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## DEVELOPMENT OF CALLIGRAPHY SCHOOLS AND THE POPULARIZATION OF RASM AL- MUSHAF IN THE KHWARAZMIAN ERA

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the cultural and academic life during the zenith of the Khwarazmshah state (1077–1231), focusing specifically on the development of calligraphy schools and the crucial role of the discipline Rasm al-Mushaf. The paper reveals how Kunya Urgench became a major intellectual center in the entire Islamic East during the reign of Ala ad-Din Muhammad II, detailing the rulers' active scholarly patronage and the function of scriptoriums (bookmaking workshops) attached to the court.

The primary focus of the research is on Rasm al-Mushaf, the science that ensured the orthographic integrity of the Quranic text. It demonstrates that the Khwarazmian calligraphers mastered its rules (Hadhf, Ziyadah, Badal, etc.) both theoretically and practically, which guaranteed the authenticity and artistic sophistication of the Quranic copies. Furthermore, the article highlights the use of script styles like Naskh, Thuluth, and Muhaqqaq, the organization of libraries, and the strong influence of the Khwarazmian school on subsequent calligraphic traditions in Transoxiana (Mawarannahr) and Khorasan.

The conclusion emphasizes the incomparable significance of Khwarazmshah-era book art as a unique cultural heritage that successfully harmonized religious canons with high artistic expression.

**Keywords:** Khwarazmshah State, Anushteginid Dynasty, Kunya Urgench, 12th–13th Centuries, Mongol Invasion, Calligraphy (Khattatlik), Rasm al-Mushaf, Quranic Studies, Scriptorium (Bookmaking Workshop), Court Patronage



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(Mecenatlik), Tazhib, Naskh Script, Thuluth Script, Muhaqqaq Script, Hadhf (Orthographic Rule), Ziyadah (Orthographic Rule).

## **Introduction**

### **The Spiritual Renaissance of Great Khwarazm**

The Khwarazmshah dynasty (Anushteginids), whose rule spanned approximately 1077 to 1231 AD, occupies a firm place in the history of Central Asia and the Near East as a period of great ascent, political might, and cultural florescence. The 12th and 13th centuries stand as a crucial stage of spiritual and educational development, illuminating the history of Islamic civilization. During this era, Kunya Urgench (Gurganj), the capital of Khwarazm, was not just a strategic and economic fortress of the state. Under the patronage of rulers like Ala ad-Din Muhammad II (1200–1220), it became a major global center for science, literature, philosophy, and the rare art of bookmaking (kitabāt).

In the midst of this intellectual renaissance, the art of manuscript creation (copying, illumination, and binding) was elevated to the level of state cultural policy. Special attention was paid to calligraphy (khattatlik), an integral part of book art. In this process, *Rasm al-Mushaf* (The Orthography of the Quran), the discipline that systematized the unique spelling rules of the Holy Quran, assumed a central role as the canonical normative basis. It functioned as the orthographic foundational document in calligraphic practice, ensuring the infallible compatibility of Quranic copies with recitation (*qira'at*) and their historical authenticity. Thus, the Khwarazmian schools of calligraphy raised the art of bookmaking to the level of high art, harmonizing religious imperatives with artistic sophistication.

### **Court Patronage and Intellectual Support: The Khwarazmian Intellectual Hub**

The second phase of the Khwarazmshah dynasty, when it became a powerful and independent empire (approximately 1190–1220 AD), is characterized by an unprecedented heightening of cultural and academic life. Rulers of this period, particularly Ala ad-Din Tekish and his successor Ala ad-Din Muhammad II, pursued an active policy of scientific patronage (mecenatlik). They strove to



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transform Urgench into the most attractive intellectual center in the entire Islamic East.

Gathered around the court were not only officials responsible for state affairs but also the most skilled scholars, literati, thinkers, calligraphers, illuminators (*muzahhib*), and artists of the time. They were afforded material support, creative freedom, and immense moral reverence. This patronage was not merely personal generosity; it was a strategic political move. The works of the scholars and the cultural ascendance at the court were considered the symbol of the state's prestige, ideological power, and cultural sophistication throughout the region.

In this generous environment, a wide range of sciences flourished in Urgench:

- **Linguistics and Literary Studies:** Deep studies were conducted in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic literatures, especially in the sciences of *Nahw* (grammar) and *Sarf* (morphology).
- **Quranic Studies and Fiqh:** Rare works were created on *Tafsir* (Quranic exegesis), *Hadith*, and *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), which strengthened the state's roots in the Sunni-Hanafi school of thought.
- **Exact Sciences:** Significant research was carried out in Astronomy (*Falakiyyat*) and Mathematics. Observatories and scientific assemblies were active precisely during this period.
- **History and Geography:** At the rulers' request, numerous historical chronicles and geographical travelogues were penned, thereby substantiating the historical continuity and territorial expanse of the Khwarazmshahs.

The intellectual foundation of this environment undoubtedly stemmed from the fundamental scientific works and traditions established by great scholars who emerged from Khwarazm, such as Abu Rayhan Biruni (973–1048) and Mahmud al-Zamakhshari (1075–1144). The Khwarazmshahs elevated this tradition to a new level. Consequently, the manuscript became not just a religious or educational source, but the state's unique cultural capital and a mirror reflecting the ruler's intellect, wisdom, and the incomparable might of the Sultanate. This enabled the Khwarazmshahs to project their intellectual superiority over their rivals in Transoxiana (Mawarannahr) and Persia.



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## **Libraries and Unique Bookmaking Workshops (Scriptoriums)**

### **Activity of State Significance**

In the Khwarazmian state, bookmaking was not considered a simple craft; it was one of the most crucial cultural activities supported and controlled at the level of state policy. The reproduction of manuscripts was a fundamental prerequisite for the dissemination of science and religious education. For this reason, vast libraries were established not only for the court but also attached to major madrasahs, and significant funds and resources were allocated to their operation. The primary function of these libraries was not limited to collecting and preserving valuable manuscripts; within them operated scriptoriums (Arabic: *Dar al-Kitaba*, or specialized workshops). These workshops served as a genuine school of calligraphic art and a conveyor belt for scholarly heritage.

### **The Systematic Process of Book Creation**

The process of manuscript creation in Khwarazmian scriptoriums was organized based on a strict hierarchy and a multi-stage system. A highly qualified specialist worked at each stage, guaranteeing both the content integrity and the artistic quality of the book:

1. The Calligrapher (*Khattat*) (or Scribe Apprentice): Was responsible for copying the main text. In this process, they were obliged to adhere strictly not only to the beauty of the script (styles like *Naskh*, *Thuluth*, *Muhaqqaq*) but also to the rules of *Rasm al-Mushaf* for religious texts (the Quran). Depending on their level of skill, they were either the Master Calligrapher (overseeing the work) or the Apprentice Scribe (copying the bulk of the text).
2. The Editor (*Muharrir*) (Authenticating Scholar): Checked the text copied by the calligrapher for orthographic and semantic correctness and accuracy. This was typically a person of high scholarly standing such as a linguist, jurist (*faqih*), or logician, whose duty was to preserve the academic value of the copied work. No serious work was accepted into the library collection without an editor's approval.
3. The Illuminator (*Muzahhib*) (Artist or Decorator): Handled the artistic decoration of the book. They used gold leaf, lapis lazuli, azure, and red pigments to adorn the chapter headings (*surah* titles), section beginnings, and page borders with geometric or vegetal patterns. The illuminator's work transformed the book from a simple text into a high work of art, showcasing the ruler's magnificence.



4. The Binder (*Sahhaf*): Assembled the prepared and decorated pages and placed them into sturdy and refined bindings. Bindings were typically made of leather, engraved with stamped designs, or lacquered, playing a decisive role in ensuring the long-term preservation of the book.

#### The Formation of the Khwarazmian School

This highly organized and specialized system allowed the preservation of high-quality standards in the style and technique of calligraphy. As a result, a distinctive Khwarazmian school of calligraphy was formed. The fluidity of the script, the precise proportions of the letters, and the refined taste of the ornamentation characteristic of this school later exerted a strong influence on calligraphic traditions in Transoxiana, Khorasan, and Persia. The skill of the Khwarazmian specialists, passed down through the multi-stage production system from generation to generation, formed the basis for creating the spiritual heritage of the great empire.

#### **Rasm al-Mushaf: The Supreme Canon of Quranic Orthography**

*Rasm al-Mushaf* (Arabic: رَسْمُ الْمُصْحَف - *The Writing of the Mushaf*) is an independent discipline in the Islamic world that studies the rules for writing the Quranic text in strict accordance with the Uthmanic script (*Uthmani imla*). During the Khwarazmshah period, this discipline was not merely a collection of rules, but was accepted as the fundamental basis ensuring the preservation and authenticity of the Quranic text in its original state.

#### Theoretical and Practical Mastery

In the major madrasahs and court scriptoriums of Khwarazm, *Rasm al-Mushaf* was taught to the highest level of theoretical and practical mastery. Calligraphers did not merely suffice with producing beautiful and flowing script; they were obliged to apply the orthographic distinctions pertaining to every letter and word of the Quran. The skill of a calligrapher was measured not only by the beauty of their hand but also by how accurately they applied the rules of *Rasm al-Mushaf*. The main purpose of this science was to guarantee the complete orthographic conformity of the Quran to the consensus copies (*ijma'*) from the time of Caliph Uthman (r.a.).

#### Fundamental Rules and Scholarly Application





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*Rasm al-Mushaf* is based on primarily six fundamental rules. Khwarazmian calligraphers rigorously applied each of them when copying the Quran:

**Hadhf (Omission):** The omission of certain letters (often the vowels alif, waw, and ya) in the writing, even though they are present in pronunciation.

**Practical Example:** The omission (*hadhf*) of the second *alif* in the writing of the word “ذلك” (that/this), despite its pronunciation. This rule ensured the authenticity of the Quran's recitation through its spelling.

**Ziyadah (Addition):** The inclusion of an extra letter (often alif or waw) in certain words, which is present in the original spelling (*imla'*) but not pronounced. This was often used to emphasize meaning or prevent reading errors.

**Practical Example:** The addition (*ziyadah*) of an extra *alif* in words like “سلاسل” (chains) was executed precisely according to the principle of *Rasm al-Mushaf*.

**Badal (Substitution):** The writing of one letter in place of another. For instance, the substitution of the alif with the *waw* or *ya*. This was often important to reflect the pronunciation of the word according to specific *qira'at* (readings).

**Wasl and Fasl (Joining and Separating):** The rule governing the joining of certain words to others (*wasl*) or writing them separately (*fasl*). This rule played a major role in clearly distinguishing meaning.

**I'jam (Dotting) and Shakl (Vocalization):** The regulations for applying dots and diacritical marks (vowel signs). Although these rules were introduced later, they were perfectly implemented in Khwarazmian *mus-hafs* to facilitate recitation.

The complete mastery of these principles in the Khwarazmian school of calligraphy ensured that the Quranic copies of that era met the highest scientific-textual requirements. The calligraphers' precise application of these rules continues to make Khwarazmshah-era manuscripts unique sources of authenticity and quality even today.

### **Integration with *Qira'at* and *Waqf* Systems**

The rules of *Rasm al-Mushaf* were intrinsically linked to the sciences of recitation (*qira'at*) (the art of reading the Quran) and *Waqf wa Ibtida'* (rules for pausing and starting). The wide use of pause markers (such as *lazim*, *mutlaq*, *ja'iz*, etc.) systematized by the scholar Al-Sajawandi in the 12th century significantly improved the readability of Khwarazmian *mus-hafs*. The calligrapher preserved



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the "skeleton" (*rasm*) of the text in the Uthmanic script while expressing the differences in *qira'at* using vowel signs and dotting markers.

## **Calligraphic Styles and the Local School**

### **Predominant Scripts**

Khwarazmian calligraphers achieved high proficiency in the main script styles prevalent in the Islamic world:

- Naskh (Flowing and Clear Script): Used as the primary script for copying the text of the Quran and scholarly works.
- Thuluth (Majestic and Monumental): Employed for decorating the titles of Quranic chapters (*surahs*) and the opening pages of books.
- Muhaqqaq and Rayhani: These styles, which are more precisely proportioned yet easy to read than *Naskh*, were also widely used in Quranic copies.
- Kufic (Ancient and Angular): Its decorative (floriated) variants were utilized in early Quranic copies and inscriptions on architectural monuments.

### **Calligraphers and Scholarly Heritage**

One of the highest achievements of the Khwarazmian school is evident in the art of copying the Quran. The names of famous calligraphers such as Abu Nasr Ahmad Khwarazmi, Abdurahim Khwarazmi, and Abdurahman Khwarazmi remain in history for their exquisite copies of the Quran in *Naskh* and *Muhaqqaq* scripts.

Calligraphers were not limited to religious texts; they also copied scholarly works such as Mahmud al-Zamakhshari's *Al-Kashshaf* commentary, Abu Rayhan Biruni's works, and Ibn Sina's treatises, thereby ensuring the dissemination of the scholarly legacy.

## **Cultural Influence and the Continuity of Tradition**

### **Regional Impact**

The distinct script styles and illumination (*tazhib*) traditions of the Khwarazmian schools of calligraphy exerted a significant influence on calligraphic centers in Transoxiana, Khorasan, Persia, and even Anatolia. Manuscripts prepared by Khwarazmian calligraphers were distributed to major cities like Bukhara, Samarkand, and Herat and were studied in their madrasahs.



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### The Legacy and the Post-Mongol Khwarazmian School

Although the Mongol invasion (1219–1221) dealt a severe blow to Khwarazmian culture, the traditions of bookmaking were not completely eradicated. Surviving calligraphers carried their skills to other cultural centers, contributing to the overall development of calligraphic art.

The traditions of the ancient Khwarazmian school were later revived in the calligraphic schools of the Timurid period (Bukhara and Samarkand) and the Khiva Khanate period (16th–20th centuries). Quranic copies from the 12th–13th centuries preserved in the funds of the Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences Oriental Studies Institute attest to the unbroken continuation of this tradition over centuries. Even with changes in format and style, the rules of *Rasm al-Mushaf* were strictly maintained in all of them.

### Conclusion

The development of calligraphic schools in the Khwarazmshah era was characterized by state patronage, a meticulously organized bookmaking process, and high scholarly demands. *Rasm al-Mushaf*, central to this process:

1. Ensured the orthographic singularity and integrity of the Quran.
2. Achieved harmony with the science of recitation (*qira'at*).
3. Subjected the book's page and decoration to religious norms.

The Khwarazmian school of calligraphy not only established a reliable standard for religious bookmaking but also laid a solid foundation for the spiritual and educational development of the entire region. Today, manuscripts from this period (copies in libraries in Tashkent, Istanbul, Cairo, and Paris) serve as invaluable sources for studying the history of Quranic sciences and the art of calligraphy.

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