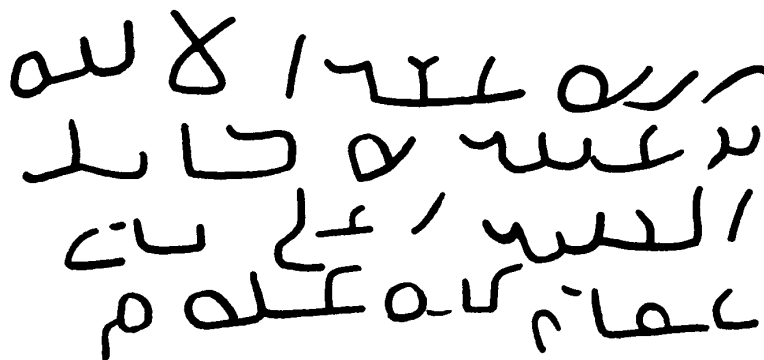


LESSON 29

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE *NASKH*

The Arabs had an aversion to writing and relied to a great extent on oral tradition for the retention of information. They did have a system of writing in pre-Islamic days but it was rudimentary, ungainly and imperfect. The pre-Islamic Arabic script was so unsightly that a bedouin poet compared the scenes of death and desolation to words scribbled on parchment. In one of his odes Imru'l-Qais said, '...the traces of a dwelling place which I saw and which filled me with sorrow resembled the handwriting of a book on South Arabian palm-bast.'



Handwritten Nabataean script, likely a copy of a pre-Islamic inscription. The text is arranged in four lines, showing highly stylized, cursive characters.

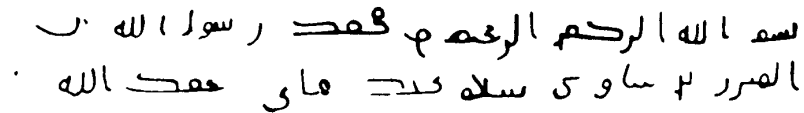
Copy of pre-Islamic (6th Century) Nabataean inscription from Ummal-Jimāl. It begins
Allāh Ghafraṇ, 'May God forgive...'

INTRODUCTION TO QUR'ANIC SCRIPT

But the need to record and hand down to succeeding generations every syllable of the Qur'an with exactitude compelled the Arabs to develop their script. And so the *ummah* of the unlettered Prophet (*al-Nabīyal-'ummī*, The Qur'an, 7.157) came to excel in the art of writing. A people ungiven to writing were turned into calligraphers producing masterpieces which have never been surpassed or even equalled.

The pre-Islamic script could be read in various ways; it had neither short vowels nor dots to identify consonants which shared identical letter outlines. Abu'l-Aswad al-Du'ali (died 69/688), said to be the founder of Arabic grammar, invented a system of providing *fathah*, *dammah* and *kasra* to indicate some vowel sounds. A few years later his students, Nasr ibn 'Āṣim (89/707 or 90/708) and Yaḥya ibn Ya'mar (89/707), devised a system of placing dots above and below the letter outline to differentiate between various consonant sounds.

Early Arabic writing in the Ḥijāz fell into two broad categories, one was curved and round (*Muqawwar wa mudawwar*) and the other elongated and straight (*Mabsūt wa mustaqīm*). The cursive style was used on soft material like leather, palm-bast, parchment, etc. The latter, which was more developed, was used on harder material like camel bones, flat white stones, wood and metals. The letters of the Prophet and the first four caliphs were written in the cursive style.

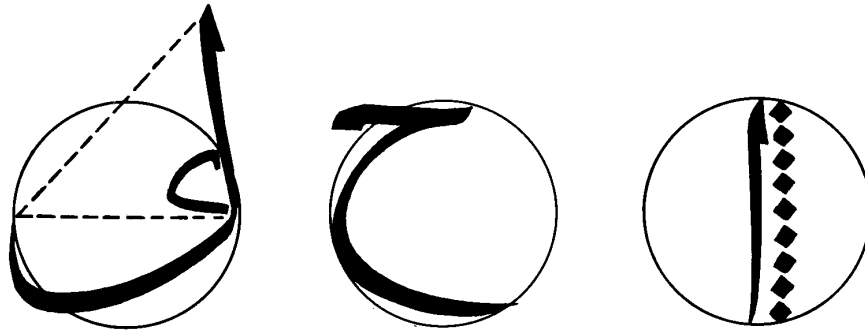


Early cursive script in a letter sent by the Prophet to the ruler of al-Ḥaṣā during the early seventh century.

This cursive style lacked elegance and discipline and was mainly used for secular purposes. It was not considered a suitable medium for the Divine Revelation. The Qur'an was written in the elongated and straight monumental script, developed (8th century A.D.) in the Iraqi town of Kūfah, hence its name Kūfic (*Kūfī*).

In contrast with its low verticals, the horizontal lines of the Kūfic script are extended and it is written on oblong surfaces. Since its width is considerably greater than its height, it gives an impression of dynamic momentum.

While the calligraphers in Kūfah were developing their monumental style, the early *Mashq* style was developed at Mecca and Medina during the first century of Islam. The complex rules which governed the early *Mashq* were gradually simplified until it came to resemble the Kūfic script. At the same time the inscrip-tional style was also developed in the Ḥijāz. In the third century of the *hijrah* Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad ibn Muqlah (272/886—328/940) codified Arabic calligraphy, using the circle and the rhombic dot to inscribe the characters according to a measured proportion (see also Lesson 22).



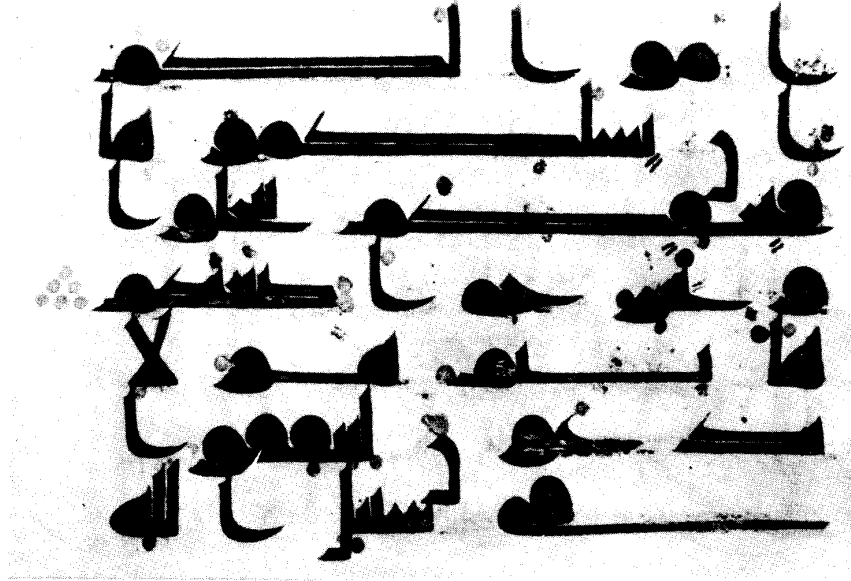
It was this system of basic calligraphic rules which elevated the *Naskh* style to the rank of a major script. Ibn al-Bawwāb (d. 413/1022) provided the final touches to the *Naskh* which transformed it into a script worthy of the Qur'an. This script is easy to read and easy to write.

Yāqūt al-Mustaʿsimī (d. 1298) devised a new method of trimming his reed pens giving them an oblique cut. This enabled him to give a new dimension of grace and beauty to the existing scripts, especially to the *Thuluth* style invented by the Umayyad calligrapher, Quṭbah al-Muḥarrir. Its verticals have a leftward slant, while its horizontals have a deep curve. The ends of most letters in *Thuluth* come up in a hook and it is often written so that letters interlace.



'*Innahū min Sulaymāna wa 'innahū 'Bismillahir-Raḥmānir Raḥim*' (It is from Solomon, and it is: In the name of Allāh, the Gracious, the Merciful.) is from the 27th Chapter of the Qur'an. It is the beginning of a letter which Solomon wrote to the Queen of Sheba. The verse seen above is in decorative *Thuluth* with interlocked circle and ligatures.

INTRODUCTION TO QUR'ANIC SCRIPT



Qur'an leaf in Kūfī, ninth century Egypt. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Rudolph M. Riefstahl, 1930 (30.45). A portion of the last verses of the 47th Chapter of the Qur'an: 'amwālakum. Iny-yas'al kumūhā fayuhfikum tabkhalū wa yukhrij aḍghānakum. Hāa 'aṅtum hāa 'ulāa'i tud'awna lituṣfiqū fī sabilillah'.

The fine calligraphic tradition of the Arabs was continued by the Timurids, the Ottomans and the Mughuls. Timūr's grandson Baysunghur was a talented calligrapher. The Ottomans felt the sacredness of the Qur'anic script very intensely. Shaykh Ḥamdullah al-Amāsī (d. 927/1520) who is considered to be the greatest calligraphist of the Ottoman period taught calligraphy to Sultan Bayazid II (886/1481—927/1520). While the Shaykh wrote his lines, the Sultan as a mark of respect to his teacher, held the inkpot.

The Mughul emperors of India were also among the great patrons of calligraphy. Bābur (d. 937/1530), Akbar (964/1556—1014/1605) and Jahāngīr (1014/1605—1038/1628) admired and rewarded the calligraphers with high ranks. The builder of the Tāj, Shāhjahān (1009/1593—1076/1666), was a good calligrapher while his son, Aurangzeb (1028/1619—1118/1707), copied the Qur'an for his livelihood. This tradition continued in the Mughul dynasty to the last emperor, Bahādur Shāh Zafar (1773—1862).

The Indian calligraphers emphasized the beauty of the Naskhī curves which are more perfectly rounded. The Indian *Naskh* is bolder and heavier with more

أَمْ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
 إِنَّ يَسْعَاءَ لَكُمْ هَاهَا
 فِيْ خَفَاكُمْ تَبَخَّرُوا
 وَيُخْرِجُ أَضْغَانَكُمْ
 هَآئِثُمْ هَآؤُلَاءِ
 تُذَعِّونَ لِتُنْفِقُوا
 فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ

The Kūfic calligraphy on the opposite page reproduced in the *Naskh*

widely spaced letters. These qualities give it a solidity which is lacking in the ordinary West Asian *Naskh*.

It is not known if non-Muslims, Christians and Jews in the Muslim world took interest in calligraphy, but in India Hindu calligraphers made a name for themselves in *Nasta'liq* and *Shikastah*, the broken style for speed writing.

In the first revelation of the Qur'an the Prophet was instructed to 'Recite... for thy Lord is most generous, Who taught by the pen, Who taught man what he did not know...' Implicit in this command was the prophecy that the rudimentary and ungainly Arabic script will become the most brilliant expression of Islamic art and an all-embracing manifestation of Muslim culture throughout the world.

The temporary decline of Arabic calligraphy, as mentioned in the Introduction, was caused by the introduction of movable type in the Arab world and in India due to litho printing which was cheap. It became so bad that A. S. Tritton advised the readers of his book, *Arabic*, to 'avoid the Koran...the oriental editions are not easy to read'. But after a temporary eclipse, both the quality of the calligraphy and printing improved. With the spread of literacy among the

فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْخٰسِرُونَ ۝ يُبَيِّنِي اِسْرَاءِ يٰلَا اذْكُرُوا
 نِعْمَتِي الَّتِي اَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَاِنِّي فَضَّلْتُكُمْ عَلٰى
 الْعٰلَمِيْنَ ۝ وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا لَا تَجْزِي نَفْسٌ عَنْ نَفْسٍ
 شَيْئًا وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا تَنْفَعُهَا شَفَاعَةٌ وَلَا
 هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ ۝ وَاِذْ اٰبَتٰلٰى اِبْرٰهِيْمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمٰتٍ
 فَاتَمَمْنٰهُ ۚ قَالَ اِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ اِمًا مَّا قَالَ وَ
 مِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي ۚ قَالَ لَا يَنْتَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِيْنَ ۝ وَاِذْ
 جَعَلْنَا الْبَيْتَ مَثَابَةً لِّلنَّاسِ وَاَمْنًا وَاَتَّخِذُوا
 مِنْ مَّقَامِ اِبْرٰهِيْمَ مَصَلٰى ۚ وَعَهْدُنَا اِلٰى اِبْرٰهِيْمَ وَ
 اِسْمٰعِيْلَ اَنْ طَهِّرَا بَيْتِيَ لِلطَّائِفِيْنَ وَالْعٰكِفِيْنَ وَ
 الرُّكْعِ السُّجُوْدِ ۝ وَاِذْ قَالَ اِبْرٰهِيْمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هٰذَا
 بَلَدًا اٰمِنًا وَاَرْزُقْ اَهْلَهُ مِنَ الثَّمَرٰتِ مَنْ اٰمَنَ مِنْهُمْ
 بِاللّٰهِ وَاَلْيَوْمِ الْاٰخِرِ ۚ قَالَ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَاَمَتِّعُهُ قَلِيْلًا
 ثُمَّ اضْطَرُّهُ اِلٰى عَذَابِ النَّارِ وَاَبْسَسَ الْمَصِيْرُ ۝ وَاِذْ
 يَرْفَعُ اِبْرٰهِيْمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَاِسْمٰعِيْلُ ۚ رَبَّنَا
 تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا ۗ اِنَّكَ اَنْتَ السَّمِيْعُ الْعَلِيْمُ ۝ رَبَّنَا وَاَجْعَلْنَا

Indian Muslims, whose mother tongue is not Arabic, attention was paid to the teaching of the Arabic script. An Indian calligraphist, Manzūr Muḥammad (1866-1950) finally developed a simple style which was basically functional.

Experimenting with the intricacies of the highly developed and ornate curves and circles of the nineteenth century *Naskh*, Manzūr Muḥammad reverted to the elongated and straight-lined (*Mabsūt wa Mustaqīm*) style of the early Kūfic script. The style he finally developed reduced the curves and simplified the ligatures. The result is a happy synthesis of the *Naskh* and *Mashq* styles combining the beauty of the *Naskh* with the simplicity of the Kūfic script.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The conventional *Naskh*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Mashq Basmalah (Basmalah is the Arabic word meaning to utter 'Bis-millāh-hir Raḥmānir-Raḥīm) from Qur'an copied in eighth century, probably in Medina.

(Museum of Islamic Art, Istanbul)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Basmalah copied from an Umayyad Kūfic inscription with distinctly triangular letters.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Basmalah written by Manzūr Muḥammad, c. 1904.

While in the conventional *Naskh* each letter has at least four forms, initial, medial, joined with a preceding letter and the final unconnected with the preceding letter, Manzūr Muḥammad tried to restrict the letters to the two forms only, the initial and the final. In this script complicated ligatures and combinations were completely eliminated. In the following four pages almost all the complicated combinations of the conventional *Naskh* have been transcribed in the simple Manzūrī *Naskh*.

INTRODUCTION TO QUR'ANIC SCRIPT

The difficult and complicated ligatures of the conventional *Naskh* are given below. On the opposite page these words have been written in the *Manzūri Naskh*.

تَجَدَّجَتْ بِهَا الصَّلَاتُ الْمَطِينَةُ الْجَوَادُ
ضَمُّهَا ضَمُّهَا الْمَجْبُورُ مِسْتَخْفِيَةٌ نَخْلَقُ
نَخْلَقُكُمْ الْجِوَادُ الْحَيُّ الْكَلِيمُ الصَّبْرُ الْحَقُّ
صَلَّاهَا خَافُونَ لِيَسْتَعْمِلُونَ اتَّبَعُوا رَحْمَتَهَا
اجْتَنِبْتَهَا اسْتَحْبُوا الْكُفْرَ اسْتَخْصُوا اصْبَحُوا
أَصْلِبْنَكُمْ وَأَصْطَفَيْتُكَ اكْتَسَبْتَ
أَمِينَةٌ مَبْعُوثَةٌ بِحَيْرَةٍ يَهْدِي تَبْسُطُهَا
أَمْهَلَهُمْ تَخْصِمُوا تَلْفُ تَقْفَمُ تَسْتَهْرُوا
تَسْلِيحُهُمْ تَسْتَقِيمُوا تَسْسِكُمْ هُمْ
جَهْرَةٌ جُنَّافَهُمْ حَصَّ حَفِظْتَهُمْ خَطِيعَةٌ

The words in the *Manzūri Naskh* are given in the same order in which they have been written on the opposite page.

تَهَجَّدَ حَجَّجَتْ لَهَا الصَّلَاةُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ الْجَوَادُ
 ضَحَاهَا الْمَحْجُوبُونَ مُسْتَخْلَفِينَ نَخَلُّكُمْ
 نَخَلُّكُمْ الْحَيَاةَ الْجَيِّمَ الصَّبْحُ الْحَقُّ
 صَحَابَهَا تَخَافُونَ يَسْتَعْجِلُونَ اتَّبَعْنِي أَرْحَمَهُمَا
 اجْتَبَيْتَهَا اسْتَحَبُّوا الْكُفْرَ اسْتَخْلَصُوا الصَّبْحَ
 اصْرَبْنَاكُمْ اِصْطَفَيْتَكَ اِكْتَسَبْتَ
 اُمْنِيَّتَهُمْ بَعُولَتُهُنَّ بِحَيْرَةٍ بِهِجٍ تَبَسُّطَهَا
 اَهْلَهُمْ تَخْتَصِمُوا تَلْفَحُ تَثَقَّفَهُمْ تَسْتَهْزِءُوا
 تَسْبِيحَهُمْ تَسْتَقْسِمُوا تَمَسَّكُمُ هُمْ
 جَهْرَةً حَجَّتْنَا فَهُوَ حَصْرُ حَفِظْتُهُمَا خَطِيئَةً

زَنْجِيًّا لَسَكِينَةً سَاكُنَةً سَلْسَبِيًّا لَا
 شَجَرَةً شَهْرَةً شُهُودًا شَيْخٌ شَيْعَتُهُ ظَهِيْرَةٌ
 عَبْقَرِيٌّ عَجَابٌ عَنْهُمْ عَجِيْبٌ عَجُوْنٌ عَنْكَوَاتٌ
 عَيْنِيهَا فَتْحَانُ فَكَاهِيْنَ قَلِيْلٌ قَمْتُمْ كَاظِمِيْنَ
 كَلِمَاتِكُمْ كَلِمَةً كَرِهْتُمْ لَمَسْتُمْ كَوْمَهَا
 لَعَلَّكُمْ لَكِنَّا كُمْ لَمْتَيْنِي مَتَاعَهُمْ مُتَجَانِفِيْنَ
 مُتَكْرِفًا مُتَطَهِّرًا مُتَكِيْنَ مُجْتَمِعُوْنَ مُسْتَضْعَفُوْنَ
 مُسْتَطَرِّمْ مُصِيْبَةً مُطْمَئِنِّيْنَ مُعِيْشَتُهُمْ مُقْصِدَةٌ
 مَلَأَتْكُمْ مَخْنَقَةً مَلِيْئَةً نَسْتَسِيْرُ نَطْعًا لَمْ
 نَقْصُرْهُمْ يَخْطُوهُ يَخْطَفُ لَيْسَالُؤْرُفِكُمْ
 فَيْسِيْكُمْ فَيْسِيْكُمْ اللهُ وَهُوَ السَّمِيْعُ الْعَلِيْمُ

زَنْجَبِيلًا سَكِينَةً سَلَكَتُمْ سَلْسَبِيلًا
 شَجَرَةً شَهْرَةً شَهْدَاءَ شَيْخٍ شَيْعَتِهِ ظَهِيرَةً
 عَبْقَرِيٍّ عَجَابٌ عَنْهُمْ عَجِيبٌ عَجُوزٌ عَنْكَبُوتٍ
 عَيْنَهَا فَتَحْنَا فَكَيْهَيْنَ قَلِيلٌ قُمْتُمْ كَاظِمِينَ
 كَلِمَاتٍ كَلِمُهُمْ فَذَكَرَهُمْ كَهَيْعِصَ لَمَسْتُمْ لُحُومَهَا
 لَعَلَّكُمْ لِكِنَّكُمْ لَمْتُنِّي مَتَاعُهُمْ مُتَجَانِفٍ
 مُتَحَرِّفًا مُتَطَهَّرٌ مُتَكَبِّرِينَ مُجْتَمِعُونَ مُسْتَضْعَفُونَ
 مُسْتَطَرٌّ مُصَيِّطٌ مُطْمَئِنِّينَ مَعِيشَتُهُمْ مُقْتَصِدَةٌ
 مَلِكَةٌ مُنْخَنَقَةٌ يُسْتَجِي فَسْتَنْسِخُ نُطْعِمُكُمْ
 نَقْصُصَهُمْ يَتَخَبَّطُهُ يَتَخَطَّفُ يَتَسَلَّلُونَ مِنْكُمْ
 فَسَيَذْفِيكَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ۝

INTRODUCTION TO QUR'ANIC SCRIPT

Copies of the Qu'ran now printed in India and Pakistan follow the simplified *Manzūri Naskh*, but each calligrapher according to his style still employs the ligatures and circles of the conventional *Naskh* as well and thus confuses the beginner. Therefore, it is necessary to familiarize oneself with the conventional *Naskh* as well.

The comparison of the conventional *Naskh* with the *Manzūri Naskh* given in the last four pages must have given you an idea that the significant pattern is that of the word rather than the letters. The word-contour depends very much on the shape of ligatures joining the letters. As previously noted, in the conventional *Naskh* many letters have four different shapes: initial, medial, terminal and standing alone. In the *Manzūri Naskh* usually two shapes are employed: initial, which is very similar to the medial, and the terminal, which does not differ from the isolated form. A table of the four forms of a letter used in the conventional *Naskh* is given below. Have a look at it, but do not try to memorize either the four forms of the letters given below or the complicated ligatures given in the last four pages. By the time you complete this book, you may find that you can decipher most of the difficult ligatures without reference to this lesson.

The letter	Alone	Final	Medial	Initial
Alif	ا	ا	ا	ا
Bā'	ب	ب	ب	ب
Tā'	ت	ت	ت	ت
Thā'	ث	ث	ث	ث
Jīm	ج	ج	ج	ج

The letter	Alone	Final	Medial	Initial
Hā'	ح	ح	ح	ح
Khā'	خ	خ	خ	خ
Dāl	د	د	د	د
Dhāl	ذ	ذ	ذ	ذ
Rā'	ر	ر	ر	ر
Zā'	ز	ز	ز	ز
Sin	س	س	س	س
Shin	ش	ش	ش	ش
Ṣād	ص	ص	ص	ص
Ḍād	ض	ض	ض	ض

INTRODUCTION TO QUR'ANIC SCRIPT

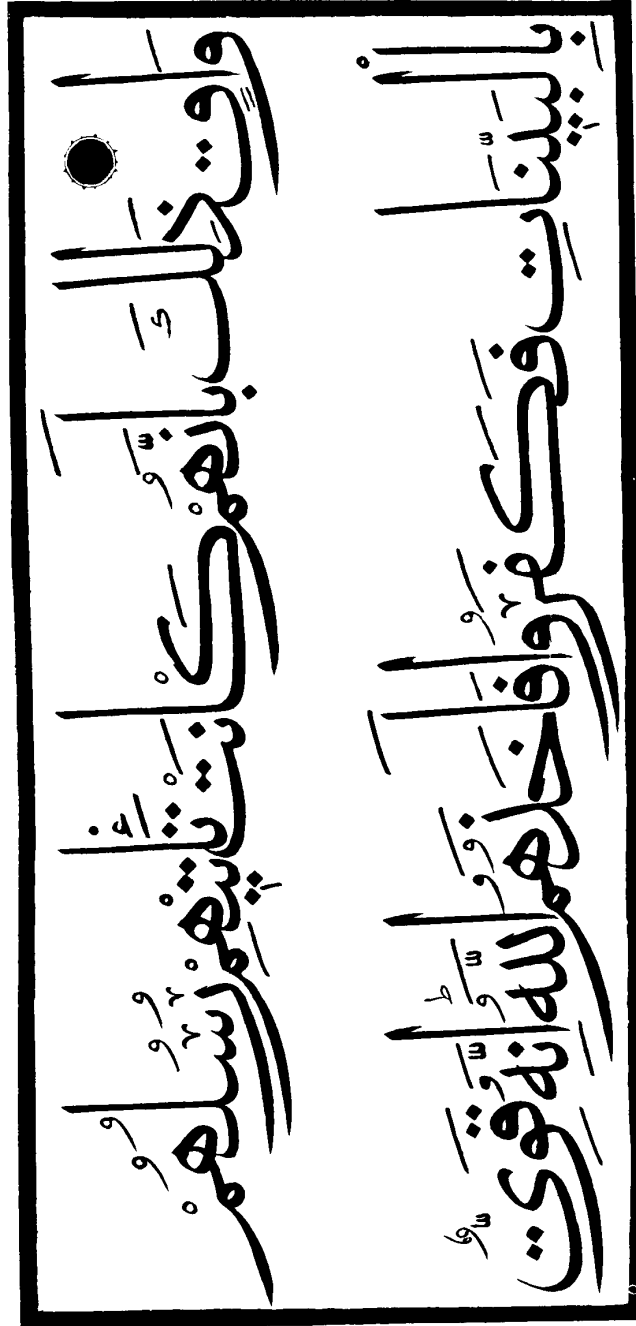
The letter	Alone	Final	Medial	Initial
Ṭā'	ط	ط	ط	ط
Zā'	ظ	ظ	ظ	ظ
ʿAyn	ع	ع	ع	ع
Ghayn	غ	غ	غ	غ
Fā'	ف	ف	ف	ف
Qāf	ق	ق	ق	ق
Kāf	ك	ك	ك	ك
Lām	ل	ل	ل	ل
Mīm	م	م	م	م
Nūn	ن	ن	ن	ن

The letter	Alone	Final	Medial	Initial
Hā'	ه	هـ	هـ	هـ
Wāw	و	و	و	و
Yā'	ي	يـ	يـ	يـ

In addition to the *Naskh* and the *Thuluth* styles, which are commonly used for copying the Qur'an, there are several derivative scripts to meet particular secular needs. The more common among them are the *Dīwānī*, the *Nast'aliq* and the *Ruq'ah*. The *Dīwānī* is an Ottoman development. The late fifteenth century calligrapher Ibrāhīm Munīf developed it primarily for use in the government offices. It is excessively cursive with overlapping words and its letters are joined together in an unconventional manner. While the *Dīwānī* was developed in Turkey, the *Nast'aliq* was evolved in the late fifteenth century in Iran. Since then it has been the Iranian national script. The Persian calligrapher, Mīr 'Alī Sulṭān al-Tabrīzī (d. 1416), was the founder of this script. Its bold and clear lines and perfectly rounded curves give it an elegance which is so characteristic of the Iranian and the Mughul sophisticated taste. In India it was adopted for Urdu and many other North Indian languages. By the time Queen Victoria assumed the title of the Empress of India in 1858, *Nast'aliq* had acquired the status of the national script of India.

Nast'aliq is seldom used for copying the Qur'an, and so far as it is known, there is only one complete extant copy of the Qur'an in *Nast'aliq*, which was copied by Shāh Mahmūd al-Nishābūrī in 1539. There is also a collection of five chapters of the Qur'an in *Nast'aliq* in the **Khuda Bakhsh** Public Library, Patna.

The *Ruq'ah* (small sheet) script, also called Riqā' (plural of ruq'ah), is derived from the *Naskh* and *Thuluth*. It is also of Turkish origin and is used throughout the Arab world for the routine day-to-day handwriting. The flourishes of the final letters resemble those of the *Thuluth* in many respects, but it is much smaller. Its curves are more rounded, its loops are invariably filled in and its ligatures are densely structured. The Qur'an is not copied in this style, but in Shāh Tahmāsp's *Nast'aliq* Qur'an the chapter headings are written in *Ruq'ah*.



Fragment of a giant Qur'an page in the Muhaqqaq script. It is attributed to Timūr's grandson Baysunghur (d. 1433/34). Last word of chapter 40, verse 21, almost to the end of verse 22. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Anonymous Gift, 1972. (1972-279)