

PAGE-SETTING IN LATE OTTOMAN QUR'ĀNS. AN ASPECT OF STANDARDIZATION

The purpose of this paper is twofold. The primary aim is to account for the types of standardized page-setting that occur in Ottoman Qur'ān manuscripts of the 18th and 19th centuries. But this aspect of the later Ottoman Qur'ān has to be seen in the context of a wider process of standardization that affected all aspects of Qur'ān production after 1600, and which resulted in the production of copies that are immediately recognizable as Ottoman. The main evidence for the discussion comes from the very large number of Qur'ān manuscripts that survive from the last centuries of Ottoman history, since the literary and other sources available are limited.

In the 16th century there was considerable variety in Ottoman Qur'ān production, both in terms of styles of script, illumination and binding and in terms of the format of the manuscript, the page layout and the programme of decoration. This variety reflected the wide range of sources for Ottoman material culture in this period, and it was sustained by the great wealth accrued by the Ottoman elite as their empire expanded: as the century progressed, an increasing number of fine Qur'āns and other religious manuscripts were commissioned both for newly founded institutions and for personal use. By 1600, however, the pace of the empire's growth had slowed almost to a halt, and it became necessary to devote resources to the maintenance of what already existed rather than to the creation of new institutions. This change was accompanied by a series of political, social and economic crises, and it resulted in the initiative in Qur'ān production passing to a larger group of less wealthy patrons [1].

The events of the late 16th century and the early 17th are mirrored in a crisis in Qur'ān production, which may be detected, for example, in the disappearance from the capital of all but one school of calligraphy, that of Şeyh Hamdullah (d. ca. 1520). This development goes almost unremarked in Ottoman sources of the 18th and 19th centuries, who take the innate superiority of Hamdullah's style for granted. But it is striking that just one individual, Hasan Üsküdarî (d. 1614 or 1615), was responsible for the transmission of this style to the scribes working in Istanbul in the 17th century. Even the school of Hamdullah, then, seems to have come close to extinction [2].

The same process of selection, by which all but one of a range of alternatives was eliminated, may be seen occurring in other aspects of Qur'ān production and associated arts in this period. Şeyh Hamdullah and the Ottoman callig-

raphers of the 16th century practised the six styles of calligraphy known as the Six Pens. In later centuries, though, this was the exception, so that the great 18th-century biographer of calligraphers, Müstakim-zade Süleyman Sa'deddin Efendi (d. 1788), consistently refers to later members of the school of Şeyh Hamdullah being trained in *hüsn-ü hatt-ı süls ü nesih* (*thulth* and *nash* calligraphy). Thus the Six Pens had become two, one for large-format work and one for small. What is more, the main text of the standard later Ottoman Qur'ān was always written entirely in *nash*, so that in this case the Six Pens were reduced to one [3].

The decoration and binding of Qur'ān manuscripts were subject to the same shrinking of the available options, which equated to standardization. Thus, the principal areas of illumination in most fine copies of the 17th century have gold and blue parti-coloured grounds, which are overlaid with scrolling tendrils set with diminutive floral motifs. These same copies are usually bound in morocco covers with recessed centre — and corner-pieces of a standard type, filled with pressure — moulded and gilded decoration. These were, of course, precisely the styles of illumination and binding found in copies of the Qur'ān written by Şeyh Hamdullah for Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481—1512) [4].

The way that the illumination was used to articulate the divisions of the text also became standardized. The double-page illuminations found in the best 16th-century examples were eliminated, and the beginning of the text was marked by a wide ornamental frame surrounding the first *sūra*, which was always confined to the right-hand page, and the beginning of the second *sūra*, which was always confined to the left-hand page. The composition of this frame also became very standardized. In the remainder of the manuscript, *sūra* headings were placed in a band the width of the text area, which is usually decorated, and gilt whorls or segmented discs set off with red and blue dots mark the conclusion of each verse [5].\

There was more variety in the occurrence and design of marginal devices. These could be used to mark the division of the text into as many as 120 equal sections (*juz'* and *hizb*), to signal the points in the text where the reader has to make a prostration (*sajdah*), and sometimes to divide *sūras* into groups of verses. The device usually includes a short inscription indicating what the device refers to (i. e. the word *juz'*, *hizb*, *sajdah*, etc.), but otherwise no formal distinction was made between devices serving different