

The Calligraphy of the Holy Qur'an
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Abstract:

Introduction:

Muslims paid utmost attention to the calligraphy and decoration of the Qur'an because writing the Qur'an is an act of worship and obedience to gain reward. A tradition by Prophet Mohammed reads as: "Whoever recites a letter from the Qur'an, gets a Hasanah and each one equals ten; I would not say that a preposition which is made up of three characters is one letter; rather, it is three letters" (Sahih Attarmizi). If this is the case when reading the Qur'an, then how would it be when someone writes verses well? The Prophet paid much attention from the very beginning to the importance of writing the Quran and urged his companions who were able to write to scribe it down. At the same time, he forbade his companions from writing anything he tells them other than Qur'an.

The direction by the Prophet was not restricted merely to writing down the verses, but he also directed them to write these verses in a stylish shape as this conveys the meaning of the written text easily and leaves a strong impact on the reader. It is reported that the Prophet said "The good handwriting adds clarity to the truth (Qur'an)" (Musnad Alferdaws). It was narrated that the Prophet peace be upon him said to Muawiyabin AbiSufyan (d. 680), who was one of the people who wrote down the Qur'an after the Prophet received the Revelation; "Prepare your pen and write down In the Name of Allah the most Compassionate the Merciful in a very beautiful way" (Adab Alimlaa).

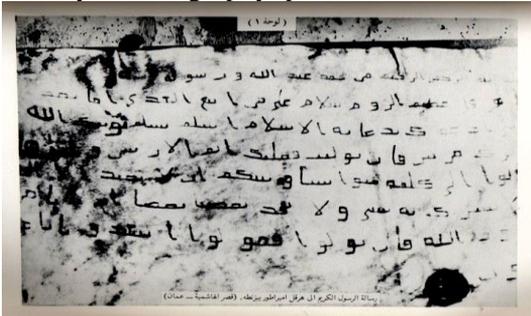
Moreover, the prophet pointed out that a good handwriting could be a reason for acquiring Allah's satisfaction leading to winning Paradise. There is a tradition reported that the Prophet says "He who handwrites In the Name of Allah the most Compassionate the Merciful in a very beautiful way will win forgiveness" (Tuhfat Alishraq). At that time, the handwriting of the companions were not very good (Figure 1), their writing instruments were not of the desired quality, and the materials on which the Qur'an was written at the time of the Prophet was different.

At the beginning, the Qur'an was written on pieces of skin, palm date leaves, shoulder bones taken from sheep and camels, and sometimes on thin delicate stones. Using special materials for writing such as paper was not widely known in Makkah and Madinah at that time (Studies in the History of Calligraphy).

Memory was the first instrument for storing the texts of the Qur'an. Allah says "Chant the Quran rhythmically." (Almuzzamel, verse:4) The only way for the Prophet to convey the texts of the Quran to his companions was to recite them. Allah says: "Recite what is revealed to you of the Scripture". (Alankaboot, verse:45). Reciting here is understood as the oral narration which was the first and basic way of keeping and disseminating the texts of the Qur'an.

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Simultaneously, the Prophet paid attention to writing down the Quran as a way of keeping it from changing or loss that may affect memory (Studies in the History of Calligraphy, p.23).



(Figure1)

The idea of the Mushaf (a group of papers bonded together in a volume or book, henceforth will be referred to as manuscript) was not known at the time of the Prophet. Although the term Suhuf (papers) has recurred in the Qur'an, it was only during the reign of the Caliphs that it started to be used practically when Abu Baker Al-Siddiq (d. 634) and Omar Bin Al-Khattab (d. 644) appointed Zaid bin Thabet (d. 660) to copy the whole Quran on papers and combine those papers in a manuscript (Alburhan fi Ouloom Al-Qur'an 1/327). This was the first time the whole Quran was combined in one manuscript on parchment.

The form of the Quran scribing at that time is unknown, but there are brief descriptions of the ways that Uthman bin Affan (d. 656) ordered to write volumes to be distributed to the different Islamic regions so that they will all have one unified form of the calligraphy of the Qur'an (Manahil Alirfan fi Ouloom Al-Qur'an). This way of writing was known as the Othmany calligraphy (taken from the name of Othman). Each copy of Quran was known as Al-Mushaf Al-Imam (the leader Mushaf)

(Studies in the History of Calligraphy p.43). The style used in writing these copies was described as Jalil Mabsoot (Almunjed p.43). Later, these two terms became two ways of writing. Al-Jalil, which means the great or the big, was classified as the style that is written in large sizes on the largest size of paper or the style that could be used for large building writings (Mansour p 33-34). Al-Mabsoot, however, is the kind of style that does not have round strokes and is more rigid than curved as its letters are written with horizontal and vertical strokes with rounded lines. It is mainly dominated by stiff/yabis characteristics (Mansour, p.34).

Ali bin Khalaf (d. 1045) divided the styles of writing into two main types: the first one is called Al-Muhaqqaq. This one was used for writing Sultanate (formal) documents and other important content. The other style is called Al-Mutlaq which was used by the public among each other (Khalaf p 126). Al-Muhaqqaq was derived from and similar to the aforementioned style Al-Jalil in which a copier needs patience and more care because he does high-value

writing. Al-Mutlaq style; which has also been called the circular and the soft, fits the fast writing used in daily writing.

Since the circular Mutlaq style is written quickly with less care and elegance. This does not fit writing the Qur'an. The need for a style of calligraphy for scribing the Qur'an with all possible accuracy, which at the same time suits the greatness of the Qur'an and the excellence of Allah's words, became inevitable. The issue of clarity is required in the Qur'anic calligraphy to achieve the clarity of the truth that can not be misunderstood (Figure 2) (Mansour, p.32).



(Figure 2)

The adaption of the Qur'an as a daily life axis for the Islamic community in addition to the early codification of the Qur'anic text led to a far reaching educational revolution. Reading and writing have been considered as part of the religion. After less than a hundred years after the death of the Prophet, the Qur'an was copied everywhere from North Africa to India. This happened because every Muslim was eager to have his own copy of the Qur'an and more copies were needed for Mosques.

In addition, the production of a copy of the Qur'an was taken as an act of faith regardless of whether the line system used follows the standardized rules or not. Some of the pious scribes/ believers and copiers/ devoted their whole lives for copying the Qur'an. In many cases, the writer or scribe indicated the number of copies he had done at the end of the mushaf. Resources mention names of copiers who had copied the Quran tens of times (The History and Art of the Arabic Calligraphy p 171-175).

It has been agreed to call the calligraphy that has been used during the first three Hijri Centuries as the kufi script. Though this term is not accurate scientifically speaking, it had been commonly used in the different resources that studied the development of the Qur'an calligraphy and it was impossible to get rid of it.

Ibn Al-Nadeem (d. about 995) was among the first scholars to discuss the calligraphy of the Qur'an/ in his book Kitab al-Fihrest. He listed a group of those styles including: the Makki, the Madani, the Kufi, and the Basri (Ibn Al-Nadeem, p 16-17). Abu Hayyan Al-Tawhidi (d. 1023) mentioned twelve different styles of writing the Qur'an (Risalah fi Ilm Alkitabah p. 38). However, none of them; Ibn Al-Nadeem and al-Tawhidi included examples of these styles of writings.

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This stage of writing the Qur'an had been known as the rigid style or the balanced writing, which remained dominant in the copying of the holy Qur'an until the Fourth Hijri Century/the tenth Century AD (Mustapha p.19-21). In this Century, some copies of the Qur'an appeared that could be said to be written using the soft calligraphy or the proportioned style whose development is attributed to Ibn Muqlah Alwazeer (d. 939) (Aljbouri, p.115). Among the most well-known Qur'an copies at this stage is the one copied by the famous calligrapher Ali Bin Hilal who is also known as Ibn Al-Bawwab (d. 1022). He made this copy in the year 1000 and it is now kept in Chester Betty Library in Dublin. This mushaf is one of the sixty four copies that IbnAl-Bawwab copied during his life-time according to the resources (Figure 3) (Aljbouri, p.225).



(Figure 3)

Many styles of writing were used in copying Qur'an at this stage, but the most widely used were Muhaqqaq, Rayhan, and Naskh. Most of these scripts were used to copy religious and non-religious texts. It could be said that Muhaqqaq and Rayhan were designated for copying Qur'an and Naskh was used for copying non-religious texts. Curved styles are faster to write than the Kufi style. Moreover, a page written using a curved style like Rayhan, for example, is capable of accommodating more lines and in turn more text. It is also more suitable to show Arabic diacritics.

The afore-mentioned Qur'an manuscript which was copied by Ibn Al-Bawwab was written in Rayhan script which is a smaller version of Muhaqqaq. There had been an attitude from the very beginning to copy Quran in large style. A saying attributed to Imam Ali reads as: "Mushafs should not be written in small scripts" (Al-Sajistani p.308). Caliph Omar bin AL-Khattab also compiled large Qur'an manuscripts and disliked copying Qur'an in small scripts (Sayouti 2/375).

This is because Allah's words are expressive and have to be written clearly to serve this purpose. Thus, Qur'an copiers tended to use Muhaqqaq style which main concern is to pay utmost care while executing letters. Al-Twahidi explains the idea of Muhaqqaq by saying: "The clarity in writing letters showing all the specific details of each letter whether long or short, connected or disconnected, or open and curved...etc" (Abu Hayyan Al-Tawhidi p.31). Muhaqqaq is the script that best fulfills these conditions and therefore it had become the most widely-used in copying the Qur'an.

Ibn Al-Bawwab with his outstanding gift had been among the most important promoters of the proportioned script. Despite the fact that not much had been mentioned about his style of calligraphy, his biography in resources indicate how distinguished his style was and that he was the master of his time in this field. Moreover, no one could challenge his style of handwriting. In addition to his famous Qur'an manuscript, his calligraphy heritage includes the divan of Salamah Ibn Jandal (d. 600) which he copied in Ash'ar style which is very close in style to Muhaqqaq and Rayhan and to a lesser degree to Thuluth and Naskh (Mustapha p.178).

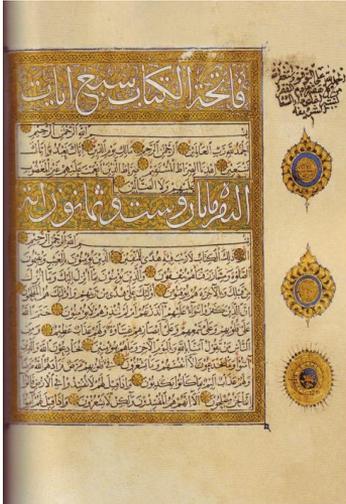
This divan is kept in Top kappi in Istanbul (under registration number, Baghdad, 125). The proportioned styles started to gradually replace the rigid horizontal styles which had been used to copy the Quran in the early times. Religiously speaking, nothing opposed this as long as the style used shows the greatness and beauty that corresponds to the Qur'anic text and God's words. The most important thing after all is keeping the Qur'anic text and copying it accurately, sincerely, and clearly.

Muhaqqaq style proved to be highly effective in copying the holy Qur'an not only in the early stage when it expressed the concept of the well-done and high quality calligraphy, but also during the stage of the attributed calligraphy when Muhaqqaq succeeded in keeping its name and function as the style used to copy the Qur'an. Though, it appeared in a new style which was of no less dignity and prestige than that it had during the stage of the balanced calligraphy (Mansour, p.39-40).

Ibn Al-Bawwab's style had been dominant throughout the Islamic world until the appearance of the famous Yaqut Al-Musta'simi (died 698/1298) (Ibn Khatheer). At his beginnings, Yaqut followed Ibn Albawwab style in his copying, but he then developed his own calligraphy style that was peculiar to him (Alzahabi, p.373) (Figure 4). The appearance of Yaqut's style did not mark the end of Ibn Al-Bawwab's style, but it replaced it in Baghdad and the Eastern Part of the Islamic world.

At the same time, Ibn Albawwab's style continued to be used in Cairo, Damascus, and Mosel (Mansour, Sacred Script, p.51). Yaqut's style; which mainly depends on placing the pen in 90° angle, endowed his style with a glimpse of delicacy and beauty. Letters written with this style are very elegant and dynamic, whereas Ibn Al-Bawwab's style which is characterized by strength and stability requires less inclination in the angle than that of Yaqut's. This led Ibn Al-Bawwab's letters and his followers' to be bigger and bolder (Mansour Sacred Script, p.74).

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(Figure 4)

Many wonderful and well executed manuscripts of the Qur'an have seen light using these two styles of calligraphy. Ibn Al-Bawwab's style was used to copy the giant manuscripts of the Quran at the time of Mamluks. It would be enough to mention the two manuscripts that were made for the same Prince; Olygato Gouldbendah Alelkhani (ruled 1304-1316). He ordered Ali bin Mohammed Al-Hussainy Al-Musily (died?) to write a manuscript of the Qur'an for him. Al-Hussainy completed the manuscript using crashed gold following Ibn Albawwab's style.

The result was a magnificent manuscript in terms of elegance and perfection (Figure 5). The same Prince also asked Ahmed bin Al-Suharwardi (died 710/1310), a student of Al-Musta'simi to copy a manuscript of the Qur'an for him. He copied it following the style of his teacher Yaqut. This manuscript is also one of the most speculated manuscripts of the Quran copied in Muhaqqaq (Figure 6) (different copies of these mushafs can be seen in Lings, Martin, Splendors of Qur'an Calligraphy And Illumination (2005), Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation, Thames & Hudson).



(Figure 7)

The Sizes of the Mushaf Manuscripts

Though the companions of the Prophet disliked copying the Qur'an in small sizes (Al-Sajistani p.309), there had been no regulation for the size of copying the Qur'an. The Qur'an has been copied in different sizes. Some of them were copied in very small sizes using al-Ghubar style (Figure 8).

Others were written in giant sizes especially during the reign of the Mamluks. Kadi Ahmed tells us in his book "Calligraphers and Painters" that the Syrian calligrapher Omar Uktah made a tiny copy of the Qur'an using the Ghubar script for the Sultan Timur. This manuscript was as small to fit in glove of a ring but the Sultan did not care about it and refused to accept it. Omar Uktah made another giant monumental size manuscript of the Qur'an. A line in this manuscript is as long as an arm, and needs a carriage to carry it. When the Sultan heard about this, he went out to receive and celebrate him among a prestigious crowd and said to him" this is how it should be" (Qadi Ahmad, Calligraphers and Painters, p.64) (Figure 9).



(Figure 8)



(Figure 9)

The Format of the Mushaf Manuscripts

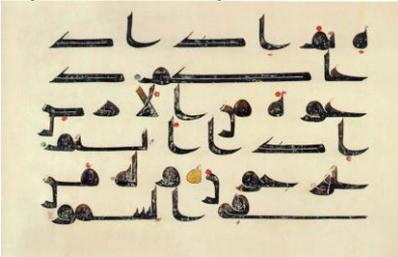
The early manuscripts of Qur'an were copied in a portrait shape. There are leaves in the collection of the British Library that are thought to belong to the second Hijri century/tenth AD. This manuscript was copied in an inclined vertical script called ma'il (Figure 10).



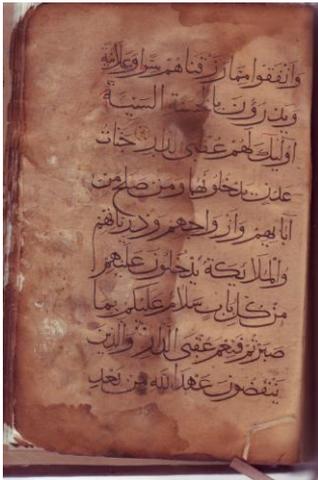
(Figure 10)

Then for unknown reasons manuscripts turned to be copied in the landscape format (Figure 11) until the Fourth Hijri Century/the Tenth AD when it returned to the old portrait shape and it is still copied in the same way (JAMES, DAVID: Qur'ans and bindings from the Chester Beatty Library, p.13) (Figure 12).

The early manuscripts had odd numbers of lines in each page. This style was also common in copying the Qur'an during the Mamluks and the Ottoman times. Though, at the times of the Abbasid, manuscripts pages included both odd and even numbers of lines like Baibars manuscripts and other early manuscripts copied in kufi script in even number of lines in each page.



(Figure 11)



(Figure

12)

Writing Ink

Black ink was used to copy the Qur'anic text, and sometimes brown ink is used too. Liquid gold is also used in copying some luxurious manuscripts of the Qur'an. The gilded text is usually surrounded with black lines to strengthen the color of gold. Copying with gold has been known since the 1st Hijri Century/7th AD. Ibn Al-Nadim mentions the writings of the gilded mosaic on the Qiblah wall of the Prophet's mosque from al-Shams sura (the sun) until the end of the Qur'an which were done by Khalid Bin al-Hayyaj (Ibn Al-Nadeem, p.17). Another example of this includes the writings below the dome of the Mosque of the Holy Rock. These writings are still there.

At the manuscripts level, Ibnal-Nadim mentions that Caliph Omar bin Abdulaziz (ruled 717-770) asked Khalid bin al-Hayyaj to make a gilded copy the Qur'an for him. Khalid made a very elegant manuscript that the Caliph liked very much but he thought that it cost much and he sent it back to Khalid (Ibn Al-Nadeem, p.17). Because this kind of manuscripts is very expensive, it is usually made upon request from a prince, a governor, or a very wealthy person. Libraries keep very unique copies of gilded manuscripts like the one copied by Ali bin Zaid al-Husainy for Sultan Uljaytu (James, David, Qur'ans of the Mumluks, figures: 68-72) (Figure 5) and the one that Ibn al-Waheed copied for Sultan Baibars (Figure 7).

Among the most famous wonderful manuscripts of this kind is the Blue Qur'an manuscript that was copied in early kufi script on a parchment stained with the blue color (Figure 13). Blue ink was used alternately with black and gold or with gold only. The black color, however, has been the most commonly used to copy the Qur'an.



(Figure 13)

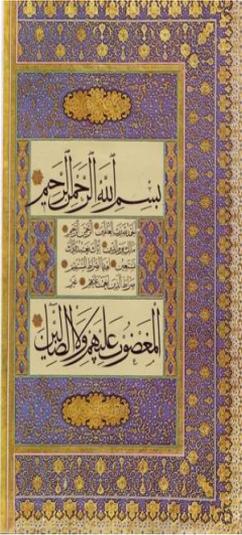
The Manuscript of the Quran and Naskh Script

After the Mamluks were defeated by the Ottomans, the Mamluks artistic aspects started to fade away and the Ottoman artistic aspects started to replace them. Among these aspects was Muhaqqaq script which was a distinctive artistic sign of the Mamluk era. The Ottomans replaced Muhaqqaq script for copying the Quran with the Naskh script which developed largely at their time especially by their famous calligrapher Sheikh Hamdullah al-Amasi (died 926/1520) (Darman, p.30-31) (Figure 14).

Then Naskh script became the best script for copying the Qur'an. The Qur'an manuscript made by the Ottoman calligrapher Ahmed Karahisari (died 963/1556) is among the very last copies that show the full greatness and perfection of Muhaqqaq script (Figure 15).



(Figure 14)



(Figure 15)

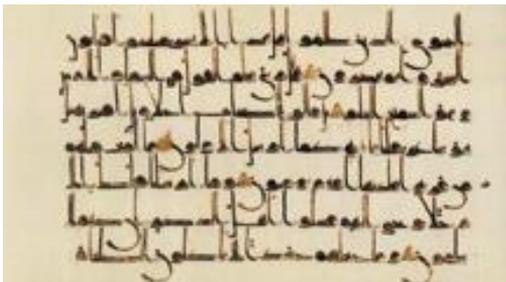
Qur'an of Maghreb

Islam swept Maghreb countries by the end of the 1st Hijri Century/7thAD. During that period, the construction of great mosque in al-Qairawan, Tunisia ended. It is thought that the oldest known manuscript from North Africa is the one copied in Tunisia about 410/1020 during the reign of al-Muiz bin Badees (ruled 1015-1061). The oldest manuscript known from Andalusia is dated 483/1090. Nothing is known about copying the Qur'an before these dates in North Africa.

Some manuscripts that carry the features of the Maghreb Kufi script are kept in museums and private collections. These are thought to belong to the transitional period that dominated the eastern calligraphy during the Third and the Fourth Hijri Centuries/Ninth and the Tenth AD (James, David, Manuscripts of the Holy Qur'an from the beginning to the fall of Baghdad, touch Edition, p. 26).

It is not specifically known how the Maghreb calligraphy developed, but it is most likely to have developed from the Kufi script that was used in the early manuscripts that the early Muslims took with them to Maghreb (Figure 16). This is emphasized by Hudas in his research when he mentions that the Maghreb calligraphy is a direct descendant of the kufi script. He also mentions that the kufi script developed into a more commonly used style which called Maghreb that widely spread since 1000 AD.

The Maghreb style is written with pens that have pointed tips unlike the pens used to write the eastern calligraphy that have slanted cut tips. Circular lines and arrows were dominant in the Maghreb calligraphy with a remaining glimpse of rigidity in its horizontal and vertical letters. In addition to the Maghreb, there was the Andalusia style that was especially used to copy the Quran starting from the Sixth Hijri Century/Thirteenth AD. This was used side by side with the style known as the Maghreb Thulth script whose decorations occupy the walls of Alhambra Palace (Turki, p.175-214).



(Figure 16)

Both black and brown ink were used in copying the Maghreb manuscripts. There are gilded manuscripts and this may be an influence of the manuscripts that were made in the Eastern parts of the Arab world. A large number of the Maghreb manuscripts dated back to the 6th and 7th Hijri Centuries/12th and the 13th AD were copied in Andalusia. Some of these were copied in Morocco as mentioned in the records accompanying these manuscripts.

Despite the introduction and the wide-spread use of paper to copy the Qur'an, the Maghreb manuscripts continued to be copied on parchment until late. Libraries have kept a number of manuscripts from the 9th Hijri Century/ 15th AD copied on parchment like the one kept in the National Library in Paris which is dated 844/1440. The Kufi script continued to be used for writing the names of suras, and the squared shape was the more common for the Maghreb manuscripts (James, Manuscripts of the Holy Qur'an. P. 27) (Figure 17).



(Figure 17)

The Calligraphy of the Holy Qur'an

The present research sets out to explore the different stages in the development of the holly Qur'an calligraphy. Much attention was paid not only to writing the Qur'an, but also to writing it in a stylish magnificent calligraphy. The study then exposes these developments in terms of the new tools introduced and the different calligraphy styles employed throughout the subsequent eras of the Islamic State.

These styles were meant to reflect the glory of almighty Allah and to convey the *text* faithfully. Moreover, Mushafs were written in different sizes i.e. small and big, and in different shapes i.e. vertical, horizontal, or italicized. Even the types of ink used in writing were of various types including black, brown, golden, and blue.

The study concludes that the early Ommiad era witnessed the introduction of the Quran ornaments, which also developed into botanical and engineering styles. The change of the shape of the Mushaf led to integrating these patterns to reflect the beauty and strength in addition to glory and completeness.

الملخص:

حظيت كتابة القران الكريم على اهتمام بالغ لما في ذلك من الأجر والثواب عند المسلمين، ولم يقتصر هذا الاهتمام على الكتابة فقط، فقد تجاوز إلى الخط الحسن الجيد والجودة العالية. وبسبب ما تقدم بدأ الاهتمام يتزايد من عصر إلى عصر آخر في كتابة المصحف الشريف، وذلك من خلال الأدوات المستخدمة والأشكال المتنوعة، فبدأت تظهر أنواع وأشكال متنوعة للخطوط لما يتناسب مع النص القرآني ومعنى الجمال الذي يليق بكمال الله تعالى والحفاظ على النص بدقة وأمانة.

كما نلاحظ أن المصحف الشريف تم كتابته بإحجام مختلفة منها الصغيرة والكبيرة وأيضا كانت المصاحف تكتب بالشكل الطولي ومن ثم المائل ومن ثم العرضي، وقد استخدم أنواع وإعداد متنوعة من الأحبار لكتابة المصحف الشريف منها الأسود والبني والذهبي والأزرق، كما أن زخارف المخطوطات القرآنية ظهرت في الفترة الأموية المبكرة وبدأت تتطور فقد استخدموا الأشكال الزخرفية النباتية والهندسية، وقد ساعد تغير شكل المصحف إلى اكتساب هذه الأنماط الزخرفية في إظهار القوة والجمال إلى جانب كونها تعكس صفة الجلال والأحكام.

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