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AL-NÜSHĀRĪ or **AL-NAWSHĀRĪ**, Abū Mūsā 'Īsā b. Muḥammad, general (said to be Turkish, but perhaps an Iranian from Khurāsān, since al-Sam'ānī, *Ansāb*, ed. Haydarābād, xiii, 201-2, derives the *nūsha* al-Nūshārī (sic) from Nūshār, a village in the district of Balkh) from the guard of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs at Sāmarrā and governor of Damascus on various occasions during the caliphates of al-Muntaṣir, al-Musta'in and al-Mu'tazz [q.v.] from 247/861 onwards. At the accession of al-Mu'tazz in 252/866, he expanded southwards into Palestine, displacing the Arab governor of Ramla [q.v.], 'Īsā b. al-Shaykh [q.v.], and subsequently defended his territories against rivals; but thereafter he fades from historical mention.

Bibliography: Scattered references in Ya'qūbī, Tabarī, Ibn al-Athīr and Ṣafādī, cited by M. Forstner, *Al-Mu'tazz billāh (252/866-255/869). Die Krise des abbasidischen Kalifats im 3.19. Jahrhundert*, Germersheim 1976, 86, 98-9, 106.

(C.E. BOSWORTH)

NÜSHIRWĀN [see ANÜSHIRWĀN].

NUSKHA (Ā.). 1. In the central Islamic lands.

Nuskha is the common Arabic word for "transcript", "copy", and in the manuscript era used in the meaning of "manuscript". Semantically directly related derived forms of the stem *n. s. kh* are *nassākh* are *nāsikh*, "copyist", and forms I, VIII and X of the verb *nasakha*, all meaning "to transcribe, to copy". In the following, *nuskha* will be more specifically used in order to denote the medium of the transmission of Islamic texts with exclusive reference to manuscripts. Other words for "manuscripts" which are commonly used are the Arabic *makhṭūṭāt*, the Persian *nuskha-hā-yi khaffī*, and the Turkish *yazmalar*. Where in the following the examples are mostly taken from Arabic literature, one must realise that, especially for the earlier period, no significantly different circumstances are applicable to the transmission of Persian texts, or Turkish or other Islamic texts for that matter. It must in this connection be borne in mind that the process of transmitting handwritten texts in an Islamic cultural environment persisted till well into the 20th century, in contradistinction to the transmission of European texts, which were almost exclusively distributed in printed form ever since the art of printing became practiced, from the second half of the 15th century A.D. onward. The following aspects of *nuskha* in this sense will be distinguished here.

(a) *The rôle of the book in Islam*. The importance of the written word in Islam can hardly be underestimated. Muslims have always insisted that the Qur'ān, the divine revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad and God's own word, was Islam's own miracle, the *mu'jiza* [q.v.], that was on equal footing with the miracles by which the earlier prophets had proved the truth of their mission. Also, the non-Muslims are divided in the *Ahl al-Kitāb*, the People of the Book who

did have a divine revelation, corrupted as it had become in the course of time, and those unbelievers who had no book at all. The concept of the Celestial Book was not alien to other, pre-Islamic, cultures in the Middle East, of course, and this culture of the written word did, of course, not originate in 7th-century Arabia. The Nabataean, Syriac, Hebrew, Aramaic, Coptic, Greek, Latin, Persian, Indian and Ethiopic literatures were there already, before Islam, with a considerable production of texts. According to a report by Ibn al-Kalbī [q.v.], Arabic books seem even to have existed in pre-Islamic al-Hīra [q.v.]. Islam's innovation seems to have been that the Book was given divine status, or rather that this divine status was so rigorously enforced. It is probably this new accent on the importance of the Holy Book that gave the book in Islam its central rôle. In the course of time, this pivotal importance of the book in Islamic culture has only increased and the result is, today, that there are many millions of Islamic manuscripts ranging in age from the earliest period till the beginning of the 20th century. When expressed in mere numbers of texts, the Islamic literature of the manuscript era can claim to be the largest literature on earth.

The Islamic book had become in less than two centuries after the death of the founder of Islam the repository of all knowledge of an increasingly internationally orientated culture, just as the Arabic language had developed into a main vehicle of that culture. Whereas in the earlier period the language of the manuscripts was Arabic, with the emergence of the local languages and the spread of Islam, manuscripts in the other Islamic languages, most notably Persian and Turkish, were made with the use of Arabic script. The number of languages for which Arabic script is used is only surpassed by those for which the Latin script is employed. In later time, Islamic manuscripts were also written in other alphabets than the Arabic. This mostly happened on the periphery of the Middle East, in countries such as China, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. Within the Near Middle East, Albanian Islamic manuscripts may be mentioned in this respect.

(b) *Material aspects of the manuscript*. The study of the material, physical, aspects of the handwritten book is called codicology. This technical term for the study of the codex [see DAFTAR] is, by extension, also employed for the study of the non-codex forms of manuscripts. The earliest writing materials in the Islamic era were papyrus, *bardī* in Arabic, and parchment [see PILD, RAKK]. There are reports on a great variety of materials on which the earliest fragments of the Qur'ān were recorded (see the survey in Nöldeke and Schwally, *Geschichte des Qur'āns*, ii, Leipzig 1919, 13-14), but, with the possible exception of leather or parchment and palm leaves, none of those can have been in regular use for the recording of texts in the Hijāz during and shortly after the Prophet Muḥammad's lifetime. It is probably because of Islam's main orientation to the Hellenistic and Mediterranean civilisations that it chose papyrus and parchment as its prime writing materials, rather than palm leaf and tree bark, which were the common writing materials of South Asia at the time. When the Chinese techniques of manufacturing of paper [see KĀGHĀD] were introduced from Central Asia into the Middle East in the course of the 8th century A.D., the production of manuscripts must have received an extra impulse. The advantages of paper over papyrus and parchment are obvious. Paper is a stronger material than papyrus and cheaper, though less durable, than parchment.