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The Qurʾānic Codices and Fragments Ascribed to Imām ʿAlī and Other Shīʿa Imāms

Forged Colophons or Historical Truths?

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Abstract

For nearly a thousand years, certain copies of the Qurʾān have been ascribed to such prominent Islamic figures as Imām ʿAlī and other Shīʿa Imāms. Although no evidence of ascription is found from the first three centuries, nearly two hundred copies of such manuscripts and fragments are found today around the world, especially in Shiite areas. After a historical overview of the phenomenon and classification of the various types of ascribed codices, this article provides evidence for the rejection of these ascriptions and that establishes the colophons as forgeries. The last part of the article includes a table of about two hundred Qurʾānic manuscripts ascribed to Shīʿa Imāms preserved in libraries and museums all over the world.

Keywords

1   Introduction

The transcriptions of some ancient Qurʾānic codices and fragments have been ascribed to certain notable figures, i.e. Shīʿa Imāms, the Companions of the Prophet, the Followers (*tābiʿūn*), and others. These ascriptions are sometimes suggested, or they are indicated by the colophons at the end of manuscripts. In the majority of cases, the veracity of these ascriptions is difficult to establish

and there are reasons, indeed there is often evidence, of spurious colophons. However, it should be borne in mind that, irrespective of the veracity or falsity of the ascriptions, these codices are highly valuable and important historical documents in themselves and are useful in the current research on the history of the transmission of the Qurʾān. If we were able to categorically establish the ascription of a single ancient codex of the Qurʾān to, say, Imām ʿAlī or to ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, we would be able to obtain much more accurate and detailed information on the history of the Qurʾān, in particular regarding the early decades of the emergence of Islam. The fact that such valuable knowledge is not available does not mean that we should ignore the merits and potential of these documents or treat them as mere museum pieces.

2   List of Abbreviations

AAS	Al-ʿAbbās Shrine (Karbala)
AQL	Āstān-e Quds Library (Mashhad)
BL	British Library (London)
BNF	Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris)
BSB	Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (Munich)
CBL	Chester Beatty Library (Dublin)
GPM	Golestan Palace Museum (Tehran)
IA Shrine	Imam ʿAlī's Shrine (Najaf)
IH Shrine	Imam Ḥusayn's Shrine (Karbala)
ISQ	Islamic Museum, in al-Aqsa Mosque (Jerusalem)
KB	Det Kongelige Bibliotek (Copenhagen)
KGL	Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ Library (Najaf)
MAM	Maktabat Amīr al-Muʾminīn (Najaf)
MML	Malek Museum and Library (Tehran)
MRL	Moroccan Royal Library (Rabat), *al-Khizāna al-Ḥasaniyya*
NAA	National Archive of Afghanistan (Kabul)
NLI	National Library of Iran (Tehran)
NLIS	National Library of Israel (Tel Aviv)
NMI	National Museum of Iran (Tehran)
NMIQ	National Museum of Iraq (Baghdad)
RAM	Reza Abbasi Museum (Tehran)
SBB	Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (Berlin)
TIEM	Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi (Istanbul)
TPM	Topkapi Palace Museum (Istanbul)
PM	Pārs Museum (Shiraz)

3   Qurʾānic Manuscripts Ascribed to Shīʿa Imāms

Many of the world's museums and libraries hold copies of the Qurʾān that have been attributed to renowned personages from the first and second Islamic centuries. About fifteen such Qurʾānic manuscripts have been transcribed by the third caliph, ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān;[1] more than fifty Qurʾānic manuscripts are attributed to Imām ʿAlī; and almost one hundred are said to have been copied by other Shīʿa Imāms. Additionally, it is possible to find ascriptions to ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb,[2] Salmān al-Fārisī,[3] ʿAqaba b. ʿĀmir,[4] and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī,[5] among others. It should be noted, however, that the context is one in which it is rare to find codices containing the colophons and names of lesser-known scribes among remaining documents from the era prior to the mid-third Islamic century. In fact, the practice of a scribe writing his name at the end or in the middle of a Qurʾānic manuscript is late and postdates the second century, possibly even the middle of the third. Given the fact that the scribes of the first centuries did not put their names in the manuscripts, attributions of transcriptions to prominent figures from the early periods with signatures such as "copied by ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib" or "copied by ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān" are anachronistic. This calls into question the authenticity of the colophons that feature at the end of certain currently available Qurʾānic codices.

Having spent nearly a decade examining nearly two hundred Qurʾānic manuscripts, in the form of complete codices, sections, and fragments, ascribed to Shīʿa Imāms, I have come to the conclusion that it is almost impossible to positively ascribe the copying of these documents to Imām ʿAlī and his progeny. These manuscripts can generally be divided into three categories:

1.   Codices or fragments whose ascriptions are purely oral, such as MS 1 in the Shrine of Imām al-Ḥusayn in Karbalā, which is ascribed to Imām ʿAlī b. al-

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1   See also the List of Abbreviations at the begining of the article. Examples include: MS Minutoli 296 of SBB (Berlin); MS E 20 of the Institute of Oriental Studies (St. Petersburg); the "Qurʾān of ʿUthmān" in Tashkent; MSS H.S. 44/32, A 1, EH 1, EH 9, EH 11, EH 208 [Fig. 20] of TPM (Istanbul); MS 457 of TIEM (Istanbul); the "Qurʾān of ʿUthmān" at the al-Ḥusayn Mosque, Cairo, Egypt; and the "Qurʾān of ʿUthmān" at the Egyptian National Library (Cairo), including: MS 139 (Cairo); MSS Arabe 324a, 324b, 324c, 324d of BNF (Paris); MS Orient. A. 462 (Gotha); and the "Qurʾān of Negel" [Fig. 30].

2   Yahuda MS Ar. 973 of the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem [Fig. 31a–b].

3   MS EH 20 [Fig. 20] of TPM (Istanbul).

4   MS 40 of TPM (Istanbul), dated 52 AH (672 CE).

5   MS 50 Maṣāḥif of the Egyptian Library (Cairo), dated 77/696; MS Y 4566 of TPM (Istanbul); MS R 14 of TPM (Istanbul); and MS B 5 of TPM (Istanbul).

Ḥusayn (Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn);[6] MS 12610 in *al-Khizāna al-Ḥasaniyya* (MRL) in Rabat, ascribed to Imām ʿAlī; MS 47 of the AQL in Mashhad, ascribed to an unidentified Imām; MSS C 3 and C 199 in the Lahore Museum, ascribed to Imām al-Ḥusayn; and MS 9983 in the Ayatollah Marʿashī Library in Qom, ascribed to Imām ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn.

2. Codices or fragments whose oral ascriptions are certified in a different handwriting, mainly in *naskh* or *nastaʿlīq*, at the beginning or at the end of the manuscripts. One of the earliest examples of this is MS 18 of the Āstān-e Quds Library in Mashhad, in which the endower (Abul-Qāsim al-Muqrī al-Sarawī) has certified the ascription at the beginning of his deed of endowment (*waqfiyya*) in the fifth/eleventh or sixth/twelfth century.[7] Another example is MS Smith-Lesouëf 194 [Fig. 24] of the BNF, which is copied in *maghribī* script in accordance with Nāfiʿ al-Madanī's reading.[8] One may put the following manuscripts into this category: MS Loth 3, of BL; MSS EH 2 [Fig. 20], EH 34, YY 754 [Fig. 16], R 11 [Fig. 15], R 38 [Fig. 23], all of TPM; MSS 4243, 4249, 4251, all of the NMI in Tehran; MS 2019, of the Āstāne Museum in Qom; MS 12023 of the Library of Majlis in Tehran; MSS 1011, 1032, 1044 [Figs. 27 and 28], 1045 [Fig. 7], 1378, all in the GPM in Tehran; MS 36 of the AQL in Mashhad; MS 555 of RAM in Tehran; and, MSS 1 [Fig. 8], 2, and 226, all of the Raza Library in Rampur.

3. Codices or fragments whose ascriptions are inscribed in Kūfic script, somewhere within the text itself or in a separate folio, with the phrase "copied by ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib", or similar. This third category has its own subdivisions, each of which has one of the Imāms indicated as its scribe in the colophon in a Kūfic script that is always different from and later than the script of the codex itself. Many manuscripts can be found that belong to this category: MSS 1 [Fig. 34], 2, 4, 6, 9 [Fig. 32], 10 [Fig. 35], 11, 12 [Fig. 33], 13, 14, 15 [Fig. 36], 2888, all of the AQL in Mashhad; MSS Loth 1 and Loth 2, both of BL; MS EH 23 of TPM [Fig. 41]; MSS 4247 [Fig. 14], 4248 [Fig. 4], 4279, 4317 [Fig. 3], 4293 [Figs. 1 and 2], all of NMI in Tehran; and, MSS 1036, 1037, 1041, 1046, 1052, all of the GPM in Tehran.

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6   Twelve leaves of this codex are now preserved in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, as MS 401.

7   For a complete survey of MS 18, *Mushaf Mashhad*, see M. Karimi-Nia, "A New Document in the Early History of the Qurʾān: Codex Mashhad, an ʿUthmānic Text of the Qurʾān in Ibn Masʿūd's Arrangement of Sūras," *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 10/3 (2019): 292–326.

8   At the beginning of this codex there is a note inscribed in 1077 AH (1666 CE) by the royal librarian at the court of the Safavid king Shāh Sulaymān I (1058–1105/1648–1694), which reads: "[This codex is copied in] the hand (*khaṭṭ*) of His Eminence al-Riḍā, upon Him be God's peace".

Performing pilgrimage (*al-ziyāra*) to a Qurʾānic codex transcribed by an Imām or one of the Companions was considered a highly honourable and esteemed practice. Thus, indications of such visits, in the form of royal or official seals and signatures, can be found in many of the available codices ascribed to the Imāms. The creedal halo surrounding such sacred practices has been a hindrance to any historical or critical investigation into the authenticity of the ascriptions of manuscripts to personages from the first two Islamic centuries.

Moreover, attribution of Qurʾānic codices to the Companions and to Shīʿa Imāms over the centuries has always been a way to enhance their material and spiritual value. On occasion, we even see the owners of these codices inscribing the price of the artefact following the attribution of a Qurʾānic leaf to one of the Imāms. For instance, the following is written in the margin of the Fraser fragment (MS Fraser 48 [Fig. 9]) in the Bodleian Library: "[This is copied by] the hand (*khaṭṭ*) of His Eminence Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, upon Him be God's peace; [with] a donation of 100 rupia."

Historical reports from the early fifth/eleventh century indicate that it was not uncommon for unscrupulous persons to modify codices by adding colophons that ascribed the transcriptions to Imām ʿAlī or to ʿAbdallāh b. Masʿūd in order that they be donated to a given ruler or emir. On the eve of the fifth/eleventh century, for instance, the anonymous author of *Kitāb al-mabānī* quotes his master Muḥammad b. al-Hayṣam as saying:

> One of our scholars, may God have mercy upon them, has said that he had seen a Qurʾānic codex attributed to Ubayy [b. Kaʿb], which was different in some letters from the present Qurʾān, but in my opinion [i.e. in Muḥammad b. al-Hayṣam's opinion] it is not unlikely that this attribution was made by certain people who liked to take pride in such peculiar possessions, and this is really a misfortune that has struck the religion, which has damaged the interests of Muslims, which has pushed heretics to attack the pillars of Islam, and which has facilitated discord in its matters. It so happens that, among courtiers and those enslaved by worldly privileges and who worship the goods of the world, we sometimes see that, because they have not been educated in the Qurʾān or in the religious sciences, they strive to get close to rulers by resorting to strange books. And when they cannot find any extraordinary feat to bolster their status before rulers, some will take a famous book and add an inscription, excise something, move some parts around, and give it an unusual title so that they will be able to earn a living by such means. It is therefore not at all surprising that one such person could take a Qurʾānic codex, move some *sūra*s around, or make changes to some wordings, and con-

tend that it is a Qur'ānic codex [that has been copied by the hand] of
'Alī or 'Abdallāh [b. Mas'ūd] or Ubayy. Such a person's purpose is noth-
ing other than to present a Qur'ānic codex to an emir or a ruler and say:
"The library of a king such as yourself cannot do without a copy of each
Qur'ānic codex." Such a person's objective is nothing but making money,
and he is not concerned with the crime he is committing against his own
people and against his own religion.[9]

Claims as to the existence or sighting of Qur'ānic codices with Imām 'Alī's signa-
ture can be found in the historical sources only after the fourth/tenth century.
For example, al-Azraqī al-Fāriqī reported that in the year 415/1024 al-Malik al-
'Azīz b. Būya, Abū Manṣūr b. al-Malik Jalāl al-Dawla gifted a Qur'ān allegedly
copied by Imām 'Alī to Naṣr al-Dawla Abū Naṣr Aḥmad (reigned 402–452/1011–
1061), the powerful governor of Mosul and Mayafariqīn (known in present-day
Turkey as Silvan).[10] We also know that Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 385/959) observed
a Qur'ān allegedly copied by Imām 'Alī in the presence of Abū Ya'lā Ḥamza
al-Ḥasanī.[11] Again, in the sixth/twelfth century, al-Ma'mūn al-Baṭā'iḥī commis-
sioned the Qur'ān allegedly copied by Imām 'Alī, which was being kept in the
'Atīq Mosque (in al-Fusṭāṭ), to be gilded in gold.[12] None of these ascriptions,
however, predate the fourth/tenth century.[13] In other words, there are no his-
torical reports from the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries that provide
any evidence of anyone having observed or having reported a Qur'ān copied by
Imām 'Alī or any other Imām.

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9   *Kitāb al-mabānī li-naẓm al-ma'ānī*, published in *Muqaddimatān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, edited
     by Arthur Jeffery. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1954: 47–48.

10   Al-Azraqī wrote, "He brought him two gifts, the first a red ruby (*yāqūt aḥmar*), weighing 7
     *mithqāl*s (c. 5 gms), which had already been [kept] in the House of Marwān, and the sec-
     ond a Qur'ānic codex copied in the hand of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, upon Him be God's peace. He
     then said, 'I have brought you [something which bestows the rewards of] the world and
     the hereafter.' The ruler was pleased and extolled him and rewarded him with over twenty
     thousand dinars." See: Aḥmad b. Yūsuf b. 'Alī b. al-Azraqī al-Fāriqī, *Tārīkh al-Fāriqī*, ed.
     Badawī A.L. 'Awaḍ. Cairo: al-Hay'a al-'Āmma li-Shu'ūn al-Maṭābi' al-Amīriyya, 1379/1959:
     144–145.

11   Ibn Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 30.

12   Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iẓ wa'l-i'tibār*, ed. Khalīl U. Manṣūr, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya,
     1418/1998, vol. 2: 289, 426.

13   This is clearly different from the issue of compilation of the Qur'ān by Imām 'Alī. There
     are numerous *ḥadīth*s on Imām 'Alī's gathering and compiling of the Qur'ān, which are
     worthy of their own critical studies and analyses. But the subject of our discussion here
     is those manuscripts that are alleged to have been transcribed by Imām 'Alī and that bear
     his signature.

4   Arguments against Attribution

Having considered these preliminary remarks, we can now proceed to enumer-
ate the reasons supporting the impossibility of authentically ascribing such
codices to Shīʿa Imāms.

1.   The ʿUthmānic Codex or copies based on it were available in Basra, Kūfa,
     Medina, Mecca, and Damascus for a long time. Numerous reports are
     available from scholars between the second/eighth and the fifth/eleventh
     centuries that refer to some features of these codices either generally or in
     detail. Although these reports also include eye-witness sightings of these
     codices, there is no report by anyone giving an account of having seen a
     codex with the name of Imām ʿAlī as its transcriber in these early cen-
     turies.[14] This was in a period when Qurʾānic codices other than the ʿUth-
     mānic Codex, such as that of Ibn Masʿūd, partially quoted by early Muslim
     scholars, had long been prevalent in al-Kūfa. Now that all the details of the
     ʿUthmānic and non-ʿUthmānic codices are available in historical chroni-
     cles, or through the observations of many Muslim scholars from the first
     Islamic centuries, it seems strange that there is no single report about a
     Qurʾānic codex transcribed by one of the Imāms.[15]

2.   The signing of Qurʾānic codices by scribes was not common practice
     in early Islam, and this was particularly true for the first/seventh and
     second/eighth centuries. If this practice had indeed been commonplace
     during these two centuries, such a significant detail would undoubtedly
     have been reported in the earliest Islamic sources, such as bibliographies,
     books on biographical evaluation (*ʿilm al-rijāl*), or books on Qurʾānic
     codices. Scholars such as Abū ʿUbayd (in his *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān*), Ibn al-
     Nadīm (in his *al-Fihrist*), and al-Sijistānī (in his *al-Maṣāḥif*) reported
     infinitesimal details and personal observations about the Qurʾānic
     codices, but they apparently never remarked on any scribe being men-
     tioned in the colophon of any codex. Interestingly, only the names of
     Imām ʿAlī, his progeny, and the third caliph ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān can be seen

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14   The only other possibility is that at some time there *was* a Qurʾānic codex that had been
      transcribed by an Imām and that was available as such to the Companions or to the fol-
      lowing generation(s) of Shīʿites, and that one of the Followers recorded the verity of the
      oral recognition with an inscription such as: "[This codex is copied by] the hand (*khaṭṭ*)
      of His Eminence ʿAlī".

15   One might well claim that the early Shīʿites excised (the evidence of) Imām ʿAlī's pen-
      manship of a given codex for fear of retribution by the Umayyad and Abbāsid rulers. This
      objection is only pertinent if the ʿAlid version was different from the official ʿUthmānic
      codex.

in manuscripts that are presently available to us, whereas the names of ordinary scribes who copied the Qur'ān on numerous occasions in the first centuries of Islam are conspicuously absent. What is more surprising is that, at times, the supposed signature of one Imām appears in the middle of a *sūra* or even prior to the end of a verse,[16] which seems to be a patent indication of fraud. The only plausible explanation would be for us to accept that someone from a later century who personally believed in the truth of such an attribution added the colophon to the codex in such an abnormal location.

3. No Companion of any Imām ever mentioned any personal observation of a Qur'ānic codex with Imām 'Alī's signature or that of any other Imām.[17] Again, no *ḥadīth* relator or religious scholar from the first/seventh to third/ninth centuries ever mentioned the existence of any Qur'ānic codex ascribed to any Imām. Even those who have reported the handwriting and colophons of Imām 'Alī in his letters have never spoken of the availability of such codices. A good witness in this regard is the Qur'ānic commentator and lexical exegete Yaḥyā b. Ziyād al-Farrā' (d. 207/822), who flourished at the end of the second century in al-Kūfa, and who wrote in his *Maʿānī al-Qur'ān*: "I have been told that the letter of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (may God bless him) reads: 'This letter is by 'Alī b. **Abū** Ṭālib' [*sic*] *kadhā fī kull al-*

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16 For example, in MS 10 of the Malik Museum (Tehran) [Fig. 11], which has a signature ascribed to Imām al-Ḥasan, and the item auctioned at Christie's in London on 13 October 1998 (Lot 11), which has a signature ascribed to Imām al-Ḥusayn.

17 This is not to imply that Imām 'Alī never gathered and compiled a Qur'ānic codex. Rather, I reject the existence of a Qur'ānic codex with the colophon "copied by 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib" similar to the codices available today, i.e. a manuscript that conforms to the standard 'Uthmānic codex. Both Sunni and Shīʿa scholars have consistently reported a Qur'ān gathered and compiled by Imām 'Alī that featured his own collection of all the revelations written down over a period of 23 years, the compilation proper of which occurred during the first few days after the Prophet passed away. But this particular Qur'ān, like the codices attributed to other Companions, such as 'Abdullāh b. Masʿūd and Ubayy b. Kaʿb, had its own unique characteristics and did not conform to the 'Uthmānic codex in terms of the text and the *sūra* arrangement. As al-Yaʿqūbī tells us in his *History* (*Taʾrīkh al-Yaʿqūbī*, ed. M.Th. Houtsma, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1960, 2:135–136.), the *sūras* in Imām 'Alī's Qur'ān were ordered in the chronological sequence of revelation, which is completely different from the sequence of the 'Uthmānic codex. This refers to all currently available codices attributed to Imām 'Alī that are in accordance with the 'Uthmānic codex. In addition, variant readings preceding the lifetime of Imām 'Alī are, surprisingly, found in all of these manuscripts. It should also be noted that the majority of these works contain numerous instances of scribal errors and blunders that, from a Shīʿa perspective, could not emanate from the hand of an Imām.

jihāt;[18] and the word has to be clarified when reading the sentence".[19] The passage indicates that such an important and prominent scholar as al-Farrāʾ had no knowledge of any Qurʾānic codex copied and signed by Imām ʿAlī, and he had no knowledge of anything appearing at the end of the currently available codices that are allegedly attributed to Imām ʿAlī. It should be noted that, in the same book, al-Farrāʾ reported extensively on ʿAbdullāh b. Masʿūd's codices and discussed details of "the ʿAbdullāh codex" (*muṣḥaf ʿAbdallāh*) or of "the ʿAbdullāh codices" (*maṣāḥif ʿAbdallāh*).

4. In many cases, a careful physical examination of the documents elicits clues from later dates about the codices ascribed to Imāms. One such clue is that some codices of this kind are written on paper that was unavailable in the Ḥijāz, Iraq, or Damascus during the first two Islamic centuries. Examples include: MS R 38 [Fig. 23] of the TPM in Istanbul, which is attributed to Imām al-Ḥusayn; MS 1011 of the GPM in Tehran, attributed to Imām al-Ḥasan; and, MS 11938 of the Library of Majlis (Tehran), attributed to Imām al-Riḍā.[20] Again, in some codices (like MS 4293 [Figs. 1 and 2] in the NMI), one can find the following statement: "Copied and illuminated by ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib in the seventh year of the Hijra".[21] Evaluating this statement, we should note that the practice of illumination obviously emerged much later than the first/seventh century. On the other hand, transcription and illumination of the Qurʾān in "the seventh year of the Hijra", i.e. *during* the lifetime and ministry of the Prophet himself and, thus, *before* the completion of the Qurʾānic revelation, is illogical. Yet another example is MS Paris, Smith-Lesouëf 194 [Fig. 24] of the BNF, in *maghribī* script and in accordance with Nāfiʿ al-Madanī's reading, which is attributed to Imām al-Riḍā, and thus is clearly ignorant of any forger.

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18   He always referred to his patronymic as *Abū* as opposed to *Abī* or *Abā*.

19   وبلغني: إنّ كتاب عليّ بْن أبي طَالِب رحمه الله كَانَ مكتوباً: هَذَا كتاب من عليّ بْن أَبُو طَالِب كتابها: أَبُو. فِي كل الجهات، وهي تعرب فِي الكلام إِذَا قرئت Yaḥyā b. Ziyādf al-Farrāʾ, *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, ed. Aḥmad Yūsuf al-Najātī et al., Cairo, 1374/1955: 3, 114.

20   In his article on the library of the Shrine of Imām al-Ḥusayn in Karbala, Munīr al-Qāḍī speaks of a very late manuscript (MS 55) on paper, in which it is stated that it has been transcribed by Imām ʿAlī. He then adds: "This is nothing but a lie, which is evident from the physical fact of its having been written on paper." See: Munīr al-Qāḍī, "Khizānat al-ʿataba al-Ḥusayniyya al-muqaddasa," in *Majallat al-majmaʿ al-ʿilmī al-ʿIrāqī* 6 (1378/1959): 28–29.

21   A reproduction of this colophon is now kept as MS or. fol. 532 in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin.

5. Given the existence of scribal errors in the most ancient codices, in addition to corrections made in the scribes' handwriting, it is impossible to attribute codices of this kind to Imām ʿAlī or any other Shīʿa Imām. Scribal errors in the written transmission of the Qurʾān are both a common and a conceivable phenomenon that has occurred from the outset. Clear evidence and examples of this can be found both in ancient historical chronicles and in the earliest remaining Qurʾānic fragments and manuscripts. Earlier scholars involved in critical research on ancient codices rarely mentioned orthographic errors in the codices at hand. While it is not reasonable to deny the occurrence of such errors in ancient codices, especially when due attention is paid to the evidence available through the ancient codices,[22] from the perspective of Shīʿite creedal imāmology, it is impossible for any Imām to commit an error, be it intentional or unintentional. Such an argument is designed to convince at least Shīʿa scholars to accept the falsity of the ascription of these codices to Shīʿa Imāms. Thus, the famous ascription of the Qurʾān MS 1 of IAShrine (Najaf) [Figs. 5–6] to Imām ʿAlī is logically rejected, since there are more than thirty instances of scribal errors, which cannot have occurred if the text had indeed been transcribed by the inerrant Imām.[23]

6. The discrepancies between the Qurʾānic codices attributed to Imām ʿAlī in terms of script, orthography, variant readings, and regional variances constitute yet another set of evidence for the falsity of the ascriptional claims. During my observations, I have never encountered two Qurʾānic

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22 In his introduction to the facsimile edition of the codex in al-Mashhad al-Ḥusaynī (in Cairo) ascribed to ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, Tayyar Altıkulaç mentioned four famous codices that are ascribed to the third caliph (the Tashkent codex, the Topkapi Palace Museum codex, the TIEM codex, and al-Mashhad al-Ḥusaynī codex), pointing out some mistakes by the scribes. Cf. his introduction to *Al-Mushaf al-Sharif attributed to Uthman bin Affan* (*The copy at al-Mashhad al-Husayni in Cairo*), Istanbul, 1430/2009, vol. 1, pp. 101–102, 109–110, 137–138.

23 Among the scribal errors in the MS 1 of the Shrine of Imām ʿAlī [Figs. 5–6] in Najaf are: العذاب (p. 82) instead of لعذاب (Q. 3:176); حظا فى الا خرة (p. 73) instead of حظا فى فى الا خرة (Q. 4:25); ذكروا به (p. 135) instead of ذكروا له (Q. 5:18); ممن خلق (p. 110) instead of ممن يخلق (Q. 6:44); ذلک (p. 174) instead of كذلک (Q. 6:145); مسفوحا (p. 150) instead of مسوحا (Q. 7:163); تستطع (p. 305) instead of تستطع (Q. 16:94); صددتم (p. 280) instead of صددكم (Q. 18:78); اضاعوا (p. 313) instead of اطعوا (Q. 19:42); يبصر (p. 311) instead of ينظر (Q. 19:59); يروا ا كيف (p. 402) instead of يروا كيف (Q. 20:111); هضما (p. 323) instead of هطما (Q. 29:19); الا (p. 135) instead of ذكروا له (Q. 33:68); ضعففين (p. 432) instead of ضعفين (Q. 6:44); ذكروا به (p. 545) instead of ايات (Q. 36:29); ايت بينت (p. 448) instead of ان كانت (Q. 57:9); and كانت (Q. 58:22). يومنون بالله (p. 552) instead of يومنوا بالله In a similar codex (MS 1 of the AQL in Mashhad) [Fig. 34], there is a missing passage, Q. 18:45–46, on the folio 162a.

codices ascribed to Imām ʿAlī that are in perfect agreement in terms of script, orthography, verse-ending, and reading. In some codices of this kind, e.g. MSS 18, 26, and 4116 of the Āstān-e Quds Library in Mashhad, each and every verse and even the *basmala* are distinct and enumerated. In other instances, like MS 1 of the Shrine of Imām ʿAlī [Figs. 5–6] in Najaf, the verse-endings are not marked but later signs are now observable indicating groups of five or ten verses that, in accordance with the Sunnite tradition, do not include the *basmala* at the beginning of each *sūra*.[24] Where the verses are separate and enumerated, the enumeration is in accordance with either the first Medinan, the second Medinan, the Basran, or, rarely, Kūfan systems. The regional variances that can be seen in certain Qurʾānic codices ascribed to Imām ʿAlī, like MS 1 of the IA Shrine in Najaf [Figs. 5–6], MS 1 of the AQL in Mashhad [Fig. 34], tend towards the Basran system, whereas others, such as MSS 18 and 4116 of the AQL in Mashhad, correspond mainly to the Medinan system.

7. Examining the Kūfic script used in most Qurʾānic codices attributed to Imām ʿAlī and other Imāms also proves the falsity of the attributional claims. In the middle Islamic centuries, people were visually accustomed to various calligraphic forms, such as *naskh*, *muḥaqqaq*, *thuluth*, or *rayḥān*, but not to Kūfic in particular. Consequently, they were unlikely to differentiate between the different styles of Kūfic script. It is possible, therefore, that they could easily assign any Kūfic script to individuals from earlier centuries. "These misattributions were possible because the scripts used in these Qurʾāns looked so ancient to the Muslims of later periods that they believed they could only have been made in the first century AH".[25] In a context where some of the greatest calligraphers of the Islamic world, such as Ibrāhīm Sultān, have ascribed the transcription of a Qurʾānic codex in eastern Kūfic script from the fifth/eleventh century to Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq[26] with no qualms [Fig. 21], the acceptance of

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24   This enumeration does not count the *basmala* as an individual verse.

25   François Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition*, p. 11.

26   Ibrāhīm Sultān (796–838/1394–1435), the second son of Shāhrukh and the grandson of Amīr Tīmūr (736–807/1336–1405), who himself has produced many Qurʾāns in the most beautiful of calligraphic styles, after having completed the missing parts of a Qurʾānic codex transcribed in *eastern Kūfic script* (now preserved as MS 17 [Figs. 21–22] of the AQL in Mashhad), has written: "This is [a copy of] the Glorious Qurʾān copied by the dexterous hand of Imām Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq, may God be pleased with him." Later, someone, apparently al-Sheikh al-Bahāʾī, has erased the closing Sunnite eulogy (i.e. the رضى الله عنه) and added the Shīʿa's as: "Supplications and blessings of God's peace be upon Him and upon those among his forefathers and among his sons, who are the Purified and

this mis-ascription by the general Shīʿa public, and even by great scholars such as Bahāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad al-ʿĀmilī known as al-Bahāʾī (953/1547–1030/1621) is not far-fetched [Fig. 22]. However, today, with just a little care, one can easily discern that these Kūfic colophons ascribed to Shīʿa Imāms are forgeries, despite the manuscripts themselves being historically authentic.

Examples of Qurʾāns transcribed in a later Kūfic script and attributed to a Shīʿa Imām include:

- MS Smith-Lesouëf 194 [Fig. 24] of the BNF: a Qurʾānic codex in *maghribī* script, written in accordance with the reading of Nāfiʿ b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Madanī, ascribed to Imām al-Riḍā.
- MS 17 [Figs. 21–22] of the AQL in Mashhad: a Qurʾānic codex in eastern Kūfic script, ascribed to Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq.
- MS R 38 [Fig. 23] of the TPM in Istanbul: a Qurʾānic codex in eastern Kūfic, ascribed to Imām al-Ḥusayn.
- MS 1378 of the GPM in Tehran: a Qurʾānic codex in a well-developed eastern Kūfic, ascribed to Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq.
- MS 3085goj of the AQL in Mashhad: a Qurʾānic section (*juzʾ*), ascribed to an unidentified Imām. The manuscript is the missing part of the famous 30-part Qurʾān copied and illuminated by ʿUthmān b. al-Ḥusayn al-Warrāq in 462–466/ 1070–1074 that features an ascription added in the Safavid era, prior to it being donated by Shāh Abbās I (978–1038/ 1571–1629) to the Sheikh Ṣafī al-Dīn Shrine in Ardebil.
- MS 4243 of the NMI in Tehran: a Qurʾānic codex in eastern Kūfic, ascribed to Imām al-Ḥasan.
- MS 1011 of the GPM in Tehran: a Qurʾānic codex in eastern Kūfic, ascribed to Imām al-Ḥasan. The manuscript is an Iranian-style Qurʾān in which the

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the Immaculate and the Righteous [Members of the House of the Prophet].” Nearly two centuries later, in the year 1008/1599 CE, Shāh Abbās I donated this codex to the Shrine of Imām al-Riḍā as a religious endowment. Al-Shaikh al-Bahāʾī wrote the deed of this endowment:

«هو. هذا المصحف المجيد الذى تنسب كتابته الى سيدنا وامامنا حجة الله على الخلايق جعفر بن محمد الصادق سلام الله عليه وعلى آبائه واولاده الطاهرين وقفٌ على الروضة المقدسة المنورة المطهرة الرضية الرضوية. سلامٌ من الرحمن نحو جنابها فان سلامى لا يليق ببابها. والواقف هو تراب عتبة الرضا سلام الله عليه، اعنى سيد سلاطين الزمان واعظم خواقين الدوران صاحب النسب الطاهر النبوى والحسب الظاهر العلوى ابو المظفر شاه عباس الحسينى الموسوى الصفوى خلد الله تعالى ملكه واجرى فى بحار النصر والتاييد والتاييد فلكه بمحمد وآله الطاهرين سنة ١٠٠٨. حرّره تراب اقدام خدام العتبة المقدسة الرضوية، بهاء الدين محمد العاملى عفى عنه.»

copyist spans each part (*juzʾ*) of the Qurʾān over a specific number of leaves and ends each folio with a verse-ending.[27]

–   MSS 2 and 226 of the Raza Library in Rampur: two Qurʾān sections on paper, both in eastern Kūfic, ascribed to Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and Imām ʿAlī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, respectively.

–   An eastern Kūfic Qurʾān which is obviously copied on 25 Muḥarram 543AH/ 22 June 1148 is attributed to Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim (128–183/745–799)! [Fig. 29]. The codex is now kept among the Kashmiri Shīʿas and is publicly displayed once a year on the occasion of Arbaeen in the Bāb al-Jawād Mosque (Srinagar). According to the popular belief in the region, this Qurʾān was written by the Imam in the year 173/789 when he was imprisoned by Hārūn al-Rashīd, the fifth Abbasid Caliph, and was brought some five hundred years ago from Ardebil to Kashmir by a descendant of the Imām.

–   The ascription of the Qurʾānic codex known as 'The Qurʾān of ʿUthmān' in the village of Negel (Iranian Kurdistan) to the third caliph, ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān [Fig. 30], is yet another instance of such a forgery, since its particular eastern Kūfic script could not have developed prior to the fourth/tenth century.

5   Table of Qurʾāns Attributed to Shīʿa Imāms

The table below provides an overview of the manuscripts attributed to Shīʿa Imāms available in libraries and museums around the world. A few, like MSS EH 34 and R 11 [Fig. 15] of the TPM, have been attributed by Sunnis to the first three Imāms and the sixth Imām, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, but most have been ascribed by Shīʿites. Although codices have been attributed to the Companions of the Prophet and Shīʿa Imāms since at least the fourth/tenth century, the trend escalated in later centuries, especially during the Safavid and Qajar periods. In the Indian subcontinent, some Qurʾānic writings even in a non-Kūfic script have been attributed to an Imām, a phenomenon indicating the inclination to increase the number of Qurʾāns attributed to Shīʿa Imāms.

The growth of Qurʾānic codices ascribed to Shīʿa Imāms during the Safavid era may be linked to religious rivalry between the Safavid kings and the Ottomans. It may also have been intensified by the love and affection for Imāms

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27   On this manuscript and other systematic Qurʾānic codices, see my article in Persian: "Qurʾān nevīsī munaẓẓam wa bā qāʿide dar Iran az qarn-e panjum tā dahum-e ḥijrī wa taʾthīr-e ān dar kitābat-e Qurʾān az asr-e uthmānī tā emrūz" (Systematic and Organized Writing of the Qurʾān in Iran from the 5th/11th to the 10th/16th Century, and its Influence on the Scribing of the Qurʾān from the Ottoman era to the Present day), in: *Ayeneh-ye Pazhoohesh* (The Mirror of Research), 31/5 (2020) pp. 45–73.

among the unlettered. Thus, it is noteworthy that, in one instance, more than ten sections comprised of pieces from several old Kūfic Qurʾāns have been attributed to three Imāms. In this case, the last one or two lines have been erased from the bottom of a Qurʾānic leaf and, instead, a colophon has been added that ascribes it to an Imām. The colophons are followed by the spurious testimony of a visit, signature, and stamp of the Safavid King Ismail I (1487–1524) in a *naskh* hand. The uniform style in these ten Qurʾānic sections is probably an imitation of a forged colophon of ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān in a sixteen-line Kūfic Qurʾān, MS Minutoli 296 of SBB, since fragments from this very Qurʾān are found among the ten sections attributed to Shīʿa Imāms.[28]

Sometimes, a Qurʾānic section is attributed to one Imām, the other fragments being attributed elsewhere, either to another Imām or to no one at all. Thus, a famous nine-line manuscript in Kūfic script was ascribed to Imām ʿAlī in the MAM (Najaf), while the other parts are found as MSS 16, 40, and 1658 of AQL, MS 139 of NMIQ, MS 401b of the Bodleian Library, KFQ 82 of the Khalili Collection (London), MS Is 1409 of CBL (Dublin), MSS Loth 3 and Or. 7285 of BL (London), and MS 1037 of GPM (Tehran). Also, the Qurʾān MS 3382 of AQL, attributed to Imām al-Ḥusayn, contains only eight Kūfic nine-line leaves, the other parts of which are in the MSS 1040 and 1046 of GPM, and in MS Yahuda Ar. 970 of NLIS. And, MSS 11, 12 [Fig. 33], 13, 14 of AQL all actually belong to a seven-part Qurʾān from the second or third century AH, which, following the addition of different colophons, are now attributed to the first three Shīʿa Imāms.

For those familiar with the various types of the Kūfic script and its development within the context of Qurʾānic transmission, it is not difficult to spot the misattribution of Kūfic manuscripts to Shīʿa Imāms. Almost all of these parchment codices are in oblong format, which was rare in the first/seventh century. Today, we know that the oldest extant Qurʾāns of the world are written in *ḥijāzī* or *māʾil* style and are formatted in a vertical orientation. Moreover, the script used in the majority of these cases cannot be dated any earlier than the mid-second/eighth century. The only possible exceptions are MSS 18, 26, 3540, and 4116 of the AQL (Mashhad) and the Qurʾān MS 4251 of the NMI (Tehran), which can be dated back to slightly earlier than the mid-second/eighth century.

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28   The ten manuscripts are as follows: MSS 3382 and 1586 [Fig. 12] of AQL; MSS 1037, 1041, and 1046 of GPM; MS 10 of MML [Fig. 11]; manuscripts of two private collections in Mashhad and Tehran; and Lots 6, 133, 11, and 2 auctioned at Christie's on 12 October 1999; Bonham's, 20 Oct. 1993; Christie's, 13 October 1998; and Bonham's, 25 April 2018, respectively. For a complete survey, see: Morteza Karimi-Nia, "Šāh Ismāʿīl und seine zeitgleich mehreren Koranexemplare. Eine Reflexion der Problematik der Signaturfälschung der schiitischen Imame in den Koranmanuskripten," *Spektrum Iran: Zeitschrift für islamisch-iranische Kultur*, 31/2 (2018): 29–53.