken place in his reign or later. It seems particularly unlikely that the combination of phrases from 64:1 and 57:2, repeated twice, could originally have been a unitary statement that was then “deconstructed” and incorporated into different parts of the Qur’ān.

Nevertheless, the types of minor variation mentioned, juxtaposition of disparate passages, conflation, shift of

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22 Pace Busse, “Inscriften.” 10. One example is an inscribed stone block dated 10 Jumādā II 550/11 August 1155, set into the north wall of the Great Mosque in the town of Cizre (Jazirat ibn ʿUmar), on the Tigris in southeastern Turkey; for an illustration, see E. Whelan, “The Public Figure: Political Iconography in Medieval Mesopotamia” (Ph.D. diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1979), fig. 407. Of the eight lines inscribed on it the first is unreadable. The second introduces the main theme of the inscription, the Day of Judgment. Lines 6–8 include an invocation of blessing for the anonymous donor and the date. Lines 3–5 contain the following fragments from the Qur’ān, run together to express a single, coherent message: “On the Day when every soul will find itself confronted with all that it hath done of good . . .” [the introduction to 3:30] “On the Day when We say unto hell: Art thou filled? and it saith: Can there be more to come?” [50:30 complete] “On the day when the wrong-doer gnaweth his hands . . .” [introduction to 25:27] “the Day of the approaching (doom), when the hearts will be choking the throats . . .” [excerpts from 40:18]. Professor Annemarie Schimmel very kindly helped in deciphering this inscription. See also A. Welch, “Qurān and Tomb: The Religious Epigraphs of Two Early Sultanate Tombs in Delhi,” in Indian Epigraphy: Its Bearing on the History of Art, ed. F. M. Asher and G. S. Gai (New Delhi, 1985), 257–67. Professor Bellamy very kindly supplied the reference to Jālāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, al-ʾIqān fī ʿalām al-Qurʾān, 2nd ed., ed. M. A. Ibrāhīm (n.p. [Cairo?], 1363/1984), 1: 378–80, a fifteenth-century work in which recitation of the Qur’ān out of order and in mixed selection is generally condemned.

person, and occasional omission of brief phrases, led Patricia Crone and Michael Cook to question the value of the mosaic inscriptions at the Dome of the Rock as evidence for the “literary form” of the text as a whole at that early date. Their skepticism appears to have been engendered rather by two contemporary inscriptions on hammered copper plaques installed on the exterior faces of the lintels over the inner doors in the eastern and northern entrances respectively: “There is extensive agreement with our text in [the mosaic inscriptions] . . .; on the other hand, there is extensive deviance from our text in [the copper plaques]. . . .” Close scrutiny of the two copper plaques suggests that the question is not one of “extensive deviance”; rather, one inscription is not primarily Qur’ānic in character, and the other is a combination of Qur’ānic fragments and paraphrases that makes sense only as a manipulation of a recognized standard text. The copper plaques include, respectively, seven and four lines of the Umayyad originals; in each instance the remainder of the text, no doubt including an original foundation inscription in the name of ʿAbd al-Malik, was replaced by an attached sheet of copper inscribed in the name of al-Maʾmūn—substitutions comparable to that at the end of the outer mosaic inscription.

In the first instance, the plaque over the eastern entrance, the remaining lines (indicated below by paragraph breaks) of the original inscription contain the following text:

“In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate” [ḥassmālah], “praise be to God than Whom there is no god but He” [taḥmīd], “the Living, the Eternal,” the Originator of the heavens and the earth and the Light of the heavens

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24 Crone and Cook, 167, n. 18.
25 For a complete publication and analysis of these plaques and their inscriptions, see van Berchem, 247–53, nos. 216–17.
26 The end of the tahmīd and these two epithets have been interpreted by van Berchem and subsequent scholars as a quotation from 2:255 or the identical passage in 3:11; nevertheless, though most of the “beautiful names” of God can be found in the Qur’ān, it seems a mistake to attempt to identify every use of such an epithet as a Qur’ānic quotation. The epithets in this inscription, including the subsequent series of three in construct with “the heavens and the earth,” can, like the tahmīd, be considered to have had an independent existence and need not be regarded as quotations wherever they occur.
and the earth and the Pillar of the heavens and the earth, the One, the eternally Besought of all" [a series of epithets]—"He begetteth not nor was begotten and there is none comparable unto Him" [112:3–4], "Owner of Sovereignty!"27 Thou givest sovereignty unto whom Thou wilt, and Thou

withdrawest sovereignty from whom Thou wilt" [3:26]; "all sovereignty belongs to You and is from You, and its fate is (determined) by You, Lord of glory the Merciful, the Compassionate" [words of praise]. "He hath prescribed for Himself mercy" [6:12], "and His mercy embraceth all things" [7:156, with shift from first to third person], "may He be glorified and exalted" [words of praise]. "As for what the polytheists associate (with You), we ask You, oh God by Your mercy and by Your beautiful names and by Your noble face and Your awesome power and Your perfect word, on which are based the heavens and the earth and through which we are preserved by Your mercy from Satan and are saved from Your punishment (on) the Day of Judgment and by Your abundant favor and by Your great grace and forbearance and omnipotence and forgiveness and liberality, that You bless Muhammad Your servant, Your prophet, and that You accept his intercession for his people, the blessing of God be upon him and peace be upon him and the mercy of God and" [prayer] . . .

The northern portal inscription begins in a fashion identical to that on the eastern portal but incorporates more passages from the Qurʾānic text:

"In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate" [baṣmalah], "praise be to God than Whom there is no god but He" [tahmīd], "the Living, the Eternal";28 "He has no associate,29 the One, the eternally Besought of all" [epithets]—"He begetteth not nor was begotten, and there is none comparable unto Him" [112:3–4, as in the eastern portal inscription]—"Muḥammad is the servant of God" [introductory statement] "and His messenger, whom He sent with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it conqueror of all religion, however much idolators may be averse" [61:9, with an adjustment at the beginning to introduce Muḥammad]; "we believe in God and that which was revealed unto Muḥammad and that which the Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered" [2:136 or 3:84, with change of person and omission of the central section, where Ibrāḥīm, Iṣmāʿīl, Ishaq, Yaʿqūb, the “tribes,” Mūsā, and Išū are mentioned individually],30 "the blessing of God be upon Muhammad, His servant and His prophet, and peace be upon him and the mercy of God and His blessing and His forgiveness and His acceptance . . ." [blessing].

The copper inscriptions do not appear to represent "deviations" from the current standard text; rather, they belong to a tradition of using Qurʾānic and other familiar phrases, paraphrases, and allusions in persuasive messages, in fact sermons, whether actual khatbahs or not.31 Of a number of such texts two examples cited by al-Ṭabarī should suffice to demonstrate the point. In a sermon supposedly delivered to the people of Ḥunāšīrah in northern Syria in 101/719–20, ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz included the phrase "nor will you be left aimless,"32 a clear reference to Qurʾān 75:36: "Thinketh man that he will be left aimless?"33 A more extended example, involving some of the same passages used at the Dome of the Rock, is the first part of a sermon

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27 This extract follows two epithets, "the One" and "the eternally Besought of all," that also occur, in declarative sentences, in 112:1–2 but need not be considered a "deviation" from the Qurʾānic text; it is clear, however, that their inclusion in the series of "beautiful names" was meant to introduce the Qurʾānic passage.

28 Up to this point the inscription exactly duplicates that on the eastern portal.

29 Perhaps from 6:163, though again it seems unnecessary to seek a Qurʾānic origin for such a standard phrase.

30 In these passages of the Qurʾān the words are those of Muhammad, expressed in the first-person plural; in this inscription ʿAbd al-Malik speaks for the community of believers, and Muhammad is thus referred to in the third-person singular.


delivered by Dā'ūd b. 'Isā, governor of Makkah, in 196/811–12.34

“Praise be to God, Owner of Sovereignty unto whom He wills and withdraws sovereignty from whom He wills, who exalts whom He wills and abases whom He wills. In His hand is the good; He is Able to do all things” [3:26, with change from direct address to God to the descriptive third-person singular]. “I bear witness that there is no God save Him . . . there is no God save Him, the Almighty, the Wise” [3:18, with shift from the third-person plural to the first-person singular and concomitant omission of references to angels and men of learning as bearing witness]. “And I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and His messenger, whom He sent to bring the religion, through whom He sealed the prophets” [further declaration of faith] “and whom He made a mercy for the peoples” [21:107, with shift from first-person plural to third-person singular].35

A narrow focus on the Qurʾānic text and continued efforts to establish and preserve a standard version without deviation have persisted throughout the history of Islam, but side by side with that concern there has been a tradition of drawing upon and modifying that text for a variety of rhetorical purposes. Such creative use of familiar scriptural associations was hardly unique to Islam, and indeed it would be more surprising if no such tradition had developed. The tradition was, however, dependent upon recognition of the text by the listeners, or readers—a strong indication that the Qurʾān was already the common property of the community in the last decade of the seventh century. The inscriptions at the Dome of the Rock should not be viewed as evidence of a precise adherence to or deviation from the “literary form” of the Qurʾānic text; rather they are little sermons or parts of a single sermon addressed to an audience that could be expected to understand the allusions and abbreviated references by which ʿAbd al-Malik’s particular message was conveyed.36 They thus appear at the begin-

36 For parallel evidence of adaptation of familiar Qurʾānic passages in early Arabic literature, see W. al-Qādī, “The Limitations of Qurʾānic Usage in Early Arabic Poetry: The Example of a Khārijite Poem,” in Festschrift Ewald Wagner zum 65. Geburtstag, vol. 2: Studien zur arabischen Dichtung, ed. W. Heinrichs and G. Schoeler (Beirut, 1994), 162–81 (p. 179; “... early Arabic poetry, like its counterpart Arabic prose ... tends to reformulate Qurʾānic materials more than to quote them literally”); idem, “The Impact of the Qurʾān on the Arabic Epistology of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd,” in Approaches to the Qurʾān, ed. G. R. Hawting and A. Shareef (London, 1993), 205–313 (p. 307; “... no one could be a master at drawing from the Qurʾān in the manner that ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd is without having full control ... of the text of the Qurʾān ... he could appeal to what is familiar to his audience”). Professor van Ess kindly supplied references to al-Qādī’s work.
37 The essence of this reform was the adoption of purely epigraphic coinage without imagery.
39 For a reconstructed plan of the mosque, see Sauvaget, 91.
Spanish traveler, who visited the Haramayn between 307/920 and 317/929 and reported that the inscriptions consisted of “the short chapters” of the Qurʾān. According to this traveler, the inscription was written in five lines of gold on a blue ground contained within a marble panel; it was thus probably executed in gold-and-blue glass mosaic, as at the Dome of the Rock. This conjecture is confirmed by a report given by al-Ṭabarî: “[I]t was as if I had entered the mosque of the Prophet of God and I raised my head and looked at the writing in mosaic that was in the mosque and there was what the Commander of the Faithful al-Walíd b. ʿAbd al-Malik had ordered.” Another parallel to the Dome of the Rock was the inscription’s characters, described as squat and thick, in a stroke the width of a finger. The inscription belonged to the reconstruction of the mosque sponsored by ʿAbd al-Malik’s son al-Walíd I (86–967/05–15) and carried out between 88/706 and 91/710 by his governor in the city, ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzîz. Because of this early date it is particularly significant, for three reasons. First, it suggests that the sequence of the Qurʾānic text from sūraḥs 91 to 114 had already been established by 91/710. Second, the clustering of the short sūraḥs in this sequence probably means that the arrangement of the entire Qurʾān generally in the order of the length of the sūraḥs had already been adopted. Finally, sūraḥs 1 and 113–14, which the compiler of one pre-ʿUthmānic codex, ʿAbd Allâh b. Masʿūd (d. 32/653), had supposedly refused to accept as part of the revelation,43 had already been incorporated into the text. ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzîz, the one Umayyad whose piety was respected even by the ʿAbbasid enemies of his family, is unlikely to have admitted anything but the officially recognized version of the Qurʾānic text; indeed, the inclusion of these passages at the Prophet’s own mosque may have constituted official recognition.

The choice of this extended passage for the qiblah wall is difficult to explain in terms of a single coherent message. It appears from a study of reports by Ibn Rustah and other observers that there had been an inscription of al-Walîd on the southern facade of the courtyard, which had been destroyed by Khârijîtes in 130/747, during the reign of Marwân II (127–32/744–50). It would have been appropriate in the Prophet’s own mosque to adorn the entire courtyard, as well as the surrounding arcades and those of the sanctuary, with the complete text of the revelation, which the faithful could theoretically follow in sequence as they progressed through the building, finishing with the text on the qiblah wall, and several sources seem to support that conclusion. The fifteenth-century Egyptian historian Nâr al-Dîn ʿAlî b. ʿAbd al-Samhûdî cited the early-ninth-century informants Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Wâjîdî (d. 207/823) and Ibn Zâbîlîh to the effect that there were inscriptions inside and outside and on the doors of the mosque.44


43 The earliest source for this story appears to have been Abû Muḥammad al-Ṣaḏīr b. Shâhdân (d. 260/874), but even by his time the actual facts about Ibn Masʿûd’s version had become blurred; see A. Jeffery, Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾān: The Old Codices (Leiden, 1937), 21.


might also be possible to interpret Ibn Rustah's report, "Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz is the one who ordered to be written the inscription that is in the mosque and the one who ordered to be written the inscription that is on the qiblah wall of the mosque of the Messenger of God, the blessing of God and peace be on him," as evidence that there were inscriptions throughout the building.

The expression of political claims through Qur'anic quotations and allusions suggests wide familiarity with these verses and their implications in the early Islamic community, between 72/691–92 and 132/750. In fact, although Wansbrough has noted, in his argument for a late compilation of the Qur'ān, that the text was not used as a basis for legal decisions before the ninth century, there is abundant evidence from the Umayyad period that it was already sufficiently familiar to the community at large to provide easily recognizable claims to political legitimation and for religious propaganda.46

COPYING THE QUR'ĀN

There is additional, more oblique evidence bearing on the issue of the Qur'ānic text. The aforementioned inscription in the mosque at al-Madinah provides a starting point. Ibn al-Nadim reported in the late tenth century (before 380/990) that one Khalid b. Abi al-Hayyāj, sāhib ʿAli, had been responsible for executing it. Khalid was in all probability a younger brother of Hayyāj b. Abi Hayyāj (sic), named in another source as one of those who witnessed the testament of ʿAli b. Abi ʿĀlib in 39/660. Khalid also made copies of the Qur'ānic text and

46 From an extensive analysis of exegesis on sūrat Quraysh, Patricia Crone has concluded that "the exegetes had no better knowledge of what this sura meant than we have today. . . . What they are offering is . . . so many guesses based on the verses themselves. The original meaning of these verses was unknown to them or else there had been a gradual drift away from it. In any case, it was lost to the tradition. . . ." Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam (Oxford, 1987), 210. Her observations suggest a substantial interval between establishment of the Qur'ānic text and the development of exegetical tradition at the end of the eighth century. They thus contradict Wansbrough's notion that codification of the text and the introduction of exegesis occurred at approximately the same time.

47 Ibn al-Nadim, 9; cf. Sauvaget, 79–80, where this man is referred to as Khalid b. Abi al-Sayyāj without further explanation.

48 Abū Zayd ʿUmar Ibn Shabbah al-Nuwayrī, Taʾrīkh al-Madinah al-manawwarah (Akbhūr al-Madinah al-nabawiyyah), ed. F. M. Shaltūt (Beirut, 1410/1990), 1: 225–28. Ibn Shabbah's source for the "testament of ʿAli," which he reproduced, was other manuscripts for al-Walid and ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAziz.49 It was Saʿd, a scribe in the employ of al-Walid, who initially recruited him; in fact, Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn al-Najjār (d. 643/1245) credited the inscription at the Great Mosque of al-Madinah to Saʿd himself, whom he identified as a mawlā of Ḥuwāyṭīb b. ʿAbd al-ʿUzza,50 a member of Quraysh and a Companion, who died at al-Madinah in 54/674, in the caliphate of Muḥāwiyya b. Abī Sufyān (41–60/661–80). Saʿd is also mentioned in the dictionary of nisbahs compiled by Abū Abū Ghassān Muḥammad b. Yahyā, who claimed to have received the document in his possession, having received it from his father, a scribe, who had, in turn, received it from al-Ḥasan b. Zayd (d. 167/783), a great-grandson of ʿAli; according to another source cited by Ibn Shabbah, it was Abū Hayyāj himself who witnessed the testament. The document cannot be assumed to have been genuine, but internal evidence suggests that, if it was a forgery, it was a forgery of the Umayyad period or the first twenty years of the ʿAbbāsid period. For example, the testator called himself only ʿAbd Allāh ʿAli Amir al-Muʾminin. The ʿAbbāsids adopted regnal names, though there is at least one instance in which al-Manṣūr called himself ʿAbd Allāh ʿAbd Allāh Amir al-Muʾminin; see al-Ṭabarī, ed. 3: 208; Cairo ed., 7: 566. (Thanks are owing to Dr. Bates for this reference and his views on this point.) Ibn Shabbah himself complained of errors in the language and spoke of having copied the "letter forms" exactly as he saw them, implying that the document already seemed archaic in the early ninth century. For a summary of Abū Ghassān's background and career, see Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Tahdhib al-tahdhib (Hyderabad, 1326; repr. Beirut, 1968), 9: 517–18, no. 846; cf. T. Nagel, "Ein früher Bericht über den Aufstand von Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh im Jahre 145 H.," Der Islam 46 (1970): 236–38.

49 Ibn al-Nadim, 9. N. Abbott (The Rise of the North Arabic Script and Its Qurʾānic Development, with a Full Description of the Kurʾān Manuscripts in the Oriental Institute [Chicago, 1939], 54, n. 83) had some reservations about Khalid, noting that he "must have been a very young companion of ʿAli and an elderly scribe of al-Walid" and calling attention to the omission of his name from the list of al-Walid's scribes assembled by W. Björkman (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Staatskanzlei im islamischen Ägypten [Hamburg, 1928], 57–58). Björkman listed only al-Walid's state secretaries in Damascus, however, whereas Khalid was working in al-Madinah. Furthermore, it should be noted that sāhib means not only "companion" but also "disciple, follower" and that the context is Ibn al-Nadim's discussion of books collected by a Shiʿite bibliophile of his own time, implying that he identified Khalid as a Shiʿite. It seems from Ibn Shabbah's report about ʿAli's will that Khalid's family was close to ʿAli.

50 Ibn al-Najjār, fol. 32a.
Sa’id ʿAbd al-Karim b. Abi Bakr al-Samʿāni (d. after 562/1167), where he is identified as sāḥib al-maṣāḥif, from which the nisbah of his own mawla, Ziyād al-maṣāḥifī, was taken. The authority cited was Ibn Abī Ḥātim (240–327/854–938), who in turn cited his father (d. 277/890). Ziyād was supposed to have transmitted ahādīth to Bukayr b. Mīṣār al-Zuhri (d. 153/770) in al-Madinah, which is consistent with the chronological position of Sa’id.\(^{51}\)

Although none of these reports can be traced back earlier than the mid-ninth century, it is nonetheless possible to pursue the matter farther. To begin with, Ḥuwayṭīb was a member of the clan of ʿĀmir b. Luʾayy and converted to Islam only after the battle of Hunayn. He was said to be one of sixteen Quraysh who knew how to write in the time of the Prophet.\(^{52}\) He was allied by marriage to a number of important early Muslim figures, and his family connections can be traced through several branches over many generations;\(^{53}\) despite certain legendary aspects of his biography,\(^{54}\) it is thus certain that he was a historical personage. Several anecdotes suggest that Ḥuwayṭīb was known for his avarice; the most important of them for present purposes is the story that at some indeterminate date he sold his house in Makkaḥ to Muʿāwiyah for the enormous sum of 40,000 dirhams and moved to al-Madinah, where he settled “on the Balāṭ near the aṣḥāb al-maṣāḥifī,” a group with which his mawla Saʿd was linked.\(^{55}\)

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\(^{51}\) Al-Samʿāni, Kitāb al-anṣāb, facs. ed., ed. D. S. Margoliouth (London, 1912), fol. 531b, s.v. al-maṣāḥifī. On Bukayr, see Ibn Ḥajar, 1: 495, no. 914; idem, Kitāb lisān al-mizān (Hyderabad, 1330/1912), 2: 62, no. 236. Y. Eche, Les Bibliothèques arabes publiques et semi-publiques en Mésopotamie, en Syrie et en Egypte au Moyen Âge (Damascus, 1967), 18, has interpreted the term sāḥib al-maṣāḥifī as “librarian” and has identified Saʿd as al-Walid’s librarian in Damascus. It is clear from the context of all these reports, however, that Saʿd lived in al-Madinah and that he was not a librarian but one who copied maṣāḥif; cf. especially al-Samʿāni, fol. 120a, s.v. al-jaʾmī: “Perhaps it is the nisbah related to the collection, that is, the maṣḥaf. The most famous [person] with this nisbah is Abū Ḥabīb Muḥammad b. Ḥāmīd b. Mūsā al-Jaʾmī on al-Maṣāḥifī, who used to copy the jaʾmī.”

\(^{52}\) Ibn Shabbah, cited in Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (Cairo, 1363/1944), 4: 157–58. The specific source may have been the lost Kitāb Makkah.\(^{53}\)

\(^{53}\) He was one of two full brothers, the other being Abū Ruhm, who was married to Barrah b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalilah, a paternal aunt of the Prophet; another of Abū Ruhm’s wives was Maymūnah bt. al-Ḥārin, who married the Prophet after Abū Ruhm’s death. Ḥuwayṭīb’s sister was married to Sufyān (or Aswād) b. Abū al-Asad. There were also two half-brothers, Makramah and Abū Sabrah (perhaps, rather, a nephew). A descendant of Makramah in the sixth generation, Saʿd or Saʾid, served as chief qāḍī of al-Madinah in the reign of al-Mahdi; his son ʿAbd al-Jabbār subsequently served as governor and then as qāḍī of al-Madinah in the time of al-Maʾmūn. Abū Sabrah served briefly as governor of al-Basrah in 17/638–39 and was commander-in-chief of the army that invaded Kūṭāzistan in that year. His son Muḥa-
From this report it seems that already in the seventh century there may have been a specific area of al-Madinah where manuscripts of the Qur'an were copied and sold. A large fragment of an early history of the city, by Abū Zayd (Umar Ibn Shabbah al-Nuṣairi (173–262/789–875), a descendant of a prominent Madinan family, has been preserved. Although his descriptions of the toponymy of al-Madinah are not always perfectly lucid, they are invaluable for their detail; of particular concern here is his mapping of the area surrounding the Balṭ al-Aʿzām, the paved street extending west from the Prophet's mosque to al-Muṣallā. Among the residences facing onto the north side of the Balṭ al-Aʿzām was one near its western end belonging to Huwaytīb. Ibn Shabbah did not explicitly mention the aṣḥāb al-maṣāḥīf near whom Huwaytīb was reported to have settled, though he did use the term aṣḥāb for various occupational groups. Particularly intriguing are the aṣḥāb al-rabbaʻāt, whom he located at the eastern end of the Balṭ al-Aʿzām, near the northwestern corner of the Great Mosque. It is not clear what they did; in fact, they were already problematic in the fifteenth century, when al-Samhūdī, who was drawing upon Ibn Shabbah's text, speculated that they might have been those who made and sold copies of the Qur'an, which were sometimes known as rubāʻ. Even if he was correct, however, it is clear that the ninth-century aṣḥāb al-rabbaʻāt of Ibn Shabbah were not the aṣḥāb al-maṣāḥīf mentioned by al-Ṭabarī, for they were not located near Huwaytīb's house on the Balṭ.

There is growing evidence that al-Madinah functioning as an Islamic intellectual center in the Umayyad period, before the rise of the cities of Iraq. For example, M. S. Belguied and Rafael Talmont have presented evidence for the existence of a distinct "school" of grammarians at al-Madinah in the first half of the eighth century, anticipating the emergence of the better-known schools of al-Baṣrah and al-Kūfah. Talmon also claims that a number of men in this group earned their livings by copying the Qur'an, but he has documented only one example, Abū Ḥāzim (or Abū Dā′ūd) Abū al-Rahmān b. Hurmuz b. Kaysān al-Aʿraj, classified as one of the tābic'ūn of al-Madinah, who died at Alexandria in 117/735 or 119/737. He was a mawla of the Banū Ḥāshim and used to copy maṣāḥīf.

1: 168–69. The detail about the aṣḥāb al-maṣāḥīf does not seem to have been preserved by al-Yaḥqūbī, however; al-Samhūdī, 2: 746, cited it from the Tabaqāt of Ibn Sa'd. There were apparently at least four recensions of Ibn Sa'd's text, the latest of which, that by Ibn Hayyawayd (d. 381/991), was used by Sachau for his edition; that by al-Ḥārīth b. Abī Uṣāma (d. 282/895) was used by al-Ṭabarī (J. W. Fück, "Ibn Sa'd," EI3, 3: 922). As the reference to the aṣḥāb al-maṣāḥīf is not given in Sachau's edition, al-Samhūdī must have been quoting it from one of the other recensions.

56 Ibn Shabbah, 4 vols. (Beirut, 1410/1990). It seems to have been composed in al-Baṣrah, but there is little doubt that the author was intimately familiar with al-Madinah. Large segments of the text were reproduced by al-Samhūdī, but it is only recently that the original has been published, apparently from a copy in the hand of the fourteenth-century author Ibn Ḥajar al-Ṣaqalānī (Ibn Shabbah, 1: nūn-alif). Certain details, including similar variations and errors in spelling, suggest that al-Samhūdī worked from this same manuscript.

57 It was located between the compounds of al-Rabi, mawla of the Commander of the Faithful (al-Maṣūr, 136–58/759–75) on the west (an anachronism of a kind not uncommon in Ibn Shabbah's text) and of Āmir b. Abī Waqqās on the east. It was separated from the former by a lane that led to the house of Āminah, daughter of Abū Sa'd; the context suggests that Āminah's house may have stood to the north of Huwaytīb's compound. Across the Balṭ to the south was the quarter of the Banū Zurayq, a tribal group originally from Yemen; Huwaytīb's compound apparently faced Dār Ḥaṣāf, owned successively in his lifetime by ʿUthmān b. Abī al-Āṣ, Muʿāwiyyah, and the latter's mawla Ḥaṣāf, and the compound of Abū Hurayrah (Yaʿqūb b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥaṣāwī, Muʿjam al-buldān, ed. F. Wüstenfeld as Jacut's Geographisches Wörterbuch [1866], 1: 245–46, 251–52; Ibn Shabbah, 1: 240–41, 252, 255–56). Huwaytīb owned two other houses in al-Madinah, one of them in the quarter of the Banū Zurayq well away from the Balṭ, the other, known as Dār Ṣubh, situated between the house of al-Muṭṭalīb and the square before the Majlis al-Hukm (Ibn Shabbah, 1: 252–53). The precise location of this third house has not yet been established, but it seems not to have been on the Balṭ.

58 Ibn Shabbah, 1: 231.

59 Al-Samhūdī, 2: 745–46.


61 Muḥammad Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī [first half of the tenth century], Kitāb māṣāḥīf al-ʿalamāt al-amsār, ed. M. Fleischhammer (Wiesbaden, 1959), 77, no. 559; al-Samīʿānī, fol. 44b, s.v. al-ʿaraj. Ibn Ḥibbān's source was again the ninth-century biographer Abū Ḥātim. Talmon erroneously cites Belguied, 172–73, as the source for his larger conclusion that several grammarians concerned themselves with "Qur'ānic scripts."
It has been demonstrated that at least three individuals in al-Madinah copied the Qurʾān professionally in the last quarter of the first hijrī century and the beginning of the second. It thus seems not at all impossible that there was already a concentration of such an occupational group in the city.62 In those early years there must have been sufficient demand for the newly codified scriptures, both for public use in mosques and schools and for private study by wealthy or pious patrons, to ensure employment for such a group.

The details cited here are scattered almost at random through texts of different character and period, and the references are too peripheral to the main accounts and the individuals too insignificant to have been part of a conscious, however pious, forgery of early Islamic history concocted at the end of the eighth century. All point to the active production of copies of the Qurʾān from the late seventh century, coinciding with and confirming the inscriptive evidence of the established text itself. In fact, from the time of Muʿāwiyah through the reign of al-Walid the Umayyad caliphs were actively engaged in codifying every aspect of Muslim religious practice. Muʿāwiyah turned Muhammad's minbar into a symbol of authority and ordered the construction of maqṣūrahā in the major congregational mosques. ʿAbd al-Malik made sophisticated use of Qurʾānic quotations, on coinage and public monuments, to announce the new Islamic world order. Al-Walid gave monumental form to the Muslim house of worship and the service conducted in it.63 It seems beyond the bounds of credibility that such efforts would have preceded interest in codifying the text itself.

The different types of evidence cited here all thus lead to the conclusion that the Muslim tradition is reliable, at least in broad outline, in attributing the first codification of the Qurʾānic text to ʿUthmān and his appointed commission. The Qurʾān was available to his successors as an instrument to help weld the diverse peoples of the rapidly expanding empire into a relatively unified polity.

It is also possible to speculate that the inscriptions at the Dome of the Rock, so distinct in paleographic style from earlier examples of Arabic writing in any medium, owed something to this background as well.64 As al-Walid called upon a Qurʾān copyist to design his inscriptions at the Great Mosque in al-Madinah, it seems that fifteen or twenty years earlier ʿAbd al-Malik would have had to turn to a similar source. The only pool of such experienced writers that has left a trace, however faint, in the historical sources, is the ʾashāḥ al-maṣāḥif at al-Madinah. As professional copyists of the Qurʾānic text, these men must very early have developed a standard script with its own conventions—for example, horizontal extensions, hollow rounded letters, the use of strokes for diacriticals on certain letters, and the marking of text divisions with simple ornaments.65 Where else could ʿAbd al-Malik have found an artist capable of laying out his beautiful inscriptions at the Dome of the Rock?66

APPENDIX: THE GROWTH OF THE MUṢḤAF TRADITION

With the expansion of the empire, the professional copying of the Qurʾān also spread from al-Madinah to other cities. In the late Umayyad period, Malik b. Dinār (d. probably before 131/748), a mawla of the Banū...
Najyyah b. Sūmah b. Lu'ayy, was said to have supported himself by making copies at al-BAṣārīh.\(^67\) Al-ASbāgh b. Zayd al-Warrāq al-Juhani (d. 159/776), a mawlā of Ju-
haynah, was a bookseller who copied the Qur'ān text at Wāṣīt.\(^68\) Ibn al-Nadīm distinguished copyists of māṣāḥif from those who copied the Qur'ān in scripts like mu-
hāqqāq and māṣāḥif.\(^69\) From the former group, Khushnam al-
BAṣīrī and al-Madīl al-Kūfī copied the Qur'ān during the reign of the 'Abbāsīd caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (170–
93/786–809). Khushnām was reported to have written his al-
ifs one cubit high with a single stroke; although this report is 
obviously an exaggeration,\(^70\) it does imply that he 

expressed by means of a monumental style. Beginning in the reign of al-Mahdi, all the māṣāḥif copyists in 

Ibn al-Nadīm's list were from al-Kūfah, and the implication is that they wrote in a style distinct from cursive. 

They were Abū Jari (or Ḥadī or Juday), who was active in the time of al-Mu'taṣīm (218–27/833–42), Ibn Umm 

Shaybān, al-Mashūr, Abū Khamīrah, Ibn Khamīrah (or Ḥumayrah or Ibn Ḥumayrah), and Abūl-Faraj, the last 

in our own time."

Of these names the most famous is Ibn Umm Shaybān, 

which belonged to the Malikite dā'ī of Baghdad, Abūl-

Hasan Muhammād b. Sālih al-Hāshimī, who died in 369/ 

979. He was a descendant of ʿIsā b. Mūsā, designated by 

the first ʿAbbāsīd caliph, al-Safāh (132–36/749–54), as 

heir to al-Manṣūr (136–58/754–75) but forced by the 

latter to renounce his succession to the throne and exiled 

to al-Kūfah. Abūl-Ḥasan's family was thus ultimately 

descended from the Companion of the Prophet ʿAbd al-

Muṭṭalib. In no other extant report is it mentioned that 

Ibn Umm Shaybān copied the Qur'ān (though he is said 
to have recited it in the version of Abū Bakr b. Mujāhid, 

the great reformer of the text), and his social status sets 

him apart from the earlier known copyists, most of 

whom appear to have been mawāli.\(^71\) If he was the man 

whom Ibn al-Nadīm had in mind, rather than some 

other member of the same family, it is possible that he 

did such work early in his career. Abūl-Faraj Ḥubah 

Allāh b. ʿUmar al-Maṣāḥifī died in 401/1011, about 
twenty years after Ibn al-Nadīm himself, and thus was 

probably working just at the time that the latter was 

compiling his book.\(^72\) It has not yet been possible to 

identify the other named māṣāḥif copyists, but it should 

be noted that the readings of their names are ambiguous. 

Nor can any of the copyists mentioned or their contem-

poraries be connected with surviving manuscript 

fragments. At present there is no convincing evidence for 

the survival of any Qur'ān datable earlier than the ninth 

century. All that can be stated with any certainty is that the 

earliest manuscripts that do survive, though the names of 

the men who copied them are totally unknown, represent 

part of a long, evolving tradition rooted in al-Madinah in 

the seventh century.

\(^{67}\) Abū Nuʿaym Ahmad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Iṣbāhānī, Hīyāt al-

awliyāʾ waʾl-tabaqāt al-asfiyāʾ (Cairo, 1351/1932), 1: 357–89; 

Ibn Saʿīd, 7.2: 11.

\(^{68}\) Al-Samʿānī, fol. 579r, s.v. al-warrāq; cf. Ibn Saʿīd, 7.2: 61.

\(^{69}\) Ibn al-Nadīm, 9–10.

\(^{70}\) Ibn al-Nadīm, 9–10; for the various cubit measures in use 

in early Islam, all of them rather large for the present context, 

see W. Hinz, Islamische Masse und Gewichte umgerechnet ins 

metrische System (Leiden, 1970), 55–62. The smallest was 

49.875 cm.

\(^{71}\) Al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, Tarīkh Baghdād (Beirut, n.d.), 5: 

363–64, no. 2889, cf. 362, no. 2888; Ibn Hazm, 1: 32; Abū 

ʿUmar Muḥammad al-Kindī, Kitāb al-wulāh waʾl-quḍāh, ed. 

R. Guest as The Governors and Judges of Egypt . . . (Leiden and 

London, 1912), 573.

\(^{72}\) Al-Khatīb, 10: 380 no. 5548.