

# A Paleographical Study of Early Christian Arabic Manuscripts<sup>1</sup>

[Un estudio paleográfico de los manuscritos árabes cristianos primitivos]

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**Abstract:** The present paper presents an overview of the types of writing that were used by Christian Arabic scribes during the long ninth century. It categories them into three groups consisting of several subcategories and discusses the traits of such categories. It further aims at collecting extant shelf marks of early Christian Arabic manuscripts and research relating to these findings, add to the search for *disjecta membra*, and contribute to our knowledge of individual scribes and scribal activity relating to the early Christian Arabic manuscript production.

**Keywords:** Manuscripts; Christian Arabic; Near East; Writing; 9<sup>th</sup> C.E.

**Resumen:** El presente trabajo ofrece una visión de conjunto de los tipos de escritura que fueron utilizados por los escribas árabes cristianos a lo largo de siglo IX. Se han dividido en tres grupos, que a su vez se subdividen en diferentes subcategorías, cada una de las cuales son discutidas. Además, tiene como objetivo recopilar marcas existentes en los estantes de manuscritos árabes cristianos primitivos, así como las investigaciones relacionadas con estos hallazgos, que se suma a la búsqueda de los *disjecta membra* y contribuye a nuestro conocimiento sobre escribas concretos y

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<sup>1</sup> The current paper was composed with the support of the Swedish Research Council (2017-01630). I wish to thank a number of people for facilitating me in this study, especially my former colleagues in the *Biblia Arabica* project in Munich who shared their thoughts on some of the manuscripts with me: Peter Tarras, Ronny Vollandt, and Vevian Zaki, and Roy Michael McCoy III for his comments on the draft version of this paper.

su actividad copista en la producción manuscrita primitiva árabe cristiana.

**Palabras clave:** Manuscritos; Árabe cristiano; Oriente; Escritura; Siglo IX.



At the turn of the Umayyad and the Abbasid dynasties, Arabic-speaking Christians began what was to become a massive production of religious texts. During the long ninth century, biblical texts and Patristic works were translated into Arabic along with the composition of hagiographies and theological tracts grappling with the new societal and intellectual challenges brought by Islam. Due to the dry climate of the desert, a significant portion of this rich and important heritage has been preserved at Saint Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, though a number of manuscripts, often in fragmentary form, have been brought from Sinai to libraries in the West. Early manuscripts are today dispersed under approximately one hundred different shelf marks and include a great number of *membra disjecta*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> These are the manuscripts commonly dated from the late eighth to the early tenth centuries by scholars and cataloguers or those written on parchment in Yiannis Meimaris' catalogue over the New Finds at Saint Catherine's, which have only partly been discussed by scholars. Cf. Yiannis E. Meimaris, *Katalogos tōn neōn aravikōn cheiographōn tēs hieras monēs Aikaterinēs tou orous Sina* (Athens: Ethnikon hidryma ereunōn, 1985). I have consulted these manuscripts *in situ*, on websites, from manuscript reproductions, in catalogues and in scholarly studies. Some were sorted out in the process due to their apparent younger features, including many of the findings in Meimaris' catalogue. I am deeply grateful to his Eminence Archbishop Damianos of Mount Sinai and Raithu and to Father Justin in particular for their help and hospitality throughout my work. Many of the Sinai manuscripts are available on the Library of Congress site: <https://www.loc.gov>. Accessed 6 June 2020. The Sinai Manuscripts Digital Library team currently works together with the Monastery, with the support of the Egyptian authorities, to make high resolution color images of the complete collection available through a new open access web portal. I also wish to thank Dr. Colin Baker at the British Library for facilitating my work on the important Christian Arabic collection *in situ* in London. Other valuable collections are found online and referenced below.

Despite awareness of these manuscripts and despite the fact that Islamic scholars have pointed out the importance of the Christian corpus which is well represented among early dated Arabic manuscripts,<sup>3</sup> there is still no systematic overview of the Christian Arabic production. Several helpful catalogues providing images of Christian Arabic manuscripts and significant endeavors to trace *membra disjecta* have been published,<sup>4</sup> as have a substantial number of valuable studies on single manuscripts.<sup>5</sup> Yet, there has so far not been any attempt to carve out a more comprehensive typology from this rich corpus. Instead, researchers and cataloguers rely on the

<sup>3</sup> Almost one-third of all early dated Arabic manuscripts are composed by Christians, according to a study by François Déroche in the late 80s: “Le Manuscrits Arabes Datés du IIIe/IXe Siècle”, *Revue des Etudes islamiques* 60-62 (1987-1989), pp. 343-380. Déroche lists forty manuscripts: fourteen Quran manuscripts, fourteen book hands (legal collections, hadiths, etc.) and twelve Christian Arabic texts. The following Christian Arabic texts are included by him: Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 1; 7; 16; 66; Sin. Ar. 72; 151; British Library, Or. 4950; Fleischer p. 587, °4 = Strasbourg, BNU, 4226; Vat. Ar. 71; Saint Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Ar. 327; Strasbourg, BNU, 4225; Paris, BnF, Ar. 6725/3.

<sup>4</sup> See especially Meimaris, *Katalogos*; Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *Forty-One Facsimiles of Dated Christian Arabic Manuscripts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907); Heinrich L. Fleischer, “Beschreibungen der von Prof. Dr. Tischendorf im J. 1853 aus dem Morgenlande zurückgebrachten christlich-arabischen Handschriften”, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 8 (1854), pp. 584-587 [reprinted in *Kleinere Schriften*, 3 vols. Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1885-88. Vol. 3, Band III, pp. 389-394]; and Eugène Tisserant, *Specimina Codicum Orientalium* (Bonn: Marcus et Weber, 1914). Reportedly, images should also be included in William Wright, *Facsimiles of ancient manuscripts: Oriental series*. Edited by W. Wright (London: William Clowes and Sons Ltd 1875-1883), for the Palaeographical Society. I have not been able to access this work. Some tenth-century texts are reproduced in Karl W. Hiersemann, *Katalog 500: Orientalische Manuskripte* (Leipzig, 1922).

<sup>5</sup> See especially Michel van Esbroeck, “Les versions orientales de la Bible: Une orientation bibliographique”, in Margaret Davis et al. (eds.), *Interpretation of the Bible* (Ljubljana: Slovenska Akademija Znanosti in Umetnosti; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 399-509. esp. 403-415; Paul Géhin, “Manuscrits sinaïtiques dispersés I: les fragments syriaques et arabes de Paris”, *Oriens Christianus* 90 (2006), pp. 23-43; and André Binggeli, “Les trois David, copistes arabes de Palestine aux 9e-10e s”, in André Binggeli, Anne Boud’hors, and Matthieu Cassin (eds.), *Manuscripta Graeca et Orientalia: Mélanges monastiques et patristiques en l’honneur de Paul Géhin* (Louvain: Peeters, 2016), pp. 79-117. For recent studies on single manuscripts, see for example the publications by Juan Pefro Monferrer-Sala quoted below.

impressions given by paleography to date and evaluate manuscripts that lack colophons. Whereas such impressions usually point us in the right direction, they are nevertheless subjective judgements based on the experience of an individual scholar or cataloguer. An example of such subjectivity is demonstrated by the recent discovery of the continuation of a manuscript fragment held in Birmingham which had been catalogued by Alphonse Mingana and dated by him to around 950 C.E. The rest of the manuscript is kept at the Ambrosiana Library in Milan. The connection between the two documents was long left unnoticed since the Milan manuscript was dated to the eleventh or twelfth century by Oscar Löfgren and Renato Treini in their catalogue of Arabic manuscripts in the Ambrosiana.<sup>6</sup>

Of special interest is the handful of manuscripts which scholars date to the late eighth or early ninth centuries. As André Binggeli has noted, the practice of dating manuscripts commenced around the last third of the ninth century and before that, any date provided is conjectural.<sup>7</sup>

Due to the underdeveloped state of Christian Arabic studies in general, scholars understandably give priority to other aspects of this material, but they are likely also discouraged by the heterogeneity of paleographical features and the wide dispersion of relevant manuscripts. Not long ago, the situation was similar in Islamic Studies where scholars noted that “there were as many kinds of Kufic as there were manuscripts written in Kufic”, a state which nevertheless did not dissuade François Déroche from embarking on his monumental study wherein he classified the early quranic corpus into Hijazi, Early

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<sup>6</sup> Miriam L. Hjälms, “The Hazy Edges of the Biblical Canon: A case Study of the Wisdom of Solomon in Arabic”, in Lorenzo DiTommaso, Matthias Henze, and William Adler (eds.), *The Embroidered Bible: Studies in Biblical Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Honour of Michael E. Stone*, col. «Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha» 26 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 569–587, there 579; Miriam L. Hjälms, “Texts Attributed to al-Ḥārīt b. Sinān b. Sinbāt al-Ḥarrānī: Notes on Prologues, Translation Techniques and New Manuscripts”, submitted. For an additional example, cf. n. 45 below.

<sup>7</sup> André Binggeli, “Early Christian Graeco-Arabica: Melkite Manuscripts and Translations in Palestine (8th–10th Centuries AD)”, *Intellectual history of the Islamicate world* 3 (2015), pp. 228–247.

Abbasid, and New Style scripts.<sup>8</sup> The aim of the present paper is thus to offer a first, preliminary categorization of early Christian Arabic material, i.e. manuscripts normally dated from the late eighth to the early tenth centuries.

It should be made clear already at this point that although categories are discernible in this corpus, their borders are somewhat blurred and it is not the aim of this study to establish an exact classification that can be used with certainty for dating manuscripts or establishing a place of origin. There is an unavoidable element of subjectivity involved also in the present study. Thus the present findings are best understood as demonstrating trends in a complex corpus of material with several hybrid forms, that will hopefully encourage further comparative studies. Any paleographical findings here should, in due time, be re-examined in the light of detailed studies on the texts themselves as well as more thorough codicological studies.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The quotation is from François Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition: Qur'ans of the 8th to the 10th Centuries AD* (London: The Nour Foundation and Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> In principle, the manuscripts within the scope of this study are written on parchment normally made up by quaternions, where each quire consists of four bi-folia. Many of the New Findings are only in fragmentary form and the composition of the quire could not be examined. The books normally measure between 10,0–25,0 x 9,0–19,5 cm but there is a large variety of size and a couple of small books for private use are also among our corpus. The folio numbers of each codex differ considerably, ranging from a few surviving folios to several hundreds. Rubrics are usually featured in red, or less often, in green. Typically, a new book or section is introduced by modest ornaments, such as a multi-colored ribbon or a chain of diamond-shaped figures, each made up of four red dots or crosses. According to Alain George, the practice of ornamenting rubrics in this manner resembles the Syriac manuscript production: “Le palimpseste Lewis-Mingana de Cambridge, témoin ancien de l’histoire du Coran”, *Comptes-Rendus des Séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* 1 (2011), pp. 377–429, here pp. 410–411. Consonantal dots exist yet they are normally sparsely used. A good example of a content related study is Binggeli, “Les Trois David”. Ronny Vollandt is planning to prepare a more comprehensive codicological study on this corpus.

*Towards a Classification*

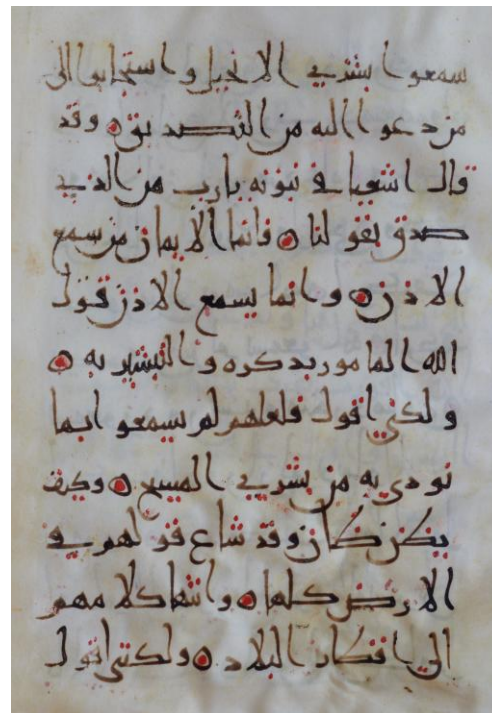
It has frequently been pointed out that manuscripts produced at the monasteries of Mar Sabas, Mar Chariton, and St Catherine around the ninth century share some distinctive paleographical features.<sup>10</sup> Most of these manuscripts are written on parchment and the script has angular features, reminiscent of what has regularly been labeled “Kufic” or “Christian Kufic”. Manuscripts which do not exhibit a typically angular script are often referred to by the broad term *naskh*.<sup>11</sup> Déroche, who questions the connection between “kufic” hands and the city of Kufa, suggests instead the term “Early Abbasid” to designate the angular scripts. Déroche’s categories are useful also to describe essential qualities of the Christian material, yet it is important to note that Christians did not make any formal distinction between holy Writ and non-scriptural texts and used the same script regardless of genre. In fact, early Arabic Bible translations are often transmitted in the same codices as non-biblical material. This is in contrast to Muslim scribes who tended to elaborate their Holy Scriptures in an ancient script, thereby matching sacred content with sacred form, while for example hadiths and Quran commentaries were typically composed in non-quranic book hands. Texts that were written in Greek and Syriac may to a certain degree have filled the function for Christians that the highly stylized Qurans did for Muslims. In any event, Christian Arabic scripts may best be described as regular book hands, although some compositions are more beautifully executed than others.<sup>12</sup> Strictly speaking, there is only one

<sup>10</sup> Bernhard Levin, *Die griechisch-arabische Evangelien-Übersetzung*: Vat. Borg. ar. 95 und Ber. orient. oct. 1108 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1938), pp. 12–16; Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, “Liber Iob detractus apud Sin. Ar. 1: Notas en torno a la Vorlage siriaca de un manuscrito árabe cristiano (s. IX)”, *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 1 (2003), pp. 119–142, here pp. 122–123; David Samuel Margoliouth, “Introduction”, in Margaret Dunlop Gibson (ed.), *Forty-One Facsimiles of Dated Christian Arabic Manuscripts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), pp. ix–xvi, esp. p. ix; George, “Le palimpseste”, and others.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Adam Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts. A Vademecum for Readers* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 162–165.

<sup>12</sup> On book hands, see Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts*, p. 36.

manuscript which could be labelled an Early Abbasid script according to Déroche's categories (cf. Sin. Ar. 154). Still, the basic distinction between these angular scripts and the cursive<sup>13</sup> New Styles is evident in the Christian corpus and it is therefore valuable, in my opinion, to retain these two categories in the typology of early Christian material while to some extent adjusting their definitions. Most notably, there are few hands in the Christian corpus within our scope that do not exhibit any influence of the cursiveness typical of the New Styles, yet only some of these fully resemble New Style scripts. Thus, in the present typology, the basic distinction pertains to the extension of the script, i.e. whether the extension is horizontal (Early Abbasid) or vertical (New Style).



Illustrations 1-2: Horizontally (left, Sin. Ar. 72 fol. 3r) vs. vertically (right, NF Parch. 52) extended script. © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photos by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

<sup>13</sup> The term "cursive" is in this study being used to denote curvy letter forms.

Having established the extension of the writing, the script is then sub-categorized according to angular and cursive features.<sup>14</sup> Next, the shapes of selected letters are attended to. The identification of these letter forms differs from those in Déroche's study and will be discussed below. In particular, more ancient forms are paid attention to as these are often used by scholars to date a Christian manuscript to the eighth or early ninth century.

There are, in my opinion, no Hijazi scripts in the Christian material, although this is sometimes suggested (see Vat. Ar. 13 below). In addition to the categories defined by Déroche, I add what I label "Plain Scripts," seemingly influenced by non-quranic book hands. As mentioned above, non-quranic book hands are in particular valuable for our study since the Christian material largely falls into this genre.<sup>15</sup> Attention will therefore be paid to "plain" scripts characterized by the many straight strokes that were often used in these texts and comparisons will be pointed out where relevant. Another study of Déroche's is helpful in this regard: "Les Manuscrits Arabes Datés Du IIIe/IXe Siecle", in which the author collects shelf marks of all Arabic manuscripts dated in the ninth century, which

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<sup>14</sup> Categorization of scripts according to their geometrical shapes is often used in Hebrew paleography. In the "Hebrew Codicology" section on the National Library of Israel online guide, the terms Square, Semi-Cursive and Cursive, are used. Cf. <http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/English/collections/manuscripts/hebrewcodicology/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>15</sup> Arabic was of course used for various literary genres. Geoffrey Khan, for instance, has offered valuable paleographical studies of early documents, including *Arabic Papyri: Selected Material from the Khalili Collection* (London: Nour Foundation in association with Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press, 1992); Geoffrey Khan, *Arabic legal and administrative documents in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Comparative material is also available in the project led by Andreas Kaplony in Munich: <http://www.apd.gwi.uni-muenchen.de:8080/apd/project.jsp>. Accessed 6 June 2020. There is perhaps limited benefit from comparing Christian Arabic texts, which mostly consist of religious literature, with the writing of documents yet it could be fruitful to a certain extent. Different kinds of scripts influenced one another, and cannot be fully separated. Nevertheless, the influence from documents on the New Styles has already been acknowledged and incorporated into the descriptions in Déroche's study. Papyri (mainly documents) identified as composed by or on behalf of Christians will not be included in the present study.



were known to him in the late 80s, and offers illustrations from which we may discern various styles of writings.

A wider comparison with Muslim hands that takes into consideration more recent developments in the field may contribute to a greater precision of the current typology, which in the present study focuses on the Christian corpus.

The result of my categorization, to which I devote the largest part of this paper to discuss, is summarized as follows:

1. Early Abbasid Scripts (cf. Kufic)
  - 1.1 Angular scripts
  - 1.2 Semi-angular scripts
2. The New Style
  - 2.1 Cursive scripts
  - 2.2 Transitional scripts
3. Plain Scripts

Most of the categories contain one or a few dated specimens. Dated manuscripts are of immense importance for our evaluation of the group as such and unless there is an obvious reason to doubt a certain date, paleographical features in dated manuscripts serve as nodes with which similar hand styles can be associated. Naturally, the approximate date of a category cannot be applied with certainty to an individual manuscript. Yet resemblance to a group provides a rough measurement and has *de facto* already been used as such by scholars in the field. On some rare occasions, hands change on the same folio, which shows that different styles were used in the same scriptorium. These examples are important also since they indicate which styles were used in parallel. It will become immediately apparent that Christian Arabic manuscripts often exhibit personal traits, yet some “scribal schools” of smaller size, perhaps consisting of a master and a student, may be identified.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Many thanks to Peter Tarras for showing me examples of such postulated scribal schools from his ongoing research.

### 1. Early Abbasid Scripts

Early Abbasid scripts were primarily used to compose Qurans from the eighth to the tenth centuries.<sup>17</sup> Alain George has investigated the dawn and early development of the Kufic script and has shown that Christian scribes and Christian scripts to some extent contributed to the development of the early Arabic writing systems.<sup>18</sup> As mentioned above, the resemblance of the Kufic script to the parchment manuscripts from Sinai was noted at an early stage by scholars. The Christian samples were sometimes described as Kufic and at other times as “Christian Kufic” to signal the unique character of the Christian material vis-à-vis Islamic hands. There is undeniably a certain truth contained in the term “Christian Kufic”, in the sense that these scripts were extensively used by Christians in the area around the ninth century. Nevertheless it is doubtful whether they were strictly speaking Christian scripts, as is evident from the Muslim book hand in Ms Leiden, Or. 298 dated 866 C.E. (see below).

The primary characteristic of Early Abbasid scripts, as defined in this study, is their horizontal elongation of writing. This means that, in principle, the belly of *ṭāʾ/zāʾ* is longer than, or as long as, its vertical shaft. The horizontal scripts are always rather angular in shape, yet whereas some are characterized by their many sharp angles, others exhibit various degrees of cursive (New Style) shapes and others again, more round features.

As opposed to quranic hands, independent *alif* is seldom featured with a right bent hook at the base line in Christian manuscripts. Instead, many of these manuscripts display curvy or straight *alifs* and may as such be understood as representing a transitional phase between Early Abbasid and New Style hands, as well as influence from other types of book hands. The most characteristic letter shape of the Early Abbasid Christian scripts, as defined in the present study, is instead final *kāf*, which is featured as two parallel horizontal strokes,

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<sup>17</sup> Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition*, p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> Alain George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy* (London: Saqi, 2010), pp. 21–53.

normally with an oblique top stroke of various lengths.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, the final *kāf* in New Style scripts are made up of one horizontal stroke and one vertical shaft. As such, the form of *kāf* often harmonizes with the overall geometry of a specific script: besides its clear horizontal vs. vertical indication, a final *kāf* with softer angles matches a script with generally round shapes, and if a final *kāf* displays a hybrid form where the second horizontal stroke is on its way to becoming a vertical shaft, it is often an indicator that the whole script is in a transitional phase.

Of special interest for the corpus under investigation is the presence of what appear to be more ancient letter shapes such as a heart-shaped *ʿayn* or an *ʿayn* whose top strokes are unconnected, a *qāf* that is marked with one dot below (or above) the *rasm*, i.e. the consonantal body, and to a certain extent a *shīn* whose three diacritical dots are arranged horizontally. The writing of *qāf* has been discussed by, among others, Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala who points out its frequent occurrence in Palestinian manuscripts.<sup>20</sup>

### 1.1 Angular Scripts

Despite its meager representation, the category of angular scripts is of significance for the history of the Christian corpus. It is primarily represented by Sinai Ar. 154, which finds its continuation in Paris, BnF Ar. 6725/6.<sup>21</sup> Gibson described it as “the most ancient specimen of

<sup>19</sup> Another letter shape that should be taken into account in the future is the writing of *ḥāʾ* in many Christian Arabic scripts. Courtesy to Roy Michael McCoy III for sharing his thoughts on his ongoing study on this with me.

<sup>20</sup> Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, “Once Again on the Earliest Christian Arabic Apology: Remarks on a Paleographic Singularity”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 69/2 (2010), pp. 195–197; cf. Levin, *Die griechisch-arabische Evangelien-Übersetzung*, pp. 14–15.

<sup>21</sup> For an edition of this manuscript, see Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *An Arabic Version of the Acts of the Apostles and the Seven Catholic Epistles from an Eighth or Ninth Century MS. in the Convent of St. Catharine on Mount Sinai, with a Treatise On the Triune Nature of God, with translation, from the Same Codex*. Edited and translated by M. D. Gibson (London: Cambridge University Press, 1899). Note that Paris, BnF Ar. 6725 has bound together six different texts; cf. Géhin, “Manuscrits sinaïtiques dispersés I.” The manuscript is found online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8406179n/f66.image>. Accessed 6 June 2020.

Arabic calligraphy to be found in the library [of St Catherine]” which was “nearly approaching Kufic”.<sup>22</sup> The original text has been dated between 753 C.E. and 788 C.E.,<sup>23</sup> but the copy in our possession is somewhat younger. Aziz Atiya dated it to the eighth or early ninth century and Murad Kamil to the ninth century.<sup>24</sup> Monferrer-Sala agrees with Atiya based on its graphological peculiarities, and as such they place the date of the codex close in time to the original composition.<sup>25</sup> According to the colophon following the biblical text (Acts and the Catholic Epistles), it was written (*kataba*) by Moses the Monk (on fol. 97r). The tract further contains two short apothegmata by the same scribe and then what appears to be a second scribe (fol. 99r) began copying a longer anonymous theological tract known as *Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid* or “The Triune Nature of God”. The first scribe copied the latter part of the theological tract (fols. 123r–139v).

<sup>22</sup> Gibson, *An Arabic Version*, vi–vii.

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion on the date of this manuscript, see Mark N. Swanson, “Some Considerations for the Dating of *fī Taṭlīth Allāh al-wāḥid* (Sinai ar. 154) and *al-Āmī wuḡūḥ al-īmān* (London, British Library or. 4950)”, *Parole de l’Orient* 18 (1993), pp. 115–141 and further references there. Swanson opts for 788 C.E. for *Fī tathlīth Allāh*. Treiger however, opts for 753/4 C.E.: Alexander Treiger, “New Works by Theodore Abū Qurra, Preserved under the Name of Thaddeus of Edessa”, *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 68, no. 1–2 (2016), pp. 1–51, here pp. 11–12.

<sup>24</sup> Aziz S. Atiya, *A Hand-List of the Arabic Manuscripts and Scrolls Microfilmed at the Library of the Monastery of St. Catharine, Mount Sinai* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1955), p. 6, n. 154; Murad Kamil, *Catalogue of All Manuscripts in the Monastery of St. Catharine on Mount Sinai* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1970), p. 16, n. 111 (154). Based on a tentative identification of the copyist “Moses the Monk,” Treiger has suggested a date shortly after 814 C.E., see Alexander Treiger, “From Theodore Abū Qurra to Abed Azrié: The Arabic Bible in Context”, in Miriam L. Hjälms (ed.), *Senses of Scripture, Treasures of Tradition: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians and Muslims*, col. «Biblia Arabica: Texts and Studies» 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 11–57, here pp. 39–40 n. 120a.

<sup>25</sup> Monferrer-Sala, “Once Again”, p. 196.

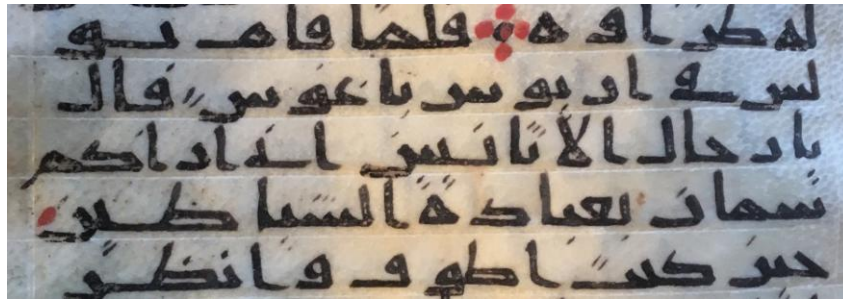


Illustration 3: Sin. Ar. 154, fol. 24r. © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

Initial *alif* in this manuscript is written as a vertical stroke with a right bent hook at the base-line, as in Early Abbasid manuscripts.<sup>26</sup> The angular shaped final *dāl* grapheme and final *kāf* are almost identical, save for the somewhat smaller size of the former. The three diacritics on *shīn* are placed horizontally and *qāf* is marked with a dot below the *rasm*. In the second hand, the top strokes on middle *‘ayn* are unconnected whereas a more modern round top is used in the first hand. In comparison to other specimens in the present study, the scripts in this manuscript exhibit very little movement of top strokes. That is, the vertical shafts of *alif*, *lām*, and *ṭā’/ẓā’* are in principle straight and do not lean much, neither towards the right nor towards the left. In a similar way, horizontal strokes such as the right bent foot of *alif*, the left leaning foot on final *lām*, and the two horizontally elongated parallel strokes on final *kāf*, are all exceptionally straight. In addition, the tails on *nūn* and *mīm* normally stay on the baseline and do not descend beneath it. This is the only manuscript in our possession in which tails of letters normally stay on the baseline. All these straight strokes create an exceptionally angular impression. The script is rather equally dispersed over the line, which is executed by the sporadic resort to *mashq* (elongation). The outer alignment is sometimes kept straight by the division of words across two lines. The

<sup>26</sup> Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition*, pp. 44–46.

script is written in thick ink and oblique strokes are applied as diacritical marks instead of dots.

The script of the postulated second scribe is somewhat different. As noted above, middle *ʿayn* represents the more ancient form. In addition, the inks used for rubrics here are green and orange, not green and red as in the rest of the manuscript.

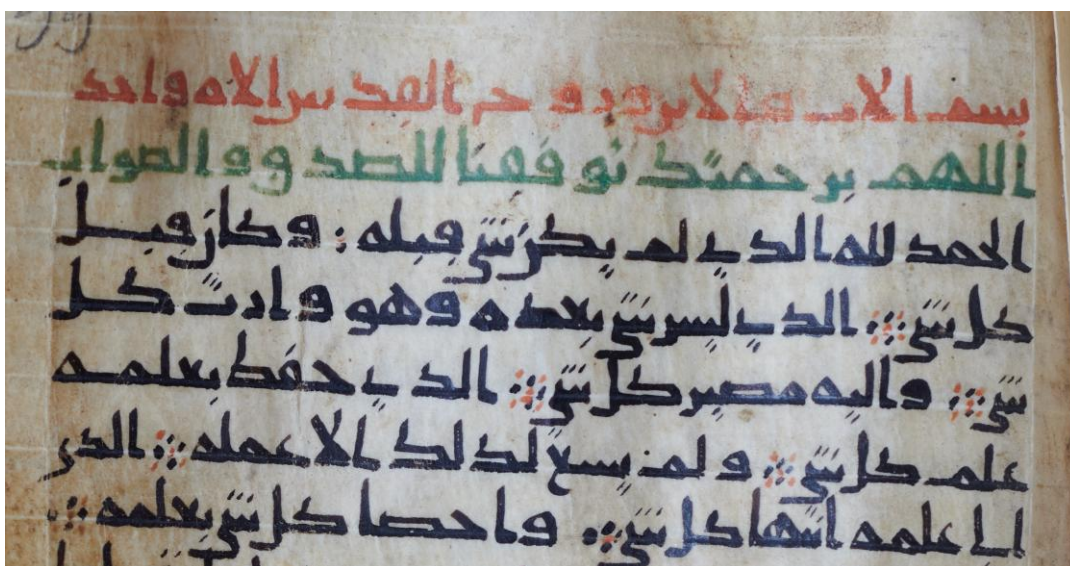


Illustration 4: Sin. Ar. 154, fol. 99r. © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

Another, later copy that arguably belongs to this category is the Psalm rendition in the bilingual Sin. Gr. 36. Most notably, the overall angular shape and many straight vertical strokes of this hand make it similar to the previous hands. It likewise displays some typically ancient features, such as *qāf* written with a dot below the letter and the use of oblique strokes instead of dots. Yet, the script also exhibits some of the ornamental cursiveness typical of the New Style, such as the head serif on *alif* and on the vertical shaft of *tā/zā*.<sup>27</sup> It appears to represent

<sup>27</sup> There are however examples of final *kāf* being written according to a New Style shape. The overall spacious disposition of the script is connected to the fact that the Arabic has to correspond to the Greek text. In general, scripts of bilingual

a hybrid of angular and cursive scripts (cf. in particular David of Ashkelon's hand below).

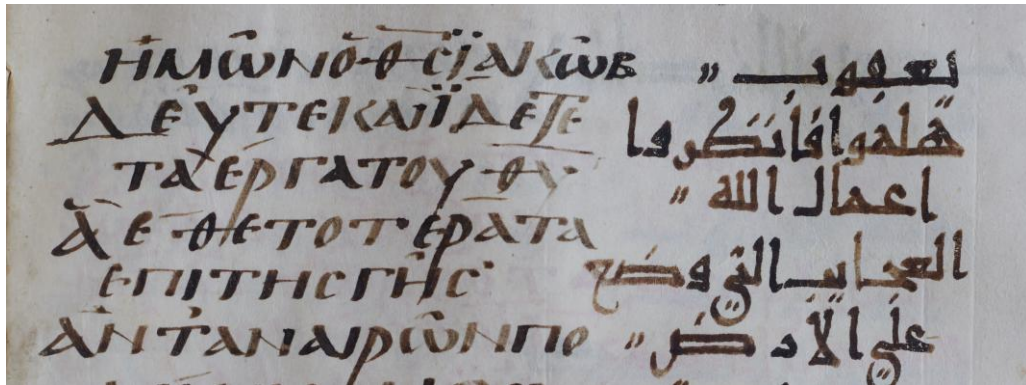


Illustration 5: Sin. Gr. 36, fol. 112r. © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

In sum, angular scripts are horizontally extended, give an exceptionally angular impression, and exhibit several typically ancient features. The younger, hybrid sample includes cursive features and fewer ancient letter shapes.

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manuscripts seem to follow a logic of their own. For instance, the Arabic hand in Sinai Ar. 116 dated 995 C.E. displays divisively angular shapes, perhaps to match the Greek script in the parallel column.













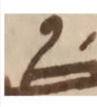





	ind. <i>alif</i>	ind. <i>dāl</i>	<i>shīn</i>	<i>ṭā'</i>	mid. ' <i>ayn</i>	<i>qāf</i>	fin. <i>kāf</i>	fin. <i>mīm</i>	fin. <i>nūn</i>
Ar. 154									
Gr. 36									

Illustration 6. Letter shapes from Sin. Ar. 154 and Sin. Gr. 36. © Miriam L. Hjälml

### *Semi-angular Scripts*

Scripts in the semi-angular category have often been referred to by scholars as “transitional Kufic” or “Christian Kufic” due to their many angular features. These hands preserve the overall horizontal elongation that I define as Early Abbasid in the Christian corpus. Most notably, the extended belly of the *ṣaḍ* grapheme and/or the long parallel strokes of *kāf*, result in the disproportionately large size of these letters and add to the horizontal length of the scripts. Connecting strokes are often elongated as a means of keeping the outer alignment straight (cf. *mashq*), a technique that contributes to the symmetry of the overall writing. Yet, semi-angular scripts do not convey the strict angular impression of Early Abbasid Qurans in Déroche’s categories or of those in the former category. Tails of letters usually descend below the baseline and there is normally a movement of top strokes. Most notably, many hands include New Style features, round shapes or straight strokes. For instance, *alif* is normally either cursive or rather straight. As a rule, final *kāf* is characterized by two horizontal strokes and an oblique top stroke, as



generally in Early Abbasid hands. In contrast, the *dāl* grapheme may be written either as a smaller *kāf* or as an elliptic half-circle. So-called ancient letter forms appear in a number of manuscripts.

This group is divisible into three somewhat overlapping subcategories.

#### Group A

The first subcategory includes several well-known Gospel translations. The scripts are characterized by their comparatively angular shapes and notable horizontal extension in addition to ancient letter shapes. On the whole, however, the manuscripts contained in this group are relatively heterogeneous.

The first manuscript in this group is Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 16 dated by Mark Swanson to 873 C.E.<sup>28</sup> Hikmat Kashouh noted that the continuation of this manuscript was kept in Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 14.<sup>29</sup> Dmitry Morozov moreover, suggests that Tischendorf XXXI, that is Leipzig, University Library, 1059A, (now lost but a facsimile is preserved in Fleischer, “Beschreibungen”, tafel II), preserves yet another piece of this manuscript.<sup>30</sup> It appears to me that the same or a similar hand copied Sinai Ar. 54, although Kashouh dates this copy to the tenth century.<sup>31</sup> Another manuscript categorized in this group, Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 17, which contains “Athanasios’ answers to Antiochos’ questions”, is also composed by the same or a similar hand. The script is angular, the body of *kāf* is disproportionately extended, *qāf* is marked with a dot below the *rasm* and the tail of final *nūn* slopes downwards with no intention of reaching back to the base line. In the

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<sup>28</sup> Swanson, “Some Considerations”, pp. 133–134. For the dates in the manuscript, see Meimaris, *Katalogos*, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> Hikmat Kashouh, *The Arabic Versions of the Gospels: The Manuscripts and Their Families* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), p. 86 n. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Dmitry Morozov, “On the Date of the Most Ancient Arabic Gospel Manuscript”, *Kapterevskie Chteniya: Sbornik statey* 6 (2008), pp. 19–23 [in Russian], here pp. 20–21, esp. n. 11.

<sup>31</sup> See Kashouh, *Arabic Versions*, p. 87.

above-mentioned manuscripts, the dots on *shīn* are sometimes horizontally arranged and sometimes appear in a triangle.<sup>32</sup>

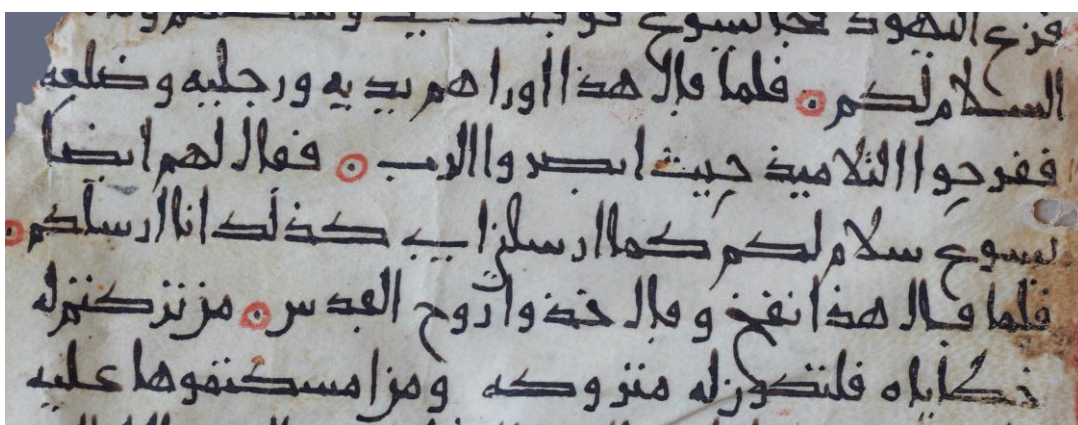


Illustration 7: Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 16. © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

To this group belongs another Gospel translation originally contained in a manuscript that today has the shelfmarks Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 5/6/63. Kashouh dates this version to the ninth, possibly eighth, century due to its archaic paleographical features, in particular the unconnected top strokes on middle *ʿayn* “one of the features found in Arabic manuscripts from the seventh and eight centuries”.<sup>33</sup> At times, however, the scribe resorted to a more regular *ʿayn* and it is likely that he aimed at imitating an ancient practice. The placement of the dots on *shīn* is likewise pending between the more ancient and the more modern form and *qāf* is marked with dots above the *rasm*. Note the disproportionate dimension of final *kāf* and the fact that few diacritical dots are applied.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> It is not uncommon that old and newer features exist in parallel also within the same manuscript.

<sup>33</sup> Kashouh, *Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, p. 114.

<sup>34</sup> A somewhat similar final *kāf* is noted in Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 66 dated 903 C.E. though in general Parch. 66 seems to be younger, with its gamma-like *lā* ligature for example, and it is placed in Group C below.

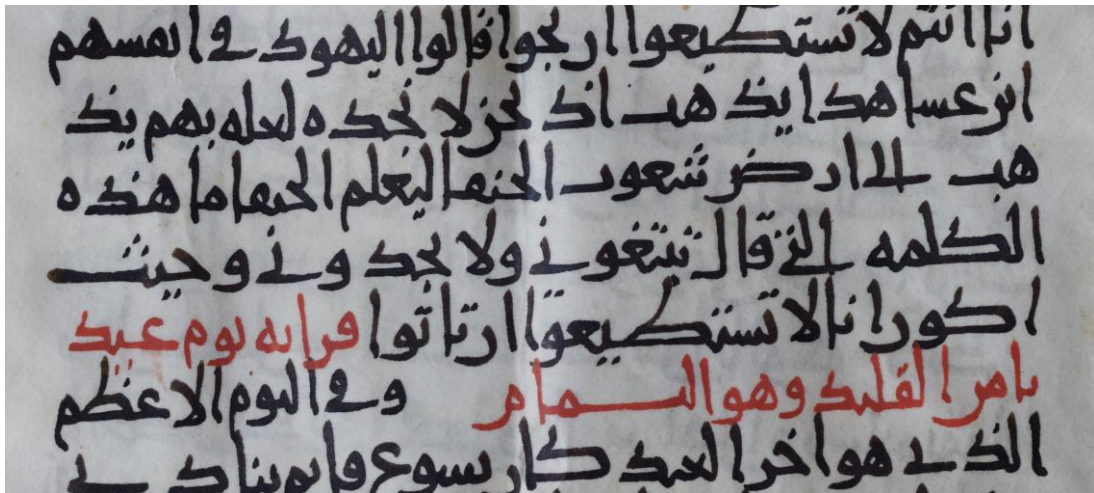


Illustration 8: Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 5 © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

Another example in this category includes Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 8 and 28 that Kashouh identified as one manuscript containing yet another version of the Gospels.<sup>35</sup> Another palimpsest, Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 27, transmitting theological tracts (*logoi*), seems to be written by the same hand. The script exhibits very few diacritical marks, *qāf* is marked with a dot beneath the body, and the dots on *shīn* are horizontally placed. Note finally that *hā'* is featured almost like a Syriac *semkath*. As opposed to the other two manuscripts, the hand combines angular and round features.

<sup>35</sup> See Kashouh, *Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, esp. pp. 97–100, including his paleographical description. A sample of the text, which is a Greek-Latin-Arabic palimpsest, is viewable online: <http://sinaipalimpsests.org/galleries/palimpsests---notable-features>. Accessed 6 June 2020.

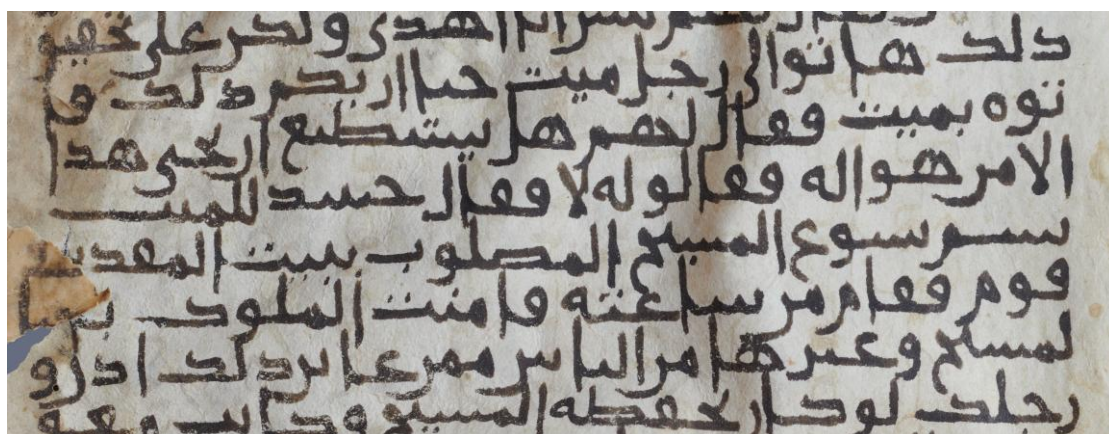


Illustration 9: Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 27. © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

### Group B

The most numerous sub-category in the corpus, here labelled Group B, exhibits a script which is less angular and less horizontally extended than the previous ones. It is interesting to note that the main features of this category are exhibited also in Leiden, Or. 298, a paper copy dated 866 C.E. containing *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, by Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām al-Baghdādī (d. 223/837 C.E.). Yet, here final *kāf* tends towards the two-shaped form typical of New Styles.<sup>36</sup>

To this group belongs the two manuscripts composed by Stephen of Ramle who was connected to Mar Chariton: a Gospel translation preserved in Sin. Ar. 72 dated 897 C.E. and the theological tract known as *al-Jamī'a wujūh al-īmān* in London, BL, Or. 4950 dated 876–7 C.E.<sup>37</sup> (for Sin. Ar. 72, see illustration 1 above).

<sup>36</sup> The similarity was noted by Levin, *Die griechisch-arabische Evangelien-Übersetzung*, 14. Note that *qāf* is marked with a dot below the letter. The Leiden manuscript is viewable online: [http://www.islamicmanuscripts.info/E-publications/wtkam\\_oldest\\_dated/index.html](http://www.islamicmanuscripts.info/E-publications/wtkam_oldest_dated/index.html). Accessed 20 June 2020. Cf. Gazek, *Arabic Manuscripts*, p. 64.

<sup>37</sup> On Stephen of Ramle, see Sidney H. Griffith, "Stephen of Ramla and the Christian Kerygma in Arabic in 9th Century Palestine", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36

It is interesting to note that Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 7, which, with minor deviations, contains the same version of the Gospels as that in Sin. Ar. 72,<sup>38</sup> is almost identical with the hand of Stephen, including the curvy *alif*.<sup>39</sup> In the colophon we read that this manuscript was composed by the deacon Michael, the disciple of al-Ṭabarānī at Mar Chariton. The manuscript is dated 901 C.E. Stephen and Michael seemingly belonged to a scribal workshop with a very distinctive scribal practice. There are some differences in the scripts, including the dots on *shīn* that are arranged horizontally in Stephen's hand and in a triangle in Michael's hand. The time difference between "ancient" and "modern" forms of this kind are thus, in isolated cases, clearly minimal. The ornamentation and incipit are also slightly different. Similar or even identical to Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 7, is the hand who copied St Andrews, Ms. 14, which like the London manuscript contains the *al-Jamī'a wujūh al-īmān*,<sup>40</sup> and Birmingham, Mingana Chr. Ar. Add. 140.

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(1985), pp. 23–45. For the dates of these manuscripts, see Swanson, "Some Considerations", pp. 134–136.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Kashouh, *Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, p. 87.

<sup>39</sup> A reproduction of Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 7 (fol. 1r) is available in Meimaris, *Katalogos*, p. 77.

<sup>40</sup> Robert G. Hoyland, "St. Andrews MS 14 and the Earliest Arabic Summa Theologiae", in Wout Jac van Bekkum, Jan Willem Drijvers, Alexander Cornelis Klugkist (eds.), *Syriac Polemics: Studies in Honour of Gerrit Jan Reinink*, col. «Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta» 170 (Leuven : Peeters, 2007), pp. 159–172. The overall style of the hands mentioned so far in this group is quite similar to Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 16 and related manuscripts.

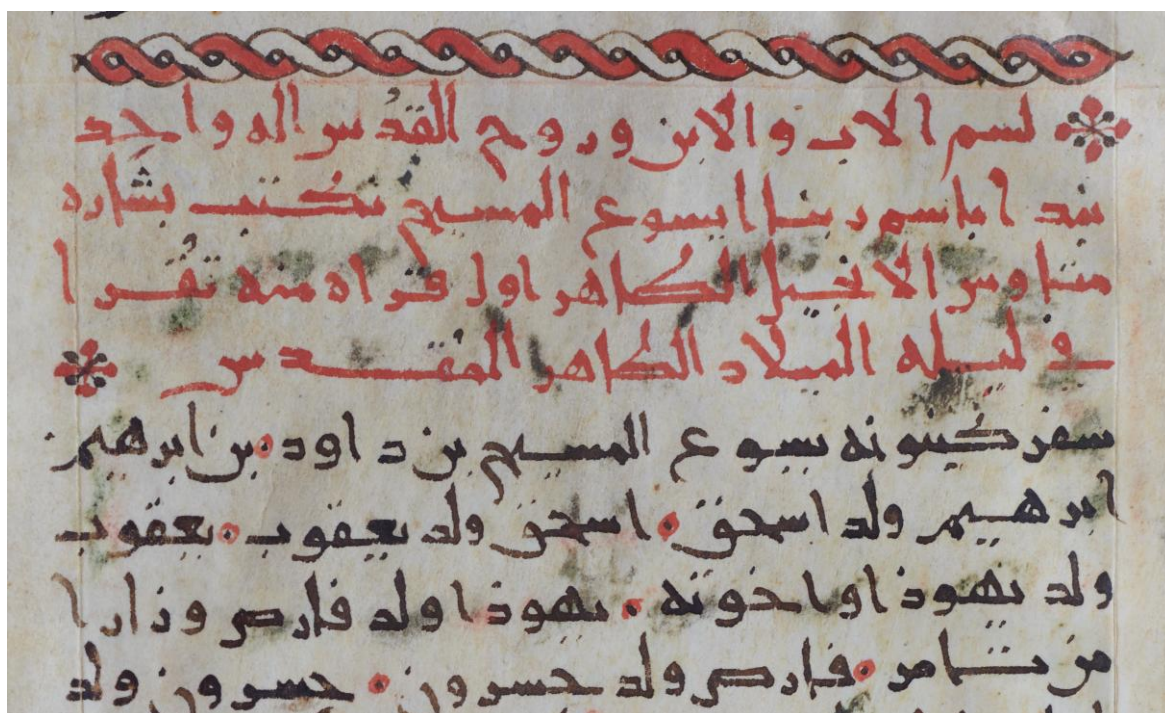


Illustration 10: Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 7 © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

Another manuscript in this category with more ancient letter forms and relatively speaking many cursive features is Sin. Ar. 155, which is continued in London, BL Or. 8612, Munich, BSB, ar. 1071, and Paris, BnF, syr. 378.<sup>41</sup> In line with many early Palestinian manuscripts, the dot on *qāf* is normally placed below the letter, *shīn* resembles the older form, and middle *ʿayn* is written with unconnected top strokes.

<sup>41</sup> Géhin, "Manuscrits sinaïtiques dispersés I", esp. 32–39. The relative old age of this beautifully composed manuscript is supported by the findings of Vevian Zaki, "The Textual History of the Arabic Pauline Epistles: One Version, Three Recensions, Six Manuscripts", in Miriam L. Hjälml (ed.), *Senses of Scripture, Treasures of Tradition: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians and Muslims*, col. «Biblia Arabica: Texts and Studies» 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 392–424.

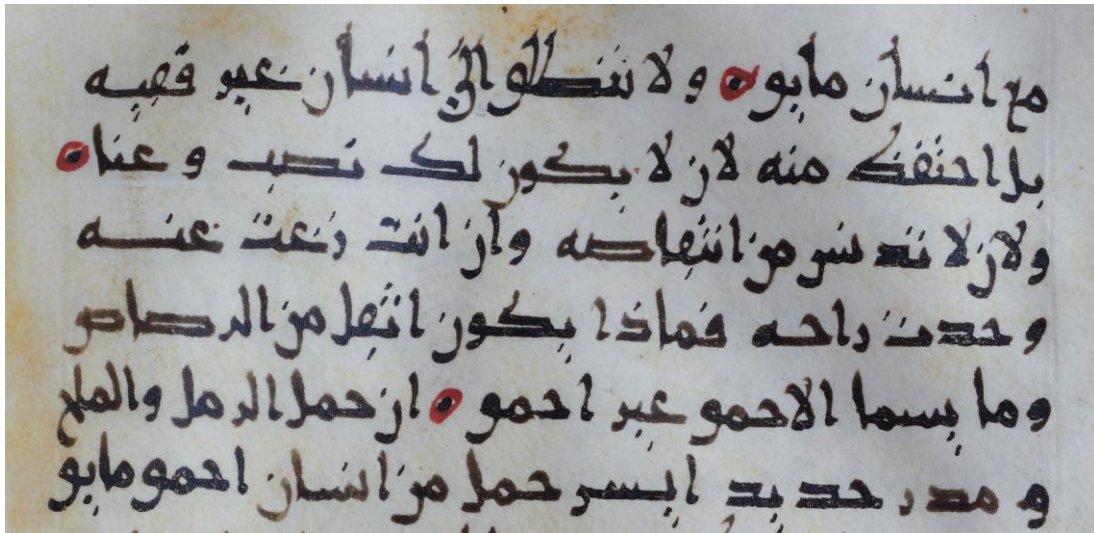


Illustration 11: Sin. Ar. 155, fol. 21v © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

Other manuscripts in this subcategory include Sin. Ar. 1, the earliest version of prophetic Bible books in Arabic, which exhibits both the older and the newer forms of *shīn* and *qāf*;<sup>42</sup> the back binding in Sin. Gr. 34;<sup>43</sup> and Sin. Ar. 75 that seems to be written by the same hand as the back binding in the former. According to its colophon (222r), Sin.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Heinrich L. Fleischer, "Zur Geschichte der arabischen Schrift", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 18, No. 1/2 (1864), pp. 288–291, here p. 291; Monferrer-Sala, "Liber Iob"; Russell A. Stapleton, *An Edition of the Book of Daniel and Associated Apocrypha in Manuscript Arabic 1* (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1989); Miriam L. Hjälms, *Christian Arabic Versions of Daniel: A Comparative Study of Early MSS and Translation Techniques in MSS Sinai Ar. 1 and 2*, col. «Biblia Arabica: Texts and Studies» 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 74–77.

<sup>43</sup> Sin. Gr. 34 contains at least four different Arabic hands: the main Psalm translation rendered in parallel to the Greek script seems to be rendered by at least two different hands, an Arabic text (some kind of commentary) which was re-used as binding support in the back cover and another one (from the Pentateuch) used for the same reason in the front cover. I would like to express my appreciation to Ronny Vollandt for showing me the back binding.

Ar. 75 was composed at Mar Chariton. The script is similar to that found in Sin. Ar. 431.

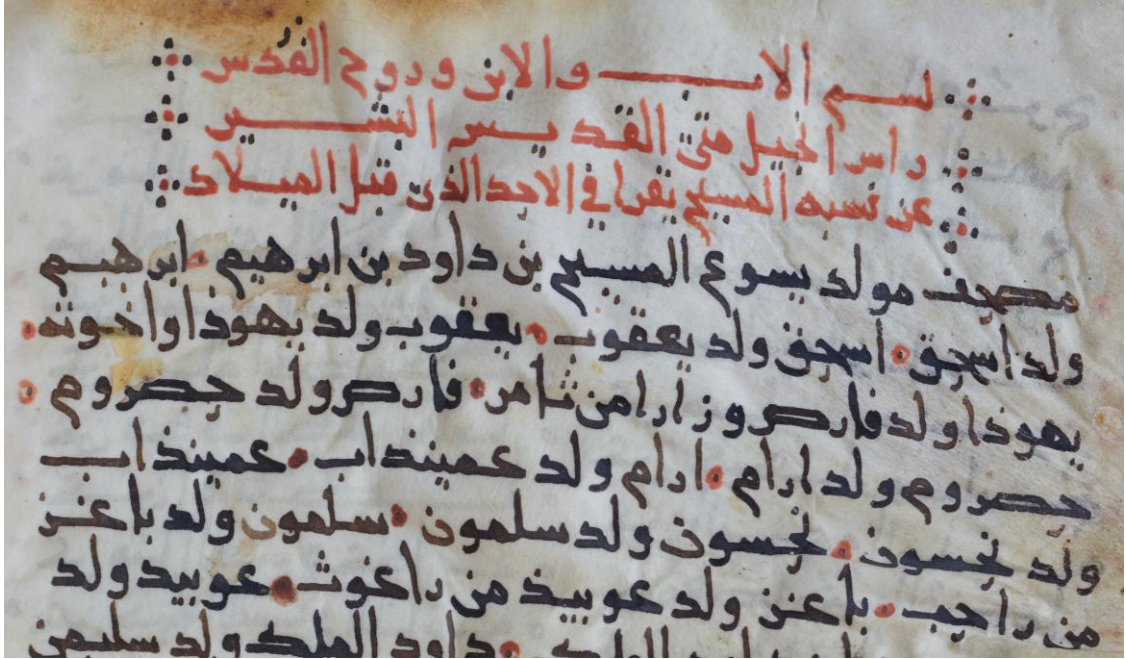


Illustration 12: Sin. Ar. 75, fol. 2v © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

In Group B I also place what appears to be later witnesses of similar styles of writing such as Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 24 and, by the same scribe, the first hand in Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 36; Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 61; and Sin. Ar. NF. Parch. 49; as well as Sin. Gr. 34: Sin. Ar. 74,<sup>44</sup> and arguably the second hand in Sin. Ar. NF. Parch. 1. In addition, Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 15

<sup>44</sup> Kashouh dates Sin. Ar. 74 to the ninth century. He describes it as "old Kufic" and notes that words are sometimes split across two lines or added above the line for justification, see Kachouh, *Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, pp. 86–89. There are no ancient letter forms in it and paleographically, this copy seems to be later, perhaps early tenth century.



and its continuation in Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 64, and the second part of Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 36 by the same scribe, are placed in this category.<sup>45</sup>



Illustration 13: Sin. Ar. 74, fol. 135v © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

<sup>45</sup> The *nūn* in Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 15 and related manuscripts has a special right-leaning form, almost like the number “6”. A very similar or the same hand is found in Paris, BnF, Ar. 6725, 4, see: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8406179n/f39.image>. Accessed 20 June 2020. It is also similar to the Psalter transmitted in Bryn Mawr College Library MS BV 47 (former Zurich, Or. 94) yet the latter has some different (younger) traits, cf. its final *kāf* and its a gamma-like *lā* ligature. It is viewable online: <http://archive.org/details/ArabicPsalterBV47BMCRreduced>. Accessed 6 June 2020. As to Bryn Mawr College Library MS BV 47, it was copied by Buṭrus ibn Yūsuf in 304 AH, i.e. 916–17 C.E., cf. Treiger, “From Theodore Abū Qurra”, p. 20. The beginning of this manuscript is found in Birmingham, Mingana Chr. Ar. Add 137, which Mingana on paleographical grounds dated to 830 C.E., cf. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection*, p. 5.

## Group C

Although we have already encountered some more cursive hands in this category, our last group in particular appears to be a hybrid between semi-angular and New Style scripts. A good representative is Sin. Ar. 70 that displays some typically old features, such as marking *qāf* with a dot beneath the body and three dots horizontally placed on *shīn*. Independent *alif* is written as a straight stroke, sometimes with a small head serif to the left, and similarly initial *lām*, and *ṣād*, *dād* and *kāf* are horizontally extended. Yet the script displays many cursive and round features, including the curvy top stroke on *ṭā'*/*ẓa'*, and most importantly, it tends towards vertical rather than horizontal extension. Kashouh, who classifies the text in Sin. Ar. 70 as the sole witness to family d of Gospel translations, dates it to the early ninth century.<sup>46</sup> There is no paleographical particularity that in my opinion firmly places this hand in the early ninth century though it might very well be a ninth-century script. A similar hand copied Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 12, though there *shīn* has the modern dotting.

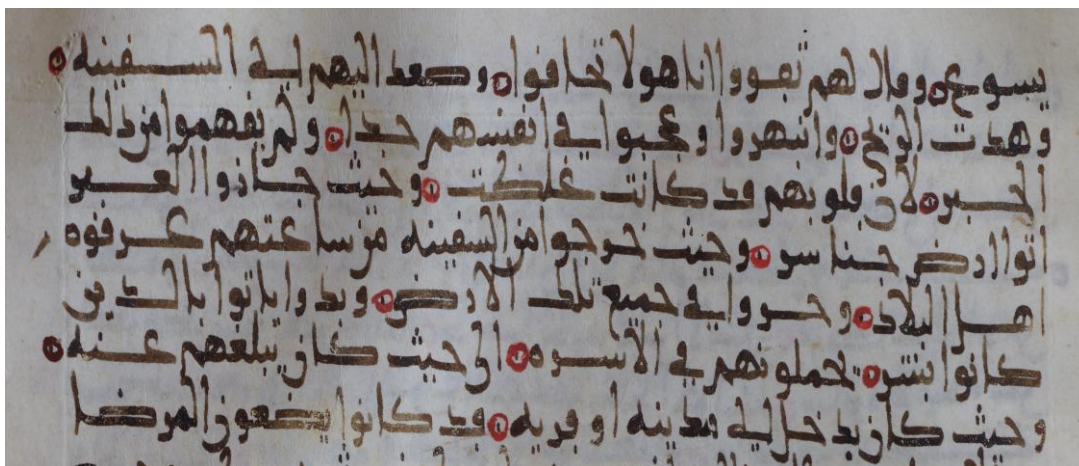


Illustration 14: Sin. Ar. 70, fol. 44r © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

<sup>46</sup> Kashouh, *Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, pp. 123–124.

Into this category, I would also place a manuscript from the Violet collection now only accessible in photographs: the palimpsest Berlin, BBAW-GCS, Akz.-Nr. 481/26-27 and 481/196.<sup>47</sup> In addition, Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 66, dated 903 C.E., arguably belongs here despite its overall similarity with the angular script in A (esp. Sinai, Ar. NF. Parch. 14/16), since the script is about to assume vertical extension and since it lacks old letter forms.<sup>48</sup>

In sum, semi-angular scripts are horizontally extended. Scripts in group A retain a basically angular impression with no or few New Style features and exhibit several typically ancient letter forms though often in combination with the so-called modern form of the same letter. Scripts in group B introduce a number of cursive features and/or round forms into the writing. Some of the scripts exhibit typically ancient features, or two forms of the same letter and, based on the existence of such features, seem to be older than those scripts in the same category which exhibit only so-called modern letter forms. By this logic, Sinai Ar. 155 and Sinai Ar. 1 seem to be older than Sinai Ar. 75 and Sinai Ar. 72 (dated 897 C.E.), though personal style and

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<sup>47</sup> I would like to thank Ronny Vollandt for bringing this manuscript to my attention. The picture at hand was not good enough for a proper assessment though in general the script is “intense” similar to Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 27 in Group A and *qāf* is marked with a dot below the *rasm*. It is nevertheless not as angular as Parch. 27, and some letter shapes are very similar to those in Sin. Ar. 70, including independent *dāl* and final *kāf*, which is on the verge of assuming a New Style shape, whereas other letters resemble later witnesses in Group B, such as Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 24. Early recognition of this manuscript was made by Arianna D’Ottone Rambach, “Frammenti di manoscritti arabi: Una conoscenza Frammentaria”, in Caterina Tristano (ed.), *Per una grammatica dell’al di l. del frammento* (Spoleto: Centro di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo, 2018). See also Miriam L. Hjälm and Ronny Vollandt’s respective articles in the forthcoming volume edited by Arianna D’Ottone Rambach, Konrad Hirschler and Ronny Vollandt, *The Damascus Fragments: Towards a History of the Qubbat al-khazna Corpus of Manuscripts and Documents*, col. «Beiruter Texte und Studien» (Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut).

<sup>48</sup> Its final *kāf* is about to assume a typically New Style shape, though this form is also similar to Hijazi and Early Abbasid scripts, see Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition*, esp. pp. 30–31, 48–52, 142 and 173. For more on this manuscript and related fragments, see Binggeli, “Les Trois David”, pp. 100–106; reproduction of manuscript on p. 116.

professional level of the scripts should also be taken into regard. Finally, scripts in group C tend toward vertical extension but may at the same time contain typically older letter forms and are therefore regarded as hybrids.

## 2. *New Style Scripts*

In quranic copies, the New Style scripts, the precursors to cursive scripts (*naskh*), increasingly replaced Early Abbasid handwriting during the tenth century. As Déroche points out, some New Style scripts were used for non-quranic compositions at least a century before the style was used to produce Qurans and some of its curvy features are traceable to papyri documents dated to the seventh century.<sup>49</sup> This style, also referred to as “Eastern Kufic”, “broken Kufic”, Kufic *naskh*”, “broken cursive”, etc.<sup>50</sup> was mostly used for Quran’s from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries.<sup>51</sup> It retains the angular shapes of the Early Abbasid scripts, yet introduces a well defined cursiveness into the writing. In the Christian corpus, several late ninth-century hands fall into this category. Many manuscripts, which appear to date from the early tenth century onwards, exhibit the basic vertical extension of New Style scripts, yet the typical cursiveness abates. In this study, the New Styles are therefore divided into Cursive Scripts, which represent New Styles proper, and Transitional Scripts, where such cursiveness tends to be replaced by straight strokes but which largely lack the roundness typical of *naskh*.

### 2.1 Cursive Scripts

In this category I place several well-known Bible translations and works by a few scribes known by name. Scripts in this category are characterized by its substantially curvy features, especially an independent *alif* which resembles an inverted “s” or alternatively, a

<sup>49</sup> Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition*, p. 133.

<sup>50</sup> Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts*, p. 167.

<sup>51</sup> See Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition*, pp. 132–135 and the images in the following pages.

nail. The curvy top stroke of *alif* and sometimes of *lām* tends towards the left whereas the vertical stroke on *ṭā'/ẓā'* leans towards the right, which creates a notable movement in the script. Final *kāf* is featured as a horizontal stroke and a vertical shaft, normally without a top stroke. As opposed to the Early Abbasid scripts, the shaft of *ṭā'/ẓā'* is longer than its belly.

An example of this style is the hand of Anthony of Baghdad. Anthony was active at Mar Saba in the ninth century where he copied several manuscripts, two of which are dated: Vatican Ar. 71 and Strasbourg, BNU, Or. 4226, which is continued in three other fragments,<sup>52</sup> dated in 885–6 C.E. As recently shown by Binggeli, Anthony copied a number of other manuscripts as well as, including Sin. Ar. Parch. NF 35.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Saint Petersburg NRL, ar. N.S. 263; Birmingham, Mingana, Ch. Ar. 93 and Ch. Ar. Add. 136 ([http://vmr.bham.ac.uk/Collections/Mingana/part/Christian\\_Arabic/](http://vmr.bham.ac.uk/Collections/Mingana/part/Christian_Arabic/)). Accessed 6 June 2020.

<sup>53</sup> Kate Leeming was the first to connect Sinai Ar. NF Parch. 35 with Anthony: “The Adoption of Arabic as a Liturgical Language by the Palestinian Melkites”, *ARAM* 15 (2003), pp. 239–246. Binggeli notes that it is continued in Sinai Ar. NF Parch. 20, and that the same hand copied Sinai Gr. 35 and its continuation in Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, L 120 sup; and also Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, ar. 1069; Sinai, Ar. 428; and Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, Mingana Arab.Chr. 132 (B), see Binggeli, “Les trois David”, pp. 80–89. The following should probably also be added: Sinai Ar. NF Parch. 21 (lower part of a folio in fragmentary form) and Berlin, BBAW-GCS, Akz.-Nr. 481/28-29, see Miriam L. Hjälms, “From Palestine to Damascus to Berlin: Early Christian Arabic texts from the Qubbat al-Khazna in the Violet Collection”, forthcoming in Arianna D’ottone Rambach, Konrad Hirschler and Ronny Vollandt (eds.), *The Damascus Fragments: Towards a History of the Qubbat al-khazna Corpus of Manuscripts and Documents*, col. «Beiruter Texte und Studien» (Beirut, Orient-Institut Beirut). See also Fleischer, “Beschreibungen”, Tafel 1. On Anthony, see also Sidney H. Griffith, “Anthony David of Baghdad, Scribe and Monk of Mar Sabas: Arabic in the Monasteries of Palestine”, *Church History* 58 (1989), pp. 7–19.

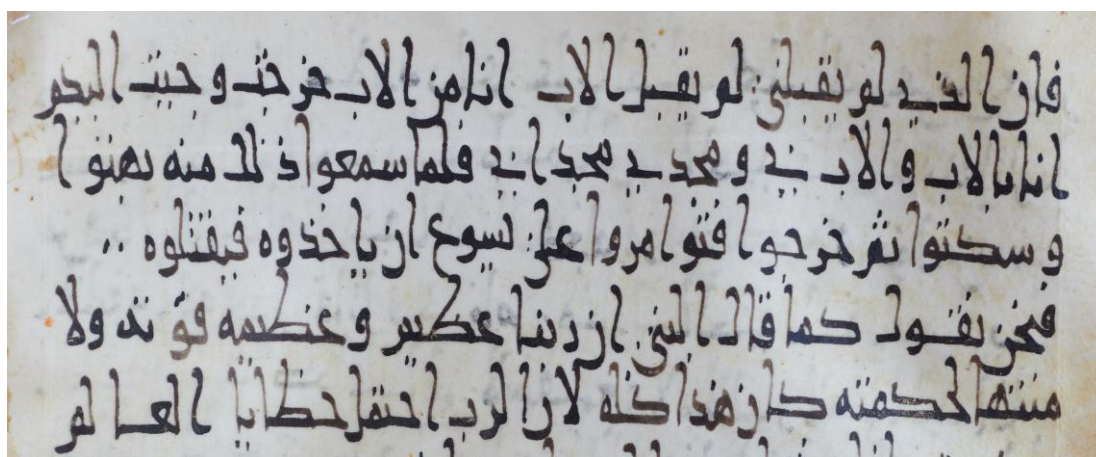


Illustration 15: Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 35 © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

Some special traits of Anthony's include the placing of the two dots in final *yā'* vertically in the end of the word and his way of adding a softly left-leaning head serif on final *lām* and final *kāf*. Binggeli has described the particularities of his hand as well as those of the next scribe to be considered, David of Ashkelon, who was active in early tenth century.<sup>54</sup> The following manuscripts have been written by David: Sin. Ar. 73 which finds its continuation in Paris, BnF 6725/3 dated 902 C.E. or 917–8 C.E.;<sup>55</sup> Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 4 (less carefully copied); and Sin. Ar. 309 dated 909 C.E. or 925–6 C.E.<sup>56</sup> Based on a note in Sin. Ar. 309, it is believed that the manuscript was written in the Anastasis in Jerusalem. Typical features of David include the broad, triangularly shaped bottom line of the *lā* ligature with the two almost straight top strokes with little space in between (though a less marked

<sup>54</sup> Binggeli, "Les trois David", pp. 106–113.

<sup>55</sup> For the later date, see Swanson, "Some Considerations", p. 141. For a reproduction of BnF Ar. 6725/3, see Deroche, "Le Manuscrits", fig. 16. The manuscript is found online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8406179n/f20.image>. Accessed 6 June 2020.

<sup>56</sup> For the later date, see Swanson, "Some Considerations", p. 141. Binggeli also connects Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 4 with David's hand: Binggeli, "Les trois David", p. 110; cf. Géhin, "Manuscrits sinaïtiques dispersés", pp. 28–29.

one is often used as well). The vertical stroke on *kāf* has a sharp bend on its midst, and the vertical stroke on *ṭā/zā* is also bent on the middle with the final part leaning radically towards the left. Whereas final *dāl* in Anthony's hand is angular, this letter is elliptic in David's hand.

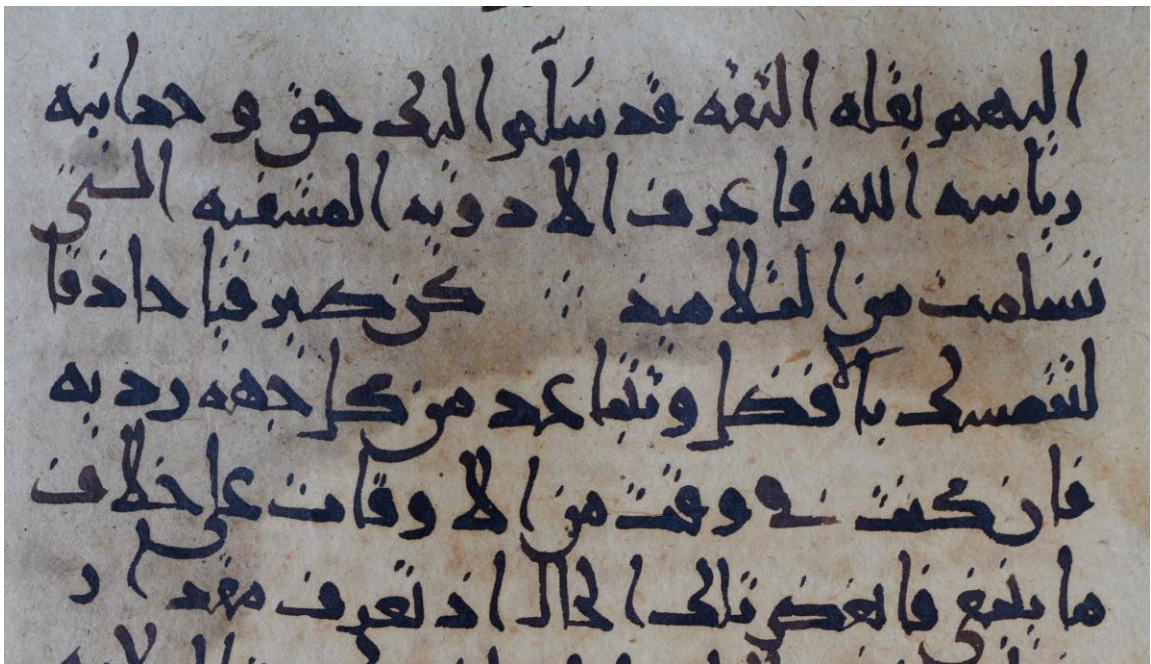


Illustration 16: Sin. Ar. 309, fol. 48r © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

In this category, I also place Saint Petersburg RNL, Ar. 327, which is dated to 892 C.E. and reproduced by Fleischer,<sup>57</sup> as well as its continuation Sin. Ar. NF. Parch. 52.<sup>58</sup> It has been shown that it reflects the East Syriac recension of the Peshitta,<sup>59</sup> and might originate further

<sup>57</sup> Fleischer, "Beschreibungen", Tafel I.

<sup>58</sup> See Vevian Zaki, *The Pauline Epistles in Arabic: Manuscripts, Versions, and Text Transmission*, col. «Biblia Arabica: Texts and Studies» (Leiden: Brill [accepted]).

<sup>59</sup> Franz Delitzsch, "Über eine alte arabische Handschrift des Hebräerbriefes", in Franz Delitzsch (ed.), *Commentar zum Briefe an die Hebräer : mit archäologischen und*

east. This manuscript exhibits typically New Style features in line with the previous two examples, yet the tail of final *nūn* is extensively “bulky.” Furthermore, the stomach of middle *‘ayn* is shaped like a heart. Final *dāl* is in an elliptic form, just as in David’s hand (for a reproduction of Sin. Ar. NF. Parch. 52, see illustration 2 above).

Finally, and with some hesitation, in this category I place Vatican Borg. Ar. 95.<sup>60</sup> It has a largely horizontally written script yet many New Style features, including its typical final *kāf*, and is as such a hybrid between semi-angular scripts (groups B and C) and curvy scripts. Independent *alif* is curvy and middle *‘ayn* has a round top. Independent *wāw* and *fā’* have a more ancient, angular shape with a distinct “eye.” Interestingly enough, *qāf* is marked with a dot above the letter and *fā’* with a dot below, a feature noted in early papyrus documents. As Monferrer-Sala points out, this feature is commonly identified with the Maghribi script although it is in fact attested in Eastern scripts as well.<sup>61</sup> Building on previous research, Kashouh dates this Greek-based Gospel translation to the eighth/ninth century.<sup>62</sup> Judging by the reproduction in Meimaris’ catalogue, the same or a similar hand copied Sin. Ar. NF. Parch. 44, which Kashouh dates to the ninth/tenth century, as well as Sin. Ar. 71 dated to the tenth century, and Fleisher, “Beschreibungen”, Tafel III.<sup>63</sup> At the least, the same way of featuring *qāf* and *fā’* is evident from these reproductions available to me only in black and white. Considering their hybrid forms, and lack of other typically ancient letter shapes, a tenth century provenance seems probable for all these manuscripts although further studies are required.<sup>64</sup>

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*dogmatischen Excursen über das Opfer und die Versöhnung* (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1857), pp. 764–769.

<sup>60</sup> The manuscript is viewable online: [http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Borg.ar.95](http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Borg.ar.95). Accessed 6 June 2020. I decided to place it here rather than in group C above due to its combination of angular and cursive features.

<sup>61</sup> Monferrer-Sala, “Once again”, p. 196.

<sup>62</sup> Kashouh, *Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, p. 87.

<sup>63</sup> Meimaris, *Katalogos*, 93; Kashouh, *Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, pp. 87, 93, 97.

<sup>64</sup> For somewhat similar scripts (not concerning *qāf*), see Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition*, pp. 168–169 and 183.



In sum, cursive hands in the present corpus are idiosyncratic yet they normally share a basic vertical extension of writing and exhibit many New Style, i.e. curvy, features which serve the purpose of embellishing the scripts.

## 2.2 Transitional Scripts

It appears that transitional, semi-cursive scripts developed at the very end of the ninth century and continued to be used during the tenth century, in parallel to New Style hands and to the straight, more round hands (cf. *naskh*). Transitional scripts exhibit varying degrees of cursiveness, yet consistently less so than the cursive hands and display a rather simple style.

George has already noted the similarities between Anthony's hand, Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 1,<sup>65</sup> Strasbourg, University and National Library, Or. 4225 dated 901 C.E. by Thomas of Fustat, the upper Arabic layers on the palimpsests Sin. Ar. 514<sup>66</sup>; Sin. Ar. NF. Parch. 2; Birmingham, Mingana, Chr. Ar. Add. 124; as well as Cambridge University Library, Or. 1287, better known as the Lewis-Mingana Palimpsest where the inferior layer consists of material from the Quran.<sup>67</sup> In this connection, he points out that Vatican Ar. 71 (fol. 236r), which was copied by Anthony of Baghdad from Mar Saba in 885 C.E., was asked

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<sup>65</sup> The first part of Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 1 is similar to Anthony's hand yet lacks the specific way of dotting final *yā'* and some of the elegant curviness of the latter, especially of independent *alif*, the oblique top stroke on *dāl* and the oblique right leaning stroke on *ṭā'* and final *kāf*. It represents a hybrid form of the curvy and transitional scripts and may be placed in either category. See reproduction of the first hand in Meimaris, *Katalogos*, 74. Several of the manuscripts listed in this group fall between these two groups, such as Mingana Chr. Ar. Add. 147 and Chr. Ar. Add. 124, and should be reexamined.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Aziz S. Atiya, "Codex Arabicus (MS S514)", in Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt (ed.), *Homage to A Bookman: Essays on Manuscripts, Books and Printing Written For Hans P. Kraus on His 60th Birthday Oct. 12, 1967* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1967), pp. 75–85; Steven P. Blackburn, *The Early Arabic Versions of Job* (PhD dissertation submitted at the University of St. Andrews, 1998).

<sup>67</sup> George, "Le palimpseste," pp. 406–409; Alba Fedeli, "The Digitization Project of the Qurānic Palimpsest, MS Cambridge University Library Or. 1287, and the Verification of the Mingana-Lewis Edition: Where is Salām?", *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 2 /1 (2011), pp. 100–117.

for by a certain Iṣḥāq from St Catharine, perhaps, he argues, the same Iṣḥāq who left his name on Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 1 “17 years earlier”.<sup>68</sup> The first hand in Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 1 is replaced by a second hand at the end of a quire. The “colophon” which is written by the second hand states that the work was translated from Greek into Arabic in the 2nd *Rabi* 255 *hijra* = 869 C.E. The scribe then draws the attention of the reader both to “the one who translated it” (*fassarahu*) and “to the one who wrote/copied it” (*katabahu*) and states that “the sinner Iṣḥāq” wrote/copied [it] (*kataba*). This could imply a setting in which someone translated the original text orally while another one wrote it down but it could also mean that the date refers to the original translation, not to the extant copy. This is supported by the fact that this note comes in the middle of the codex, not at its end (the end is missing). The second hand, whose script looks like a later representation of Group B in the semi-angular scripts above, might very well have been a close contemporary to Anthony, which strengthens George’s theory that the Iṣḥāq mentioned in Anthony’s copy is the same scribe as that in Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 1. George’s main point here that monks in the area requested copies of books from other monasteries is also important. Such activities underscore the emphasis placed on learning in the Palestinian monasteries and the consequent need of book production and scribal workshops. As noted in his study, several manuscripts in this group appear to be related to Sinai.

In addition to the manuscripts mentioned by George as belonging to this group (Anthony’s hand is placed in the cursive category), the following manuscripts exhibit similar or sometimes the same hands: parts of Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 20; parts of Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 21; Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 22; Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 33; Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 38; Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 47; Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 48; Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 56 (a palimpsest); Sin. Ar. 542; Sin. Ar. 457; Sin. Ar. 460; Sin. Ar. 461; Munich, BSB, Ar. 1068; Munich, BSB, Ar. 1066; Mingana Chr. Ar. 94; Mingana Chr. Ar. Add. 130; Add. 134; Mingana Chr. Ar. Add. 141; Mingana Chr. Ar. Add. 147; Mingana Chr. Ar. Add. 148; Mingana Chr. Ar. Add. 149; Mingana Chr.

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<sup>68</sup> George, “Le palimpseste”, p. 410.

Ar. Add. 150.<sup>69</sup> Peter Tarras has pointed out that many appear to be related to Thomas or his workshop, who often reused writing support.<sup>70</sup> All these fragments seem to belong to only a couple of hands. There are for sure additional witnesses to this category and more research is required on this group in particular. Some of these hands seem to belong to the early tenth century, others resemble Anthony's hand above and are thus hybrids, while yet others may have been composed later during the tenth century.

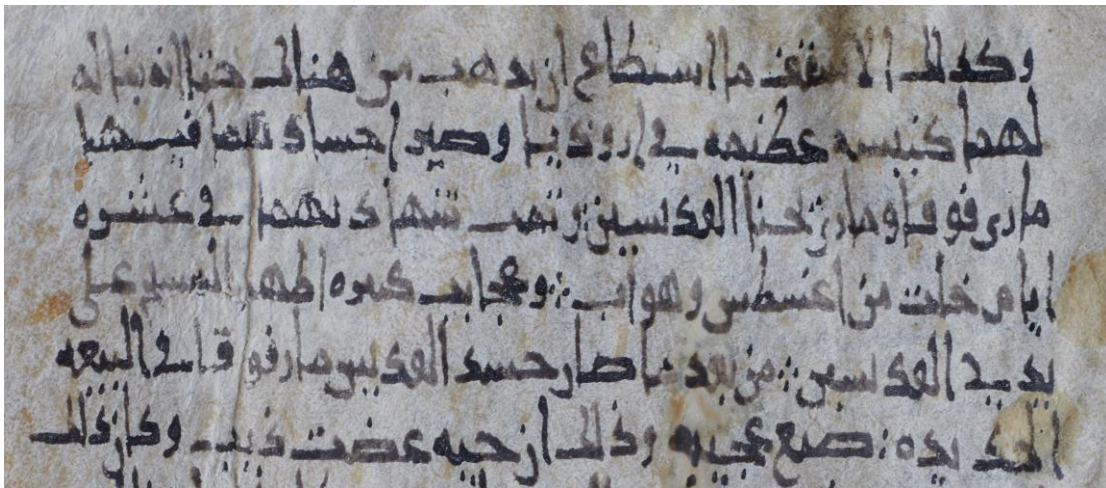


Illustration 17: Sin. Ar. 514, fol. 167v. © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

To conclude, transitional hands retain the vertical extension, sharp-corners, and some of the curviness of the New styles, yet tend toward a more simple script with many straight strokes.

<sup>69</sup> See also Hiersmann, *Katalog 500*, Nb. pp. 14–15 (tafel vi–vii) and also p. 16 (tafel viii).

<sup>70</sup> As presented at a *Biblia Arabica* workshop in Cordoba 2017. See also his blog post “Thomas of Fustat: Translator or Scribe?” and more on some of these findings: <https://biblia-arabica.com/thomas-of-fustat-translator-or-scribe/>. Accessed 11 June 2020.

### 3. Plain Scripts

The last category is what I label “plain scripts,” as their scripts contain neither typical angular shapes nor cursive features. As opposed to transitional scripts, these manuscripts are not copied in a hand which seem to be transitioning away from New Style features, but which is sidelining the introduction of such. It consists of one or possibly two ninth-century manuscripts only, including the oldest dated Christian Arabic text, Sin. Ar. 151. The colophon in this manuscript informs us that the name of the main scribe was Bishr ibn al-Sirrī and that he translated the manuscript from Syriac to Arabic in Damascus in the month of Ramadhan 253 *hijra*, which corresponds to 867 C.E., on behalf of his spiritual brother.<sup>71</sup> Whereas this colophon is often regarded as original to the composition, Joshua Blau questioned this assumption based on its position in the manuscript (it was placed in the end of the Pauline Epistles and not in the end of the complete manuscript).<sup>72</sup> Following Blau, Alexander Treiger has pointed out that the script in Sin. Ar. 151 is similar to that in Sin. Ar. 2, dated to 939/40 C.E. and he argues that the former should be dated to the early tenth century as well.<sup>73</sup>

It is evident that the script in Sin. Ar. 151 does not fit into any of the categories described above and that it does resemble Sin. Ar. 2, which is copied 939/40 C.E. as well as Sin. Ar. 597 dated to the middle

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<sup>71</sup> Staal described, edited and translated the manuscript, see Harvey Staal (ed. and trans.), *Mt. Sinai Arabic Codex 151: II. Acts of the Apostles, Catholic Epistles*, 2 vols. (Louvain: Peeters, 1983–1984). On the scribe, see Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. 2. (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1947), p. 158; Sebastian P. Brock, “A Neglected Witness to the East Syriac New Testament Commentary Tradition, Sinai, Arabic MS 151”, in Rifaat Y. Ebied and Herman G. B. Teule, (eds.), *Studies on the Christian Arabic Heritage: In Honour of Father Prof. Dr. Samir Khalil Samir S.I. at the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), pp. 205–215.

<sup>72</sup> Blau suggested that the colophon was copied, see Joshua Blau, “Über einige christlich-arabische Manuskripte aus dem 9. und 10. Jahrhundert,” in Joshua Blau (ed.), *Studies in Middle Arabic and its Judaeo-Arabic Variety* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988), pp. 311–118, here p. 317 [Originally published in *Le Muséon: Revue d'Études Orientales* 75 (1962), pp. 101–108].

<sup>73</sup> Treiger, “From Theodore Abū Qurra”, p. 40 n.c. and p. 43.

tenth or early eleventh century.<sup>74</sup> What is important here is that at least Sin. Ar. 151 and Sin. Ar. 2 were acquired in Damascus.<sup>75</sup> Thus, this script was used in the Damascus area around the ninth and the tenth centuries. In comparison with the Sinai findings, the script in Sin. Ar. 151 exhibits several “later” trends such as the *gamma*-like *lā* ligature, and further simplification of letter forms but it also displays the more ancient heart shaped middle *ʿayn*. Furthermore, it becomes clear from Muslim hands dated in the ninth century, such as Cairo, Dār al-kutub, ḥadīth 2123 and Dublin, Chester Beatty Library 3494,<sup>76</sup> and from a literary papyrus dated 844 C.E.,<sup>77</sup> that similar features were indeed used in other areas in the ninth century for non-quranic book hands. Thus, I see no reason on paleographical grounds to question that the colophon refers to the copy at hand. As Vevian Zaki has recently shown, both the codicological units of this manuscript as well as the lack of copying mistakes in it, indicate that the text was not copied but is an original composition.<sup>78</sup> Thus, this copy represents the

<sup>74</sup> Treiger has also pointed out the similarities between Sin. Ar. 597 and Sin. Ar. 2 and because of this he re-dated the former from 1002 C.E., a date which may refer to a different hand, to the first part of the tenth century where he also places Sin. Ar. 151, see “From Theodore Abū Qurra,” p. 42 n. 128. There are nevertheless differences in these handwritings; as opposed to the roundly shaped middle *ʿayn* in Sin. Ar. 2 and Sin. Ar. 597, this letter is heart shaped in Sin. Ar. 151. Final *kāf* is normally supplied with an oblique top stroke in Sin. Ar. 2 and Sin. Ar. 597 whereas it lacks such in Sin. Ar. 151. Although the ligature *lā* resembles a Greek *gamma* in both Sin. Ar. 151 and Sin. Ar. 2, it tends to lean rightwards in Sin. Ar. 2 whereas it tends to be straight or even left leaning in Sin. Ar. 151. This ligature has a broad triangular bottom in Sin. Ar. 597.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. the colophons and *waqfiyya* reproduced by Staal, *Mt. Sinai Arabic Codex 151*, v-vi i.e. fol. 186v/187r; Miriam Lindgren Hjälms and Ronny Vollandt, “An Early Copy of the Pentateuch and the Book of Daniel in Arabic (MS Sinai—Arabic 2): Preliminary Observations on Codicology, Text Types, and Translation Technique”, *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 1 (2013), pp. 43–68, here pp. 44, 46–47.

<sup>76</sup> Samples of both are reproduced in Deroche, “Le Manuscrits”, fig. 11 and fig. 12.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. reproductions in Nabia Abbott, “An Arabic Papyrus in the Oriental Institute: Stories of the Prophets”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 5/3 (1946), pp. 169–180, here plates III–IV.

<sup>78</sup> Vevian Zaki, “A Dynamic History: Manuscript Sinai Arabic 151 in the Hands of Scribes, Readers, and Restorers”, *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 11 (2020), pp. 200–259.

earliest dated Christian Arabic Bible manuscript in our possession (though undated manuscripts could of course be older).

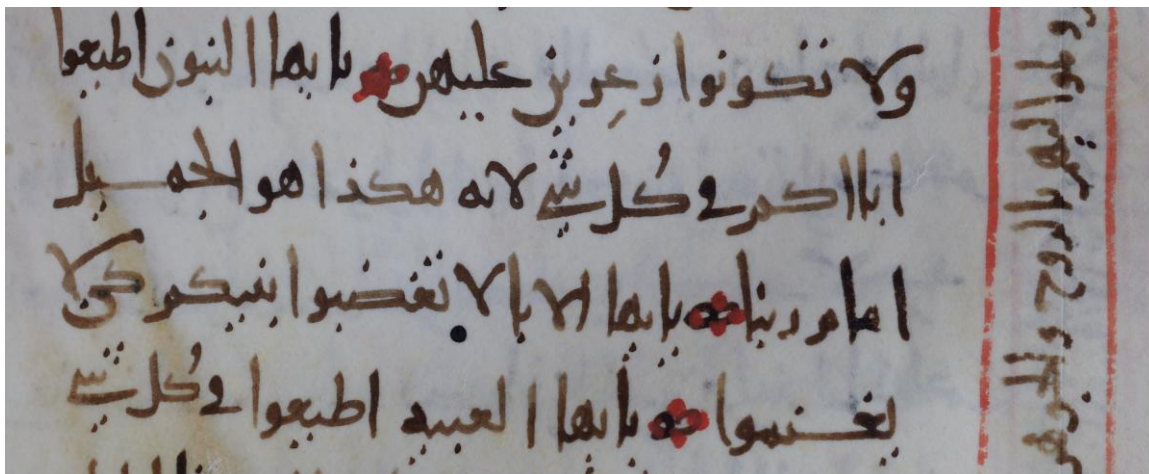


Illustration 18: Sin. Ar. 151, fol. 127v © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

With a certain amount of hesitation, I also place another disputed manuscript here: the early hand who copied the Gospels in Vatican Ar. 13 (fols. 15r-46v; 55r-64r; 75r-86v).<sup>79</sup> As noted by Kashouh, this script does not resemble other Palestinian manuscripts and he claims that its simple style is reminiscent of the ancient Hijazi scripts.<sup>80</sup> According to Déroche, Hijazi scripts were used up to the eighth century and mainly identified by their overall right-leaning script, as

<sup>79</sup> For recent discussions on origin and text type of texts in this manuscripts, see Kashouh, *Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, pp. 142–171; and Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, “The Pauline Epistle to Philemon from Codex Vatican Arabic 13 (Ninth Century CE): Transcription and Study”, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 60/2 (2015), pp. 341–371. See also Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic. The Scriptures of the People of the Book in the Language of Islam* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 50–51 and 114–118. The manuscript is accessible online: [https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Vat.ar.13](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.ar.13). Accessed 6 June 2020.

<sup>80</sup> Kashouh, *Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, pp. 145–147.

described by al-Nadīm in the *Fihrist*.<sup>81</sup> Yet the script in Vat. Ar. 13 leans towards the left.

Kashouh correctly highlights ancient features in this script, including a heart-shaped middle *ʿayn*, an *alif* with a right bent foot at the baseline, the lack of a finishing vertical bend on the *bāʿ* grapheme and, one might add, three horizontal dots on *shīn*. He points out that perhaps the scribe was imitating the text he was copying.<sup>82</sup> In any event, it is uncertain whether these features might take us back to a date around 800 C.E., as argued by Kashouh and others, especially if, as he argues, the script is not of Palestinian provenance and hence should not be compared with styles used in the area. Should we choose to do so however, the most convincingly old feature is the form of *alif*, which we have so far found only in the Angular scripts (1.1). Yet, this practice is upheld mostly in the beginning of a line and elsewhere it is normally featured as a nail, which is common in New Styles. It is also correct that there was no horizontal stroke connecting the two vertical strokes on middle *ʿayn*, neither in Hijazi scripts, nor in Early Abbasid hands.<sup>83</sup> This was usually the case also in Nabatean-Arabic epigraphic material and thus it clearly represents an ancient way of writing.<sup>84</sup> However, the specifically heart-shaped form was, according to Déroche, introduced in the ninth century and is, as we have already seen, attested in dated copies such as Saint Petersburg, RNL, Ar. 327 (892 C.E.) and Sin. Ar. 151 (867 C.E.).<sup>85</sup>

The manuscript contains several different hands.<sup>86</sup> The two earliest hands once change on the *recto* and *verso* of the same folio (fol. 64r-v),

<sup>81</sup> Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition*, pp. 27–33.

<sup>82</sup> Kashouh, *Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, pp. 145–147.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition*, 28. In some Christian Arabic manuscripts not *ʿayn* but the *ḥāʾ* grapheme in middle and final positions assumes a heart-shaped form: Mss Sin. Ar. N.F. Parch. 7 (dated 901); pp. 8, 45 and 151.

<sup>84</sup> Beatrice Gruendler, *The Development of the Arabic Scripts: From the Nabatean Era to the First Islamic Century According to Dated Texts*, col. «Harvard Semitic Studies» 43 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), pp. 76–79.

<sup>85</sup> For the introduction of a heart-shaped *ʿayn* in the ninth century, see Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition*, p. 135.

<sup>86</sup> Kashouh, *Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, p. 145, n. 47.

which indicates that these hands operated jointly.<sup>87</sup> Since the second early hand copying the Epistles seemingly represents a later witness of the semi-angular scripts with no specifically ancient letter shapes and since the only really old feature in the Gospels, i.e. an *alif* with a right bent foot, is not consistently executed, it seems reasonable to me to assume that both these scribes were active in the early tenth century. Interestingly enough, Sara Schultess has recently suggested that the codex was copied in Homs,<sup>88</sup> and a Syrian provenance may indeed explain its hybrid form of New Style features and more simple, plain style. That the Epistle hand is reminiscent of Palestinian scripts should not be very surprising, since a Palestinian monk could easily have resettled in Syria, or the other way around, given that these scripts were geographically confined at all.

#### *Concluding Words*

As we have seen, several New Style manuscripts are dated in the first decade(s) of the tenth century and a dated parchment manuscript roughly belonging to the semi-angular scripts in the British Library (Or. 5008) is dated 917 C.E.<sup>89</sup> Thus, these styles continued to be used in the tenth century, yet they increasingly gave way to simpler, round (*naskh*) hands.

Judged by surviving dated manuscripts, there appears to be a shift from parchment to paper as the most common writing material

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. Kashouh, *Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, pp. 146–147. The two later hands always begin on a new quire which indicates that they are later additions.

<sup>88</sup> Sara Schultess, *Les manuscrits arabes des lettres de Paul: État de la question et étude de cas (1 Corinthiens dans le Vat. Ar. 13)*, col. «Biblia Arabica: Texts and Studies» 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 177–179.

<sup>89</sup> Although the older form of final *kāf* is not used as the only form, mixed writings of the word *al-malik* “the king” appears in the tenth century Sin. Ar. 513 and in the tenth–eleventh century Oxford, Bodl. Libr., Fraser 257. On this practice, see Geoffrey Khan, *Arabic Documents From Early Islamic Khurasan* (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2014), p. 29. The practice of representing final *kāf* in two different forms was long-lived as it is also found in the fourteenth-century Paris, BnF, Ar. 23/Copenhagen, Ar. 76 (A). Bengt Knutsson, *Studies in the Text and Language of Three Syriac-Arabic Versions of the Book of Judicum with Special Reference to the Middle Arabic Elements: Introduction, Linguistic Notes, Texts*. (Leiden: Brill, 1974), Plate 1 and 3.



around 920 C.E.<sup>90</sup> In our corpus, all manuscripts dated before the early tenth century are written on parchment: Sin. Ar. 151 dated 867 C.E.; Sin. Ar. N. F. Parch. 16 dated 873 C.E.; London, BL, Or. 4950 dated 876–7 C.E.; St. Petersburg, NRL, Ar. 327 dated 892 C.E.; Sin. Ar. 72 dated 897 C.E.; Sin. Ar. N. F. Parch. 7 dated 901 C.E.; Sin. Ar. 73/Paris, BnF 6725 dated 902 or 918 C.E.; Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 66 dated 903 C.E.; and London, BL, Or. 5008 dated 917 C.E. In contrast, many manuscripts dated subsequent to 920 C.E. are written on paper, including Sin. Ar. 2 dated 939/40 C.E.; Sin. Ar. 116 dated 995 C.E.; and Sin. Ar. 139 dated 988 C.E. Nevertheless, parchment continued to be used to a certain extent, especially for palimpsests.

Many of the parchment manuscripts in Meimaris' catalogue that fall outside of the categories discussed above display notably softer features and might belong to the first half of the tenth century as well. There are a number of such manuscripts among the New Finds that appear to have been copied by the same or a similar hand: Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 18; 19; 39; 42; 43; 45.

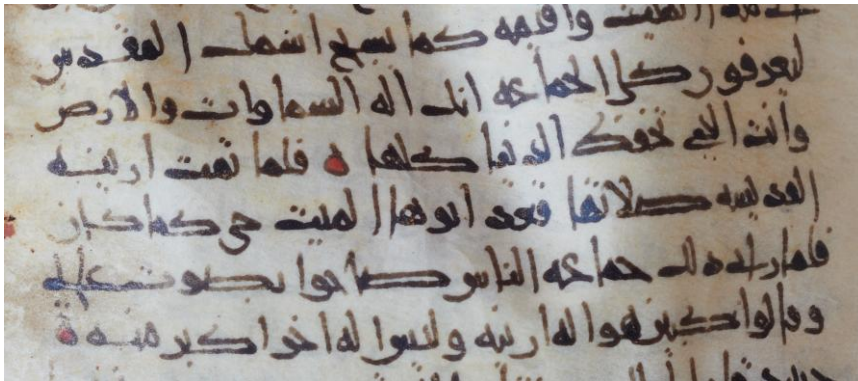


Illustration 19: Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 19 © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo by courtesy of Fr. Justin.

<sup>90</sup> As paper is less costly than parchment, the writing naturally became more spacious which effects the overall impression of the writing. For instance, in Sin. Ar. 1, which is written on parchment, each page measures around 23x16 cm and contain 24–25 lines of writing. In the slightly larger-sized Sin. Ar. 2 written on paper each page measures 27 x 16, 5 cm but contains only 15–20 lines.