The Impact of the Holy Quran on the Evolution of Writing

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ABSTRACT

It is an inevitable necessity to examine the factors of developing human civilization and its cultural backgrounds. Scientists acknowledge that the development of writing should be considered as one of the factors of human civilization and today the Arabic script is one of the strong scripts. We are going to discuss the subject through analyzing the historic role of the Quran in evolution of Arabic writing. The influence of the Holy Quran in the development of writing in Islamic societies, has been continued from the beginning of Islam till now and this could be true because of the holy status of Quran and the strong will of Muslim people to preserve this divine book. In the present article the influence of the Holy Quran has been proved through a historical process, with strong evidences.

INTRODUCTION

The starting point for the flourishing of Islamic civilization is the holy Quran. The Muslims started to develop their sciences by searching and studying on the holy Quran and then Hadith. Thus the first city that started scientific movements was Medina and the first scientific centers were the mosques and the first subjects were about Quran and Islamic Traditions and the first teacher was the holy Prophet himself. The knowledge of reading, interpretation, theology, Hadith, Rijal, Philology, syntax, morphology, rhetoric and History which are all important Islamic sciences are emerged because of the Holy Quran and Sunnah. Edward Brown says:

Professor Dakhwia the great scientist of Arabic language showed admirably in an article written about Tabari and other Arab historians for volume 23 of Encyclopedia of Islam that how the different Islamic sciences, especially history, made progress thanks to the holy Quran and how these sciences focused on the central concept of divine wisdom. The linguistic sciences and studies about language were naturally in the first rank. Once foreigners flocked to convert to Islam, the immediate need to Arabic grammar and vocabulary was felt, because the Holy Quran was revealed in Arabic. To describe rare and strange words in the Quran it was needed to collect the classical Arabic poetry as much as possible.

To understand the meanings of these poems the knowledge of al-Ansab and Arab news and information from the holidays was generally felt.

In order to complete the decrees of the holy Quran for daily life it was needed to ask the companions of the holy prophet some questions about his quotations and his actions in different positions and situations and consequently the science of Hadith came to existence. For admittance of the attributions, the knowledge of history and description of these people was necessary. Again, this led to study of the lives of famous people and sequence of events in different ages, and the knowledge of Taqwim and the knowledge of Azmane came to existence.

Also, Arab history was not enough and it was partly required to know the history of Arab neighbors, particularly Persians and Greeks and Ethiopians and etc. to understand the meanings of some points in the holy Quran and classical poetry.

Interest in the Quran: The Beginnings of the Great Islamic Civilization:

Jurji Zaydan says that Muslims interest to different sciences started from the Quran. It was important for Muslims to recite the holy Quran correctly and the holy Quran was all their religion and world. They tried their
best to understand the decrees of the Quran. The need of Muslims to understand the words and meanings of
Quran created the different Islamic sciences. In short the important reason which was emerged and developed in
Islamic society and led to the great Islamic civilization, was the endless love and interest of Muslims to the holy
Quran.

Jurji Zaydan says about the great interest of Muslims to the Holy Quran that is the source of the
successfulness of Muslims in sciences that “Muslim people were so careful about writing and preserving the
Quran which is unique among other people.” Muslims used to write the Quran on gold sheets and silver sheets
and ivory, or they used to select high quality silk clothes and write the verses of Quran on them through gold
plating and silver plating and they used to decorate their houses, mosques, and libraries by Quranic verses and
they used very beautiful writings for them. Different types of animal skins, leathers, and papers have been used
for writing the Quran. Muslims recorded the numbers of Quranic Chapters, Quranic Verses and even Quranic
Words one by one and they recorded the numbers of the letters, for example how many times a letter is repeated
in the Quran. The style of the Quran is considered as a model for their speeches and books, and the teachings of
Quran became the pattern of their behavior in their daily life.

While many of Islamic nations had a language other than the language of the Quran, Muslims, in addition to
legal sciences, used the verses and meanings of Quran for their discussions and argumentations in linguistic
studies (like morphology and syntax). For instance, only in the book of Sibawayh, 300 verses of Quran are
mentioned. Writers and authors who were trying to decorate their sayings and writings, used to include the
verses of the Quran in their sayings and writings.

With this introduction, it has become clear that the holy Quran was the basis for development and creation of
many sciences and Technologies. In this paper we are going to examine the impact of the Quran on the
evolution of writing in Islamic societies. This goal has been tried to be achieved through historical evidences in
a descriptive-analytic method which is hoped to be useful.

The definition of the word “Writing”:
Writing means: To write down something and something which is written. We can read in the sermon 23 of
Nahj al-Balaghah:

“And this Quran is only a writing, written between two covers...”
Also, in the sermon 145, we can read about the people and about the Quran:

“And they do not know the Quran, but its script and writing.”
The word has some other meanings, but in the Quran it is used only in the meanings of writing.

The History of Writing:
Ralph Linton writes that “Writing is also one of the inventions of Near East. It is an invention that has a
much more important effect on the development of civilizations than the metalworking industry. If the writing
had not been invented, the development of science would not be possible. The techniques of writing was created
about five to six thousand years ago in Egypt and Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley almost simultaneously.

In all the areas mentioned before, the first stage of writing, was using the pictures, namely, the real images of
objects, but because they wanted to use these images to indicate special meanings, they had to become simple
and they had to take conventional forms.

Despite the fact that simplifying the signs and techniques of writing would led to spread the public literacy
and had many benefits, nevertheless, scribes and secretaries preferred to keep the difficulties of writing because
they did not want to have competitors in their career.

Particularly in Egypt, in spite that they had great advances from the beginning and they developed
ideograph writing, and then syllabic writing and finally they invented real alphabet writings, scribes that had
influence on scientific works and governments, preferred to keep writing a hidden secret and inaccessible to the
public.

Dr Girshman says:
“Should we believe that the inventor of writing was inspired by the art and paintings of Iranian craftsmen
who had ready images and signs before their eyes? Anyway, this is possible and we should know that this art
represents a step towards pictorial writing. Potters in this era also knew the technology of molding for all kinds
of animal sculptures, children’s toys or votive gifts.

Generally ancient nations, due to the evidences found, used to try to show their meanings, purposes and
intentions using shapes and unbalanced designs. For example ancient Egyptians used to draw a shape of the
desired objects to express their own purpose and if the concept was an abstract thing, they used to show their
purpose using conventional signs. For example, in one of ancient writings, friendship had been shown by the
shape of a dove, hostility had been shown by the shape of a snake, war and struggle by the shape of a tiger, peace by the shape of sheep and deer, and happiness and joy by a man and woman dancing together.

This kind of pictogram or “hieroglyphs” is the oldest and most basic historical writing. Professor Pourdavood writes in the book titled as “Ancient Iranian Culture” about this kind of writing:

Writers of this kind of writing should know painting and drawing to have the ability to draw and to paint anything and any idea and meaning. For example the shape of an eye means to see, the shape of two arms one with hastate and one with a shield, conveys the meaning of fighting, and Justice is expressed with the shape of ostrich feather.

Expressing the meaning using these conventional images was so difficult and usually the audience could not understand the meaning. This type of incomplete writing which was common since thousands of years before Christ among the inhabitants of Egypt and Phoenicia, gradually evolved into a system of writing with a less number of signs and letters.

Instead of old materials like stone and wood which were heavy and thick, a kind of paper was made up of a plant called papyrus and gradually its quality was improved. Some samples of these kinds of papers are now in in Egyptian Museums. After centuries Sumerians invented cuneiform writing system and then Elamites and Assyrians learned to use this writing system and then Iranians started to use this writing system, but while the Assyrian cuneiform had 700 signs and Elamites cuneiform had 300 signs, Iranian cuneiform had only forty two signs for setting their alphabet.

While Phoenicians had business activities, they transferred the syllabic letters to the Greeks and other nations. All of Aramaic tribes contributed to the creation and development of the letters of syllabic writing system. Because of problems in reading the old writing systems of Assyrians, Babylonians and etc., using these writing systems was not simple.

Wells believes that the most important thing that happened in fifty or sixty centuries of human progress, was surely the invention of writing and its importance in human life. Writing was a new means for human thought that provided a wide scope of activities for human being and it was a means to deliver the ideas of people to next generations. At the beginning of the new Stone Age, emergence of language gave a means to human being for transferring their ideas and thoughts, and this led to increase their power through cooperation.

Before emergence of the real writing systems, pictograms came to existence. People used to draw the pictures of things to convey their meanings and thoughts.

In this way writing was derived from painting and it evolved and for centuries it was considered by some special people in high social class and ordinary people could not understand it, but eventually the idea of thinking and mutual understanding overcame and writing for expressing ideas and thinkings emerged over the centuries.

**Pre-Islamic Arabic Writing:**

Historians are not consensus about who created the Arabic writing system for the first time. Some of them attribute it to Ismail bin Khalil Ullah (AS), and some others believe that the first person from the Quraish who wrote in Arabic Writing system was Harb bin Omayyah, and he had learned it from Islam bin Sedre Hamiri.

It is reported from Harb bin Umayya that I asked my tutor Islam bin Sedre Hamiri: Who was your teacher in writing? He said Marar bin Morreh Anbari. So based on this, we can say that Arabic Writing is from Anbari.

What can be seen in Arabic tradition about the origin of writing and Arabic Writing and its relation to the Hirra and Anbar is noticeable because Writing and scribing is the most important element in Islamic culture and civilization. It is due to mention that when we are speaking about the origin of writing in Arabic, we mean the spread of writing among Arab people not the emergence of Arabic writing system which is related to Linguistic Studies and it has its long history itself.

In these narratives we can see that the first one who wrote in Arabic Writing system was a man named Marar bin Morreh from the city of Anbar, and Arabic writing spread to other places from Anbar. It is reported by Asma’i one of the most famous Arabic Language scientists. He says in the same regard:

The Quraysh had been asked about how they learned writing. They Said that we have learned it from the people of Hirra and the people of Hirra had been asked about how they learned writing? They said that we learned it from the people of Anbar. This narrative has been reported by Ibn-e Rasteh in the book of al-A’laq al-Nafisa. Bayhaqi also narrated the same thing in the books titled as al-Mahasin and al-Mosawi:

“The first Arab who wrote in Arabic Writing was the Marar bin Morreh from the city of Anbar and it was distributed from this city to other places.” Also, Tabari has reported something that admits the same news. He said in the description of conquering the city of Anbar by Khalid bin Walid:

“When Muslims and Khalid bin Walid settled down in the city of Anbar, the people of city came out of their houses; Khalid found out that they write something in Arabic and they teach it to each other and learn it.”

In the narration of Ibn Abbas it is reported that:
“The people of Anbar learned writing from the people of Hirra and one of them taught writing to Abdullah
bin Jad’an and he taught it to Harb bin Umayya; and in this way the Hejazi writing of the people of Quraysh
came to existence, and as you can see, in this story the main source of Hejazi writing system is Anbar [14].

Arabic writing system in the way that was common in the Islamic era, had been taken from two tribes in a
time near the emergence of Islam. One of them was Nabi tribe from Huran and the other one was Syriac tribe
from Hirra (near Kufa).

These two writing systems were taken from the Semitic Writing Systems and they were completely imitable
for Arabs. The first writing system became a base for Naskh Calligraphy and the second writing system became
the origin of Kufic Calligraphy. It is due to explain that speakers of Syriac language in Iraq used to have two
types of Syriac writing system that one of them was “al-Satr Najili” and, as can be deduced from its name, it
was used for writing the sacred books of the holy Bible. This writing system had been adopted by Arabs in the
first century of pre-Islamic era. The writing system had been firstly adopted in the city of Anbar and then they
took it to Hejaz and tried to distribute it, so that at the time of Bi’ that of the holy prophet of Islam, some people
in Quraysh knew how to write in this writing system. Firstly, this writing system was called Hirri Writing or
Hejazi Writing, but later it came to be known as Kufic Calligraphy.

Two writing systems of Naskh and Kufic both remained among Muslims after the dominance of Islam and
they had been apparently used at the same time. Naskh had been used for writing letters and Kufic had been
used for writing holy books, like Satr Najili and then they had been used for decorating the mosques and also
coins.

Writing in Saudi Arabia:

As we have seen, from the point of view of the historians, the origin of Arabic writing system was from
Hirra and Anbar whether it was invented by an Arab or it was derived by Syriac Alphabet. This happened
around the advent of Islam, and Muslims seem to have learned from them and they taught it to their children and
they have gradually advanced in this technique. Alphabetical order was like “ABJAD” letters (a, b, j, d, h, w, z,
h, t, i, k, l, m, n, s, ’, f, s), which had been common among Syriac and Jewish people. But some experts believe
that this order was adopted during the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab in this way. However, the conventional
alphabetical order which is common today was adopted subsequently.

Apparently the ABJAD alphabetical order had been adapted from the Aramaic alphabet, and the theory that
the Hirri or Anbari writing system had been derived from Masnad writing system seems unlikely, because of the
great differences of these two writing systems. Although it has been reported that writing has been common
among the people of Anbar or Hirra, but unfortunately there is no script from the Ignorance era (Jahiliya)
available for more inquiry and also unfortunately there is no script available from the time of the holy Prophet of
Islam.

According to the relation of writing in Mecca and Medina and the fact that they have been taken from Nabi
twriting system which had been common in the north of Hejaz and Syria after the Christ and also the Aramaic
writing system which is its source and origin, it can be accepted that the people of Mecca have learned writing
from Hirra or Anbar. There was a great relationship between Hirra and the Arab Peninsula and there was a high
amount of transaction between the businessmen of Hirra and Arab Peninsula.

Historians have mentioned in their books the name of lots of the famous people of Mecca who had gone to
Hirra and have returned back to Mecca. In Hirra reading and writing was common, especially because it was
near Iran and the exposure to influence of Iranian civilization. Even it has been mentioned in History that they
used to teach their children and their children had the ability to write.

So, the spread of writing among the Iraqi people before Islam is indisputable. The relationship of the people
of Hirra and Mecca is also assured. So it is not unlikely that the people of Mecca have learned writing from
Iraqis.

Another point was the names of people who invented Arabic writing mentioned in history:
Maramar bin Marra, Aslam bin Sedrah and Amer bin Jedrah have invented Arabic script.

Some experts believe that these are not names of people, but they are characteristics of the people that
would be attributed to people to celebrate them. They believe that these are Syriac traits that some people have
thought that they are the names of people and the myth of invention of writing came from here.

For example the name “Maramarin” is the Aramaic phrase “maramari bir mari” which means “the great of
the great and son of the great or the great of scientists and child of the pioneer of science”. Also the name
“Aslam bin Sedrah” is the distortion of the phrase “Shalima bir sedra” which means “a full-fledged writer and a
complete scientist” and the name “Amer bin Jedrah” is the distortion of the phrase “Amraya bir Jidra” which
means “a qualified or skilled writer”.

Historians have thought that these words which were attributed to calligraphers, are the names of the people
who invented the Arabic writing system [6].

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- Iragisi
Writing in Mecca and Medina:

Arab people, as we are informed, did not know how to write. Only a few people used to go to Iraq and Syria for business. They learned writing and when they return to their country and city they taught it to their people. The question that who was the first person that took writing to Mecca is unanswered. According to some narratives Sufyan bin Umayya or Harb bin Umayya have learned writing for the first time from the people of Hirra. It has been reported that there were only 10 people or 17 people who had the ability to write. Also we know that at the time of the holy prophet of Islam there were some people in Mecca who knew the writing and this fact has been mentioned in some verses of the holy Quran. But they were not a particular group of people. Among them there were some people from “Bani Israel”, who knew Hebrew and some Christian people who knew Syriac, Greek and Latin. Even in the biography of “Waraqa bin Nawfal”, the translation and scribing of the previous holy books has been mentioned.

Writing was also common in Medina and teaching and learning Hebrew and Syriac languages, was customary. Even among women there were some people in Mecca and Medina who were literate. One of them was Omar’s sister and the other one was Shafa”, the daughter of Abdullah Adwiah who knew writing.

These are mentioned as some instances and certainly there are some other examples too. There many references in history that show Jewish people would read the Torah in Hebrew and they would interpret it in Arabic.

As it is said, Mecca was then a big business center and there were some special orders for buying and selling goods. Big business caravans would go from Mecca to Syria and the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine) or towards Iran. The rich people of Mecca had caravans and they would send their caravans to other places around. Hashim, the grand grandfather of the holy prophet of Islam, was one of the man of means in Mecca who had relations to Heraclius the Emperor of Rome and Negus the Emperor of Abyssinia. Khadija the wife of the holy Prophet sometimes would dispatch a caravan with two thousand camels of goods around. The markets of “Bazars” around Mecca was the assembly which of different great poets of the time who would put together for poetry contests. The best poem which was selected would be written in a beautiful calligraphy and was hung on the door of Kaaba and “Mo’allaqat Sab’a” or the seven hangings were the most famous among them. When the famous declaration of tribal leaders against the prophet was set up, as it was customary, they hung it on the Kaaba for all the people to be aware of it. It has been reported that in Ta’if and Medina there were schools in which one of the courses taught was writing and reading; it has been pointed out that some of the children who did not like to write on wooden tablets, used to write in black ink on the walls of the classroom.

So reading and writing at the time of the Prophet existed in Mecca and Medina but a few people were able to write and read.

Scribes of Revelation:

Reviews on the scribes of Revelation could be considered as an evidence for the fact that Muslims intended to write the words of the holy Quran from the very beginning and it is necessary to learn reading and writing for doing that.

Muhammad apparently did not have the ability to read and write, and was not known among his people as a literate person. Because they had never seen him reading or writing something, so they used to call him “Ummi”. The Quran has also called him with the same description:

كنت نقل من كتاب و لا تخطي يميك انلأزاب المبطنون (عذكيات/48)

“You have not read any book before, and you did not write anything with your hand, otherwise the wrongdoers would certainly be in doubt” (Spider/48)

This verse means that the Prophet did not read or write anything, but it does not mean that he did not have the ability to write, and it was enough for protecting Islam from oppositions of enemies, because the Prophet has never been considered as an educated person, so the way to raise problems against Islam would be closed in this way.

For this reason the Prophet (PBUH) needed some scribes to write different things including the revelations of God, so whether in Mecca or Medina, the most skillful ones in scribing were selected for writing the revelations of God. The first person responsible for writing in Mecca, especially writing the revelations of God, was Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib, and he continued this till the end of the Prophet’s life. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also greatly insisted on writing and recording the revelations of God, in order to make sure that the Quran and the divine revelation is away from distortion.

Salim bin Qais Hilali, one of the followers, says:
I was with Imam Ali in the mosque of Kufa and the people were gathered around him. Ali said: Ask me your questions until I am among you. Ask me about the Book of Allah. I swear to God that the holy Prophet, recited all of verses revealed to him and he taught me the interpretation of all the verses of the holy Quran.

The first person who became responsible for scribing in Medina was Ubay ibn Ka'b Ansari. He knew Arabic and Hebrew writing, and he translated the Arabic and Hebrew for the holy Prophet. Therefore the most important scribes of revelation were Ali ibn Abi Talib, Ubay ibn Ka'b and Zayd ibn Thabit and other scribes can be ranked in second level.

Ali ibn Abi Talib, was the neighbor of the holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Medina. He was able to write. Initially Whenever the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) needed to write something and Ubay ibn Ka'b was not available, he would call Zayd to write for him. Zayd ibn Thabit was with the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) more than other companions, for writing for him. Gradually his writings became official and even by the order of the holy prophet learned the Hebrew language and writing to read the Hebrew letters for the holy Prophet and translate them and write answers for them. Therefore the most important scribes of revelation were Ali ibn Abi Talib, Ubay ibn Ka'b and Zayd ibn Thabit and other scribes can be ranked in second level.

Abdullah bin Arqam was the first one who scribed from the Quraish for the Prophet. Then he became apostate and returned to Mecca and the verse was revealed about him:

أَمْ مَنْ أَفْلَحْ عَلَى الْكَلِّمَةِ أَوْ قَالَ أُحِيُّ الْأَيْنَىِّ وَلَمْ يَحْيَ آَيَةٌ شَيْ عُمِّرَةَ (93)

Apparently these people were those who were literate among the Arab people and they would write occasionally for the Prophet, but the official scribes were the three mentioned people and Ibn Arqam.

Abu Abdullah Zanjani has counted more than forty people as writers of the holy Quran. He adds:

“Some of the women who had the ability of writing." Researchers and Historians have written that the scribes of revelation were Ali ibn Abi Talib, Zayd ibn Thabit and Zayd ibn Arqam. Handhalah ibn Rabih al-Tamimi and Mu'awiah were responsible for writing letters to the heads of different countries, the writing required for people and also the list of alms and properties.

Abu Abdullah Zanjani has counted more than forty people as writers of revelation that apparently they would be used when it was needed:

“Some of the women who had the ability to write were Umm Kolthum bin Aghaba, Karima bint Meghad and Shafa bint Abdullah. The Prophet ordered to Shafia to teach writing to Hafsa. Aisha and Umm Salama were among women who had only the ability to read. In Medina, Sa'd bin 'Ubada, Munther bin Amr, Ubay ibn Ka'b, Zayd ibn Thabit, who knew Arabic and Hebrew writing, Rafe ibn Malik, Asid ibn Hadhir, Mu'n ibn Uday, Basheer ibn Sa'd, Sa'd ibn Rabih', Aus ibn Khali and Abdullah bin Abi had the ability of writing.”

In scribing the holy Quran, verses would be arranged and recorded in each chapter and each chapter would be started by the name of God and the chapters were recorded separated and independent of each other. In the time of prophecy, no arrangement was made between the chapters of the holy Quran.

Arabic scripts initially were amorphous and had no points, but it is reported that the first known Syntacticians i.e. Abu al-Awsad Duali and Nasr ibn Asim added forms and points to Arabic writing.

Until the end of Umawiy period there was no change in Arabic writing but in Bani Abbas period, Iranian calligraphers made different types of new writings. For example Ebrahim al-Shajari, one of the scribes of the late second century created the Tholthain writing and his brother, Yusef, created the Riasi writing, after the name of Dhorriasatinae Fadl ibn Sahi, the minister of the Abbasid caliph Mamun, and its real name was Towghi’.

The disciple of Ebrahim, Alaw Moharrar who was of the students of Barmaki people, invented some calligraphy writings like Nesf, Khafif, Thulth, Mosalsal, and Roghae. Some of the students of Ahwal were Abu Ali Muhammad bin Maghla (d. 328) and his brother Abu Abdullah Hasan (d. 338) that the Arabic script was completed by them.
Tools of Writing:

Jurji Zaydan writes in the history of Islamic Civilization:

“Pens would be made up of reed and ink would be made up of ground charcoal plus something sticky such as gum. But the Arab people would make papers of some kinds of animals’ skins. Sometimes they would write on fabrics and the most famous fabric was a kind of textures made in Egypt which was called “Ghabati”. The book Mo’allaqat Sab’ in pre-Islamic era was written on the same material. Sometimes they used leather, wood, bone, stone, clay or other materials. It has been written in the third volume of the same book on 83:

“The verses of the Quran would be written on materials such as animals’ bones and skin, stones and palms leaves. It has been written in “The History of Quran”, page 47, that we should add cloth and silk to these materials. It has been mentioned that they would call the Quran written on cloth and silk “Suhuf” and they would send one volume to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to keep it in his home.

It shows that the holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had collected a volume of the Quran for himself.

The way of scribing in the period of prophecy was that they would write on everything that would be possible to be used for writing. For instance:

Asab: Plural form of Asib; It was palm tree branches so that they would make its leaves apart and they would write on the flatten part.

Lakhf: Plural form of Lakhe; thin white stones.

Roqa: Plural form of Roq’a; pieces of skin or sheets (leaves) or paper.

Adam: Plural form of Adim; skin prepared for writing.

After writing, the verses would be sent to the Prophets’ house and would be kept there.

Sometimes that some companions wanted to have a chapter or chapters of the holy Quran, they had to scribe a copy for themselves.

Positive impacts of the Holy Quran on the development of Writing:

1- The holy prophet’s special order for scribing and collecting the holy Quran:

Absolute order of the holy prophet about scribing and collecting the Quran from the early days of prophecy was a reason for seriousness of the religious leaders and artists to record and collect the holy Quran in different forms such as book, tiling of the mosques, and beautiful works of art in the area of calligraphy.

Wafi, in vol. 5, page 274 in the end of Chapter of Salat, quotes Imam Sadeq (AS) who quoted the holy prophet who said at the time of his death:

You, Ali! The Quran is behind my bed place among the scriptures and other papers. Collect them and do not let it be destroyed as the Old Testament was by the Jews. Ali (AS) wrote the holy Quran down on a piece of yellow cloth and finished it in his own house and said “I will not wear my cloak (formal clothes, which means I will not leave my house) unless I finish this task”. They say that even if someone wanted to meet him at his door, he would not wear his cloak until he finished scribing the Quran. (Banaei, vol. 5, p 276)

The Quran was scribed on parchments during the fourth and fifth centuries. The writings were by liquid gold. The best works of the fifth and sixth centuries which were done over regular paper were in Abbasid style of Bagdad and Egypt. The Arab learned how to make paper after conquest of Samarkand and they no more used the parchments. The valuable works which have remained from this era are usually in Naskh and the titles of Suras are written in Kufi. Later, artists created other forms from major styles. Gilders and artists drew beautiful geometric designs and beautified their works with drawing flowers. (Ravandi, 1385, vol. 7, p 585)

Jurji Zaydan says “During the rule of Sakah Al Din Ayyubi over Egypt, there were over 3400 volumes of the holy Quran in a library which was made by Al Aziz Billah, the second Fatemi Khalifa by the advice of his minister Yaqub Ibne Kals. All these Qurans were written beautifully by liquid gold. The beautiful Qurans which are now kept in Museum of Shrine of Imam Reza (AS) are so glorious that show the high value of the holy Quran for the people of this land.

2- The holy prophet and Quran’s emphasis over the issue of writing and learning:

Knowledge and learning are of high importance in Islam and they are valued much. Motivating others to learn writing and reading and hard tries in this area was not just limited to last years of the prophet’s life, but it was a mission which started from early days of prophecy. Knowledge and pen (as symbol of writing) were highly respected from early days of rise of Islam. This surely has an important role in advance of science, techniques, and even calligraphy. In the first verses which were sent to the holy prophet, God says “Your kind Lord who taught through pen. He taught them what they did not know”. (Sura Al Alaq, verse 3)

And in the Sura Al Qalam (which means pen) He swears to the pen and what is written down:

“Noon! And swear to the Pen and what is written down by that. Under the mercy of your Lord, you are not insane”. (Sura Al Qalam, verse 1)

More surprising and glorious are the words uttered in praise of writing. The holy prophet motivated his companions to learn and he even motivated them to learn other languages such as Hebrew and Syriac. It is recorded in history that in the war of Badr, Muslims captured sixty or seventy of pagans and there were some
among them who were literate. He asked ransom (in form of service or even money) for those who were illiterate, but for those who could read and write, he accepted that if each of them could teach ten of his followers how to read and write, he will be free and by this he defined literacy equal to freedom for all his followers and this was a great step which was taken in releasing the ignorant from darkness of ineptitude.

Also it is said that the holy prophet said “Do not write about me. If you have done so, destroy that. Just write the holy Quran. Do not thrill to quote what I say. And if a person ascribes a lie to me, he will end up in the Hell”.

We can see that the holy prophet was so serious in scribing the holy Quran, but this seriousness was not only limited to the Quran. Abdullah Ibne Said Ibne Aas was a man who was skillful in reading and he could also write well. Therefore, the holy prophet told him to teach people how to read and write in Medina. It is thought that the nine mosques in Medina, at the time of the holy prophet, were centers for learning and education. Also the holy prophet ordered children to educate in their tribes’ mosques.

3- Invention of punctuation and other linguistic marks to prevent reading failures (progress of writing due to the holy Quran)

The writings of the Quran had no markings. That is because there were no such items in Syriac and Nibti from which Kufi and Naskh (types of calligraphy) were derived. This led to different readings among companions. There were several cases that because there were no dots, as an instance, different words could be made. The Arabs, out of their natural and genetic behaviors, could read the Quran correctly on early days. But later, when the Islamic border widened and Iranian and Roman Empires were ruled by Muslim commanders and many non-Arabs joined Islam, Arabic lost its purity and accuracy in mixture with other languages. The Arabs were no more like their past who could speak and write out of their own intellect and without passing any education.

Mixture with non-Arabs little by little affected negatively on the accuracy of Arabic. They even sometimes made mistakes in speaking and writing. This was why the reading of Quran, which was in Othmani style, had so many mistakes. Basically, no other languages are so much affected by a change of a marking as is Arabic. These markings are of high importance in this language and in its meanings.

There is a nice story about markings of the holy Quran by Abu al-Aswed Duali. The cause of this correction is the mistakes in reading and interpreting. The oldest quotation belongs to Abu Al Tib Luqawi. Since Ziyad, due to his children’s education, asked the help of Abu al-Aswed Duali, he intended to start the markings of Quran.

Ziyad Ibne Sumayya was the commander of Basra and its belongings during the years 50 to 53 (after Hijrat). Atabi says “Muawiya, the Umavid Khalifa, wrote a letter to Ziyad and asked Ubeidullah, son of Ziyad, to go to Sham. When Ubeidullah went to him, Muawiya saw that he is speaking awfully. He had a strong accent. Muawiya returned him to his father and blamed Ziyad, in a letter, on how he raised his children.

Ziyad intended to teach his children. He called for Abu al-Aswed Duali and asked about the changes which have occurred in Arabic. He wanted Abu al-Aswed Duali to start marking the holy Quran, but he refused to do so. Ziyad did not give up. He ordered a man to sit on Abu al-Aswed Duali’s path and read a verse of Quran incorrectly while he was passing by. He was very angry with this man’s reading, which had a completely opposite meaning to the real intention. He, immediately, went to Ziyad and said “I will do what you asked me. I decided to start marking the Quran. Send me a scriber”.

Ziyad sent of the scribers to him and he chose Abd Al Qais from among them and told him “Take the paper and choose a color in opposition to black. When I open lips to utter a sound, put a sign over it (fatha) and if I lowered my lips, put a sign under it (kasra) and if my lips joined each other, put another sign (zamma)”. He also taught him the sign of silence. Then he started reading and the scriber started marking. People liked his method and imitated him.

From such stories we can figure out that punctuation was first done through using dots. Even those who think Yahhya Ibne Yamar first did this, they also agree on the quality of the work in this manner. (Araste, 1380, pp. 116-117)

Jurji Zaydan had seen a book which had dots in this manner in Dar Al Kutub in Egypt. He says “This book was first seen in Mosque of Amro Ibne Aas near Cairo and is considered as one of the oldest books in the world. Its pages were large and its lines were written in black. Its dots were in red and, as Abu al-Aswed Duali had pointed out, special markings were used in the book which had their special meaning”.

In Andolos, books were written in four separate colors; black for letters, red for dots over letters, yellow for hamza, and green for the letter Alef.

Abu Amro Dani says “Dots were used in the holy Quran for two purposes:
1- Dots which were used to differentiate similar letters
2- Dots which were used to show pronunciation (those similar to vowels in English).

After Abu al-Aswed Duali, some people in Kufa and Basra followed him in this regard. In Basra, Khalil Ibne Ahmad, who is a famous scholar in linguistics, and Sibuya wrote explicit books about this. Kitab Al Ayn which is about terminology was written by Khalil and Al Kitab in syntax was written by Sibuya. Many later
literary books were inspired by these books. Also in Kufa, Kasaei and Fara, his student, were famous. After foundation of Bagdad, scholars of Kufa went to Bagdad and were supported by Abbasids and the conflict between Kufa and Basra was very serious. Four great books were written in Bagdad of that age; Adab Al Katib by Ibne Qatiba, Al Kamil by Tabrad, Al Bayan wa Al Tahyin by Jahiz, Al Nawadir by Ibne Ali Qasi Bagdadi. Abu Al Hassan Akhafsh was also a very famous scholar in Kufa.

After using dots as sign of vowel sounds by Abu al-Aswad Duali, during the reign of Abdul Malik Ibne Marwan, Hajjaj Ibne Yusif Thaqafi, who himself was a reader and memorizer of the holy Quran, was assigned to finish this task and prevent the diversion in reading and interpreting the Quran. He picked Yahya Ibne Yamar’s student, Nasr Ibne Asim Leithi, who is thought to have first used dots in Basra and had learned it from Abu al-Aswad Duali. Apparently, dots were first used to differentiate between /l/ and /j/ sounds (which have similar letters in Arabic). The reason of using dots by Khalil Ibne Ahmad, Abu Amro Dani and others will be discussed elsewhere. Whatever the purpose, the result made a change in reading the Quran despite all oppositions and disagreements. (Ayine Pajuhesh, Daftar Tabliqat Eslami, vol. 1, p 5)

Using dots to differentiate letters helped improve letters:
The period:
According to many evidences, this task was done in the year 65 (after hijrat) according to the order of Abdul Malik Marwan under the supervision of Hajjaj Ibne Yusif Thaqafi and by two students of Abu al-Aswad Duali, Yahya Ibne Yamar Udwanji and then Nasr Ibne Athem Leithi. Some documents show that only one the two did this work, but it seems more probable that both of them cooperated in doing this work and Nasr, who was Yahya’s student, had continued this project. Since there could happen a confusion in recognition of the dots, those which were used to show vowel sound were written in a separate color, often red. This was Nasr and Yahya’s method to use one, two, or even sometimes three dots to differentiate similar letters.

Evolution of Dots:
Since several dots were invented to be used in texts, the letters were confused in presence of so many dots with many different colors. Khalil Ibne Ahmad Farahidi thought a solution for this problem and invented the present signs which are used in Arabic to show vowel sounds. The text of Quran was written by black ink and other signs which regarded reading were in red. Hamza was written in yellow and the letter alef at the beginning of the sentence was written in green.

Other issues of marking:
By passage of time, other signs and markings were invented to facilitate reading. Some of them used dots. For example, some signs, which used dots, were applied to mark the end of different parts of the holy Quran such as Suras, Hizbs, etc. Some believe that dividing Quran into smaller parts such as Juz’ were first done in that era and were by the order of Hajjaj Ibne Yusif and some others ascribe it to Ma’mun, the Abbasid King. Also dividing Suras into five- and ten- verse parts are ascribed to Nasr Ibne Asim. (Ayine Pajuhesh, Daftar Tabliqat Eslami, vol. 1, p 15)

Evolution of script with emphasis over beautiful writing (calligraphy) by the Islamic rulers
Quran has passed several stages throughout history in the case of beautification and calligraphy. Different calligraphers had important roles in this evolution. The first person who had a significant role in beautification and calligraphy of Quran was Khalid Ibne Abi Al Hijayj who was a companion of Imam Ali (AS). He passed away in about 100 (after Hijrat). He was famous for having nice handwriting.

It is also said that Sa’d, the companion of Walid, hired him in the castle of Walid Ibne Abdul Malik for writing letters and books and poems. He is the man who wrote the Sura Al Shams over the altar of Masjid Al Nabi by gold after its reconstruction. This operation finished in the year 90 (after Hijrat).

Omar Ibne Abdul Aziz asked Khalid to write a similar book and he did so. Omar Ibne Abdul Aziz accepted this as a gift and praised him. But Khalid asked for a great amount of money in its return and Omar did not accept this offer, so he returned the book.

Muhammad Ibne Ishaq (Ibne Al Nadim) says “I saw a book which was written by Khalid Ibne Abi Al Hijayj who was a companion of Ali (AS). This work was kept in the historical collection of Muhammad Ibne Al Hussein also known as Ibne Abi Bi’ra who passed to Abdullah Ibne Hani after him”.

Calligraphers wrote in Kufi style until the end of the third century. After that, during early fourth century, the beautiful Naskh handwriting replaced Kufi style. The first text in Naskh was written by the famous calligrapher Muhammad Ibne Ali Ibne Al Hussein Ibne Muqla (272 – 328). He was the first person who wrote in Thulth and Naskh. He, who was expert in geometry, used geometrical signs for writing and established new basis for Islamic Arabic handwriting and beautified it.

This was his innovation and no one ever could reach his skillfulness. Some of great books, such as the holy Quran in the museum of Herat, are ascribed to him and it is said that he wrote the holy Quran twice.
Arabic Naskh reached its highest level during the seventh century by Yaqut Ibne Abdullah Musili (deceased in 689 after Hijrat). He wrote the Quran seven times. Each of these was written in a separate style and he was pioneer among other writers. All of these Qurans were written according to Yaqut style until the eleventh century. During early twelfth century, Turks of Othmanid Dynasty focused on Islamic Arabic handwriting especially after conquest of Egypt by Sultan Salim. They tried to elevate this handwriting especially by help of Iranian calligraphers who served in Othmanid court. Sultan Salim gathered all calligraphers, painters, and artists in its capital. They created new kinds of Arabic handwriting such as Ruq‘i, Divani, Tuqraei, Isalmubi. They are still frequent.

Some of the most famous Othmanid calligraphers include Hafiz Othman (deceased in 1110), Seyyed Abdullah Afandi (deceased in 1144), Ostad Rasem (deceased in 1169), and Abubakr Mumtaz Bak Mustafa Afandi who invented Ruq‘i handwriting. This style is one of the simplest styles in writing Arabic. He set some rules for this style and wrote a book by that. Abubakr Mumtaz Bak introduced this style in 1280 (after Hijrat) and during the reign of Sultan Abdul Majid Khan. (Marefat, 1374, p 84)

Publishing the Quran using Naskh and the path for its improvement

The holy Quran was published in Naskh until late 15th century. Not only was this sacred book introduced to people through this beautiful style and it was a great service to the Quran, but the art of calligraphy was highly improved through the holy Quran. That was because Muslims' interest in calligraphy of the Quran motivated calligraphers and artists to create new trends and techniques in their own fields of calligraphy. The evolution of Naskh, Kufi, Nastaliq, and Thulth in Arabic and Persian during the last one thousand years had left so many beautiful pages of the holy Quran which have beautified many museums around the world and is a sign of pride of Muslims. By the late 15th century, when the printing machine was invented and used in Europe, Quran was one of the first books which was planned to be printed. Sometimes its Arabic texts and sometimes its translations were printed. (Zamani, p 44)

Scribing the Quran; the great honor of scholars of calligraphy

It has always been the honor of inventors of new styles of writing to practice their innovation through Quran. They have always tried to do it as precise and as beautiful as possible. Ibne Muqla, who was a genuine of his age in calligraphy and was famous for inventing several styles in writing, said that it has been one of his greatest honors to write the text of the holy Quran.

Ibne Muqla Beizawi was born in 272 and deceased in 328. He was a scribe, bookkeeper, poet, and calligrapher and was an expert in writing Kufi style. He invented Reihani, Thulth, Muhaqiq, Naskh, Toqi’, Ruqa, and Ta‘liq. He was a politician and was very ambitious. He gathered a lot of money during his office. His rivals slandered him and he was set out of office. After a while he again was empowered and intended to take the position of Ibne Raqi’. Al Razi Billah informed Ibne Raqi’ of this issue and in the month of Shawal of 326, after a short interrogation, Ibne Raqi’ asked the Caliph to cut his right hand. Al Razi agreed. Other courtiers mediated in this issue. They spoke about his arts and services. They said that he used his right hand for writing the text of the holy Quran and had invented seven styles in writing. But all these were of no use and they cut his right hand and imprisoned him. After a while, the Caliph was regretful and ordered doctors to cure him. His doctor said “When I went to treat him, he cried for his off-hook hand and his situation and said: They cut the hand which served the Caliphs and wrote the Quran twice in two different styles like the hands of thieves”.

Conclusion:

Script, which was an important factor in human cultural evolution and had a unique role in development of science and safekeeping the elders’ heritage, is highly affected by long years of thinking and progress of human being. This man-made product has always been a means of transfer of thoughts and ideas from early days of its creation through images of animal or any other forms. The more it developed the more important role it had in its mission. Its evolution was affected by several factors such as sciences, techniques, and arts. Arabic script, such any other languages, is both an art and a science. From among causes of evolution of script, the role of the holy Quran is undeniable. History truly proves this. The holy Quran strongly emphasized the role thoughtfulness and script in even early verses of the holy Quran and the holy prophet was really concerned with the issue of scribing the holy Quran. Later artists tried to strengthen this matter by inventing new items which helped betterment of this language. This is the incredible role of Quran in evolution of script.

REFERENCE