Madd as Orthoepy Rather Than Orthography

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Abstract

This article explores the function and distribution of the maddah sign throughout the history of the Islamic manuscript tradition. It demonstrates that, to date, descriptions have not adequately described its use, and it shows that rather than being a part of Classical Arabic orthography, medieval sources clearly indicate that the maddah sign was specifically used to express an orthoepic feature of Classical Arabic prose, namely madd, the pronunciation of vowels as overlong.

Keywords

maddah – madd – orthography – orthoepy

1 Introduction

The maddah sign in modern Arabic orthography has only one function: it distinguishes a hamzah followed by an ā from a hamzah followed by short a, as in ātā ‘to give’ versus ātā ‘to come’ . However, when we look at medieval Arabic manuscripts, we find a much more diverse use of maddah, which frequently occurs throughout Islamic manuscript history. It occurs in places where it cannot represent the sequence hamzah followed by long ā.

In modern works on Classical Arabic grammar and orthography, if the broader use of the maddah in pre-modern manuscripts is mentioned at all, it is explained as a purely orthographic practice.

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When ēlif with hèmza and a simple vowel or tènwīn (أِلْيِ, etc.) is preceded by an ēlif of prolongation (اَـ, etc.), then a mere hèmza is written instead of the former, and the sign of prolongation, mèdda or maṭṭa (مَّدَّة, مَدَّة, مَدَّة, i.e. lengthening, extension), is placed over the latter; e.g. semāʿun, جَاهَا يَتَسَأَّلُونَ َنَأَسَأَلُونَ [...]

Mèdda is sometimes placed over the other letters of prolongation, و and ى when followed by an ēlif hèmzatum, only the hèmza being written [...]; as َءآَمَس, َءآَج.

Rather than ْلِكآ for َلِكآ, to avoid two successive اَلْيِs, one writes َءآَسَي (مَدَّة maddah): ُءٓوُسَي, ُءٓيِجَي، ُءٓئٓوُس raʾ-hu.

Note 1. In archaic spelling, for example in the Koran, madda identifies the sound sequences َأَ, َيَر, َوَ (long vowel + اَلْيِ): ُءٓدَمْ وَعَد, ُءٓيِجَي yajīʾu, ُسُرِّؤل sūʾila.3

Further miniature letters were introduced: a [...] small mīm-dāl derived from madd ‘extension’ for the word-initial َأَ or the word-final اَلْيِ.4

Indeed, when examining vocalised Classical Arabic manuscripts, one frequently encounters this practice of the maddah sign before َلِلْيِ followed by hamzah. It is often used instead of the hamzah sign, the maddah being sufficient to denote its presence. This, however, is neither a particularly archaic practice, nor a purely Quranic peculiarity, as Fischer suggests, but rather occurs in classical manuscripts throughout history until the modern period. Moreover, the descriptions given by these works are incomplete. While it is true that the most common context in which the maddah sign appears is above a word-final اَلْيِ followed by a hamzah and not infrequently with word-initial hamzah followed by a long vowel, as Gruendler suggests, this is by no means the only context in which it appears. It can also occur above ُيَ and ُو followed by a hamzah. Moreover, it may arise just as readily word-medially as it occurs.

2 William Wright, A Grammar of the Arabic Language: Translated from the German of Caspari and Edited with Numerous Additions and Corrections (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), 24ff.
3 Wolfdietrich Fischer, A Grammar of Classical Arabic, Third Revised Edition., trans. Jonathan Rogers (New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press, 2002), 11.
4 Beatrice Gruendler, “Arabic Alphabet: Origin,” in Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics (Online Edition), ed. Lutz Edzard and Rudolf de Jong (Leiden & Boston, MA: Brill, 2011).
word-finally. Lastly, its spelling is triggered not only by a subsequent *hamzah* but likewise by a succeeding long consonant.

While these uses of the *maddah* sign occur frequently in the Islamic manuscript tradition, the only accurate description of the spelling of the *maddah* that I am aware of is by Nico van den Boogert in his study of the Maghrebi script. It is noteworthy that in Maghrebi writing, the modern use of the *maddah*, to denote a *hamzah* followed by ʾā, is never used. Instead, a baseline *hamzah* is simply placed before the ʿalif. This practice has also been adopted in modern print editions of the Quran, where, for example, آدم ‘Adam’ is spelled أدم.

The following overview is a selection of dated manuscripts throughout the centuries that reveal the practice of using the *maddah* sign. No specific attempt has been made to be comprehensive—an impossible task considering how commonly the *maddah* sign is deployed—and my selection of these manuscripts is based on their availability in digitized form and whether, during my research, I had worked with them for other topics or was easily able to identify examples of the rarer contexts in which the *maddah* sign is used. This overview will establish that the spelling of *maddah* may occur above any long vowel, and that it occurs in situations of a following *hamzah* and a succeeding *šaddah*. This broad view will clearly establish that this is not archaic, but rather a standard and widespread spelling practice throughout the Islamic manuscript tradition. It is hoped that the overview will promote wider awareness and a more accurate description of this spelling practice.

2 Ibn al-Nadīm’s *Fihrist* (End of the 10th Century) MS Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, Ar 3315

This copy of Ibn al-Nadīm’s *Fihrist* (Chester Beatty Library, Ar 3315) was copied from the (now lost) original. It is estimated to date from between around 377AH/987CE (the year Ibn al-Nadīm finished his work) and 1000CE and contains many examples of the *maddah* sign of ʾā before a *hamzah* (NB. not exclusively for word-final ʾāʾ sequences), e.g.:

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5 Nico van den Boogert, “Some Notes on Maghribi Script,” *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 4 (1989): 33. Note that this practice is in no way exclusive to Maghrebi manuscripts, as we will see in the following section.

6 Ibid.

7 Arthur J. Arberry, *The Chester Beatty Library. A Handlist of the Arabic Manuscripts*. Vol. 11. *Mss. 3251–3500*. (Dublin: Emery Walker, 1956), 31.
It is likewise used to write ḏ, a spelling practice that continues until this day.

Different from later manuscripts, this manuscript does not seem to use the maddah sign before a šaddah.
3 Al-Hamaḍānī’s Kitāb al-ʾAlfāẓ (552 AH/1128 CE), MS Leiden Or. 1070

The copy of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿĪsā al-Hamaḍānī’s (d. 320 AH/923 CE) Kitāb al-ʾAlfāẓ al-Kitābiyyah is held in the Leiden University Library special collections under the shelfmark Or. 1070 and was copied in 552 AH/1128 CE. This manuscript is an example of another fully vocalised manuscript that provides ample evidence for the use of the maddah sign, primarily as the sign that is written over a long vowel followed by a hamzah (not just ā’ but also į’):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{iddīʿī} (2r, l. 7) & \quad \text{ar-rūṣāʾī} (3r, l. 5) & \quad \text{al-ʿulamāʾī} (3r, l. 6) \\
\text{wa-fāʾa yafīʾu fayʿatan} (7r, l. 7) & \quad \text{ʾisāʾati-hī} (8r, l. 2) & \quad \text{ʿašwāʾi-hī} (8r, l. 6)
\end{align*}
\]

In addition, there are ample examples of the maddah sign being used when a long vowel is followed by a long consonant.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{aš-šāḏāṭi} (2v, l. 2) & \quad \text{al-ʿāmmati} (2v, l. 3) & \quad \text{māddatan} (3r, l. 10) & \quad \text{sābbun} (12v, l. 2) \\
\text{bi-māttatin wa-l-ǧamīʿu mawāṭtu} (28r, l. 10) & \quad \text{ʿāmmun} (62r, l. 9) & \quad \text{muɡārratan} (71v, l. 7)
\end{align*}
\]

I have not identified any examples in this manuscript where a word-initial hamzah followed by an ā or another long vowel is written with a maddah above. While this spelling is common today, it appears not to have had the same popularity in earlier centuries.

\footnote{Jan Just Witkam, Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts of the Library of the University of Leiden, vol. 2 (Leiden: Ter Lught Press, 2007), under Or. 1070.}
Ibn Durayd’s Ğamharat al-Luġah (644 AH/1246 CE) MS Leiden Or. 321 a–c

The Leiden University Library special collections hold a copy of Ibn Durayd’s (d. 321 AH/933 CE) lexicographical work Ğamharat al-Luġah (Or. 321 a–c), the first part of which is a more modern copy, whereas the latter two are dated to 644 AH/1246 CE. This work consistently shows maddah being used in front of hamzah and šaddah.

The use of maddah in front of hamzah and šaddah is evident in the following examples:

- kisāʾin (c, 2r, l. 15)
- tāʾirun (c, 3r, l. 4)
- ġāa (c, 4v, l. 11)
- ġanāʾimu (c, 5r, l. 8)
- sūʾin (b, 274v, l. 14)
- marīʿu (c, 176v, l. 1)
- nubūʿan (c, 152r, l. 2)
- nasīʿatan (c, 199r, l. 17)
- al-ʾāḫaru (c, 4v, l. 4)
- ad-dābbatu (b, 2v, l. 1)
- al-ʿāmmati (c, 31r, l. 20)
- šābbun (c, 184r, l. 16)

Al-Dānī’s al-Taysīr (1149 AH/1736 CE) MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Landberg 864

A copy of the Kitāb al-Taysīr fī al-Qirāʾāt al-Sab’ by ʾAbū ʿAmr al-Dānī (d. 444 AH/1052 CE) dated to 1149 AH/1736 CE and held at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (Landberg 864) is our final example of this practice and reveals that the use of maddah in this manner continued in the Classical Arabic manuscript tradition to (at least) the early modern period.

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9 Jan Just Witkam, *Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts of the Library of the University of Leiden*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Ter Lugt Press, 2007), under Or. 321.
10 W. Ahlwardt, *Kurzes Verzeichniss der Landberg’schen Sammlung Arabischer Handschriften* (Berlin: A.W. Schade’s Buchdruckerei, 1885), 84.
6 Quranic Madd

Those familiar with Quranic recitation will be struck by the environment in which the maddah occurs in these Classical Arabic manuscripts, as it coincides perfectly with the places where Quranic recitation requires the application of the madd, i.e. the overlong articulation of long vowels. Manuals on Quranic reading traditions typically feature a chapter containing considerable discussion of the conditions in which madd occurs and the relative lengths of the overlong vowels among the readers, and some of their specificities. We will summarize the rules as they pertain to the canonical seven readers briefly here, based on al-Dānī’s Ǧāmiʿ al-Bayān:

1. When ū, ĩ, or ā precedes a hamzah within a word, all readers of the Quran agree that it should be read overlong, as in, for example, ʿulāāʾika, qāāʾimīn, hanīīʾan, marīīʾan, bi-sūūʾin, and ʿan tabūūʾa.\(^{11}\)

2. When the sequence of a long vowel plus a hamzah occurs across word boundaries, there is disagreement on whether to lengthen the vowel. Most readers treat this environment in the same way, thus reading yāāʾ ʾayyuhā, yā banīī ʾādam, and ǧāāʾūūʾ ʿabā-hum. However, Ibn Kaṭīr, Qālūn ʿan Nāfiʿ, Warš ʿan Nāfiʿ (in the transmissions of Yūnus and al-ʾAṣbahānī), and ʿAbū ʿAmr do not lengthen the vowel in between words.\(^{12}\)

3. All readers are also in agreement that a vowel should have an overlong pronunciation if it is followed by a long consonant, e.g. wa-lā ḍ-ḍāāllīn.\(^{13}\)

Warš ‘an Nāfiʿ adds two more environments in which madd is applied. Firstly, he adds it to long vowels when they are preceded by hamzah, e.g. āādām,

\(^{11}\) ʿAbū ʿAmr al-Dānī, Ǧāmiʿ al-Bayān fī al-Qirāʾāt al-Sabʿ al-Mašhūrah, ed. Muḥammad Ṣad-duq al-Ḡazāʾi (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2005), 185.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 186.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 203f.
This appears to correspond to the maddah that denotes the word-initial ā, as it is still used in Modern Standard Arabic today, and not infrequently (albeit less often than when a hamzah follows the long vowel) in earlier manuscripts.

Finally, it has been transmitted that Warš ‘an Nāfi‘ applied madd to ay and aw, e.g. šayyy’īn, ka-hayyy’ah, and as-sawww’ī.¹⁵

In later, vocalised Quranic manuscripts, such cases of madd are, understandably, written with the same maddah that we see in these non-Quranic manuscripts. To a large extent, the places in Quranic manuscripts where the maddah is written corresponds to where the maddah is also written in non-Quranic Classical Arabic texts, as examined above.

The use of madd across word-boundaries seems to be typical for Quranic recitation and does not find a clear reflex in the non-Quranic manuscript tradition.

7 Madd amongst the Grammarians

The clear parallels between the places where the maddah sign is written in Classical Arabic manuscripts and the environment in which madd is applied in Quranic recitation suggest that this cannot be coincidence. Thus, while the use of madd is usually considered a feature that is specific to Quranic recitation,¹⁶ the distribution strongly suggests that the practice of making these vowels over-long in these environments was not unique to Quranic recitation, but rather part of general Classical Arabic orthoepy. As one would expect, the topic is also discussed by grammarians, explicitly not in the context of describing the proper recitation of the Quran, but simply with respect to the proper pronunciation of Classical Arabic prose.

To my knowledge, the earliest grammarian to discuss this phenomenon explicitly is Ibn Ġinni (322–411 AH/941–1002 AD) in his influential grammatical work al-Ḫaṣāʾiṣ in bāb fī maṭl al-ḥurūf “the chapter on the stretching of the letters”.¹⁷ He first discusses the definition of the long vowels, citing the examples qām ‘he stands’, sīr bi-h ‘travel with him!’, ḥūt ‘whale’, kūz ‘small jug of clay’.

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¹⁴ Ibid., 193.
¹⁵ Ibid., 202 f.
¹⁶ E.g. Kristina Nelson, “Tajwīd,” in Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics (Online Edition), ed. Lutz Edzard and Rudolf de Jong (Leiden & Boston, MA: Brill, 2011).
¹⁷ ʾAbū al-Fatḥ ʿUṯmān Ibn Ġinni, Al-Ḫaṣāʾiṣ, ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Naǧǧār (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1952), 111, 124 ff.
kitāb ‘book’, saʿīd ‘happy’, and ʿajūz ‘old woman’. There are three places, however, where their sound is lengthened and their length is strengthened (ʿillā ‘anna l-ʿamākīna llatī yuṭawwilī fī-hā šawta-hā, wa-tatamakkinu maddatu-hā, ṭalāṭah).

These three places are when the long vowel is followed by:

1. A hamzah: he gives the examples kisāʾa ‘garment’, ridāʾa ‘robe’, ḥaṭīʿa ʿsin’, razaʿa ‘calamity’, maqrūʿa ‘read’, and maḥbūʿa ‘hidden’.
2. A long consonant: he gives the examples šābbah ‘young girl’, dābbah ‘animal’, ḥādā qaṭīb=bakr (for qaṭību bakr with assimilation across word boundaries) ‘this is the staff of Bakr’, qad tamūdda ṭ-tawb ‘the dress has been spread out’ and qad qūūssa bi-mā ʿalay-h ‘he was reckoned with for what he owed’.
3. When pausing while remembering something: he gives the examples ʿaḥwā-ka ḍarabāa ‘your two brothers hit …’ while trying to remember to say ʿaḥwā-ka ḍarabā zaydā ‘your two brothers hit Zayd’, ḍarabūū ‘they hit …’ for ḍarabū zaydā ‘they hit Zayd’ and ʿidribīū ‘hit (fem). …!’ for ʿidribī zaydā ‘hit (fem.) Zayd’!

The last of these three conditions is, of course, irrelevant for written Classical Arabic, as it explicitly involves speech. But the first two conditions would be of relevance for properly composed Classical Arabic. Indeed, these conditions match perfectly with what we see in medieval manuscripts and their use of the maddah. In other words, the use of the maddah is not simply an orthographic device to mark long vowels before a hamzah, as has been suggested in the literature; instead, it is a specific sign to denote the orthoepy of pronouncing overlong vowels before the glottal stop and long consonants. While this specific lengthening of the vowel in this environment has now been lost in Modern Standard Arabic pronunciation, it was obviously perceived as such an important distinction that it was specifically and quite consistently marked in carefully produced Classical Arabic manuscripts throughout the history of Islamic manuscript tradition.

While the first explicit description of this maddah by Ibn Ḫinnī is fairly late, the terminology used by earlier grammarians seems to suggest that they, too, considered the overlong vowel to be a salient feature, at least, before a hamzah. This is clear from their terminological use of ʿalif maqṣūrah ‘shortened ʿalif’ and ʿalif mamdūdah ‘lengthened ʿalif’. While in modern parlance these terms are used to denote the word-final ā written with a yāʾ and written with an ʿalif respectively, this is a modern innovation. To the medieval grammarians ʿalif maqṣūrah denoted the word-final ā regardless of whether it was written with ʿalif or yāʾ, whereas ʿalif mamdūdah denoted the ʿalif that was followed by a hamzah, and thus, given the orthoepic rule discussed above, the pronunciation of its ʿalif would have been overlong. This distinction was already present
in the time of Sībawayh (d. 180 AH/796 AD), who in bāḥ al-maqṣūr wa-l-mamdūd ‘the chapter of the shortened and the lengthened’\(^{18}\) says:

The shortened (using manqūṣ instead of maqṣūr) are each word among the sisters of the yā’ and wāw (i.e. roots with yā’ or wāw as a final root consonant) where its yā’ or wāw occurs after a letter that carries a fathah, so its shortening is that they are replaced by an ‘ālif’ in the place of the yā’ and wāw and it does not end in the accusative, nominative or genitive.

He then cites examples such as muʿṭan ‘something given’, muṣṭaran ‘something bought’, and mīʿzan ‘goat’.

Turning to the lengthened forms he says:

As for what is lengthened, it is everything that occurs when a yā’ or a wāw would come after an ‘ālif. So things like this are known to be lengthened, and this is for example with al-istisqāāʾ ‘praying for rain’ because istasqaytu ‘I prayed for rain’ is (of the form) istafʿaltu, just like istaḥraṯtu ‘I moved out’, so if you want the maṣdar you know that it is certain that there is supposed to be a yā’ after the ‘ālif just like it is certain for the ġīm (of istaḥraṯtu) to be present in the maṣdar (istiḥrāǧ) after the ‘ālif.

Other examples he gives include: al-ištirāāʾ ‘purchase’; al-ʾiʿṭāāʾ ‘granting’; al-ʿuwāāʾ ‘howling’; and ad-duʿāāʾ ‘prayer’, as well as several nouns that are only recognised by making them plural, such as as-samāāʾ ‘the sky’, as then the semi-vowel that is replaced by the hamzah returns, as in as-samāwāt ‘the heavens’.

Interestingly, in the discussion of these nouns with a lengthened final vowel, at no point does Sībawayh point out that the root consonant wāw or yā’ is replaced by a hamzah. To Sībawayh, it seems that the most salient feature of the ġīm maddūdah was indeed what the name suggests, i.e. that is was lengthened.\(^{19}\) This suggests that already in Sībawayh’s time the orthoepic pronunciation of an overlong ā (and likely also ī and ū) when it was followed by a hamzah was considered normative.

\(^{18}\) ‘Ābū Bišr ‘Uṯmān Sībawayh, Kitāb Sībawayh, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ḫānǧī, 1988), iii, 536 ff.

\(^{19}\) For a similar case of the use of madd versus qaṣr to describe ‘ālif followed by a hamzah, see Sībawayh’s comment ‘a-lā tarā-hum qālū: Zakariyyāʾūna fi-man madda, wa-qālū zakariyyawna fīman qaṣara “Do you not see that they say Zakariyyāʾ for he who lengthens and they say zakariyyawna (for the plural Zakariyyā) for those that shorten” (Ibid., iii, 394).
8 Conclusion

Contrary to common description, the maddah sign is not primarily used to write syllable-initial ā in Classical Arabic orthography. Rather, it frequently occurs in environments where ā, ī, or ā precede a hamzah or a long consonant. This is exactly the environment where, even today, in Quranic recitation, one is to pronounce these vowels overlong. Ibn Ġinnî’s description makes it clear that, in his time, this type of orthoepic overlong vowel realization (madd) was not considered an exclusively Quranic practice. Instead, it seems to have been part of the historical orthoepic pronunciation of any form of Classical Arabic prose. In light of this, we should conclude that the use of the maddah sign was not so much an orthographic practice deployed to indicate that a hamzah follows or precedes a long vowel, as has been suggested by descriptions at the start of this article, but rather it should be seen as a sign that specifically denoted a difference in pronunciation, namely that of an overlong vowel.

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