

The Pen in the Holy Qur'an: A Study of Its Terminology and Function -A Study of Its Terminology and Function

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Abstract:

This study aims to clarify the meaning of the term 'the pen' as mentioned in the Qur'an, and whether it refers to the pen commonly used by people. It also examines the role of the pen in learning and teaching, acquisition and change, and innovation and continuity, compared with its modern technical substitutes. The study also emphasises the importance of using this instrument, especially during the training and development stage, to prevent potential harm to learners and others, in line with contemporary scientific research.

Keywords: Terminology, the pen, the Qur'an, study, scientific research.

Introduction

Praise be to God, the Lord of all the worlds. May peace and blessings be upon the noblest of messengers, his family, his Companions and those who follow his guidance in righteousness until the Day of Judgement.

Then, after:

There is no doubt that referencing 'the pen' in the first revelation of the Noble Qur'an and swearing by it in a surah named after it was not done in vain. Rather, it highlights the profound importance of this instrument in education. The 'pen' referred to here is the type of pen that has been used by people since ancient times: one that is held in the hand and used to write on paper and other surfaces so that people can learn.

The Qur'an says much about reading and writing, and the tools and means associated with learning, such as manuscripts, tablets, writing lines, books, studying and handwriting. This clearly indicates the importance of these means in education, with the pen at the forefront.

'Read in the name of your Lord, who created, created man from a clot. Read, for your Lord is the Most Generous' (Surat Al-'Alaq, verses 1-3).

The Prophet also used a writing instrument for revelation, safeguarded by God Almighty: "Indeed, We have sent down the Reminder, and indeed We will preserve it" (Surat Al-Hijr, verse 9).

The Qur'an was written with a pen using the tools available at the time, so that it was preserved in lines, just as it was preserved in hearts. This was done in accordance with the Qur'an's dictates on orthography, as Abu al-Baqa' states in al-Kulliyat, p. 22: "The complete letter is the one for which a specific form is required in both speech and writing."

Contemplating how the Qur'an was preserved in written lines until it reached us and how knowledge was transmitted from predecessors to successors, we realise the pen's great status in education and preserving knowledge across generations.

In the present day, the electronic pen has emerged. The learner sits with a device in front of them and presses buttons to write, learn or search for information. This naturally raises the question: Does the pen mentioned in the Noble Qur'an include every pen that has appeared throughout history?

This is the central issue that I will address in this study, alongside related topics, which I will present after discussing the following:

Reasons for choosing the research topic

In the present era, there has been a significant leap in educational technologies. Learners can receive instruction and access information from various fields without leaving their location, with reduced effort and time. These are some of the benefits that modern technology brings to education at certain stages of life and under particular circumstances, such as overcoming difficulties and making distant matters more accessible.

However, it is important to consider when learners, especially those in training, resort to these technologies and dispense with teachers and traditional educational tools such as pens, books and paper. This is what should be investigated, given what we observe: educational failure and a lack of advancement in learners' levels despite earlier progress achieved through these simple tools. Furthermore, there are physical and psychological harms associated with overusing these technologies. Keeping pace with civilisation and moving with the times is unavoidable. As a steward, a believer is entrusted with conveying the divine message; therefore, it is unreasonable to neglect the language used to communicate with others. At the same time, however, there must be wisdom and discernment in the use of that language, namely modern educational technology. The Noble Qur'an explicitly highlights the importance of the pen in learning. Therefore, it is necessary to understand this reference in order to answer the research question. Contemporary scientific studies substantiate what the Qur'an indicates when it speaks about the pen, reading and the significance of writing and learning. However, it is precisely the unconsidered and undirected use of modern technology that has led to negative results, which scientific studies try to uncover and warn against in terms of their consequences.

This issue concerns learners in general and specific types of knowledge, such as Qur'anic recitation (al-iqra'/ta'lim), more than others, and particular stages, especially childhood education. Therefore, we must examine the harm arising from dispensing with original tools such as the pen, paper, books and others in the educational process.

The research problem

The pen and writing materials have long been regarded by Arabs as symbols of pride, permanence and an enduring legacy, and this is true for all human beings. This study seeks to clarify the meaning of 'the pen' as mentioned in the Noble Qur'an and to elucidate its function in education. It will then address a set of subsidiary questions, including:

Why is the pen mentioned alongside reading and teaching in the first revelation of the Qur'an, and why is it later sworn by?

Is it possible to dispense with the pen in the educational process, particularly at the formation and training stage?

Does keeping pace with the times in education imply doing away with the original tools used for learning?

What effect would dispensing with the pen in education have?

Importance of the research

The educational process is an integrated system comprising a teacher and a learner, the tools through which learning takes place, the setting in which the process occurs and the knowledge acquired through well-established methods and sound pedagogy.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was taught the Qur'an by Jibril (peace be upon him) gradually, and then the Companions (may God be pleased with them) learned from him step by step. The Successors (may God be pleased with them) then learned from the Companions, and so it continued until God inherits the earth and all upon it. Moreover, obtaining certification depended on continued association with teachers (as well as the tools used for learning), as al-Shatibi states in al-Muwafaqat.

This research is important because it reveals:

- The significance of the pen, an educational tool used since ancient times.
- The wisdom behind its reference and the oath sworn by it in the Noble Qur'an, and its relationship to the educational process.
- Recognising the profound significance of this tool in elevating learners to the rank of scholars from a scientific perspective.
- Highlighting the benefits of using the pen in education, particularly during the training and formation stage.
- Clarifying the pen's role in preserving knowledge and transmitting learning across generations.
- Exposing the harms resulting from excessive reliance on modern educational technologies at the expense of the pen.
- Emphasising that keeping pace with the times does not mean neglecting the original principles of education and other areas.

Previous studies

Within the scope of my research, I have not found a study on 'the pen' and its role in the Noble Qur'an that employs the thematic interpretation of Qur'anic terminology. However, there are scientific studies that highlight the importance of the pen in education, particularly in training and formation stages, and among children. They also point to the harms caused by the excessive or improper use of modern educational technologies. For this reason, I undertook this study.

Research method

The nature of this study requires the researcher to adopt an inductive approach. After examining and collecting the places where the word 'the pen' appears, as well as references to words with similar meanings, in order to determine the term's true meaning, the study follows the stages considered by specialists in the field when interpreting a Qur'anic term through thematic interpretation.

Sources of the study

I relied on lexicons (dictionaries), Qur'anic exegeses (tafsīr) and specialised references relevant to the subject matter and related aspects of the study.

Plan of the study

To clarify the meaning of the term 'the pen' and its significance in education through the Noble Qur'an, I divided the research into two chapters (two sections).

In the first section, I sought to explain the linguistic and legal meaning of this term in Islamic usage, and then referred to expressions with a similar meaning to confirm the intended sense. I then endeavoured to understand how the term is used in the Qur'an, first in Surat Al-'Alaq, second in Surat

Al-Qalam, and third and fourth in Surat Luqman and Surat Al-‘Imran, according to the chronological order of revelation of those passages.

In the second section, I presented the importance of this tool in the Qur’an and indicated its importance in practical terms from a scientific perspective.

This is preceded by an introduction covering the research topic, reasons for selection, problem statement, importance and previous studies.

In conclusion, I summarised the most important findings.

Section One: The Meaning of the Term ‘The Pen’

Preamble

The pen is a well-known instrument that has been used by people since ancient times. The earliest forms of writing date back more than 35,000 years, when people used simple tools such as sharp stones or wooden sticks. Writing instruments then gradually improved, evolving from quills and reeds to metal quills with handles, and eventually to modern pens and electronic pens.

‘The pen’ refers to anything used to write on paper and other materials. One example is the reed pen, which was largely used by calligraphers and is trimmed and shaped to suit Arabic calligraphy. The traditional Arabic pen was made from reeds that grew along riverbanks.

Other types of pen were also used, including ones made from silver and copper. The use of pencil lead began in the sixteenth century following the discovery of the first graphite mine in Cumberland, Britain, in 1564 CE, and it later developed.

The Arabs paid great attention to the pen. It is mentioned in the Qur’an and in Hadith, and has been discussed by writers, poets and scholars. The following is among what has been said about it: “The pen is a stick among sticks; it stands in for the tongue whenever homelands grow distant and hearts and companions part.”¹

In order to trace the life course of this word — how it grew, evolved and changed its meaning in light of cultural developments accompanying the growth of human knowledge — we need terminology². For example, the pen shaped from a reed becomes a ‘smart pen’. However, Arab customs must be taken into account when interpreting Qur’anic terms³. The pen is one such custom: it is trimmed from a tree, shaped, and used; it remains available until the Day of Judgement.

Therefore, expressions found in the Qur’anic text should be understood according to the customs and practices that were customary at the time of the revelation of the divine message, and not according to those that arose afterwards. This is a well-established rule. It has also been said that Qur’anic texts should be interpreted according to the usage of unlettered Arabs in communication⁴.

When interpreting the verses in which this term appears, we will carry out a thematic interpretation after discussing its linguistic and legal meaning, and addressing expressions that are similar in meaning.

First Requirement: The Meaning of “The Pen” Linguistically and Legally, and Mention of Some Related Expressions

First: The linguistic meaning of “the pen”

¹- See: The Development of the Pen Through the Ages, pp. 272–277.

²- The General Principles, p. 5.

³- See: 'Interpretation of Verification': 1/125 and onwards.

⁴- Rules of Interpretation: Collection and Study: 1/157, 217.

It appears that the linguistic meaning of the word “the pen” revolves around something that is trimmed or treated (“i.e. it is cut and shaped, and then used for writing. This becomes clear when we — يقلم”) :trace the lexicons

- The pen: that which is written with, and the container for pens is trimmed (مقلم)⁵.
- The pen: the trimmed/planed reed quill (yara‘ah); its plural is qalam and qalam⁶. The *يراعة* is a single reed stalk⁷. Thus one says: ‘the pen of the nail’ (قلم الظفر), and the verb يقلم means to cut it⁸.
- The root Q-L-M is a sound indicating the act of smoothing something by shaping and putting it right. From this come the phrases: ‘I trimmed the nail’ (قَلَمْتُ الظَّفَرَ) and ‘I trimmed it’ (قَلَمْتُهُ). For this reason, the ‘pen’ is called *qalam* — because its shape is similar to that of a trimmed nail⁹.

It is said that ‘the reed-stalk (پراع)’ is the pen¹⁰.

- The pen is that with which one writes. Its plural forms are *aqlāmu* and *qalam*. The pen is also a dart or arrow used for gambling, and its plural is likewise aqlām. It is called *qalam* because it is ‘trimmed’, i.e. planed and shaped. Anything that is cut bit by bit is trimmed. The pen used for writing is named as such because it is trimmed bit by bit¹¹.

One does not call it a qalam unless it is trimmed; otherwise it is just a tube¹². The pen with which people write is understood from the saying ‘he wrote’, meaning he lined or scripted, and writing is the assembly of letters arranged and composed by means of the pen¹³.

‘Trim the reed’ (قَلِّمِ العود): one says *قلمه* / *يقلمه* to cut something from it, and ‘trim the pen’ (قَلِّمِ القَلَم): to shape or trim it. ‘Trim the nail’: to cut away what exceeds it. The pen is so called because something is cut away from its tip to make it even and ready¹⁴.

Secondly, the meaning of ‘the Pen’ in Islamic law.

Scholars have explained that the word ‘the Pen’ mentioned in the Noble Qur’an refers to the instrument used for writing. They also indicated that its original meaning is ‘to cut or pare something hard’, from which comes the idea of sharpening and shaping.

Abu Ubayda said that, in his interpretation, it refers to:

‘And what they inscribe’ (meaning ‘what they write’)¹⁵, and regarding the verse of Surat Luqman: “If there were trees in the earth—pens—and the sea supplied ink...” (Qur’an, Luqman 31:27), he explained that the sea here means fresh water, not salt water, because salt water does not produce pens. Therefore, the meaning is that the writing would continue indefinitely in accordance with God’s decree¹⁶.

Al-Damaghani said: ‘The Pen’ has two aspects:

⁵- As-Sihah, al-Jawhari, p. 966.

⁶- The Encompassing Ocean, al-Firouzabadi: p. 1038.

⁷- As-Sihah, al-Jawhari, p. 1278; Lisan al-Arab, Ibn Manzur, p. 9/450.

⁸- The Encompassing Ocean, al-Firouzabadi: p. 1038.

⁹- The Dictionary of Language Standards, al-Firouzabadi: 5/15–16.

¹⁰- The Science of Language, Abu Mansur ath-Thalibi: p. 165.

¹¹- Lisan al-Arab, Ibn Manzur: 7/482.

¹²- The General Principles, Abu al-Baqa': p. 737.

¹³- Same source: p. 767.

¹⁴- Dictionary of the Virtues of the Holy Quran, Majma' al-Lugha: 5/68.

¹⁵- 'Metaphor in the Quran': 2/264.

¹⁶- Same source: 2/128.

(1) arrows and (2) ‘the Pen itself’, and he pointed to the verses of Al ‘Imran and Surat al-Qalam as evidence¹⁷.

Al-Asfahani said that the origin of ‘the Pen’ is cutting or paring something hard, such as a nail, the shaft of a spear or reed stalks. He adds that “ (pared or shaped) is also called ’مقلام’ qalam”, and he connected this specifically to what is used for writing, so “qalams” is the plural of “qalam”.

He cited verses such as:

- “N. By the pen and what they inscribe” (Surat al-Qalam 68:1).

- “If there were trees... pens” (Surat Luqman 31:27)¹⁸.

Al-Fayrouzabadi said: ‘The Pen’ is what is used for writing, and its plural is ‘pens’ (أقلام) or ‘qilam’ (قلام). He cited the same verses from the Qur’an: Luqmān (31:27) and al-Qalam (68:1). He also cited:

‘The one who taught by the pen’ (Surat al-‘Alaq 96:4).

He also noted that the Qur’an indicates and reminds us of what God granted humanity: teaching writing and the benefits and subtleties contained in the pen¹⁹.

He also said that ‘the pen’ can refer to a ‘feather or arrow shaft’ used for gambling or divination by arrows. It was called ‘qalam’ because it was sharpened like a pen, then used for casting lots²⁰. He cited:

‘They cast their pens...’ meaning their dart-arrows/shares, i.e. the arrows they used for dividing and determining outcomes.

Ibn ‘Āshūr emphasised all of this in his discussion of ‘the Pen’ across the verses of Surat al-‘Alaq, Surat al-Qalam, Surat Luqman, and Surat Al ‘Imran²¹.

- Abu al-Baqaa said:

‘N. By the pen’ means ‘the one that writes/lines the tablet’, or ‘the one used for writing’, and:

‘He taught by the pen’ means writing with the pen²².

The Language Academy said:

‘The pen’ is what is used for writing — this meaning appears in ‘Nun’ (ن سورة) and al-‘Alaq, and comes in the plural form in Luqman. It is also used for the arrow or dart that is cast among people in gambling or drawing lots — plural: pens²³

Conclusion

In both linguistic and Islamic (Qur’anic) usage, ‘the Pen’ refers to something that is sharpened, shaped and written with. It appears in the Qur’an in more than one place. To determine exactly what is meant, we follow the method of thematic interpretation of the Qur’anic term, after discussing related expressions that are close in meaning.

Thirdly, expressions that are similar in meaning to ‘the Pen’.

¹⁷- Dictionary of the Quran (or The Rectification of Homonyms and Synonyms in the Holy Quran): p. 390.

¹⁸- Quranic Terms: p. 522.

¹⁹- Insights for the Discerning into the Nuances of the Holy Quran.: 4/294–295.

²⁰- Insights for the Discerning into the Nuances of the Holy Quran.: 4/294–295.

²¹- See: The Verification and Enlightenment: 12/740, 12/52–53, 8/837 and 2/207. As we will see in the research, for example on p. 7.

²²- The General Principles: pp. 740–741.

²³- Quranic terms: 5/68.

There is no doubt that the thematic interpretation of a Qur'anic term is based on a complete and thorough survey of everything related to the word being explained. In our study here, we can benefit from expressions similar in meaning to the Qur'anic term 'the Pen' to achieve more accurate results.

Among the expressions that are close:

A) 'Writing/inscribing with the right hand'

Allah says:

"And you did not recite before it any scripture, nor did you write it with your right hand; then the liars would have doubted." (Qur'an, al-ʿAnkabut 29:48).

This means that the Prophet did not write with his right hand, as reported by Qatada and Mujahid²⁴. They understood the verse to emphasise that the Prophet had lived among his people for a long time before the Qur'an was revealed, during which time he did not read any books and did not know how to write. Therefore, everyone among his people knew that he was 'unlettered' (أُمِّي / مِي): he did not read or write. This description is also mentioned in previous scriptures, as in:

'Those who follow the Messenger, the Prophet, the unlettered... whom they find written about in the Torah and the Gospel' (Qur'an, al-Aʿrāf 7:157).

It is also stated that:

- He did not know how to write, nor could he draw a line or a letter with his hand. However, he had scribes who wrote messages and revelations for him²⁵.

Ibn ʿAshur points to the same meaning in:

"Nor did you write it."

He explains that the verse negates two aspects of learning:

- learning through reading, and

- learning through writing, in order to thoroughly confirm the Prophet's state of unletteredness. The phrase 'with your right hand' is included for emphasis because writing is only done with the hand, so it functions like other Qur'anic expressions that specify the manner, such as 'nor a bird that flies with its wings'²⁶.

Al-Raghib al-Aschfani also said that the Qur'an uses the term 'writing' to refer to scribbling, and he cites the verse 'nor did you write it with your right hand'²⁷. The Qur'an also repeatedly mentions that writing is done by the hand, for example:

"Woe to those who write the scripture with their own hands, then say, 'This is from Allah,' for a small price..." (Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:79).

Here, 'hand' (اليد) refers to the limb — the member from the fingertips to the armpit. Its plural is "hands" (أيدي)²⁸.

What does this imply for 'writing by hand/by the right'?

Writing by hand — indeed, by the right hand — means there is a tool that the hand holds and uses to write or inscribe on something else, such as paper, a page or a book.

²⁴- The Gathering of Explanations on the Interpretation of the Quran: 11/21/9.

²⁵- Interpretation of the Great Quran: 5:62; also see The Compendium of Legal Rulings of the Qur'an: 8/206.

²⁶- 'The Verification and Enlightenment': 8/703–704. Abu al-Baqa' said: 'The right is called yamin because it is stronger than the two sides, and it is the direction from which movement begins.' The General Principles: p. 985.

²⁷- Terms: p. 20; also see the general principle, Quranic terms: p. 311

²⁸- The General Principles: p. 983; also see Qur'anic Terms: p. 303.

This connects to what was said earlier about the Pen: what people write with. The question raised is whether it was something that humans could carry and use in different times and places, such as a gold or silver pen, or an electronic pen. Or more generally, is it something that every human can have, such as a pen made from reed or a tree branch, until Allah inherits the Earth and everything on it? This understanding is supported by the Qur'anic indication regarding the materials that make the 'pens' possible:

“If there were trees in the earth—pens...” (Qur'an, Luqman 31:27).

B) Close expressions to 'the Pen' include recitation (reading), writing and related activities, as well as pages, inscribing/lining, tablets and study.

These meanings can be summarised briefly as follows:

- The Book: well-known; plural books²⁹.

Also, to write or record something means to line it with writing, i.e. 'he wrote it'³⁰.

Writing means arranging and composing organised letters with a pen, so “ can mean 'كتب' she wrote/lined'.

- Line/row (السطر): writing/inscribing.

“ means 'سطر يسطر to write'. Allah says:

“By the pen and what they inscribe” (Surah al-Qalam 68:1)³¹.

- Page/sheet (الصحيفة): what something is written on.

Plural: pages (صحائف), scrolls (صحف).

“ can also mean 'صحيفة' a book/record³².

Study/studying (درس): repeated reading that makes memorisation easier.

'درس الكتاب' and 'درست الكتاب' mean: I studied the book — I subdued it through frequent reading until it became easy for me to remember³³.

- Paper/leaf (الورق): From the leaves/foilage of trees; also “paper”.

'الورق' can also refer to thin animal hide or skin ('أدم رقيق') and to the leaves of the Qur'an ('الصفحات')³⁴.

- Tablet (اللوحة): Every broad sheet made from wooden boards, and anything written on them is also called a tablet.

'اللوحة' also means the writing surface itself — what is written upon and used as a medium³⁵.

These terms often appear together in the Qur'an³⁶, for example:³⁷

- “And We wrote for him in the tablets, from everything as guidance...” (Surah al-A'raf 7:145).

- “That was written in the Book.” (Surah al-Isra' 17:58).

- “As for the one who is given his record in his right hand, he will say: 'Take—read my record!'" (Surah al-Haqqa 69:19).

²⁹- Lisan: 7/587 and onwards.

³⁰- Same source: 4/576.

³¹- The general principles: p. 767.

³²- Lisan: 5/282 and onwards.

³³- Same source: 3/335 onwards.

³⁴- Same source: 9/277 and after.

³⁵- Same source: 8/153 and after.

³⁶- Concordance of the Words of the Holy Quran: pp. 701–702.

³⁷- 'The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Quran': p. 39.

- Ayat al-Dayn (the verse of debt) (Surah al-Baqarah 2:282).
- ‘A messenger from Allah reciting purified scriptures’ (Surah al-Bayyinah 98:2).
- ‘But be rabbāniyyīn, for you teach the Book and study it.’ (Surah Āl ‘Imrān, 3:79)

Main takeaway: a person with understanding can see that these terms, when considered together, indicate a complete system of learning and teaching. All the elements of this system are important and necessary, including the tools and means by which the process occurs. At the forefront of these is the Pen.

Where is “the Pen” mentioned in the Qur’an?

The word “the Pen” appears in four places in the Qur’an. In order of revelation, they are:

1. Surah al-‘Alaq 96:3–4:

“Read! Your Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the Pen.”

2. Surah al-Qalam 68:1–2:

“Nun. By the Pen and what they inscribe...”

3. Surah Luqman 31:27:

“If there were trees on the earth—pens—and the sea supplied them, and seven seas besides.”

4. Surah Āl ‘Imrān 3:44:

‘And you were not with them when they cast their pens — whichever of them would take charge of Mary...’

Next step: a detailed explanation of the meaning in each of these places.

The second requirement: The meaning of ‘the Pen’ in Surat al-‘Alaq and Surat al-Qalam.

First: Allah says:

“Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous—who taught by the Pen” (Qur’an, al-‘Alaq 96:3–4).

Scholars have offered several closely related explanations of the phrase “who taught by the Pen”:

1) The creation of writing and the pen:

Ibn Jarir al-Tabari said that it means: He created the Book and writing (خط).

He also related that Qatada said the pen is a great blessing from Allah; without it, people’s lives would not function properly. The people of interpretation understood that Allah taught humans writing by the Pen³⁸.

Ibn Zayd likewise said: He taught humans writing by the pen³⁹.

2) Teaching through the pen as a type of knowledge

Ibn Kathir understood this to mean the pen used for writing, and explained that the verses describe knowledge in different forms.

- knowledge in the mind;
- knowledge in speech;
- and knowledge in written form⁴⁰.

3) ‘Pen’ as something sharpened for writing.

Al-Qurtubi said that the pen is a great blessing and was named ‘qalam’ because it is made sharp and trimmed, i.e. pared and cut. This is also the origin of the practice of trimming things such as nails (قَلِيم (الظفر)).

³⁸- 'The Comprehensive Exposition of the Interpretation of the Verses of the Quran': 15/30/317.

³⁹- Same source: 15/30/320.

⁴⁰- 'Interpretation of the Great Quran': 6/492–493.

He also mentioned that, according to scholars, pens originally are:

- 1) the first pen that Allah created with His own hand and commanded to write;
- 2) the pens of the angels,
- 3) pens of human beings⁴¹.

4) Using a 'lifeless instrument' to convey understanding

Al-Qasimi said that people understand through the pen in the same way as they understand through the tongue. The pen itself is an inanimate instrument; it is neither alive nor able to convey meaning by itself. However, Allah makes it an instrument for understanding and explanation⁴².

5) Teaching people to write

- Ibn 'Ashūr said:

'He taught by the Pen' means: He taught writers (or taught people) writing.

He noted that the Arabs honoured the learning of writing and considered it to be a quality of the People of the Book. Therefore, the meaning is that the One who taught people writing by the Pen is able to teach you reading even though you do not know how to write⁴³.

6) Description of the pen's material

Shinqīti explained that Allah's 'Pen' is a general term that encompasses the types of pens mentioned in the Sunnah, all of which are of great importance. He then listed pens such as:

- the pen that wrote everything that has happened and will happen until the Day of Judgement (as mentioned in the narration: 'The first thing Allah created was the Pen. He said to it, "Write".')
- the pen that records the provisions for the year on Laylat al-Qadr (linked to the verse: "On it is decreed every wise matter", ad-Dukhan 44:4).
- the pen that writes in the womb what pertains to a person's provision and deeds;
- the pens of the noble scribes (linked to: 'He does not utter any word except that with Him is an observer ready', Qaf 50:18,

And the pens with which Allah enables people to write what He teaches, including the pens of the scribes who wrote revelation in front of the Prophet and Solomon's letter to Bilqīs⁴⁴.

He concludes that the apparent intent of 'the Pen' in this verse is the pen used by humans for writing, as understood by al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir, al-Qasimi and Ibn Ashur. This is further supported by al-Zamakhsharī's statements about the excellence of the Pen⁴⁵ and Abū Hayyān⁴⁶ and Fakhr al-Razī's statements about the excellence of writing⁴⁷, meaning that the verse highlights the virtue of writing at that point in the Qur'an.

In summary, the dominant meaning of Surat al-'Alaq (96:3-4) is that Allah taught humankind writing by the Pen, and that writing is a major means of knowledge and guidance.

4) Using a 'lifeless instrument' to convey understanding

⁴¹- 'The Compendium of Legal Rulings of the Quran': 10/645-646.

⁴²- The Beauties of Interpretation: 17/09/440.

⁴³- The Verification and Enlightenment: 12/740-741.

⁴⁴- Lights of Clarification: 9/151-153.

⁴⁵- The Revealer: 4/776.

⁴⁶- The Encompassing Ocean: 10/507.

⁴⁷- 'The Keys to the Unseen': 16/22/18.

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He noted that the Arabs honoured the learning of writing and considered it to be a quality of the People of the Book. Therefore, the meaning is that the One who taught people writing by the Pen is able to teach you reading even though you do not know how to write.

6) Description of the pen's material

Shinqiti explained that Allah's 'Pen' is a general term that encompasses the types of pens mentioned in the Sunnah, all of which are of great importance. He then listed pens such as:

- the pen that wrote everything that has happened and will happen until the Day of Judgement (as mentioned in the narration: 'The first thing Allah created was the Pen. He said to it, "Write".')
- the pen that records the provisions for the year on Laylat al-Qadr (linked to the verse: "On it is decreed every wise matter", ad-Dukhan 44:4).
- the pen that writes in the womb what pertains to a person's provision and deeds;
- the pens of the noble scribes (linked to: 'He does not utter any word except that with Him is an observer ready', Qaf 50:18,

This is also confirmed by al-Şābūnī in his tafsir, in which he states that Allah swore by the pen with which people write sciences and knowledge because the pen is the 'brother' of the tongue and a mercy from the Most Merciful to His servants.

Secondly, Allah said: "نُون. By the Pen, and by what they write' (Qur'an 68:1).

Al-Tabari said that the Pen refers to the well-known Pen. However, the pen by which our Lord swears consists of pens, specifically the pen that Allah created. He commanded it and it wrote everything that will occur until the Day of Resurrection⁴⁸.

Ibn Kathir said that what appears to be intended is the category of the Pen used for writing, as in Allah's statement:

'Read, and your Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the Pen, taught the human being what he did not know' (Qur'an 96:3-5).

Therefore, this is a divine oath, along with a reminder to His creation of the favour He bestowed upon them by teaching them writing, through which sciences are attained. Hence He said: 'And what they write', meaning 'what they do'. Others said that what is meant here is the pen that Allah made run through divine decree when He wrote the decrees of created beings⁴⁹.

Al-Qurtubi said, "This applies to every pen used for writing in the heavens and on earth." Ibn Abbas said that this is an oath by the pen that Allah created and commanded to write down everything that will occur until the Day of Resurrection. He said that it is a Pen of light⁵⁰.

Al-Qasimi said that 'By the Pen' refers to the Pen by which writing is done⁵¹.

⁴⁸- 'The Comprehensive Exposition of the Interpretation of the Verses of the Quran': 14/29/22.

⁴⁹- 'Interpretation of the Great Quran': 6/275-276.

⁵⁰- 'The Compendium of Legal Rulings of the Quran': 10:203.

⁵¹- 'The Beauties of Interpretation': 9/16/202.

- Al-Shinqiti said: 'It is comprehensive, including the types of pens mentioned in the Sunnah.' He mentioned it in the context of honouring: " Nun. By the Pen and by what they write" — and this magnifies the matter sworn by and the sworn-upon, which is Allah's favour upon His Messenger ﷺ through revelation. This indicates the greatness of the Pen and of what is written by it, namely revelation and other things⁵².

- Ibn Ashur said: It is reported from Mujahid and Qatada that the Pen by which Allah swears is the Pen mentioned in Allah's statement:

'Who taught by the Pen... taught the human being what he did not know' (Qur'an, 96:4–5).

This accords with the apparent meaning of 'and what they write', and with the situation of the polytheists to whom the discourse refers — who only know the Pen as a writing instrument among the People of the Book and among literate Arabs.

What does "the Pen" appear to mean in this passage?

It appears to be one of the following:

The pen that Allah created, as seen by tabari.

The pen(s) with which people write, as Ibn Kathir, Al-Qasimi and Ibn Ashur see it.

- All pens, as al-Qurtubi and Ash-Shinqiti interpret it, and as Ibn Kathir reports in one narration⁵³.

The most apparent interpretation is that the intended pen is the pen by which humans write, as most scholars hold. This view is supported by:

- the hadith attributed to al-Zamakhsharī concerning the benefit of the pen;

- Abu Hayyan's statement that it is the pen known to people;

- what al-Qadi reported from al-Razi, after mentioning the second view that the Pen sworn upon is the well-known Pen mentioned in the report — that the first thing Allah created was the Pen⁵⁴.

'This report must be understood metaphorically because the pen, being a specific writing instrument, cannot be alive, thinking, accountable, or subject to command and prohibition⁵⁵. The combination of being a responsible living being and a writing instrument is impossible.⁵⁶

This is also confirmed by as-Sābuni in his tafsir, where he says: 'Allah swears by the pen with which people write sciences and knowledge, for the pen is the brother of the tongue and a favour from the merciful to his servants.⁵⁷

The Third Topic: The meaning of 'pens' mentioned in Surah Luqman and Surah Al-'Imran

First: Allah's saying: "And if all the trees on the earth were pens..." (Surah Luqman: 27).

Al-Tabari said, 'If all the trees on earth were cut into pens and the sea was used as ink to write the Speech of Allah, those pens would break and the ink would run out, but the words of Allah would never end.' He mentioned narrations from al-Hasan, Qatadah and others⁵⁸.

(This is also what Ibn Kathir leaned towards.⁵⁹)

⁵²- Lights of Clarification: 9/151.

⁵³- The Verification and Enlightenment: 12/52.

⁵⁴- The Revealer": 4/584.

⁵⁵- The Encompassing Ocean: 10/235.

⁵⁶- The Keys to the Unseen: 15/30/79.

⁵⁷- The Best of Exegeses": 3/1284.

⁵⁸- The Gathering of Explanations on the Interpretation of the Quran.: 11/21/98.

⁵⁹- Interpretation of the Great Quran: 5/188.

Al-Qurtubi said that this highlights that even if the trees were pens and the seas were ink, and they wrote with them about the wonders of Allah's creation that indicate His power and Oneness, those wonders would never end⁶⁰.

- Ibn Ashur said that 'pens' is the plural of 'pen'. It refers to a split stick used to take ink and write with. This means that if every tree became a pen in proportion to the number of branches fit for that purpose and the sea became ink, there would still not be enough to write all of Allah's words⁶¹.

Summary

The tafsir scholars conclude that if the trees were made into pens to write Allah's words, the pens would break and the ink would run out. As Ibn Ashur explained in more detail, this indicates that the pen used to write Allah's words is made primarily from trees, and remains available to everyone at all times.

Secondly, Allah says, "And you were not with them when they cast their pens" (Surah Al-Imran, 3:44).

What do the 'pens' mean here?

Al-Tabari said that their pens mean their arrows/shafts — the pieces they used to draw lots when deciding on Maryam, as narrated from Mujahid and Qatada. He also reported that, when Maryam was placed in the mosque, the people at the gathering would draw lots while writing down the revelation. They would draw lots with their qamḥ/مقلام—meaning to decide who would take responsibility for her⁶².

Al-Qurtubi said that 'pens' is the plural of 'pen', from the root meaning 'to cut/trim'. It has been said that they meant their dart shafts/arrows. It was also said that they meant the pens with which they used to write the Torah, and this opinion is the best in his view⁶³.

- Al-Qasimi: He interprets it as 'shafts/arrows'⁶⁴, explaining that they are called 'pens' because they are cut and planed — anything you cut bit by bit is called 'qalamtuha' (trimmed it). For this reason, the instrument used for writing is called a pen.

Al-Shanqiti said, 'It points to the pens with which the words of Allah are written.'⁶⁵

Ibn Achour said that they are the pens used for writing the Torah; they would use them to draw lots in difficult matters by writing the names of those being chosen (or the names of the matters being drawn for) on them⁶⁶.

Conclusion: what is meant by 'here'?

The intended meaning of 'pens' in this verse is:

1) Arrows or shafts (or pieces for drawing lots), as al-Tabari and al-Qasimi say, and as al-Qurtubi also mentioned, though he considered another view to be weak.

These arrows/pieces are made from reeds and trees because, as al-Tha'labi explained⁶⁷, the suitable reeds/plants have internal tubes and go through stages until they become usable darts/shafts⁶⁸.

⁶⁰- The Compendium of Legal Rulings of the Quran: 8/272.

⁶¹- The Verification and Enlightenment: 8/837–838.

⁶²- The Gathering of Explanations on the Interpretation of the Quran: 2/3/343–344.

⁶³- As for Ibn Kathir, he does not discuss "the pens." See Interpretation of the Great Quran: 2/38. The Compendium of Legal Rulings of the Quran": 3/73.

⁶⁴- The Beauties of Interpretation: 2/4/363.

⁶⁵- Lights of Clarification: 4/142.

⁶⁶- The Verification and Enlightenment: 2/207.

2) 'Pens' as writing instruments for revelation, a view favoured by al-Tabari as the strongest and also supported by al-Qurtubi, al-Shanqiti and Ibn Ashur.

Therefore, according to the majority: They are the pens used for writing revelation.

Finally, Fakhr al-Razi reported al-Qadi's statement:

Even if using the word 'pen' for these things is correct from the standpoint of word derivation, custom requires limiting 'qalam/pen' to the instrument used for writing, so the verse must be interpreted accordingly⁶⁹.

Result:

In language use and in the Qur'an, the word 'pen' refers to the instrument with which people write and make marks on paper and other materials⁷⁰. It was called 'qalam' because it is 'qalam' (trimmed), meaning it is cut from a hard material and planed/smoothed (made ready for writing). This meaning is supported by the following verse from Surah Luqman:

'If all the trees on Earth were pens and the sea was ink...'

The word 'tree' is well known. Ibn Fāris said that the root s-j-r has two interrelated meanings: overlap or intermixing of parts, and elevation or height. The word 'tree' is also understood to have branches and interwoven growth⁷¹. In Arabic, "شجر" means 'abundant in trees', and 'tree' refers to any plant that has a stem. Allah also says: "And the stars and the trees prostrate" (Surah Ar-Rahman 6)⁷².

So the meaning is that pens are made from trees, specifically in the manner indicated. This is what Abu 'Ubayda refers to in Majaz al-Qur'an when interpreting this passage. Likewise, Abu al-Baqā' points out that everything that grows on the earth is a 'tree', and that a 'tree' is anything on a stem among the plants on the earth. What has no stem is a 'star' or 'grass' (the stars and the trees prostrate). This is also supported by the principles of interpretation (rules of tafsir), as mentioned earlier⁷³.

- The names that have boundaries in the speech of Allah and His Messenger are three types:

1) A name that has a linguistic boundary (e.g. the sun, the moon, land, sea). Those who carry these names to meanings outside their established designation have crossed their limits. The word 'qalam/pen' can be considered in this first category.

2) A name with a boundary in Islamic law, such as prayer and fasting⁷⁴.

In linguistic usage, a name is a term assigned to a concept or used to identify something. Therefore, the word 'pen' can be considered to refer to the instrument cut from trees and used for writing. It has different grammatical forms throughout the Qur'an: it is defined by al in Surah Al-'Alaq and Surah Al-Qalam, and appears with an added construct in Surah Al-'Imran, while in Surah Luqman it is restricted to:

"from a tree" (مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ)⁷⁵.

⁶⁷- Fiqh Lughā: p. 13.

⁶⁸- Same source: p. 161.

⁶⁹- The Keys to the Unseen: 4/8, p. 51.

⁷⁰- It is mentioned in Fiqh al-Lughā, p. 197: 'A chapter on listing forgotten Persian names and their Arabic equivalents, e.g. the pen, ink, hibr, the book, the script/line, etc.'

⁷¹- See also: Fiqh al-Lughā: p. 13.

⁷²- The Rectification of Homonyms and Synonyms in the Holy Qur'an: p. 259.

⁷³- Lexicon of Linguistic Measures: 3/246.

⁷⁴- See also: p. 3 of this research and p. 523 and p. 539 of The General Principles.

⁷⁵- See this research: p. 1.

Considering the context and Arabic usage, the interpretive weighting rules state that one should use the most common and well-known usage in the Arabic language when carrying the speech of Allah. Therefore, this supports the meaning we have determined for the word ‘qalam/pen’⁷⁶.

Second topic: The importance of the pen

The Qur’an highlights the pen in the first revelation and then swears by it in the second revelation due to its great status. Held in the hand, the pen is used to write on paper, scrolls or tablets to preserve knowledge and pass it down through the generations. It refines the mind and helps scholars to grow. It will remain within human reach until the Day of Judgement, no matter how advanced technology becomes.

Reality confirms the truth of what the Qur’an declared centuries ago: education through the pen has always been and will always be of immense importance. This is also what past and present scholars have emphasised.

First Topic: The Importance of the Pen Through the Noble Qur’an

The pen attained the highest rank of honour by being the means by which the Book of Allah and His message began, and by Allah assigning teaching to it. Then Allah swore by it to demonstrate its significance.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) also paid attention to it, keeping a record of revelations even though Allah guaranteed the protection of the Qur’an. He encouraged people to learn to write and used it as a means to invite rulers to Islam. He prioritised teaching over wealth and weapons — for example, he ordered the release or exchange of prisoners in return for teaching: Teaching ten imprisoned youths to write in exchange for those who could not pay a ransom.

Because forgetfulness can erase the images of knowledge, the Qur’an emphasises the pen: knowledge is transmitted through the pen, and people’s stories and affairs are recorded. Holding the pen and writing on paper is a form of miraculousness and a reminder of the greatness of the Creator, who made the pen a means to achieve an essential aspect of stewardship (khilāfah) until the end of time. Indeed, the pen may accompany the sword in governing lands and people, and in many cases it may even precede it.

To provide further clarification, we will quote some of what scholars have said about the pen and its great importance.

Al-Qasimi says:

‘Education by the pen is one of the greatest blessings that Allah has bestowed upon His servants.’

Through it,

knowledge is preserved and lasts forever.

rights are affirmed;

People’s dealings and transactions are regulated.

Without writing, the news of one era would have ended and been disconnected from another, traditions would have been erased, and rulings would have become confused. Later generations would not have known the doctrines of earlier ones.

Since much deficiency in religion and worldly life stems from forgetfulness, Allah provided people with writing to preserve knowledge—like containers that prevent belongings from being lost or wasted.

⁷⁶- 'Rules of Interpretation': 1/156.

Therefore, teaching by the pen after the Qur'an is one of Allah's greatest blessings. The gift of teaching by the pen is one that Allah granted to human beings. He taught them to write, gave them fingertips with which to write, and supported the fingertips with the hand and the hand with the arm.

How many of Allah's signs are we heedless of when learning to write with a pen! So pause while you write and reflect on your situation: you hold a lifeless pen and place it on a lifeless piece of paper. Yet it is through this process that kinds of rulings, categories of knowledge, forms of correspondence, speeches, poetry and prose, and answers to questions are produced.

So who causes the 'orbit' of meanings to move in your heart and draw those meanings to your mind? Who causes the wording that points to them to appear on your tongue? Who moves your fingertips to create astonishing marks that help you to achieve your needs and fulfil what is in your heart, sending it to distant lands and far places? It stands in your place, conveying your message, speaking on your behalf, and performing the role of your messenger. It benefits you in ways that sending a person away cannot.

No one can do this except the one who knows the pen, because knowing the pen means knowing humanity in a way that was previously unknown⁷⁷.

Then he continues:

There is no more eloquent statement or more decisive proof of the virtue of reading, writing and acquiring knowledge than the fact that Allah began His Book with it and initiated revelation with these magnificent verses⁷⁸.

As al-Shanqiti says:

In Allah's statement: "Who taught by the pen" (Surah Al-'Alaq, 96:4), the pen is praised. Even though Allah is fully able to teach without the pen, teaching by it is the highest level of honour. Then Allah mentions the pen in an act of honouring and magnifying that which He swears by: 'Nun, by the pen and what they write' (Surah Al-Qalam, 68:1). This shows how great the one sworn by is — namely the pen and what is written with it, such as revelation and other writings⁷⁹.

The message (the Qur'an's early call) begins with reading and writing. The Prophet also recognised the importance of the pen. He did not take it lightly; rather, he cared for it greatly. The greatest sign of his attention is that he appointed scribes to write down the revelations he received while he was present, even though he himself memorised and preserved them. Allah also guaranteed its protection and preservation:

'We will make you recite, and you will not forget' (Surah Al-A'la, 87:6).

"Indeed, We have sent down the Reminder, and indeed, We will preserve it" (Surah Al-Hijr, 15:9).

Nevertheless, the Prophet commanded that this preserved revelation be written down. He employed several scribes, which demonstrates his utmost care for the written word.

However, his focus on the pen extended beyond merely writing the revelation. He also promoted teaching through writing. As reported about Abdullah bin Sa'id bin Al-'As, the Messenger of Allah ordered him to teach people how to write in Medina, as he was a skilled writer⁸⁰. 'Ubadah bin Al-Samit said: 'I taught some people from Ahl As-Suffah how to write and recite the Qur'an.'

⁷⁷- Same source: 1/421.

⁷⁸- Chapters on the Fundamentals of Interpretation: pp. 133, 138.

⁷⁹- See: The Beauties of Interpretation, pp. 9–17, 441–442.

⁸⁰- See also The Beauties of Interpretation, pp. 9/17/441–442.

The Prophet also used writing to invite kings and rulers to Islam. Furthermore, in the story of the prisoners of Badr, those who could pay ransom were ransomed with wealth. However, those who could not pay but knew how to write would be ransomed by teaching ten boys how to write. As a result, writing spread widely in Medina afterwards. Among those who learnt were Zayd bin Thabit and others.

Initially, despite their need for wealth, weapons and even enslaving prisoners, Muslims still preferred teaching boys to write. Because of this, the number of scribes of revelation increased until it reached forty-two men, and then writing spread further with the spread of Islam.

The Qur'an also explicitly mentions writing in relation to religious and contractual documents:

“O you who believe! When you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down” (Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:282).

This is the longest verse in the Qur'an and includes all the elements of modern contract writing and justice⁸¹.

The point here is the importance of the pen in education. However, Allah's statement “Who taught by the pen” (96:4) does not preclude other methods of teaching, as illustrated by the story of Khidr with Moses, peace be upon them, and other examples⁸².

Ibn Achour says:

‘Learning through reading’ involves different methods, such as copying/writing practice, oral teaching, and inspiration. Referring to teaching by the pen and teaching in general points to the knowledge a person acquires, whether through lessons or reading books.

Learning the sciences depends on three things:

1. Learning from others through review and reading, which is achieved through writing and reading books.
2. Receiving knowledge orally, through teaching and dictation.
3. Ideas that arise in the mind, such as deductions and inventions.

In the verse “He taught by the pen”, there is a sign of special attention to the science of writing, and that Allah wants the Prophet to write down what is revealed to him. For this reason, the Prophet appointed scribes to record revelations from the outset of his mission⁸³.

Ibn Khaldoun says that human beings acquire knowledge, morals, beliefs and virtues through teaching and speaking directly, or through imitation and direct practice. However, developing skills through direct teaching and guidance is stronger, more established and more firmly rooted.

A clear explanation comes in two forms. It is either:

- for teaching purposes, or

2) For the purpose of discussion and debate.

The first level is speech, or verbal expression. The second level occurs when what is in a person's mind must be conveyed to someone who is absent or to future generations who did not meet or see the person. This second form is mainly writing, meaning marks made by hand, whose shapes and forms function as a substitute for spoken words.

⁸¹- See: Lights of Clarification: 9/151.

⁸²- See: Lights of Clarification: 9/151.

⁸³- Same source: 9/152–153.

People of knowledge and crafts are careful to transcribe their understanding into the pages of books in this written form, so that the benefit will reach those who are absent and those who come later. This is known as the pen and writing (script)⁸⁴.

He also says, in a chapter titled: ‘Differences in the ranks of the sword and the pen in states’:

Many rulers use force to take control of a government, yet they still need the authority of the pen as long as they remain in power. It is no coincidence that political leaders try to attract intellectuals and bring them into their inner circle for support⁸⁵.

The need for the pen within a state is even greater. The ruler becomes somewhat less dependent on the sword; his power has already been established and his main concern becomes reaping the benefits of kingship, such as taxation, administration, demonstrating the strength of the state and enforcing rulings. The pen helps him with all of this, so the need to manage it increases, while swords remain idle. In contrast, those who work with writing gain higher status and rank, and greater honour. They also enjoy more wealth and blessings⁸⁶.

Because of this, Allah — Glorified and Exalted — swore by it, and a whole surah was named after it.

Al-Zarkashi says:

‘One of the eloquent methods of the Qur’an is oaths, or swearing by something.’ An oath is only taken in the name of something great, as in Allah’s statement: ‘By the Lord of the heavens and the earth, it is indeed true’ (Surah Adh-Dhariyat, 51:23). Allah, Glorified and Exalted, swears by many of His creations in many places. Among the reasons for that are:

1. The Arabs used to honour these things and swear by them, so the Qur’an came with what they already recognised.

2. Oaths are meant to bring a person closer — because a man swears by what he honours and respects.

Al-Qushayri says in ‘Kanz al-Yawaqit’: ‘An oath by something never goes beyond two purposes:

- either for its virtue, like Allah’s oath by Mount Sinai and this secure city: “By Mount Sinai and by this secure city” (Surah At-Tin, 95:2–3).

- Or for a benefit, like Allah’s oath by figs and olives: ‘By the fig and the olive’ (Surah At-Tin, 95:1)⁸⁷.

Ibn ‘Ashur indicates this when interpreting Allah’s statement: “Nun. By the Pen and what they write” (Surah Al-Qalam, 68:1). He says:

‘The oath here follows the established pattern of oaths in Allah’s speech: they are taken by great things that point to the effects of Allah’s attributes.’ One benefit of this oath is that the Qur’an is the Book of Islam and will be written and read by Muslims. For this reason, the Messenger (peace be upon him) commanded his companions to write down what was revealed to him.

Therefore, the oath by the pen is an honour because it is used to write the Qur’an and other sacred texts. It is also used to write books about education, noble character and knowledge, all of which are honoured by Allah.

Allah also highlights the pen at the beginning of the Qur’an, preferring the oath by the pen and writing to emphasise that the attackers of the Messenger — those who accused him of madness — were attacked only because of what was revealed to him, i.e. the message that came with the Book⁸⁸.

⁸⁴- Same source: 9/158.

⁸⁵- See: The Verification and Enlightenment: 12/740–742.

⁸⁶- See: Introduction, p. 709.

⁸⁷- Same source: p. 308.

The Qur'an also honours the letters of the alphabet, writing and knowledge in order to encourage the community to embrace literacy and turn towards writing and knowledge. Writing and knowledge then become a means of preserving the Qur'an⁸⁹.

This is a summary of what commentators and scholars have said about the importance of the pen in the Qur'an. Today, science confirms this.

The second requirement: The importance of the pen from a scientific perspective

Scientific studies today have revealed many significant benefits of writing, especially with regard to learning and acquiring knowledge. They also help to preserve physical, psychological and mental health, and strengthen the bonds of love and connection among members of society.

Moreover, using the pen, a practice known since ancient times, is not economically costly because it is accessible to everyone, anywhere and at any time.

Specialists in neuroscience, psychology, and artificial intelligence have informed me about the pen. I asked them about it so I could discover the scientific truth about the usefulness of this tool, which is held in the hand and used to write on paper and other materials.

This is because the Qur'an contains truths about many areas of life. Even if people do not fully understand the wisdom behind these truths at the time, later scientific discoveries confirm them.

Believers are certain that Allah's mention of the pen — together with reading and teaching in the first revelation, the oath by it in the second revelation and the reference to the material used to make it and its use in the most serious matters, such as writing the revelation (the Qur'an) — is not meaningless. Rather, it is of great importance until the Day of Judgement.

Reality supports this: what we experience today, such as the decline in educational standards and the difficulty of addressing this using modern technology, confirms the findings of scientific studies. As those researchers said:

The ability to write by hand is one of the most important skills for developing mental abilities. Handwriting creates stronger neural connections in the brain, improving the retention of information over time.

Handwriting also strengthens 'muscle memory' and improves the links between the motor cortex and areas responsible for learning.

- Pen and paper provide cognitive benefits that digital tools cannot fully offer because writing by hand activates the parts of the brain responsible for thinking and remembering.

Using pen and paper encourages deep thinking and concentration more quickly and effectively.

Learning is not only a mental process; it involves the whole body. Fine movements (such as writing) support conceptual understanding.

- The area of the brain that controls the hand is one of the largest regions in the motor cortex, and the language area is located nearby.

- In neuroscience, there is a concept called motor learning theory.

Drawing and writing on paper develop visual-motor perception and spatial representation — skills that are essential for mathematics and engineering⁹⁰.

Al-Qushayri says in 'Kanz al-Yawaqit': 'An oath by something never goes beyond two purposes:

⁸⁸- Same source, p. 309.

⁸⁹- 'The Proof in the Sciences of the Quran': pp. 646-648.

⁹⁰- 'The Verification and Enlightenment': 12/52-54.

- either for its virtue, like Allah’s oath by Mount Sinai and this secure city: “By Mount Sinai and by this secure city” (Surah At-Tin, 95:2–3).

- Or for a benefit, like Allah’s oath by figs and olives: ‘By the fig and the olive’ (Surah At-Tin, 95:1).

Digital screens can cause problems related to visual perception. Long screen use can lead to ‘digital eye strain’ and affect children’s vision development.

Easy access to information reduces the likelihood of recalling it later, even if you use a smart pen, so you cannot rely solely on modern technology during the early stages of learning.

Early childhood experts recommend avoiding digital devices in the first five years due to their negative impact on sensory-motor and language development.

Using a pen helped children aged 3–5 recognise letters more effectively and gain skills faster than children who used a keyboard (study).

- Research shows that children who write letters by hand demonstrate stronger brain activity in reading areas (such as the temporal–parietal regions) than children who use a keyboard or touchscreen. This speeds up learning symbols/characters.

- When children use devices unsupervised, they face psychological risks such as anxiety and social comparison.

Digital use increases distraction and reduces focus compared to handwriting⁹¹. It can also lead to frustration, a lack of confidence, exposure to unsuitable content and weaker social interaction.

The Qur’an’s reference to the pen being held in the hand and used to write on paper or other materials was not arbitrary. It highlights the pen’s significant role in education.

In addition to what was mentioned earlier, scientific studies also show that artificial intelligence’s outputs depend on the quality and quantity of the initial inputs it receives — inputs based on human-written texts, whether handwritten or produced electronically. Any deficiency in the data can lead to weak or incomplete results. Furthermore, if some programmers favour certain ideologies, this can result in models that are effective in some societies but ineffective in others. Therefore, these models should be trained and evaluated using human-written text⁹².

The effectiveness of these AI models is also tied to how closely they match the characteristics of human writing. Machines always require human correction and adjustment. While it may reach a level of performance comparable to human skills, the absence of context remains a major barrier to AI replacing humans.

Studies also suggest that replacing handwriting with digital technology can be harmful. Handwriting activates a wider network of brain regions than digital typing does. The effort involved in writing also strengthens memory, improving the ability to retain information over the long term. Handwriting helps people develop ideas and engage in creative thinking to a greater extent than when they rely heavily on AI tools.

Dependence on AI products, such as electronic summaries of written texts, does not equip learners with the skills of reflection, simplification, structuring or creative critical thinking. In contrast, the pen facilitates the generation of ideas based on the learner’s personal experience, state of mind, and creativity — something that machines do not possess.

⁹¹- Same source: 12/50–51.

⁹²- This is a summary of what the specialist professors told me: Prof. Dr. Hichem Talbi (computer media specialist), Prof. Dr. Abu Bakr Seddik Fekraoui (neurology specialist) and Dr. Moussa Djenahia (clinical psychology specialist).

Education specialists also recognise that AI can produce inappropriate or incorrect outputs due to algorithmic bias. Some models are still fragile and struggle to work well when the context changes. Teachers adapt to students according to the situation because they understand what each learner needs. By contrast, a machine is an abstract object without feelings or the ability to form the kinds of social relationships unique to human beings.

Reading and handwriting skills are closely related. Research shows that children who practise handwriting develop greater fluency and a better understanding than those who rely on typing, particularly when learning. While typing may be faster and more efficient, neurological evidence suggests that handwriting is an important tool for learning and memory retention in educational contexts.

In the digital era, reducing reliance on pen and paper has produced generations who are distant from the foundations of language, especially Arabic, which is rich and distinct compared to other languages. Handwriting improves spelling, expression and creative thinking⁹³.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the most important results of my study, ‘The Term of the Pen in the Holy Qur’an’, are as follows:

1. The intended meaning of the word ‘pen’ is the type of pen used for writing by people, as evidenced by its linguistic, religious and Qur’anic usage.
2. It is called a ‘pen’ because it is shaped/produced from something solid, and the learner can obtain it in a special and relatively easy way from trees until the end of time, as the Holy Qur’an points out.
3. This pen is held in the right hand and is used to write on paper or other materials when learning or teaching.
4. The pen has many great benefits, as indicated in the Holy Qur’an.
5. Modern scientific studies confirm the great usefulness of the pen compared with modern educational technologies, especially smart/technological “pen” tools.
6. These studies also highlight the potential harms of excessive use of such technologies and emphasise the importance of using the traditional teaching tool: the pen.
7. The gradual approach to teaching becomes difficult when modern technologies are used due to the uncontrolled flow of information.
8. Even while they try to reduce certain difficulties, modern technologies originally depend on human production using the pen.
9. A machine cannot replace teachers and learners using the well-known pen — at least not without being able to teach properly according to circumstances.

For this reason, we must reflect on the Holy Qur’an and draw meaning from its texts, especially when it summarises or details particular issues using specific words in all aspects of life. For example, consider its references to the pen and its connection to reading and education in more than one place. This is significant at a time when modern technologies have not yet achieved the successes that this simple tool has enjoyed for centuries. Moreover, scientific studies have demonstrated the advantages of using this tool and the disadvantages of dispensing with it.

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⁹³- This is a summary of what Dr Wasilat Askarkatniya, a specialist in computer media at Emir Abdelkader University in Constantine, informed me.

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