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I’jam and the Development of Islamic Khatatti

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Abstract
In our study, we tried to find the roots and contexts which formed the Islamic Khatatti and configured the form of letters, through social backgrounds, historical texts and also inscriptions of first century AH. According to the prevalent thesis, Arabic scripts originated before Islam from Nabatean in letter’s form and from Syriac in calligraphic structure. Nevertheless, the contentions raised through the first century, mainly on Quran, were the major cause and agent in formation of khatatti, and the necessity of their sublation, brought about main parts of key Islamic principles, sciences and rules. The Islamic khatatti formed correspondingly from the systematic sublation of contentions on exegesis, esoteric interpretation, collecting, reciting, and mainly I’jam of the Quran. I’jam, as the science of resolving the misgivings and mistakes, not only consists of diacritics, but also includes the shape of graphemes and words. Orthographical I’jam in its evolutionarily advanced phase, deconstructs the letters into their few in-dividual monomorphic elements (e.g. Muntasib, Munsatih, Munahhan, and Muqawas), determines a fixed form and size for each, and eventually reconstructs them in the homogenized distinguishable compositions. Thenceforth, the letters will be repeated similarly and located orderly in text. Islamic khatatti emerged, constituted and advanced based on this structure.

Keywords: I’jam, Islam, Script, Calligraphy, Khatatti, Quran.

Problem statement

on the origin of Islamic script-[khattati]-calligraphy

Considering Khatt (script) as the writing system of storing and conveying knowledge, Khattati would be the elaborating system of the forms of written knowledge, and Khushnevisi (calligraphy) is the hegemony of aesthetic aspects over the legibility and orthographic features in writing. Khattati is a transitional phase, with no equivalent word in English, between script and calligraphy, with overlapping features causing common misconceptions. The concern of the script is the transition of meaning, while the concern of khattati, although presupposes the meaning, is legibility and the rules of the forms of rasm. Khatatti rests immediately on the script. The overall shape and spatial arrangement of letters, isolated or joined, which is determined in the script, feed the structure of khatatti. In other words, each script potentially bears and builds khatatti and will be promoted through it. So, the evolution of khatatti, mainly through the early formation of a writing system, is based on the evolution of the script.

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There are two strongly supported hypotheses on the origin of the Arabic script: 1. According to the pre-Islamic inscriptions and by tracing the genetic transformation of the individual graphemes, it relates to Nabatean. 2. Referring to al-Balādhurī narrative of the formation of Arabic script, stressing its graphic arrangement resting on the baseline (opposite to the Nabatean which is suspended), and arguing that before the rise of Islam, Syriac used to be more prevalent than Nabatean, it connects to Syriac. These two theories are repeated in almost every book on the history of Arabic script. The arguments are so justified and evident based that there is also a combined generally accepted approach. Gruendler supposes that although “the general proportions of this pre-Islamic Arabic script suggest Syriac calligraphic influence. Yet the individual Arabic Graphemes descend through Nabatean from the west Semitic alphabet” (Gruendler, 2001, 138). These theories mainly show the implicit conception of the difference between Arabic script (as a branch of Nabatean) and Arabic khattati (under the influence of Syriac), which are both rooted, unanimously, in the pre-Islamic era.

The burden of the all-pervasive Nabatean-Syriac hypothesis of the origin of the Arabic writing system, made the researchers canalized in this dichotomy. For example, in The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy, which explores the written materials of the first century, AH to find the roots of Islamic calligraphy, we will again land up to Syriac script. According to George “it only finds a clear parallel, before Islam, in Syriac, where the letters are also joined by straight ligatures at the base” (George, 2010, 22). So, the hidden parallel lines in the structure of the Arabic script originated from Syriac, formed Islamic calligraphy. Inscriptions of the Dome of Rock verify the same thesis through the geometric structure of mosaic: “Indeed, the rationale that was placed at the heart of calligraphy - not only in this inscription but in the Kufic tradition as a whole - mirrors that of mosaic, with its parallel rows of tesserae and underlying grids. We may be close, here, to the context that led to the spectacular transformation of Arabic script.” (ibid., 67). To prove the propagation of mosaic rationale to the entire realm of early Islamic calligraphy, George refers to ibn-Nadīm and his narrative about Khalid ibn Abi al-Hayyaj, who wrote the inscription of the Prophet’s mosque, and the one who wrote a manuscript on the same model, at the request of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-’Azīz (ibid., 75). George conceives very well the influencing rationale of the mosaic form, its employment techniques, and mainly the rectangular structure as the forming logical cell of calligraphy and illumination. But he does not go further from this moment. He, under the influence of the dominant hypothesis about the origins of Arabic calligraphy, traces all the roots back to the pre-Islamic era and notices the role of Islam with a cursory glance in the conquests and the necessity of “reliable transmission of orders across long distances” which, “along with the need to record the Qur’anic text, could have provided an impetus for reforming the script” (ibid., 31). Whereas, such a necessity of reliably storing and transmitting a unique text can similarly function as the forming rationale of khattati; exactly as the imposing necessity of mosaic over the script, and not only as ‘an impetus for reforming’.

So we can pose the question of how Islamic khattati was influenced by the context and dilemma of early Islam? The significance of this study, unlike the current theses, is that it explores the origins of Islamic khattati, not only in its pre-Islamic evolutions but also in the Islamic context, and will give voices to the part of history which is silenced in the Nabatean-Syriac spiral. The main context which gave birth to and evolved Islamic sciences and regularities was the early contentions of the Quran. The sublation of the contentions was the prominent rationale that formed most of the techniques and sciences, including khattati.

The era of contentions and the necessity of their sublation

Sublation of contentions on the Quran played a
basic role in the formation of Islamic disciplines and regularities. The Quran at the rise of Islam was the main source of conflict. Any other socio-political conflicts would rearrange and represent somehow through this main one. There were three main contentions on Quran: 1) Tafsir and Ta’wil (exegesis and esoteric interpretation), 2) Jam’ and Qira’at (collecting and reciting), and 3) Naqat and Tashkil (dots and diacritical marks). The progressive forces of the first decades are those who try to resolve these contentions. Contentions occupied the minds of intellectuals. These forces as the civilizational drive of Islam, not only constituted the disciplines but also presented the overall route and new horizons of the civilization of Islam.

The Mutashābih (contradictory verses with several possible interpretations) in Quran were introduced during the lifetime of Muhammad, first by the non-Muslims, and were so serious that were responded to in Quran (7:3). The doubt and misgivings of the text, gradually extended to the Muslims and also other non-Quranic texts. Contentions necessitated the science of the sublation of contentions, such as Exegesis and esoteric interpretation. Ignác Goldziher generally proposes that the history of those unique-text-based religions is the history of the interpretations of their sacred texts (Goldziher, 1979, 104). Accordingly, Ta’wil and Tafsir evolved and also reshaped and tuned other sciences such as “Linguistics, Syntax, Morphology, Rhetoric, Fiqh (Principles of Islamic jurisprudence) and Recitation” (Al-Suyuti, 1995, 462). Collecting the scattered verses and versions of the Quran also happened in several courses. The first course named the first collection, each of the companions of the prophet (al-sahābah) could have heard and kept some part of the Quran. The concept of collecting unanimously agreed to have the meaning of hearing and remembering. Putting it into written forms, although happened in the case was not prevalent (Ramyar, 2019, 211-212). The second course, after the death of Muhammad and cessation of revelation, took the ownership of the Quran from sporadic collectors (Hufaz) and gave it to a single codex (Mushaf). Following the Battle of Yamama and the killing of so many collectors and reciters, made it clear that both those who owned the verses and their lifetimes were limited. Although the collection of the Quran became essential after Muhammad’s death, and although all the caliphs tried to introduce one and only written compilation of the Quran, according to the oral tradition of the Islamic population, recitation used to be the omnipresent way of transmission for decades. With every step of the spread of Islam and annexation of various lands and conversion of different people with different languages and dialects, the potential contentions in reciting grew and became an issue. The result was the agreement on several definite recitations. Contentions in recitations gave rise to orthographical contentions. Hence, dots and diacritical marks of Mushaf and the science of I’jam became necessary.

**Genesis of I’jam**

There are two main narratives of the early genesis of dots and diacritical marks. First, it is about verse 9:3 “that Allah and His Apostle repudiate the polytheists”, which can be read to “that Allah repudiates the polytheists and His Apostle” by changing the pronunciation. Consequently, Abu al-Aswad al-Du’ali asks for a scribe and invents a system to differentiate the consonant and vowels according to mouth positions (ibid., 534). The second narrative is about Hujjaj, who by finding turmoil in Quran “told the scribe to put diacritics on the similar graphemes to facilitate reading” (ibid., 536). I’jam was the science of resolving these contentions. Abu Bakr Ibn al-Sarrāj explains I’jam genesis and says that “what necessitated diacritics was the mistakes of the reader—in case of similar graphemes, e. g. ‘Jamal and Hamal’ (جمل حمل) could not be distinguished without dots” (Ibn Sarrāj, 2009, 8). The competitive argument was that any kind of diacritic marks can cause Tahrif (distortion) in Quran. Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī asserts
that “I told to Ibn-Zarrin: Write like this and that [with diacritics], he replied: I am afraid, these reforms continue and the people think that it has been revealed from the sky” (Kazemi, 1995, 97). In both arguments, preserving the authenticity of the Quran is an axiom. The former, by maintaining the unchangeability in content and the latter in form. I’jam keeps the concept and content authentic and Tajrīd (perfection) keeps the form (Ibn Abū Dāwūd, 2002, 513). Formal perfection in the Quran (consist of marks, illuminations, and decorations) did not last long, but I’jam persisted for centuries.

Al-Fayoumy in al-Misbah al-Munir states that ‘Ujmah in speech is an impediment and the absence of eloquence, and I’jam (of the same root) means to treat stammering and achieving fluency (Al-Fayoumy, 1997, 205). I’jam is commonly used for texts and means differentiating the grapheme with dots and diacritic marks. One can say that its function is to distinguish between letters and words to resolve the ambiguity and make the text accurate in writing and reading. More generally, anything concerning the script, which can bring impediment and non-fluency can be included in I’jam. In (historical) fact, I’jam consisted of the shape of the letters, as well as dots and diacritics.

Formation of Khattati in Islam

Ibn Sarrāj in the treatise of al-Naqat’ o al-Shakal’ (putting dots and diacritic marks), to differentiate the graphemes and to find a general rule for reading them identifiably, points out several letters which are similar in shape. The attempt to differentiate similar graphemes is a critical moment in the formation of script-khattati-calligraphy. Excluding Hamza and Alīf (你会发现) the rasm in some letter groups باء، تاء، دالت (ج، ح،Ế، د، دالت، راء، زاي)، سين، شين (ص، ص، ص، ص، ص، ص، ص)، طاء، زاي (ط) and ‘ayn, Gāin (ع) are exactly the same. But some groups of letters are almost the same: “Fā’, Qāf (ق) when joined to the next letter are the same and they can be differentiated by one dot on Fā’ and two dots on Qāf. Their difference in the isolated positional form is that Qāf will curve downward and Fā’ stretches” (Ibn Sarrāj, 2009, 17). The moment of differentiating between Fā’ and Qāf with curves and stretches is a khattati(c) moment, which was proposed first to resolve ambiguity. As we mentioned before, just like Tafsir and I’jam, the contentions in interpretation and recitation can be the source of new fields and disciplines. Khattati(c) genesis also began with the very first mistake and misgiving in reading the script. Another point is about Ibn Sarrāj is the way he categorizes the letters by their similarity and the possibility of reading mistakes. Some of them can be found in which the khattatic moments are made bold.

formal categorizing of letters based on the possibility of reading mistakes:

- Kāf, Lām (ل): according to their difference in shape, there is no need of adding dots.
- Mīm, Wāw (و): the difference between the final or isolated Mīm with Wāw is that the former is a small circle attached to a bent line resembling the back (concave), but Wāw is a small circle attached to a bent line resembling the belly (convex).
- Hā’, Mīm (م): their difference –as they are in fact both circles- is that the circle of Hā’ in initial or medial position parts in half by a line, and that is why differentiated with Mīm. And the final position their kinds of bending makes them different.
- Yā’, Nūn (ن): the difference is the final position, in which Yā’ returns and Nūn bents and curves.
- Zāy, Nūn (ز): their difference, when they bend and the curve is that the curve of Nūn –at the scribe’s scale and his writing habits- is larger and wider than Zāy.

One century later, Abū ‘Amr al-Dānī points out some items that these similarities and differences are not the same as those of Ibn Sarrāj. But the rules are still based on the sublation of the formal contentions between graphemes. Al-Dānī quotes Khalīl Ibn Ahmad that
Qāf in an isolated position needs no dots, because it is larger than Wāw, and being larger suffices. That is, they were similar in rasm and differ only by size. Kāf needs also no dots, while it is larger than Dāl and Ḏāl. It means that they were also similar, while Ibn Sarrāj, a century ago had said that Kāf resembles no other shapes. About Mīm, Khalīl says that it is unique, but Ibn Sarrāj differentiated between Mīm and Wāw by their kind of bent lines. According to Khalīl, Nūn, and Lām, in the joint position look like Bāʾ, Tāʾ, and Ṭāʾ and in isolated position resemble Rāʾ and Zāy. However, being larger than Rāʾ and Zāy, it makes them needless of dots. Ibn Sarrāj had also mentioned the resemblance of Nūn and Zāy, but not that of Lām and Zāy, while Lām is completely identifiable in his eyes. For Khalīl, Hāʾ is unique, while for Ibn Sarrāj it resembles Mīm, with a difference of its circle being separated by a line (Al-Dānī, 1986, 36).

Ibn Sarrāj points out a moment, which is basic to the formation of Khattati. He asserts that “the author of these shapes derived them from a line, a circle, and a curve of a circle, and if you yourself scrutinize…, you will find it out. He then had combined these three and made the letters out of them” (Ibn Sarrāj, 2009, 16).

Ibn Muqla, who was contemporary with Ibn Sarrāj, conceives and analyzes calligraphy with the same rationale. According to this rationale, the script will be subdivided into the smallest possible unit; words into letters, and letters into basic elements. The basic elements are undividable from the similarity point of view of the elements, which means that they are completely distinguishable. Hence, According to Ibn Muqla, the basic elements of graphemes are Muqavas (curved), Muntasib (risen), Munnahin (bent), and Munsatih (flattened), which differ from each other but are similar in their repetition (Fig. 1).

Al-Qalqashandi in Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshā, based on the same rationale and two narratives from Ibn Muqla and Ibn ‘Abd al-Salam dedicated a chapter on the “rules of individual letters”. He, as well as Ibn Muqla, not only used metaphors to name the elements but also scaled the letters (in size and surface) by dots. For him, each letter would be the combination of several concepts (basic elements of graphemes), in a phrase such as “it is a shape combined from three lines”; e.g. Bāʾ “Risen and Flattened”; Ǧīm “tending and falling and half-circle [flattened]” (Al-Qalqashandi, 1921, 33-38). Letters are deconstructed, separated, and described by unique elements and their scaling system is based on dots10. It is interesting that since then, the similarities of the letters would be explained through these basic units. For example, Ṭāʾ is described “curved as the suspended Rāʾ, and flattened as the released Bāʾ”; Wāw “on the head is like the head of Fāʾ, and curved like Rāʾ”. Hence, in khattati, the letters deconstruct to minor units
and the graphemes would get the simpler but more developed form in their scalability and legibility. What used to be problematic for legibility got modified as a developed manual. Accordingly, we had three levels of analysis of graphemes. The first level includes I’jam in its common concept, and the second and third levels cover the I’jam in shapes (Table 1).

Abū Hayyān al-Tawhīdī in his treatise on the rules of scribing mentions ten axioms, which are conceptualized according to same logic: Tahqīq, Tahdīq, Tahwīq, Taxrīq, Ta’rīq, Tashqīq, Tanṣiq, Toufīq, Tadqīq, Tafrīq. From all the above, Tafrīq stresses the “differentiation of the letters and prevention of mistaking one for another, so that the shape of the letters differ from each other, but aesthetically resemble”. The difference in shape and similarity in beauty are two features that have formed khattati. Tadqīq means “narrowing” and refers to the release of the final letters. Toufīq means “harmonizing” and refers to the order of lines and uniform ruling. Tanṣiq is the identical consideration of the graphemes, positionally and aesthetically. Tashqīq is “the appropriation and equivalence of letters such as Ṣād, Ḍād, Ṭāʾ, Ẓāʾ, Kāf, etc. to have correct and beautiful shapes”. Consistently, these letters would be categorized in size in a group and would be identifiable from other groups like Dāl, Ḏāl, Rāʾ, and Zāy. Ta’rīq is the lettering of final Yāʾ and Nūn in the recurring combinations such as Man (of, from, who), ‘An (about, on, that), Fl (in), Hatta (even, to), Ela (to), and Ala (on, high), while their homogenization can constitute the script. Taxrīq means tearing the mouth in ‘Ayn, Ġayn, and Hāʾ, in a way it becomes legible for everyone, including those with “poor eyesight and perception”. Tahwīq refers to the curves of the head of Fāʾ, Qāf, and Wāw, which are different in form from those of Mīm and Hāʾ. Tahdīq refers to the eye socket shape of Ġīm, Hāʾ, Hāʾ, which should be open enough to be distinguishable from the returning Yāʾ (ے). Tahqīq, which is the main axiom refers to all of the shapes and means to formally amend the letters in such a way that “when observed at a distance, smiles at you or looks like a beautiful garden full of flowers”. Interesting thing is that Tahqīq, for Sufis is the “representation of God in the form of holy names”, and here it refers to the totality of the script and “the clarity of letters … in a joint or isolated position, extended or shortened, and their curves and kerning” (Tawhīdī, 2000, 7-11).

Ibn Durustawayh categorizes graphemes in Kitāb al-kuttāb and describes some forms metaphorically: Mahzuf (shortened in initial and medial Bāʾ, Sīn, and Ṣād «ب ب ب»); Mamtut (stretched in final and isolated Bāʾ «ب ب ب»); Mu’araq (curved for Ḥāʾ, Rāʾ, Ṣād, Sīn, Nūn, Wāw, Qāf, Mīm, Lām); Maftūh/Muqafal-Mu’araq (opened/closed »in the head’s part»-bent »in the returning part» of ‘Ayn); Mu’araq Memliya (curved laid in Yāʾ); Mashkul/Mu’ara (tied/untied in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grouping</th>
<th>Simple Substances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28 letters</td>
<td>Alīf (алиф), Bāʾ (ب), Tāʾ (ت), Ġīm, Hāʾ (ح), Ḥāʾ (خ), Dāl, Dāl (ـ), Rāʾ (ر), Zāy (ز), Sīn, Sin (س، ش)، Śād, Dād (ص، ث)، Tāʾ (ت)، Zāʾ (ز)، ‘Ayn, Ġayn (ع، غ)، Fāʾ (ف)، Qāf (ق)، Mīm, Wāw (و)، Yāʾ, Nūn (ن)، Kāf, Lām (ل)، Kāf (ک)، Hāʾ (ه)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 basic units</td>
<td>Muqavas (curved), Muntasib (risen), Munnakkab (tended and fallen), Munsatih (flatten), Mustalaq (lied on the back)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Grapheme’s categorization placed on the logic of I’jam. Source: authors based on al-Qalqashandī, 1921.
Kāf in medial position/isolated); Musalath/Mustadīr-Mahzuf Mamtut (triangular/circular in the head’s part Fā’, Qāf); Mashqus (parted in two in Ḥā’). Mu’araq can be placed under three categories according to the size of the curve: large curved (Ṣīn, Śīn, Ṣād, Ḍād, Qāf, Yā’, and Nūn); medium curved (Mīm and Wāw); small curved (Rā’, Zāy). About the vertical stroke of Bāʾ, Tāʾ, and Yāʾ when they are joint together, he asserts that one of the strokes should be written higher. In addition to the rules of individual, joint, and stretched letters, finally, he finds the beauty of letters in their uniformity and isodiametricity (Ibn Durustawayh, 1921). This is the same principle as Tawhīdī’s “different in body shape and similar in beauty forms” (Al-Tawhīdī, 1951, 33).

Configuration of the script in viewer’s eye
Al-Tawhīdī quotes Ali ibn Ja’far that “the shape of letters are hidden in hands”. Here we tried to show that the shapes are hidden not in the hands of the scribe, but the viewer’s eye. Actually, it is the viewer’s discrimination that configures the script and forms Khattati. Again according to Tawhīdī quoting Omar ibn Khattab “the most beautiful script is the most distinctive one, and the most distinctive script is the most beautiful one” (ibid.). Being distinctive implies the script casting in the viewer’s eye socket. To indicate the importance of distinctiveness in Khattati, from the remained script samples of around the first century AH, we extracted the similarities between the letters (Table 2). These similarities were the source and drive of I’jam and the formation of Khattati. Undeniably, the similarity of Dāl and Kāf is the main contention of this period. Gruendler in her study of the development of the Arabic scripts, from the Nabatean Era to the first Islamic century according to dated texts showed the evolution of individual letters (Gruendler, 1993). According to the similarity of Dāl and Kāf in early Arabic scripts, we extract them from her tables in evolutionary order. It is obvious that almost every Nabatean-Arabic text Dāl and Kāf is the same as the following evolution (Fig. 2).

Reading and Legibility
Hitherto we declared our problem statement on the similarity of graphemes and the probability of misgiving. From an orthographical point of view, it is called legibility. Alan George opens a discussion under the title of “economy, orthography and legibility”, but just mentions the dots and diacritics marks and conceives legibility as kerning (George, 2010, 43-46). Habibullah Faza’eli, in his six-phased periodization of calligraphy, suggests a vague conception of the first period as relating to I’jam (Faza’eli, 1971, 5). Although he also mentions diacritics and not the shapes of letters, diagnosing it as the “early evolution” is of significance. Ibn Khaldūn also discusses the script and legibility and suggests that “perfection of script and speech is in their clear and identifiable implications … and also when their shapes in rasm will be separately beautiful and distinguishable.” (Ibn Khaldūn, 2003, 174). We can also touch I’jam, legibility, and their role in the formation of Islamic calligraphy from a different perspective. For a contemporary outsider viewer, deciphering the inscriptions or classification of them follows the reverse process of khattati formation. Samuel Flury’s deciphering methodology of Islamic ornamental inscriptions is an interesting experience (Flury, 1912). In Flury’s method, the letters are
Table 2. similar graphemes in the early Arabic texts. Source: authors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Similar graphemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inscription</td>
<td>Jabal Usays pre-Islamic 528 CE</td>
<td>Rā’, Zāy almost similar to Lām</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inscription</td>
<td>Harran Pre-Islamic 568 CE</td>
<td>Rā’, Zāy almost similar to Lām</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inscription</td>
<td>Umm Al-Jimāl pre-Islamic 5th or 6th</td>
<td>Dāl and Kāf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inscription</td>
<td>Tombstone Of ʿAbd al-Rahmān Ibn Khair, 31 AH / 652 CE</td>
<td>Dāl and Kāf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inscription</td>
<td>Dam Built By Muʿāwiya, 58 AH / 678 CE</td>
<td>Dāl and Kāf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epigraph</td>
<td>Dome of the Rock 72 AH</td>
<td>Dāl and Kāf – mostly different in size and serif</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inscription</td>
<td>‘Abd al-Malik’s Milestone 73 AH</td>
<td>Dāl and Kāf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inscription</td>
<td>South of Makkah Qur’an 4:87, 38:26, 80 AH</td>
<td>Dāl and Kāf</td>
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Continued of table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
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<tr>
<td>Coin</td>
<td>Abl al-Malik Dinar 77 AH</td>
<td>Rā’, Zāy and Nūn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papyri</td>
<td>Statement of amir al-Jarrah ibn ‘Abdallah 22 AH</td>
<td>Rā’, Zāy different from Nūn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Papyri</td>
<td>The Qurra Papyrus tax demand 91 AH APEL III.161 PSR I,V</td>
<td>Kāf infrequently different by size</td>
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<tr>
<td>Papyri</td>
<td>Letter from Qurra ibn Sharik to the sovereign of Asuh 91 AH</td>
<td>Rā’, Zāy different from Nūn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Papyri</td>
<td>Letter from Divastich to the amir al-Jarrah 99-100 AH</td>
<td>Dāl, Kāf and ‘Ayn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Folio</td>
<td>Quranic fragment 11.5-11 First Century AH</td>
<td>Rā’, Zāy different from Nūn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Folio</td>
<td>Quranic fragment 24:59-64 1st-2nd AH</td>
<td>Rā’, Zāy different from Nūn</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 2. Genesis of Dāl and Kāf from Nabatean to Arabic. Source: authors based on Gruendler, 1993.

categorized into 18 groups according to their visual similarity: “1= alif; 2= bāʾ, tāʾ, thāʾ; 3= djīm, hāʾ, khāʾ; 4= dāl, dhāl; 5= rāʾ, zāʾ; 6= sīn, shīn; 7= Ṣād, Ḍād; 8= tāʾ, zāʾ; 9= ‘ain, ghain; 10= fāʾ, qāf; 11= kāf; 12= lām; 13= mīm; 14= Noūn; 15= hāʾ; 16= wāw; 17= yāʾ; 18= lām.alif.” Based on these categorizes “the alphabetic tables are so arranged that for each group of letters, we put the simple form first in line and the most complicated at the end. So, we will have a clearer image … Numbering the letters in this way permits everyone, even non-Arabs or someone who does not know the characters, to appreciate the evolution of epigraphic alphabets” (ibid., 237-238). Built on this methodology, Lisa Volov, reading plaited Kufic on Samanid epigraphic pottery, suggests a more general classification. Letters are categorized in five basic forms: I. Vertical (alif, lām), II. Rectangular (dāl, dhāl, kāf, sād, dhād, tāʾ, zāʾ), III. Round (mīm, fāʾ, qāf, hāʾ, wāw), IV. Low (rāʾ, zāʾ, noun, wāw) and V. Oblique (‘ain, ghain, djīm, hāʾ, khāʾ) (Volov, 1966, 112).

Visual classification of Flury and Volov is important to us because, in their attempt to read the complicated Kufic inscriptions, they found the most basic form of the letters and then categorized them in such a way to propose a rule for reading the inscriptions. Finding the differences and similarities, for them is a method to regulate the inscription reading, which is in fact an exploration of the roots in the genesis of Islamic khattati.

**Conclusion**

The origin of Islamic khattati and its prevalent forms and styles returns to the first century on the seedbed of contentions in the completion and regularization of the Quran. Khattati formed as the result of I’jam, in a more general sense, and evolved diversely. The similarity in letters and the possibility of misgiving in reading necessitated the differentiation of individuals and the formidability of forms. Accordingly, Khattati is configured on the perception of the viewer and structured systematically. This evolution is of significance from different aspects. First, it suggests the recollection of the history of Islamic civilization, in such a way that contributes to understanding the socio-historical structures and mechanisms to the historical necessities, contentions, and any systematic attempt to resolve them. Secondly, in such a manner of historical perception, in addition to the representation of the individuality of a genesis based on its immanent dilemmas, it can also stretch our contemporary horizons of forming our civilizational individuality in the course of our confrontations with our necessities and contentions. Finally, in a reverse process in I’jam, by finding the similarities of graphemes, we can extend the methods of classification, paleography, codicology, calligraphic periodization, and decipherment.

**Endnote**

1. Al-Balādhurī says that “three people from Tayy gathered … and constitute the script, and scaled Arabic grapheme on Syriac grapheme”. (Al-Balādhurī, 1956, 597 v 3)
2. See Sheila Blair’s Chapter “The Standardization of Arabic Script” in Islamic Calligraphy (Blair, 2006); also Beatrice Gruendler topic “Nabatean or Syriac?” (Gruendler, 1993, 1); or Alain George’s chapter “Looking for the origins” (George, 2010, 21); find more on the debate here (Abbott, 1939); (Grohmann, 1971); (Briquel-Chatonnet, 1997); (Starcky, 1966).
3. The same approach supported by (George, 2010, 27).
4. For an immanent conception of the history of exegesis and interpretation...
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