

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
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Pre-Islamic Arabic Jazm inscription of Umm al-Jimāl found south of Damascus, Syria. Dated to 4th or 5th century

وَجَاءَ مِنْهَا زُجُجٌ كَثِيرٌ
وَمَا يَأْتِيهِمْ مِنْهَا إِلَّا فِي هَبٍّ
وَمَا يَأْتِيهِمْ مِنْهَا إِلَّا فِي هَبٍّ
وَمَا يَأْتِيهِمْ مِنْهَا إِلَّا فِي هَبٍّ
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وَمَا يَأْتِيهِمْ مِنْهَا إِلَّا فِي هَبٍّ

Page from a Qur'an in Kufic style, 8th century (Surah 15: 67-74)



Folio of Qur'an, Mamluk Egypt, 14th century

Evolution of the Arabic Script

While the Arabic language has existed orally since the Iron Age, the Arabic script or writing system developed rather late. The first recorded text in the Arabic alphabet was written in 512. This earlier version of the Arabic alphabet was generally written without any dots to distinguish letters that otherwise look the same. For example, the letters b, t, th, n, and y look exactly the same (in most cases) without their dots, and could only be told apart by the context. Since most people in Arabia were not literate and did not need to read, these issues were of little concern. After Islam came to Arabia, however, people needed a way to read and write the Quran that was clear and consistent. To avoid confusion or misreading, the Arabs further developed the Arabic script by adding not only dots to tell similar letters abut also vowel markings and other symbols to make sure everything was pronounced exactly as intended.