

# THE GLORIOUS QUR'AN

From Revelation To Recitation & Beyond

*INCLUSION OF DOTS & MARKS  
TO FACILITATE RECITATION*

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## STEPS TAKEN TO FACILITATE RECITATION

When the Qur'an was being revealed, it would immediately be written. The letters were empty of dots. The Arabs were sufficiently skilled in their language to be able to discern the letters without dots, also using the context of the writing. Some have written that the use of dots was considered a sign of weakness and ignorance of the language. It was considered an insult if someone received a letter with dots. A total of 18 letters were used to pronounce the 29 letters of the Arabic alphabet as we know it today.

The Ummah reached a consensus that it is not permissible to write the text of the Holy Qur'an in any manner other than the Uthmani script. Consequently, from then on all transcripts of the Qur'an were written in accordance with this Uthmani script, and the companions and their successors prepared and circulated copies of the Qur'an on a vast scale using it.

But the script of these Qur'anic transcriptions was still free of dots and diacritical marks that made it difficult for non-Arabs to recite them freely. As Islam spread far and wide in non-Arab countries, it was felt that dots and diacritical marks should be included so that people could recite the text easily. Several steps were taken to achieve this purpose, a short history of which is given below.

## INCLUSION OF DOTS

It was not customary amongst early Arabs to place dots on letters. Scribes simply wrote words without any markings. Readers were so accustomed to this style that they experienced no difficulty in reading the dot-less writings and could easily distinguish between doubtful letters by reference to the context. In fact, it was often considered to be an insult to include dots in writing.

The renowned historian Mada'ini has quoted someone as saying, "To include numerous dots in writing should amount to suspicion about (the comprehension of) the addressee." (*Subh al-A'sha by Qalqashandi*)

Hence the transcripts of Hazrat Uthman رضي الله عنه were devoid of any dots, and apart from prevalent custom, this exclusion's primary purpose was also to incorporate all the mass-transmitted recitals in the script. Later, however, dots were placed on letters for the convenience of non-Arabs and less educated Muslims.

## WHO PLACED THE DOTS?

Reports differ as to who was the first to place dots on the Qur'anic manuscript. Some reports claim that the feat was first accomplished by Abul-Aswad al-Du'ali (al-Burhan 1:250, al-Itqan 2:171). Some say that he did it on the instructions of Sayyiduna Ali ؑ. Still others say that the Governor of Kufah, Ziyad bin Abi Sufyan requested him to do so (Subh al-A'sha 3:155). There are also reports that state that 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan asked him to do it (al-Itqan 2:171). There is yet another report that Hajjaj bin Yusuf order it done with the help of Hasan al-Basri, Yahya bin Ya'mur, and Nasr ibn 'Asim al-Laythi.

*(Tafsir al-Qurtubi)*

Some scholars believe that no concept of dots existed before the compilation of the Qur'anic script. But Allamah Qalqashandi (arguably the most renowned researcher in the art of script and writings) refuted this claim and proved that dots had been invented long beforehand. According to one report, the inventors of the Arabic writing script were Muramar ibn Murrah, Aslam ibn Sidrah, and 'Amir ibn Jadarah of the tribe of Bulan.

Muramar invented the shapes of the letters, Aslam laid down the methods for breaking and combining the words and letters, and 'Amir founded the dots. (Subh al-A'sha 3:12) Yet another report claims that credit for the first utilisation of dots goes to Abu Sufyan ibn Umayyah, the grandfather of Abu Sufyan ibn Harb, who had learnt them from the people of Ambar (Ibid). Thus, dots were invented much earlier than the compilation of the Qur'anic transcripts but they were kept free of them for various reasons. Whoever placed dots on the Qur'anic letters was not the inventor of dots. He was simply the first person to use them in the Quranic script.

## DIACRITICAL MARKS

In the beginning, like dots, the Qur'an was also free of diacritical marks (Fathah, Kasrah, and Dammah). Historical reports differ as to who was the first to use them. Some claim they were first utilized by Abu 'l-Aswad al-Du'ali. Others give credit to Hajjaj ibn Yusuf who they say had appointed the task to Yahya bin Ya'mur and Nasr bin 'Asim al-Laythi (Tafsir al-Qurtubi). Keeping in view all the reports in this connection, it appears that diacritical marks were first invented by Abul-Aswad al-Du'ali but these diacritical marks were different from how they exist today. Instead of the short vowel “a” (Fathah), he would place a dot over the letter. For the short vowel “i” (Kasrah) he would place a dot under the letter, and for the short vowel “u” (Dammah) he would place a dot in front of the letter. To represent

nunation (Tanwin) he would use two dots (Subh al-A'sha 3:160). Later on, Khalil ibn Ahmad founded signs for the glottal stop (Hamzah) and doubling (Tashdid) (Al-Itqan 2:171, Subh al-A'sha).

Afterwards, Hajjaj bin Yusuf requested Yahya bin Ya'mur, Nasr bin 'Asim al-Laythi, and Hasan al-Basri to place both the dots and diacritical marks on the Quranic letters. On this occasion the present forms of diacritical marks were chosen rather than the use of dots so that they would not be confused with the intrinsic dots of the letters. And Allah knows best.

*(An Approach to the Qur'anic Sciences' by Mufti Taqi Usmani and 'Ma'ariful Qur'an' by Mufti Muhammad Shafi Usmani Rabimabullah – from Ilmgate)*





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