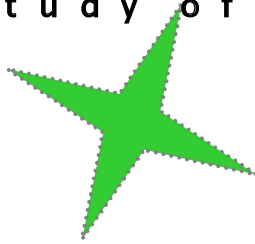


**I S L A M I C**  
**CALLIGRAPHY**  
&  
**M U S L I M**  
**IDENTITY**  
C a s e s t u d y o f  
K u w a i t



Hee Sook Lee-Niinioja



I S L A M I C  
CALLIGRAPHY  
&  
M U S L I M  
I D E N T I T Y

Hee Sook Lee-Niinioja

**Copyright 2008**

**All Rights Reserved.**

**No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.**

**Published by NOVEL&NOBLE, LEE-NIINIOJA COMMUNICATIONS**

**Text/ Design: Hee Sook Lee-Niinioja, PhD**

**Ebook version with new images 2017**

*To my  
God who endowed the meaning of life,  
Parents who inspired it,  
Family who supported it.*

## **F O R E W O R D**

The words of the Koran, given by God through the Prophet Muhammad to Muslims, are the core in Islam. His Will was accomplished by the invention of calligraphy which is regarded as one of the greatest achievements in Islamic civilization. Islamic calligraphy has become not only a direct-indirect driving force of Muslims' strong identity but also an object of high appreciation to non-Muslims due to its beauty. This attitude has been tremendously praised by artists and calligraphers in religious and applied art. Kuwait is not an exception.

This paper investigates Arabic calligraphy as an illustrative tool for religious and applied art in modern Kuwait, in parallel with an examination of its role in Muslim identity. As better understanding of Islamic culture is unavoidable in current societies where many conflicts take place, this paper could open up dialogues between different beliefs and religions, underlining the

**common culture and values. This book is especially made for education and research.**

**Hee Sook Lee-Niinioja, PhD**

## **C O N T E N T S**

### **PART I**

**Spread of Islam 8**  
**Belief in Allah 11**  
**Exploring Scripts 19**  
**Variety of Styles 33**  
**Initiative Calligraphers 46**  
**Tools for Perfection 57**  
**Mystic Approaches 63**  
**Applications 70**

### **PART II**

**Kuwait 82**  
**Calligraphy & Identity 84**  
**ISLAMIC ORNAMENT 99**

### **PART III**

**Contemporary 102**

**Searching for Self 107**  
**Vocabularies 119**  
**Sources 121**

## **PART I**

**The extraction of part one is theories of calligraphy,  
establishing a means of Islamic art and Muslim identity.**



## **S P R E A D   O F   I S L A M**

**Islam was founded by the Prophet Muhammad Before his death in 632. he had established a Muslim state in a large part of Arabia, and his successors were known as the caliphs. However, 30 years after his death, the state became split between the followers of Uthman, the third caliph, and those of Ali, the fourth, Muhammad's son-in-law. This division led to the two religious parties - the Sunni (Uthman's followers) and Shi'i (Ali's followers).**

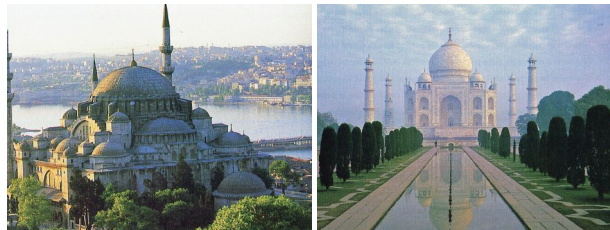
**In 661, the ruling patriarchal caliphs from western Arabia were succeeded by the first dynastic caliphate, the Umayyad, who had their main base in Syria. The Islamic Empire extended east as far as the borders of India and China, west to the Atlantic Ocean and the Pyrenees mountains. The Umayyad was overthrown by a revolution in 750, and succeeded by the House of Abbas. The Abbasids transferred the capital from Syria to Baghdad, Iraq, where they reigned until the year 1258.**

**The Arab conquerors and their descendants had control of the caliphate at the beginning, but later had to share power with non-Arab converts to Islam, especially Persians in the east. During the tenth and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Seljuk Turks as third ethnic element entered the Middle East. They were migrating westwards both north and south of the Caspian and the Black Sea, and established a new sultanate, claiming authority over the whole of Sunni Islam. During their domination, Islam**



reached new areas in Central Asia, and the Turkish converts to Islam carried the new faith to India by conquest and preaching. A new Islamic principality was founded in Asia Minor by a branch of the House of Seljuk.

The independent dynasties under the Abbasid caliphate recognized the supremacy of the Abbasid caliph as the single legitimate head of all Islam. However, in the tenth century, this was challenged by the rise of the Fatimid dynasty in Tunisia, and the migration of the people of Central and Eastern Asia into the Middle East reached its climax in the 13<sup>th</sup> century when the Mongols conquered the whole of Southwest Asia, and incorporated in the empire. Beijing as their capital, they ruled over Central Asia, Iran and Iraq, and extended their suzerainty to Anatolia. Later they were themselves converted to Islam, and several new Islamic states with a strong Turko-Mongol character were set up in the Middle East.



Suleymaniya mosque, Istanbul, Turkey 1550-57  
Taj Mahal mausoleum, Agra, India 1632-53

There were five main political centers in the Islamic world after the Mongol invasion. The first was the Ottoman Empire. With the capture of Constantinople in 1453, it became the greatest of all the Islamic

empires.<sup>(1)</sup> The sultans were patrons of a book-culture, favoring calligraphy.<sup>(2)</sup> The second was the Mamluk sultanate of Egypt, Palestine and Syria, creating the main citadel of the old Arab-Islam culture for some time.<sup>(3)</sup> The Koran brought religious and cultural unity to the sultanate, and was the instrument of power for its rulers, explaining Muslims' interest in calligraphy and the art of book.<sup>(4)</sup> Mamluk was conquered, and its territories belonged to the Ottoman Empire in 1516-17. The third was based in Iran. At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century a new and powerful monarchy covering the whole country was created by the Safavids. They were Shi'ites and made Shi'ism the state religion of Iran.<sup>(5)</sup> Among several patrons of the arts, Shah Abbas favored a style of production that distinguished Iran for more than a century.<sup>(6)</sup>

The fourth center was in India, where a succession of Turkish Muslim dynasties ruled over most of the northern part of the country. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century these dynasties were succeeded by the Mogul house, founded by Babur, a descendant of Tamerlane who came to India from Central Asia. The empire lasted until its overthrow by the British in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>(7)</sup> Under the great emperors, artistic creativity prevailed in prestigious books.<sup>(8)</sup> The last center of Islamic world is now southern Russia and Central Asian republics. Two large states of Muslim Mongols are the khanate of the Golden Horde in southern Russia and the Chaghatay khanate in Central Asia.

Islam had both advanced and retreated in various areas. In Southwest Europe the Muslims were driven out of Spain, Portugal and Sicily. In Eastern Europe the Ottoman Turks brought Islam to the walls of Vienna, but

were forced to withdraw. In Eastern Europe, the Golden Horde for a while managed to extend its sovereignty over large parts of Russia.

However, the most important area of Islamic conquest was in Southeast Asia, where Islam was brought by traders from Arabia and India. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century a large part of Malay had already become Muslim. From this century onwards, Islam was in retreat, when Europe was expanding both in Southwest and Southeast.<sup>(9)</sup> During the past decades, Islam has regained a foothold in Europe when the number of immigrants from Muslim countries has increased.\*

## B E L I E F   I N   A L L A H

Islam as an Arabic word interprets peace, purity, soundness, safety, submission, and obedience. Its religious term has two principal meanings: (1) Full submission to the Will of God (Allah) and obedience to His Law, (2) God's divine guiding system revealed to mankind through the prophets and completed in

---

\* (1) Lewis 1980, The World of Islam: Outline of Islamic History (2) Musee d'art et d'histoire 1988, Islamic Calligraphy (3) Lewis 1980 (4) Musee d'art 1988 (5) Lewis 1980 (6) Musee d'art 1988 (7) Lewis 1980 (8) Musee d'art 1988 (9) Lewis 1980

the Koran to the last Messenger, Muhammad. Everyone who submits himself to the will of God and obeys his law is termed "Muslim".

For Muslims there is the one and only God. Undertaking strict rules of worship, they are supposed to submit themselves to the Will of God, and follow the way of the life of Muhammad. As Creator of the Universe, God ordains and decrees all acts of worship and the means in which Muslims must observe. Islam is a comprehensive religion that deals with every aspect of human life, both spiritual and physical. The religion gives Muslims guidelines and instructions on how to deal with social, economic, and even political issues.<sup>(1)</sup>

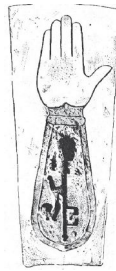
The Prophet is the bearer of God's revelation, the messenger of God's purpose, the ruler of God's community of believers, on God's behalf. In Islam, he is the last of the prophets. The revelation of God's Will to mankind had been fulfilled, and there would be no more prophets and no further revelations.<sup>(2)</sup>

## **The Five Pillars**

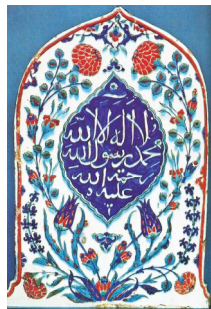
### **Shahada (the Profession of Faith)**

*Ash-hadu An La ilaha illa Allah*

*Wa Ash-hadu Anna Muhammadan Rasool-Allah*  
I bear witness that there is no god but God  
and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Prophet of God.



“There is no god but God)”, square Kufic, Samarkand  
An open hand, symbolizing the five pillars of Islam on a  
doorway, Alhambra, Granada, Spain



Shahada, flower pattern at the pulpit, Turkey, 17C

The first pillar is *Shahada* or Testimony. It is the confession of faith recited by Muslims: Muslims’ firm acknowledgment and belief in God’s existence and oneness. There is none to be worshipped but God, and He must be worshipped only according to the teaching of the Prophet. As Muslims believe Muhammad as God’s Messenger, the Koran, the word of God, and his *Hadith* (sayings) form a comprehensive system to guide man’s life to the right path.<sup>(3)</sup>

## **Salat (Prayer)**

The second pillar is prayer. Between two kinds of prayer, Du'a is a personal and spontaneous prayer, not bound by any rules or rituals, while Salat has a ritual prayer to be offered with Koranic words and actions five times every day at sunrise, midday, afternoon, sunset, and evening. It is a religious obligation of all adult Muslims, both men and women, except those incapacitated by illness.<sup>(4)</sup> Salat is a direct link between the worshipper and God.<sup>(5)</sup> The worshipper must be in a state of ritual purity, facing to Mecca, the birthplace of the Prophet.<sup>(6)</sup>

## **Hajj (Pilgrimage)**

The third pillar is pilgrimage, the Hajj. At least once in his lifetime, every Muslim is required to go on pilgrimage to the two holy cities (Mecca and Medina) and to follow the migration of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina. Women are allowed to go with the permission of their husbands and with a safe escort. Those who are unable to go may entrust this duty to others on their behalf, even by testament. The pilgrimage takes place between the seventh and tenth days of the month of Dhu'l-Hijja and culminates in the Festival of Sacrifices known as the Greater Festival. Pilgrimage has made Muslims to belong to a single entity. This sentiment is reinforced by the participation in the ritual and ceremony of the pilgrimage. The annual pilgrimage, which brings together Muslims

from different lands in a single act of devotion, is one of the strongest unifying factors in Islam.



Image of Mecca in rug or tile, Ottoman miniature, 1666

### **Sawm (Fasting)**

The fourth pillar is fasting. During Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic year, all adult Muslims should observe fasting with the exception of the old and the sick. Those on a journey may postpone the fast. For the whole of this month, believers must abstain from food, drink and sexual relations from sunrise till dusk. During the night, special prayers are recited. When the new moon appears, and the month of fasting is ended, there is a festival called the Lesser Festival (Id al Fitr) for three days.<sup>(7)</sup> Besides health benefits, fasting can help to attain piety and humbleness, and share feelings in the community to be more benevolent and charitable.<sup>(8)</sup>

### **Zakat (the Poor-Due)**

The last pillar is Zakat, a financial contribution paid by Muslims to the community. Originally it was a charitable levy collected from the believers, but was

transformed into a kind of tribute or tax whereby converts to Islam express their formal acceptance of Islam and loyalty to the Islamic state.<sup>(9)</sup> It encourages new Muslims' faith and solves those who have problems with finance. It purifies or legitimizes one's wealth and property too.

### God (Allah)

The name of God in Islam is Allah. God is the One, the Sole, and the Indivisible. His essence does not resemble other essences. God is the Omnipotent, the Omniscient, whose knowledge comprehends all things in the most perfect manner, hidden or visible. God is the most Merciful and is the God of the worlds. According to "tawhid" (monotheism), Muslims must believe in the Oneness of (1) the Lordship of God, (2) the Worship of God, and (3) the Names and the Qualities of God.



Allah in Kufic, mosaic part of a mosque in Samarkand  
Allah on the gazelle leather, Magribi kufic letter, 14C

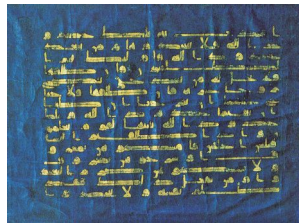
### The Koran

*Bismillah Al Rahman Al Rahim* (the opening phrase of the Koran)

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate



The Koran is Scripture of God which angel Gabriel brought down to Muhammad over a period of 23 years. The Prophet memorized the verses which he received, and recited them to his companions, in order to be written immediately down. The Koran is divided into 114 chapters (*surah*) of unequal length. It is one of the fundamental sources of Islamic teachings. God revealed some chapters and verses in Mecca, and the rest in Medina. The Meccan chapters and verses dealt mainly with the belief in the Oneness of God, the Existence of God, and the Day of Resurrection, while those revealed in Medina were about the actions of the individuals and all sides of life, including forms of worship.<sup>(10)</sup>



15 lines of Koran manuscript in Kufic on blue parchment, Qairawan, mid of 10C

As a second source of guidance, the Koran can be supplemented by *Hadith*, sayings of the Prophet. The Prophet is believed to have been divinely inspired in all that he did and said. The Koran and *Hadith* form the basis of Shari'a, the Holy Law. Shari'a covers all aspects of Muslims' public and private, communal and personal life. In those relating to property, marriage, inheritance and other matters of personal status, it is a normative code of law, which men were expected to obey and society to enforce. In the political prescriptions, it is

rather a system of ideals towards which men and society were presumed to aspire and strive.<sup>(11)</sup>

### **Muhammad, the Prophet**

Muhammad was born in Mecca, in western Arabia in about 571. The Arabian Peninsula lay on the edge of the civilized world, in touch with both the Byzantine and Persian empires. Though in the southwest, agriculture and cities had flourished since the ancient times, the greater part of Arabia consisted of arid steppe and desert, relieved by scattered oases and crossed by a few caravan tracks. Most of the populations were nomads, tending their herds or raiding rival tribes and the peoples of the oases and borderlands. Only a few small towns existed, because of the traffic that passed through Arabia between the Mediterranean and the East. One was Mecc.

The Arabs had a common literary language and a rich poetic literature which gave a common sense of identity. However, there was no common political order, and pagan was still in religious beliefs, they worshipped various gods under one supreme god, called "Allah". When Muhammad started to preach in Mecca, he converted first in his own family, then in wider circles. He was opposed by the Meccan polytheists, who regarded the new preaching as a threat both to their faith and interests.<sup>(12)</sup> Nevertheless, neither his faith was affected nor more people stopped from responding to his preaching.<sup>(13)</sup>



The birth of the Prophet Mohammad, Rashid al-Diin's  
“Universal History”



Shahada, in square pattern, Tabriz, 15C

In 622, Muhammad made an agreement with emissaries from Yathrib, north of Mecc. The people of Yathrib selected him their arbitrator, and those converts were along with him from Mecc. Yathrib now became the center of the new faith and community, known as Medina (the City). The migration of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina, named in Arabic “the Hijra”, is considered to be the decisive moment in the mission of the Prophet. It is from the year in which the Islamic calendar is reckoned, thus year 1 of the Hijra began in 622. Contrary to Mecca, in Medina he was first a chief, then a ruler, and had political and military as well as religious authority.

On 8 June in 632, the Prophet died after a short illness. He had established a new monotheistic religion

and ethical doctrines on a higher level to the people in western Arabia. Moreover, not only he brought a book of revelations which became the guide to thought, faith and conduct of Muslims, but he also set up a new state, well organized and armed, whose power and prestige made it a dominant factor in Arabia.<sup>(14)\*</sup>

## EXPLORING SCRIPTS

The attitude of Islam towards pictures of living beings is negative. The Koran forbids only cult statues, but Islamic Tradition (*Hadith*) reveals negative expressions concerning pictures. Six different kinds of

---

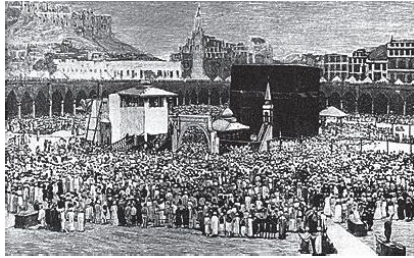
\* (1) Murad, Islam in Brief (2) Lewis 1980, The World of Islam: Introduction, (3) Murad (4) Lewis 1980 (5) Murad (6-7) Lewis 1980 (8) Murad (9) Lewis 1980 (10) Murad (11-12) Lewis 1980 (13) Murad (14) Lewis 1980

document can identify it: (1) pre-Islamic art, (2) the Koran, (3) traditions of the prophet (4) accounts of the conquest, (5) early monuments, and (6) coinage.

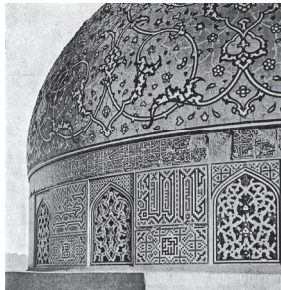
### **Islamic Art Tradition**

Firstly, the architecture of pre-Islamic Arabia was not particularly impressive. Religious places were poorly constructed for the simple ceremonies, and the holiest Kabaa was composed of parts without decoration. In general, pre-Islamic writing does not indicate an aesthetic reaction to the Kabaa, in terms of visual beauty. The emotional and pietistic idealization of the holiest place in Islam did not appear in the early times.<sup>(1)</sup>

Secondly, the Koran was not very significant to the artistic creativity, and was never used as a source of illustrations. The absence of major narrative parts lets the Korean difficult to be translated into visual form. Rather, it was and still is recited in mosques at prayer time. As a most important legal document, its aesthetic appeal is in the sound of its divinely inspired words. The central theological message of the Koran is the total uniqueness and power of God. He alone is a “Fashioner”, a *Musawwir* (Koran 59.24), which is the term, used for painter. God is the only Creator, and cannot admit of competitors.<sup>(2)</sup> Therefore, the artist who makes something lifelike is thought to compete blasphemously with God, and on the Day of Judgment, he will be punished for being unable to obey the divine command. In addition, such pictures distract one away from prayer, because a picture is thought to have magic and supernatural qualities, and worshipped as an icon.<sup>(3)</sup>



Pilgrims around Kabaa at Mecca



Koran phrase in geometric Kufic and Thuluth, Isfahan mosque, Iran, 1603

Thirdly, *Hadith*, the traditional sayings and practices of the Prophet, is quite clear about this hostile point of view. It calls artists of figured pictures “the worst of men”. It is as bad as to keep a dog, a despised, unclean animal which hinders entry of the angel’s mercy within the house. Human and animal figures are, however, allowed on carpets and pillows, since stepping, sitting, or leaning on them is not worshipping. The only themes permitted are trees and objects of “no living spirit”. *Hadith* also says that possessing figural paintings are forbidden almost as severely as making them.<sup>(4)</sup>

The legendary life of the Prophet soon after his death was occasionally illustrated from the 13<sup>th</sup> century

onward.<sup>(5)</sup> Muhammad considered himself as an ordinary human being whom God had selected to bring His message. Unlike Christianity, Islam has never developed a sacred iconography on the life of the founder of the religion. Instead, the Koran in its written form was elevated to a highly praised position, and its texts were borrowed to the decorative schemes of buildings.<sup>(6)</sup> In other word, the lack of a liturgy in Islam prevented it to develop the sacramental setting, contrary to requirements of the church.<sup>(7)</sup>

Fourthly, in the beginning of conquests, Muslims admired the art of the conquered Christian world, noting the brilliance of church decoration as a superior technique. Due to a powerful impact of churches of Jerusalem, the Byzantine mosaicists were brought, in order to decorate the mosque of Damascus and probably that in Medina. However, Muslims' initial awe and admiration may arise rejection and contempt.<sup>(8)</sup>

Fifthly, several scholars have argued that architectural compositions in the mosaics symbolize a paradisiacal vision of a peaceful Islamic world. Regardless of their ornamental value, the mosaics could have a symbolic meaning, the same as the decoration of churches with an iconographic sense.<sup>(9)</sup>

Lastly, the avoidance of figures was systematic and deliberate concerning a religious building, thus symbolic significance was given to new forms or forms in older artistic languages, such as in coinage. Before the conquest of the Fertile Crescent, nothing is known about Islamic coinage. The local coins, Byzantine ones in formerly Byzantine territories and Sassanian ones in the East were continued with Arabic inscription, indicating a

date, the name of a caliph or governor, the profession of faith, and a mint. Among numerous modifications in more imitation of Byzantine than that of Sassanian coins, some modifications removed a Christian symbol like the cross, replacing it with a knob.<sup>(10)</sup>

It can be said that the ban of living figures led to the use of other patterns. In the religious and secular sectors, vegetal, geometric and epigraphic decorations, and even non-figural landscapes were emerged. The Muslims' creative potentiality was channeled into decoration.<sup>(11)</sup> There was no scope to the figural painter; instead, the artistic talent was directed toward calligraphy or floral and geometrical designs, as a characteristic of Islamic art.<sup>(12)</sup>



### **Origin of the Arabic Scripts**

Recite in the name of thy lord who created  
Created man from a clot;  
Recite in the name of thy lord,  
Who taught by the pen,  
Taught man what he knew not  
(the Holy Koran 96.1-5)

These were the first words which God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and underline the central role of writing in Islamic culture and art. This can be seen through the Koran. Chapter 68 opens with the words, “By the pen and what they write”, and it has been suggested that the pen (*qalam*) was the first thing created by God to write down coming events. Man’s every deed is recorded in the Book of Reckoning for the final accounting on Judgment Day (69.18-19).<sup>(13)</sup>

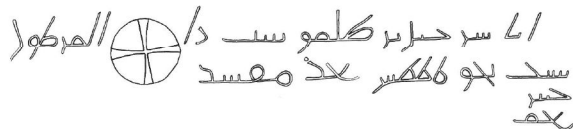
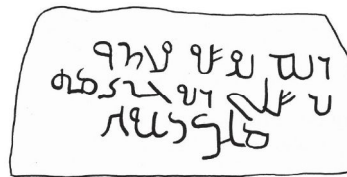
The growing importance of writing is largely mentioned in the early times. Another poetic message says, “And if all the trees on earth were pens and the sea - seven seas after it to replenish it -, yet would the Words of God not be spent.” (31.27) Again, God has sent His divine message through writing.<sup>(14)</sup> In fact, writing had been known to the pre-Islamic Arabs, especially in trade.

Two flexible surfaces were most commonly. Papyrus from the pressed fibers of a plant along the Nile in Egypt was used for business correspondence, while parchment, a more durable material from the skin of an animal, was intended for books.<sup>(15)</sup>

However, the Arabic script was developed much later than the Roman alphabet, because the Arabs were chiefly a nomadic people and did not trust the written word. They relied greatly to oral tradition for keeping information and communication. In pre-Islamic times and particularly in the sixth century at the heroic age of literature for the Arabs, poetry was dearest to their hearts and the only means of literary expression. The Arabs were dependent upon almost exclusively on oral tradition for preserving their poems. It is said that the Koran was at first transmitted among Muslims, not through the written word, but by oral tradition. Soon Muslims realized a necessity of using writing, and wanted to make their script beautiful too. In a relatively short time, they produced an astonishing calligraphic development, and transformed the Arabic script into an artistic medium that reflected their genius and talents. Among different views on the origins of the Arabic script and its relation to those in the Semitic group, North Arabic script relates most substantially and directly to the Nabataean script whose origin is the Aramaic script.<sup>(16)</sup> It is a consonantal script of 28 letters, recording long but not short vowels.<sup>(17)</sup>

The Nabataeans were in close contact with the other Arab tribes, and had long-standing trade and cultural links with them. As semi-nomads, they lived in an area extending from Sinai and North Arabia to southern Syria,

and founded a kingdom until the Roman's destruction in about 105 A.D. Nevertheless, their language and script outlived, and had a deep impact on the early development of the Arabic writing.<sup>(18)</sup>



Nabataean script on Um Umm al Jimal's tombstone, 250 Nabataean from Haran, starting "Ana Sharhil", 568

The earliest reference to the Arabic script proper is with the name Jazm. Probably it is a further development of the Nabataean-derived forms of letters. The Jazm's stiff and angular characteristics and the equal proportions of its letters affected the development of the Kufic script later. Gradually, Jazm became the script of all the Arabs, and gained the status of the sacred script for God's divine message until with the arrival of Islam.<sup>(19)</sup> However, words from the written text were difficult to read, and could even be misunderstood, if one did not know the text. Written from right to left, the Arabic script is a flowing continuum of ascending verticals, descending curves, and temperate horizontals with a balance between static perfection of individual form and paced a rhythmic movement.<sup>(20)</sup> Two styles of writing have

co-existed since the first centuries of Islam: Kufic and Naskh. Kufic was named after the town of Kufa in Iraq, one of the main centers of the Arab culture in the days of Umayyad. However, due to its difficulty to read, Naskh became the most common in the Koran later.<sup>(21)</sup>

### **Development**

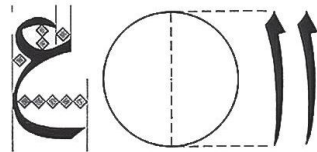
Calligraphy has accompanied the whole history of Islam in its own way. Wherever Islam was victorious, in war or religion, the indigenous culture would reinterpret calligraphy. The adoption of Arabic script in Afghanistan, Persia, Turkey, or even China, shows the power of this inspiration.<sup>(22)</sup> The Arabs have always been proud of their learning and mastery over the language. Already in pre-Islamic era, the Arabic language had a high reputation, because of its large vocabulary and power of expression. The first book was the Koran which set a new standard in

the Arabic language and the starting point of calligraphy. Calligraphy was beautified with fresh styles and new decorative motifs, seen from walls, minarets and arches of mosques.<sup>(23)</sup>

The origin of Arabic calligraphy has been twofold: (a) Kufic with an angular geometric script of a hieratic and monumental character, and (b) Naskh with a rounded, cursive and stenographic type. Both existed side by side. The more stiff Kufic was used in copying the Koran, cutting inscriptions on stones, and scribing legends on coins, while the more simple Naskh was for daily use. Its insufficient use in everyday life created Kufic a floriated and decorative shape for the specialists who can read and understand it. During the beginning of Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258), Kufic began losing ground, and almost disappeared from the Islamic world by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>(24)</sup> despite an occasional combination of Kufic and Naskh on a single page of text.<sup>(25)</sup>

Arabic calligraphy entered its most glorious phase during the ninth and tenth centuries. Ibn Muqla (d.940), vizier to the three Abbasid caliphs, was founder of the cursive scripts. By the late ninth century, more than 20 cursive styles were in use, but most of them were not as elegant as the perfected Kufic, and had to avoid the degeneration and proliferation into different types of style. Ibn Muqla decided to design a cursive script which would be both beautiful and perfectly proportioned, to compete with Kufic. He laid down a comprehensive system of basic calligraphic rules, based on the rhombic dot as a unit of measurement. He redesigned geometric forms of the letters, and fixed their relative shape and

size by the rhombic dot, *Alif*, and circle as the three standard units.



Ibn Muqla's system of proportion for the drawing of Naskh, the the letter 'Ayn



Shahada in Kufic on tombstones, Iran, 10C

For the system, the rhombic dot was formed by pressing the pen diagonally on paper, so that the length of the dot's equal sides was the same as the width of the pen. The standard *Alif* was a straight vertical stroke measuring a specific number of rhombic dots placed vertex to vertex, and the number of dots varied, according to style, from five to seven; the standard circle had a radius equal to *Alif*. Both standard *Alif* and standard circle were also used as basic geometric forms.<sup>(26)</sup>

This new method of writing was called "al Khatt al Mansub", and was readily applicable. Ibn Muqla applied it in the six major cursive scripts (Thuluth, Naskh, Muhaqqaq, Rayhani, Tawqi', and Riqā').

Among his pupils, Ibn al Bawwab (d.1022) made a significant addition to Ibn Muqla's work. Without violating any of the rules, his artist's soul gave elegance to the geometric harmony of the letters designed by Ibn Muqla. This more graceful style was known as "al Mansub al Fa'iq" (the elegant Mansub). Ibn al Bawwab's artistic contribution to Arabic calligraphy and in particular to the six scripts was praised as much as that of his great predecessor.

Despite perfection and beautification of the six styles, Ibn al Bawwab favored the Naskh and Muhaqqaq scripts. He is said to have written 64 Korans and a large number of secular works, but only one of his Korans and fragments of his secular works remain to the present day.

During the following century Yaqut al Musta'simi (d.1298) developed a new method of trimming his reed-pens with an oblique cut, giving the six scripts to a new dimension of grace and beauty. By his hand, calligraphy had attained the best ideal. To crown his achievements Yaqut evolved a new style from Thuluth, named "Yaquti", which is said to have surpassed all other styles. Yaqut had a reputation of being a strict tutor, who required his pupils to practice for long hours. He practiced daily by copying two sections from the Koran. Having attained the levels of perfection, the cursive scripts, especially Thuluth, evolved special ornamental forms which began to be used in the Korans and secular manuscripts. They could compete with Kufic in epigraphy.<sup>(27)</sup>

The Mongol invasions that culminated in the destruction of Baghdad in 1258 had serious disruptive effects on the Muslims' religious and cultural life of the conquered areas.<sup>(28)</sup> The reconstruction followed almost

immediately with the establishment of Il Khanid dynasty. After less than half a century, Islam became dominant again. Il Khan Ghazan (d.1305) himself converted into Islam, and made it the state religion. As a learned and pious Muslim, he devoted himself to enhance Islam and to revive its culture and arts, including calligraphy and book illumination.<sup>(29)</sup> During this time, many calligraphers produced splendid works in the writing of the Korans, continuing the traditions of Yaqut al Musta'simi and his followers. Many of these works which are remained today were largely in the Thuluth and Muhaqqaq scripts.

The Il Khanid's reign over Islam's eastern area was followed by the Timurids who also supported the arts of bookmaking and calligraphy. The dynasty was founded by Tamerlane (d.1405), and the patronage of calligraphy and bookmaking reached a zenith under his son Shah Rukh (d.1447). The Timurid style of writing the Korans was a balance between calligraphy and illumination. The Timurids used different sizes and styles of script on the same page in the Korans. Although this practice dated back to the time of Ibn Muqla, the Timurids were probably the first to extend it to the Koran. They also established traditions of writing very large Korans in the Rayhani, Muhaqqaq and other Naskh scripts.<sup>(30)</sup> Naskh was used less, but later influenced the scripts of Persian Ta'liq and Indian Naskh.<sup>(31)</sup>

The Mamluks sultanate (1250-1517) ruled Egypt, Syria and parts of Arabia, and Arabic calligraphy attained its ultimate perfection during the first century of the Mamluk rule. The huge use of calligraphy gave rise to special styles of Thuluth and Naskh. Moreover, other

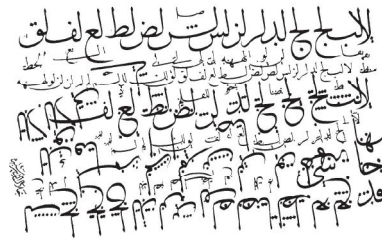


materials, such as metal, glass, ivory, textiles, wood, and stone, were introduced in writing.<sup>(32)</sup> Sultans commissioned a number of illuminated Korans, and the beauty of these works set up standards of calligraphy.<sup>(33)</sup>

By the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the calligraphic traditions of the Arabic script had been firmly set up. This was achieved through the evolution of the first scripts from their early roots and the development of Kufic in its different forms. The various styles of Naskh were consolidated into magnificent works, particularly in the writing of the Koran.

The true followers of the traditions were master calligraphers under the Safavids and Ottomans. They refined the art of Arabic calligraphy of the previous generations, rendering calligraphy both an artistic activity and a spiritual act, mainly within the established classical styles. The Safavid dynasty, which lasted until 1736, was the longest and most glorious of the later dynasties that ruled in Persia and Iraq with high culture.<sup>(34)</sup> The major contribution was the introduction of Ta'liq (hanging), in which the horizontal strokes of letters were boldly elongated, and the text was often written at angle across the page. This script was further developed into a lighter and more refined style called Nasta'liq whose origin was also found in the classic Naskh.

Nasta'liq established itself as one of the most important styles of Arabic calligraphy, and was adopted as the national script of Iran, still in use today. The style gained favor in Turkey and the Indian subcontinent, as the common script for illuminated literature, miniatures, epics, and other secular works. Despite its beauty and clarity, the script was seldom appeared in the Koran.<sup>(35)</sup>



An exercise, invented by Ibn Muqla, drawn by the Ottoman calligrapher M. Jalaudin, 1768

The Arabic scripts had reached a peak of refinement during the Ottoman (1281-1924), and the works of Ottoman calligraphers remain amongst the finest ever written. The Ottomans ruled Turkey, almost all of Arabia and parts of the Balkans in Europe. They were renowned for the patronage of calligraphy, and elevated the writing of religious text and especially the Koran into a sacred art. They added a number of new calligraphic styles. One was Diwani, used extensively in the secular writing of government directives and decrees, and architectural decorations around the Arab world.

The Ottoman's another contribution is the introduction of symbolism and images in the composition of text. Tughra, a symbol of the Sultan's signature, remains one of the most enduring calligraphic images. It was geometry, representing vegetal forms, birds, and other animals as calligraphic compositions. The highly esteem of calligraphy by the Ottomans was apparent in the exceptionally large number of illuminated Koran manuscripts, ornamental scripts in mosques, schools and public buildings, and calligraphic manuscripts of secular works.<sup>(36)</sup>



Surah al-Fatiha, in Muhaqqaq, Mamluk Egypt or Syria, 1245

Surah al-Fatiha, Safavid manuscript, Holy Mishaf, 16C

Surah Al-Fatiha and Surah al-Bakara, Ottoman Turkey, 1845

Besides Kufic and later Naskh, there developed a number of calligraphic styles with regional characteristics which added further aspects to the writing of Arabic. Calligraphy in India was directly influenced from that of Iran. The traditional Naskh scripts were used in the Koran, while Nasta'liq for literary and non-religious works. During the 14<sup>th</sup> century, two specific scripts for religious manuscripts emerged: Behari in bold and heavy horizontal strokes and a variation of the traditional Naskh with a much bolder and heavier use of line.



Roundel in mirrored Muthanna script, Indo Deccan or Bijapur, 16-17C

Calligraphers strove to perfect their art, and produced it within the rules and principles of the recognized style variations and innovation. Attempts were made at creating symbolic compositions of a doubled Muthanna text in a mirror image, and a miniaturized script of Ghobari for pocket size Korans. Arabic calligraphy became a medium for modern artistic expression. Artists and calligraphers create interesting composition with the Koran as the subject matter, testifying the art of calligraphy as a bond between Muslims and the Holy Koran.<sup>(37)\*</sup>

---

\* (1-3) Grabar 1973, The Formation of Islamic Art (4) Ettinghausen 1977, Arab Painting (5) Grabar 1973 (6) Ettinghausen 1977 (7-10) Grabar 1973 (11) Ettinghausen 1980, The World of Islam (edited by Lewis): the Man-made Setting (12) Ettinghausen 1977 (13) Bloom and Blair 1997, Islamic Arts (14) Grabar 1992, The Mediation of Ornament (15) Bloom and Blair 1997 (16) Safadi 1978, Islamic Calligraphy (17) Welch 1979, Calligraphy in the Arts of the Muslim World (18-19) Safadi 1978 (20) Welch 1979 (21) Burckhardt 1980, Art of Islam Language and Meaning (22) Khatibi and Sijelmassi 1995, The Splendour of Islamic Calligraphy (23) Ahmad 1984, Islamic Calligraphy (24) Saif-Ur-Rahman Dar 1986, The Roots of Muslim Calligraphy,

## VARIETY OF STYLES

The art of calligraphy thus attains the fullness of its effect at the moment when the letter, word, line or even the whole page ceases to be a vehicle of meaning...and glides into 'the pure visual significance' of the stroke. Nevertheless...no complete disappearance of intellectual perception...of the sensory, but...simultaneous and overall grasp of the signified and of its material expressions as released together by the motion of the writer's hand. It is even this uncertainty...which drifts unattached between the will of the text and the exuberant grace of its formal wrapping, this gap between the concept and continual movement, and this transcribed deletion which constitute the miracle of calligraphy.<sup>(1)</sup>



A line of calligraphic decoration...stands in perfect harmony with its background. Its adaptability ensures its fitness with the surrounding scheme and gives it grace and life...its abstract nature calls for even greater artistic skill...the lines in themselves have to be so supple and round in form and graceful in movement that they must give the impression of being alive to the sight...Thus rhythm, movement and grace...by realizing them in lines abstracted from those object.<sup>(2)</sup> (Image: Lettering, Ottoman Turkey, 19C)

---

Musee d'art et d'histoire 1988, Islam Calligraphy (25-26)  
Safadi 1978 (27) A Beit Al Qur'an Publication 1996 (28)  
Safadi 1978 (29) A Beit Al Qur'an 1996 (30-31) Safadi 1978  
(32) A Beit Al Qur'an 1996 (33) Safadi 1978 (34-35) A Beit Al  
Qur'an 1996 (36) Safadi 1978 (37) A Beit Al Qur'an 1996

Calligraphy is most widely shared by all Muslims. Anyone who can write can appreciate the merits of a good calligrapher. Nothing has typified the aesthetic sense of Muslims as much as the Arabic script.<sup>(3)</sup> Thomas Arnold relates that “No art has been so much honored or assiduously cultivated as that of calligraphy.”<sup>(4)</sup> Calligraphy was started by the Arabs, but was received its highest fulfillment at the hands of the Persians.<sup>(5)</sup>

### Kufic



Kufic; Variation of Kufic, Iraq or Syria, 8-9C

The simple Kufic, as a hieratic script, was used in the Koran, due to its bold character in form.<sup>(6)</sup> It was not until the second half of the eighth century that the script reached perfection for copying the Koran. It was written on surfaces of which the height was less than the width, because the script had a relatively low vertical profile with almost no strokes below the main line of writing, but had extended horizontal strokes. The Kufic Korans were in an oblong format.<sup>(7)</sup> In the ninth century, the Koran had rounder curves and slantingly pointed tips, and by the middle of the tenth century Kufic was finally replaced by Naskh, no longer used in the Koran.<sup>(8)</sup>



Variation of Kufic and arabesque, Mosque, India 13C

As the Kufic epigraphy was not subject to strict rules, and rather allowed the artist a free hand in his concept and execution of its ornament forms, the letters were extended into simple ornaments without hindering the basic outlines. From the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the letters created ornamental letterforms. And new geometric elements were seen in the shape of plaiting, knotting and inter-twining at the verticals of certain letters. The free ends of some squared letters acquired ornamental extensions as well.<sup>(9)</sup>

The Fatimid dynasty of Egypt (1155) elaborated the most of Kufic, but with the passing of this dynasty, the script also fell out of use except in architectural and ceramic decorations.<sup>(10)</sup> Its more complex ornamental forms continued until late in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Foliated, floriated, plaited, knotted, interlaced, intertwined, and animated letters took the form of human heads or figures or animal shapes. The purest angular Kufic became geometric patterns on minarets, and in mosques and calligraphic patterns. The ornamental Kufic could be applied on every kind of surface; brick, stone, stucco, tile, wood, metal, glass, ivory, textiles, and parchment.<sup>(11)</sup>

## Eastern Kufic



The Koran leaf, Surah 54, Iran, 11C, in Eastern Kufic

Eastern Kufic, along with Kufic of Fatimid Egypt, described the early scripts in the Islamic East, particularly in Arabia, Iraq and Iran. Eastern Kufic remained as the primary script for the writing of the Koran into the 11<sup>th</sup> century when it was replaced by Naskh. Since then, the script has been appeared on chapter headings and other ornamental and decorative elements, instead of the body text.<sup>(12)</sup>

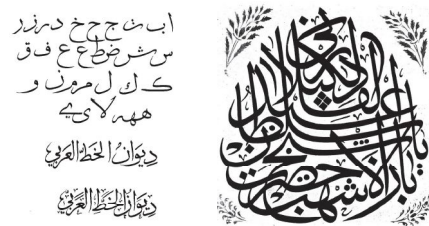
## The “Six Styles” of Cursive Writing

The “six cursive styles” were raised to the status of major scripts by Ibn Muqla, and gained grace and beauty at the hands of succeeding master calligraphers, such as Ibn al Bawwab, Yaqut al Musta’simi, Shaykh Hamdullah al Amasi (d.1520), and Hafiz Uthman (d.1698). They are Thuluth, Naskh, Muhaqqaq, Rayhani, Tawqi’, and Riqa’.<sup>(13)</sup> All scripts have their own special character: Naskh (from which all present day printing types are derived), Thuluth (more cursive outgrowth of Naskh), Muhaqqaq (bold script with sweeping diagonal flourishes), Rayhani (more ornate version of Thuluth), Tawqi’ (derivative of Thuluth with the letters sometimes



joined together), and Riqā' (cursive style, common in use for handwriting in almost all of the Arab world).<sup>(14)</sup>

### Thuluth



Thuluth; Thuluth in Iraq or Turkey, 18C



Thuluth on iron frame with a phrase of Arab poem, Iran, 17C



Naskh and Thuluth, by Shaykh Hamdullah al Amasi, 1500C

Thuluth was first formulated in the seventh century during the Umayyad, but was fully developed in the late ninth century. The name means “a third”, because of the proportion of straight lines to curves, or because the script was a third of the size of another popular

contemporary script, the Tumar.<sup>(15)</sup> Thuluth is an ornamental variety of Naskh. Its structure differs only from Naskh in the proportion of its curves and strokes that are about three times the size of Naskh. The script brings out the wavy movement which is suppressed in the peculiar curves and strokes of Naskh.<sup>(16)</sup> It has letters of rounded shape, linked and intersected, giving rise to a cursive flow of ample and complex proportions, as the most elaborate graphics and outstanding plasticity.<sup>(17)</sup> Thuluth has been extremely popular and the most important decorative script for calligraphic inscriptions, titles, headings and colophons. One of varieties, developed by Ibn al Bawwab and Yaqut, was so closely associated with the Koran and other religious texts that it achieved the status of hieratic script.<sup>(18)</sup>

### Naskh

ا ب ج د ه ز س ص ط  
ع ف ق ك ل م ن  
و ه ه ه ل ا ي م ن

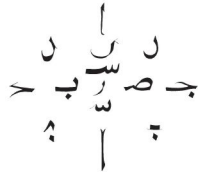


ذِي سَوَانِ الْعِظِّ السَّعَوِيِّ

Naskh; Bird in Naskh, Iran, 17C

The Naskh scripts had developed different lines than those of Kufic. The scripts were derived from the pre-Islamic and early Islamic scripts of Hijaz,<sup>(19)</sup> but appeared in a more systematized form at the end of the ninth century.<sup>(20)</sup> As Naskh did not own much elegance and discipline, it was used for secular purposes. Naskh was easier and faster to write than Kufic, due to its cursive nature.<sup>(21)</sup> When the introduction of paper in 750 replaced other writing materials such as papyrus and parchment, Naskh spread throughout the Islamic East.<sup>(22)</sup> Ibn Muqla made it to perfection. His rule was to make the diameter of a circle correspond to the length of an *Alif*. The circle became the reference measure for each letter. With rhythmic lines, the graphic movement of Naskh is well-proportioned and rapidly applied, because of its regularity.<sup>(23)</sup> Having become a major script, Naskh was transformed by Ibn al Bawwab into a script worthy of the Koran.<sup>(24)</sup> Despite its first aim for everyday purposes, the script was favored by the Koran copyists, and used for theological books and translations from Greek and Persian as well. It is the supreme script for dissemination of Islamic culture and art.<sup>(25)</sup>

## Muhaqqaq



Muhaqqaq; Koran leaf, Surah 28:83, Muhaqqaq, Timurid, 15C

Muhaqqaq was less angular than Kufic, with well-spaced ligatures. With the discovery of paper and its rapid spread, it became widely used. During the caliphate of Al Ma'mun (813-833), the script acquired certain roundness for easier writing. Although modification and reproduction were done by Ibn Muqla, it kept the main features of extended upstrokes. Ibn al Bawwab made the perfection of Muhaqqaq, giving it shallow and sweeping horizontal sub-linear flourishes for impetus and more extended upstrokes for grandeur. For more than four centuries, this characteristic allowed it to be the favorite script for large Korans in the Islamic East. It was the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries in Egypt under the Mamluk sultans, and in Iraq and Persia under the Il Khanid Mongols.<sup>(26)</sup>

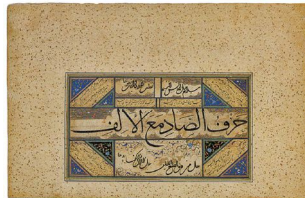
### Rayhani



Rayhani

Rayhani was first developed during the ninth century, and was probably derived from Naskh. It has characteristics in common with Naskh, Thuluth, and Muhaqqaq. It also has some of the features of Thuluth, despite more delicacy. Another feature of Rayhani, as compared with Thuluth, is that its vertical strokes are straight and extended. The curves of Rayhani, like those of Muhaqqaq, are little angular, pointing almost horizontally leftwards. The script became close to Muhaqqaq, considered as a sister script, but is written with a pen about half as wide as that used for Muhaqqaq. Rayhani was a favorite script for large Korans, and was preferred in Persia under the Il Khanid sultans who were contemporary with the Mamluk sultans of Egypt.

### Tawqi'



Lion, "May God Almighty be pleased with him and honor him", Persia, 19C

Leaf, Nastaliq, Muhaqqaq, Tawqi', Safavid Iran, 16C

Tawqi' (signature) was invented in the time of the Caliph Al Ma'mun in the ninth century. It is close to Thuluth, though its letters are more rounded. It has many of the same characteristics as Riqā'. The difference is that the lines in Tawqi' are thicker than those in Riqā', and its curves are less rounded, which makes it look like

a much heavier script. The script did not develop fully until late in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Its establishment as a major script was brought about by Ibn al Khazin, who was a second-generation pupil of Ibn al Bawwab. During the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, a heavier variety of Tawqi', similar in size to Thuluth and more closely on its characteristics, was developed in Turkey, favored by the Ottoman caliphs.

### Riqa'

ا ب ت ج ذ ز س ش ض ظ

غ ف و ق ك ل م ن و

همزة بـ ة لـ يـ

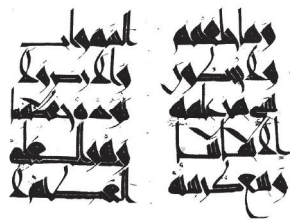
ديوان الخط العربي

Riqa'

Riqa' was derived from both Naskh and Thuluth. The geometric forms of its letters resemble those of Thuluth in many respects, but the script is smaller with more rounded curves.<sup>(27)</sup> Mumtaz Bag, counselor of the Ottoman sultan Abd al Magid Khan, laid down the rules for its compact graphic form. The spaces between letters and words are equal, and the height of the letters gives a certain rhythm.<sup>(28)</sup> The most graceful is Riqa' in ornamentation, more decorative than Thuluth.<sup>(29)</sup> Riqa' was one of the favorite scripts of the Ottoman calligraphers, and was improved by the famous calligrapher Shaykh Hamdullah al Amasi (d.1520). It was

progressively simplified later, becoming the preferred script of handwriting throughout the Arab world today.<sup>(30)</sup>

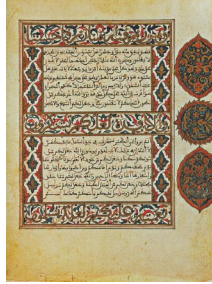
### **Maghribi**



Surah al Baqara, bold Western Kufic Maghribi, in Qairawan

Maghribi, Western Kufic, has its roots in the Eastern Kufic styles, but from the tenth century onward it developed own character in North West Africa and Muslim Spain. Its started in Qairawan (670 A.D), making the city as a center of power, religion and culture between the ninth and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>(31)</sup> The lightness and grace of Maghribi were contrasted with the massive ornamental Kufic for the headings. The size of the script relative to the page and its density were dependant upon calligraphers and the occasion.<sup>(32)</sup> The script acquired elegance and lightness with various styles, distinct in compact characters, delicate letters and finesse of line. By the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, sharing aesthetic details, individual styles produced the present Maghribi for the Koran and in normal correspondence.<sup>(33)</sup>

أب جيب تفت تفت  
 ج ح خ د ذ ر ز  
 ن ش ص ض  
 ط ظ ع ف ج ج ع  
 هـ هـ و ي ي ء آ إ أ  
 ديوان الخط العربي



Maghribi; Koran leaf, Surah 39:1, Maghribi and Kufic, Spain, 14C

### Ta'liq

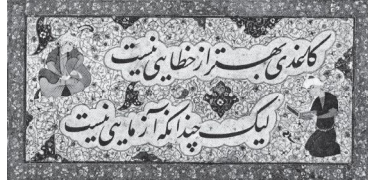
ا ب ت ج د ر ز س ش ص ط  
 ع ف ق ك ل  
 م ن و ه ه ي ء  
 ديوان الخط العربي

### Ta'liq

Ta'liq (hanging) was developed by the Persians from the Arabic script, called Firamuz, an unpretentious cursive script in use until the early ninth century. It never gained great favors among the Arabs, despite establishment as a defined script in this century. In the development, the script was particularly influenced by Tawqi' and Riqqa', and its invention is attributed to the calligrapher Taj I Salami. Ta'liq became the native calligraphic style among the Persian, Indian and Turkish Muslims.

### Nasta'liq





An album written by Mir Ali during his stay in Bukhara, c.1535-40

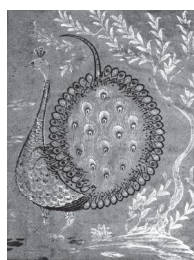
**Nasta'liq (compounded from the names Naskh and Ta'liq) is considered as a variant style of Ta'liq. It was developed in the late 15th century by the Persians, and has ever since been their national script. The Persian calligrapher Mir Ali Sultan al Tabrizi (d.1416) was the founder of this script. Legend tells that Mir Ali, a devout Muslim, prayed earnestly to be granted the gift of creating a beautiful new calligraphic style. The Imam Ali appeared to him in a dream, and instructed him to study a certain bird. Soon afterwards, he was visited in his dreams by a flying grouse, and was inspired to model his letters on the shape of its wings. Legend apart, the bold and clear lines of Nasta'liq and its perfectly rounded curves suggest a bird in flight. Its clarity and geometric purity give Nasta'liq a seemingly casual elegance which belies its highly sophisticated and strictly applied rules.”<sup>(34)</sup> As the latest style, the curves develop into most sensual form: round, crescent, or oval. Its strokes are long and sharply pointed in the form of a straight sword.<sup>(35)</sup>**



Jami poem, Nastaliq and decorated Kufic, Heart, Afghanistan, c.1500

### Diwani

لا اله الا الله  
 محمد وآله وصحبه  
 وسلم  
 اللهم صل على  
 سيدنا محمد  
 وآله الطيبين  
 الطاهرين

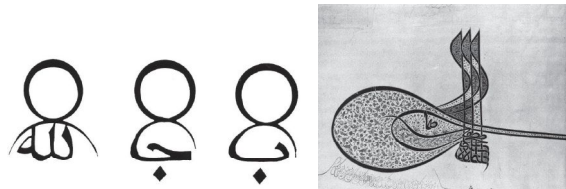


Diwani; Peacock in Diwani, blessing for Ottoman ruler, Turkey, c.1700

Diwani is constructed from a cursive movement accentuated by a balanced up-and-down and right-to left slant. The graphic form of its letters shows a mixture of Thuluth, Naskh and Rayhani, the latter being a variant of Thuluth. Each letter begins with a downstroke, and ends with an upstroke. The rules for this style are attributed to the 15<sup>th</sup> century calligrapher Ibrahim Munif, but reached perfection in the 17<sup>th</sup> century under the pen of the calligrapher Shahla Pasha. Diwani was prized by the

administration, and became the noblest manner of writing in the Ottoman chancellery.<sup>(36)</sup>

### Tughra



Tughra; Tughra of Sulayman the Great, Mid 16C

The ingenious use of the Arabic script is Tughra; a symbol of the Sultan's signature. A sentence from the Koran or a common prayer is written in a way that the composition outlines a bird or any animal excepting those considered unclean or of ill omen. Tughra writings are used as amulets by the superstitious masses. A lion or a tiger, a symbol of the valor of Ali, are mostly used. Such animal figures form a very common object of decorating Muslim homes, serving both decoration and a means of warding off the evil spirit from the house. However, Tughra needs not be necessarily in animal figures, and might be written in any other ingenious way. Names of Allah, Muhammad, his daughter and those of the succeeding caliphs are written in various ways, in order to keep in mind the characters of those whom the names signify.<sup>(37)\*</sup>

---

\* (1) Musee d'art et d'histoire 1988, Islamic Calligraphy (2) Ziauddin 1979, A Monograph on Moslem Calligraphy (3)

## INITIATIVE CALLIGRAPHERS

You will abandon peace and sleep,  
Even from your tender years.  
Like unto a *qalam* you will rub your head against the paper.  
Not resting a day or a night from labor,  
Discard your desires,  
Turn away from the road of covetousness and greed,  
Wrestle with the cravings of the concupiscent soul,  
...  
He who knows the soul, knows that  
Purity of writing proceeds from purity of heart.  
Writing is the distinction of the pure.  
-Epistle of Maulana Sultan Ali- <sup>(1)</sup>

The ideal of a calligraphist...was to express an emotion,  
which he strove to realize through the medium of the linear  
rhythm that his script was capable of producing..The  
charm of a calligraphic writing is contained in the structure  
of strokes and curves which aim at producing a graceful  
movement instinct with universal appeal...A line, by its  
nature, is symbolic of a movement, of a particular rhythm

---

Burckhardt 1980, Art of Islam Language and Meaning (4-6)  
Ziauddin 1979 (7) Safadi 1978, Islamic Calligraphy (8)  
Ziauddin 1979 (9) Safadi 1978 (10) Ziauddin 1979 (11)  
Safadi 1978 (12) A Beit Al Qur'an Publication 1996 (13)  
Safadi 1978 (14) A Beit Al Qur'an 1996 (15) Safadi 1978  
(16) Ziauddin 1979 (17) Musee d'art et d'histoire 1988 (18)  
Safadi 1978 (19) A Beit Al Qur'an 1996 (20) Safadi 1978  
(21) A Beit Al Qur'an 1996 (22) Safadi 1978 (23) Musee d'art  
1988 (24) Safadi 1978 (25) Musee d'art 1988 (26-27)  
Safadi 1978 (28) Musee d'art 1988 (29) Ziauddin 1979 (30)  
Safadi 1978 (31) A Beit Al Qur'an 1996 (32) Safadi 1978  
(33) A Beit Al Qur'an 1996 (34) Safadi 1978 (35) Ziauddin  
1979 (36) Musee d'art 1988 (37) Ziauddin 1979

abstracted from a natural object. A calligraphist selects a particular kind of line which he feels would produce the desired suggestion. His success depends upon the successful execution of the theme of his rhythm. Styles in calligraphy differ from each other in the styles of rhythm they convey.<sup>(2)</sup>

According to one of the earliest handbooks, the future calligrapher needed certain psychological characteristics: he should be “of sweet character and of an unassuming disposition.” As writing often dealt with sacred words, Sultan Ali also warns in his epistle “Sirat al Khatt” that the calligrapher should not be unclean for a single hour. “Purity of writing is purity of the soul” reflects external purity too.

To write the Koran in a worthy style was the highest goal for the calligrapher, and it can be touched or recited only in the state of ritual purity (56.79).<sup>(3)</sup> A master calligrapher like Shaykh Hamdullah (d.1519) was an excellent sportsman. His absolute concentration on the target was a spiritual exercise, strengthening both his eye and his mind, for his mystical concentration is at the heart of calligraphy.<sup>(4)</sup>

Although many Muslims had received a general education in the basics of decent writing, it took more time for them to be rightly called “calligrapher” (*Khatta*). Calligrapher needed a long study with his master by receiving the permission (*Ijaza*), which gave him the right to sign his work with his own name. A teacher wrote a document in 1775, under the condition that he does not divide a single word to write it on two lines, and that he always write the formula ‘God blesses him and gives him peace’ after mentioning the noble name of the Prophet,

and that he does not place himself arrogantly above his colleagues, I give him permission to write the Kataba.<sup>(5)</sup>



A scribe, attributed to Bichitr, Mughal India, c.1625. Leaf from an album

In other words, the person who was interested in calligraphy had to find a master to teach him, individually or in a small group, letter by letter. The pupil then had to spend all day practicing, as Mir Ali says:

Forty years of my life were spent in calligraphy;  
The tip of calligraphy's tresses did not easily come in my hand.  
If one sits leisurely for a moment without practicing,  
Calligraphy goes from his hand like the color of henna.<sup>(6)</sup>

The pupil should learn how to sit properly, usually squatting, but also sitting on his heels. The paper should rest on his left hand or on the knee, thus it is slightly flexible, because the round endings could be written more easily for large pieces. Then he learned the measurements of the letters by the dots and circles introduced by Ibn Muqla. All this happened under the guidance of the master.

Mir Ali recommends that “The calligrapher needs five things - a fine temperament, understanding of calligraphy, a good hand, endurance of pain, and the necessary utensils. And if any of these five is missing, then it will be of no use even if you strive for a hundred years.”<sup>(7)</sup>

The relation between master and pupil was similar to the close and loving relationship between a spiritual guide (Sufi) and his disciple. If someone spoke against the master or annoyed him, it could cause punishment. When a disciple of Shaykh Hamdullah claimed to write better than his teacher, the disciple soon cut two of his fingers with a penknife, and the wound did not heal for a whole year. The future calligrapher usually began his training early, even before he was ten years old. However, the normal age range seemed to have been in the twenties, and calligraphy was often connected with certain families. Ibn Muqla’s father and brother were well-known calligraphers.<sup>(8)</sup>

In most cases, the development of a calligraphic career followed the same pattern. They grew up in an intellectual environment, and studied, often with relatives. Afterwards, they tried to gain their livelihood as independent or court calligraphers or joined some practical profession.<sup>(9)</sup>

During the time of the Abbasids, when paper had been taken into use, and more people were educated, the art of book reproduction became extremely important. The scholars including the government officers employed skilled calligraphers as secretaries and amanuenses.<sup>(10)</sup> In Ottoman Turkey, talented young men from all parts of the country came to Constantinople to receive the

training in calligraphy. Many worked as teachers in the imperial or theological schools, offices of the sultan or some vizier, a religious administration, and a financial office.<sup>(11)</sup>

It is told that Yaqut wrote 1,001 copies of the Koran, which amounts to two Korans a month. Ibn al Bawwab wrote 64 copies of the Koran, of which at least one is preserved.<sup>(12)</sup> The work of calligraphers was always expensive and greatly admired. They were devoted to their profession, and led almost ascetic life filled with strict discipline. Moreover, they were highly respected in the society, and had a reputation of having strong moral purity and religious character.<sup>(13)</sup>



Permission certificate to Ali Ra'if Efendi, 1796

Hundreds of calligraphers worked in studios next to the halls of a library. They were grouped together copying Korans; some were appointed to go through the copied manuscripts, and add short vowels and diacritical marks. The caliphs set up the standard and style, and the calligraphers got the credit for educating the masses.<sup>(14)</sup> Kings and dervishes were also very fond of calligraphy.<sup>(15)</sup> Sultan Ali of Mashhadi boasted that, despite his being sixty-three years old, his musk-colored pen did not spoil



a single page, and manuscripts that he copied ten years later are still beautiful.<sup>(16)</sup>

In Constantinople from 1500 onward, Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent was surrounded by excellent calligraphers. The most outstanding of them was Ahmad Qarahisari. His large inscriptions in roundels at the Suleymaniya mosque are the *Bismillah*, in which he reached the perfection of the large Tawqi<sup>(17)</sup>

In many cases, calligraphers had to work hard to achieve perfection, though few managed to do so. Every calligrapher must have felt, consoling for repeat of the same letter thousand of times. A 17<sup>th</sup> century writer in Sind expressed: “Everyone who lives through the Water of Life of the pen will not die, but remain alive as long as life exists.”<sup>(18)</sup>



Middle Age's Arab public library from Al Hariri's Maqamat, Hulwan near Baghdad, 1237

**Ibn Muqla(886-940)**



Ibn Muqla

Ibn Muqla (“the Son of the White of the Eye”) was the inventor of the six styles of writing (*Sittah*) - Thuluth, Naskh, Muhaqqaq, Rayhani, Tawqi’ and Riqa’. He took the circle for the basis of writing,<sup>(19)</sup> although rounded styles of writing had long been used for correspondence and documents.<sup>(20)</sup> His full name was Abu Ali Muhammad ibn Ali bin al Hussain bin Muhammad bin Muqla. He was a non-Arab by descent, but rose to the prime post of vizier during the reigns of three Abbasid caliphs, al Muqtadir, al Qahir, and al Razi.<sup>(21)</sup> Around the year 900, Ibn Muqla developed a system of proportioned writing, based on the diamond-shaped dot formed when the nib of a reed pen was pressed against a piece of paper.<sup>(22)</sup>

He utilized his knowledge of geometry and mathematics fixing the measurement of the letters,<sup>(23)</sup> calculating the length of *Alif*, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet and a straight vertical line, and then extrapolating the size and shape of other letters from the *Alif*.<sup>(24)</sup> These became the fundamental proportions of the letters and the basic points of reference in measuring the length and breadth of letters.<sup>(25)</sup> Traditionally, the first script was known as Muhaqqaq (“accurate”, “well-

organized” or “ideal”), where the *Alif* was nine dots high.<sup>(26)</sup>

Ibn Muqla brought the fluent, rounded and cursive style of Naskh to the world.<sup>(27)</sup> In his Epistle 6, he shows general principles: “round off the shape of the characters; observe the laws of proportion; clearly distinguish the geometric forms according to their movement, horizontal, vertical, oblique and curved; observe carefully the thickness and thinness of the line; keep the hand steady but relaxed when handling the pen, so that the line shows no sign of wavering. These principles were to give harmonious form to the art of calligraphy”.<sup>(28)</sup>

Throughout his career, Ibn Muqla was in rivalry with Muhamad bin Yaqut, and remained deeply engaged in intrigues and counter-intrigues against him till his death in prison. The envious courtiers were not content with his mere imprisonment. His right hand was cut off, and a hole was made in his tongue. Finally in 940 he was killed.<sup>(29)</sup> Nevertheless, Ibn Muqla has remained the best known Islamic calligrapher till today. It is said that when his right hand was struck off, he continued to write with equal skill with his left hand. Ibn Muqla established a geometric codification of “Khatt al Mansub” (Proportioned Writing) which inspired subsequent scholars after the tenth century.<sup>(30)</sup>



A follower of Ibn Muqla's writing from a Koran, 1000-1

Many poems and tributes celebrate the talent of Ibn Muqla. Abdullah ibn al Zariji wrote in the tenth century. "Ibn Muqla is a prophet in the art of calligraphy. His gift is comparable to the inspiration of bees as they build their cells."<sup>(31)</sup> No examples of Ibn Muqla's work are known to have survived, but he taught his art to many followers, including his daughter who became the teacher of the most important calligrapher of his day, Ibn al Bawwab.<sup>(32)</sup>

### **Ibn al Bawwab (944-1022)**

The second greatest name in Arabic calligraphy is Abul Hasan bin Hilal al Baghdadi, better known as Ibn al Bawwab.<sup>(33)</sup> He was esteemed by sultans, and enjoyed favor and high rank. Nobody was equal to him, either in his time or after him.<sup>(34)</sup> Ibn al Bawwab ("the Son of the Doorman") was born in 944.<sup>(35)</sup> He began his career as a house painter, but soon turned his attentions to calligraphy, and later, was appointed as a librarian. The library contained a thirty-volume manuscript of the Koran penned by Ibn Muqla, but one volume was missing. Ibn al Bawwab was asked to make a replacement for the lost volume, and the calligrapher wrote so successfully that it was impossible to distinguish the replacement from the original. Ibn al Bawwab was told to know the Koran by heart. Though he copied it sixty-four times, only one copy is known to have survived in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.<sup>(36)</sup>

Ibn al Bawwab proved himself to be the true successor to the great innovator Ibn Muqla, but explored the aesthetic possibilities, making them daily experience.<sup>(37)</sup> He used a cursive Naskh script, precisely regular according to the proportions, and rendered his characters more regular and simple, clothing them in grace and beauty.



The "Bismillah" written by Ibn al Bawwab

Naskh was given its final shape by Ibn al Bawwab. He himself writes of the calligraphy:

When you propose to cut and nib you reed,  
See that your goal is perfect symmetry;  
Examine well both ends, and then proceed  
To cut the slenderer end, so that it be  
Of moderate length, not over short nor long,  
Middling the split - that way your will secure  
An equal match both sides. With purpose strong  
When you have done all this as firm and sure  
As any expert certain of his aim.  
Next turn your whole attention to the task  
Of fashioning the point, for in this game  
The perfect point's the nub of what we ask.<sup>(38)</sup>

When Ibn al Bawwab died, a poet wrote about him:  
"The scribes must have had a premonition that they  
would lose you, and that this day would be spent in  
weeping. That is why the inkwell was filled with black, as  
if it were mourning you, and the pens were split."<sup>(39)</sup> In  
1955, R. S. Rice published Ibn al Bawwab's single

surviving manuscript with a well-documented and detailed analysis.<sup>(40)</sup>



Koran in Naskh, by Ibn al Bawwab, Baghdad, 1000-1;  
Koran finispiece of Ibn al Bawwab, brown ink on paper,  
gold, Chester Library, Dublin, 1000-1

### **Yaqut al Musta'simi (1214-1296)**

Among the later disciples of Ibn al Bawwab was the famous Yaqut al Musta'simi. As the calligrapher of the last Abbasid caliphate, he gave the Thuluth script its prominence.<sup>(41)</sup> His full name was Abu 'l Majd Jamal al Din Yaqut ibn Abdallah al Musta'simi. Yaqut al Musta'simi was born in 1214 at Amasya in central Anatolia, a city at that time in Byzantine territory.<sup>(42)</sup> He was a slave in the service of Caliph Musta'sim Billah in Baghdad, but the caliph saw his aptitude for artistic skills, and sent him in apprenticeship to learn calligraphy. He became librarian of a rich foundation, and later produced a number of exquisitely written manuscripts of the Koran with a high reputation in Baghdad.<sup>(43)</sup>



The Koran in Naskh, written by Yaqut al Musta'simi

Yaqut was famous for his skill in the Six Pens, the name given to the six scripts as the standard repertory of Arabic calligraphers. He is credited with standardizing and beautifying Naskh by trimming the point of the reed pen obliquely and the clipping of its nib the point. But his precise contribution to the development of the format scribal hands has still to be elucidated.<sup>(44)</sup> He was the one who started the popular tradition of confining the Koranic page to eleven lines, only with first and sixth and eleventh lines in Thuluth and the remains in Naskh.<sup>(45)</sup>

Yaqut drew his guidance from the words of His Holiness the Shah, the Refuge of Sanctity, namely: "Cut the *qalam* (pen), so that its point be long, and leave it thick; cut the end of the *qalam* at an angle, after which it should ring like the ringing of Mashriqi's sword." He wrote in the six styles of writing with extreme elegance and beauty: "My enchantress writes in six styles, without any trouble: thuluth, rayhani, muhaqqaq, naskh, tawqi', and riqā'."<sup>(46)</sup>



Yaqut al Musta'simi on a minaret; Surah title, Rayhani and East Kufic by Yaqut al Musta'simi, Baghdad, 1286

When Hulagu Khan seized Baghdad in 1258 and the Mongol army sacked the town, Yaqut fled to a minaret. He took with him ink and a pen, but had no paper for practicing. All he had was a towel, and so he wrote a few words on it. One of his friends happened to take refuge there also asking, "Why do you loiter here? (All) Baghdad has been subjected to massacre and looting, all has been ruined." Yaqut replied. "Do not worry, I have written a sufficient quantity of what is worth the whole world." He died in Baghdad in 1296.<sup>(47)\*</sup>

---

\* (1) Qadi 1959, Calligraphers and Painter (2) Ziauddin 1979, A Monograph on Moslem Calligraphy (3-9) Schimmel 1990, Calligraphy and Islamic Culture (10) Ziauddin 1979 (11-12) Schimmel 1990 (13-14) Ziauddin 1979 (15-18) Schimmel 1990 (19) Qadi 1959 (20) Bloom and Blair 1997, Islamic Arts (21) Saif-Ur-Rahman Dar 1981, The Roots of Muslim Calligraphy (22) Bloom and Blair 1997 (23) Ahmad 1984, Islamic Calligraphy (24) Bloom and Blair 1997 (25) Ahmad 1984 (26) Bloom and Blair 1997 (27) Ahmad 1984 (28) Khatibi and Sijelmassi 1995, The Splendour of Islamic Calligraphy (29) Ahmad 1984 (30) Saif-Ur-Rahman Dar 1981 (31) Khatibi and Sijelmassi 1995 (32) Bloom and Blair 1997



## T O O L S F O R P E R F E C T I O N

The arts of calligraphy, illumination, illustration and binding reached maturity during the middle period of Islam (900-1500). Paper became common for writing, replacing parchment. Rounded scripts were regularized and perfected, taking over the angular scripts of the previous period. Much earlier, the Koran was the most popular book for to be produced and embellished, but now, wide range of books was available. These continued to include manuscripts of the Koran as every Muslim wanted to read. Scientific works, histories, romances, epic and lyric poetry were also copied in fine hands and decorated with beautiful illustrations.<sup>(1)</sup>

### Paper

There is no paper better than Chinese (*Khita*),

---

(33) Saif-Ur-Rahman Dar 1981 (34) Qadi 1959 (35) Ahmad 1984 (36) Bloom and Blair 1997 (37) Ahmad 1984 (38) Saif-Ur-Rahman Dar 1981 (39) Schimmel 1990 (40-41) Khatibi and Sijelmassi 1995 (42) James 1992, The Master Scribes (43) Ahmad 1984 (44) James 1992 (45) Saif-Ur-Rahman Dar 1981 (46-47) Qadi 1959

However much you may try.  
Saffron, henna, and a few drops  
Of ink are (the means of the test?). Until then, do not  
approve!

How good is the Samarqand paper!  
Do not reject it, if you are wise.  
Writing upon it comes out clearly and well,  
But the paper should be clean and white.  
-Maulana Sultan Ali-(2)

Instruments of writing were very important, and much of the Islamic literature on calligraphy dealt with practical matters of sound materials and proper application. Most calligraphers were first and foremost scribes who earned their living by writing holy texts or official documents. Their training, exercises, and finished products were almost all on paper, and it was on this material that nearly all the innovations in Arabic script were completed.<sup>(3)</sup>

Papermaking had been brought to the Islamic countries from China in the eighth century. Some of the Chinese prisoners who were captured in a battle near Samarqand between the Chinese and the Muslims in 750 were papermakers, and that was how the technique of papermaking slowly spread westward.<sup>(4)</sup> Before that, parchment and papyrus were commonly used, although a small amount of paper was imported from China.<sup>(5)</sup>

As paper has advantage of being difficult to alter what was written in ink, papermaking spread quickly further to Egypt and eventually Sicily and Spain, while the western Islamic lands continued to use parchment for manuscripts of the Koran, due to the conservative nature of the art of copying the Koran and its practitioners.<sup>(6)</sup>

When the Arabs learned the skill of making paper, they also improved paper quality with polishing. As the great Chinese invention and discovery of paper went to Europe through the Muslims, Bertrand Russell states that the period of “Dark Ages” in Europe was to the period of knowledge and light in the Middle East, Muslim European and North African countries.<sup>(7)</sup>

Paper became increasingly available, particularly after 1250, and people started to use it for making architectural plans and drawings. Artistic ideas and motifs could be transferred over long distances from one medium to another and in a different scale which was impossible in the previous period.<sup>(8)</sup>



Polish of paper and scribe from the border of the Jahangir Album, India, c.1615

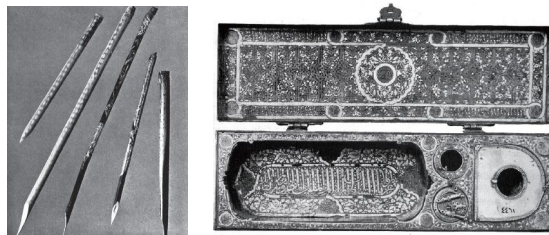
Calligraphy required extraordinarily fine paper. The highly burnished surface was achieved by sizing the paper with vegetable starch or gum to fill in the pores and by polishing it on a board. The sizing and burnishing was carried out by the paper dealer or the calligrapher himself.<sup>(9)</sup> After this work, he could begin to write. However, he had to practice page after page, using

oriental ink that was soluble in water and could be washed off again.<sup>(10)</sup>

“The inkstand is one-third of the writing, the pen, one-third, and the hand, one-third,” says a tenth century handbook for secretaries. After preparing pens and ink, paper had to be specially treated.<sup>(11)</sup> Papermaking had a decisive impact on every aspect of Islamic civilization, while paper became the new medium in written communication. It was on paper that nearly all-subsequent invention and reformation of the Arabic script took place.<sup>(12)</sup>

### Pen

The Prophet Muhammad said that the first thing that God created was the pen, thus Adam could acquire knowledge and learn names of various things.<sup>(13)</sup> The reed pen was the most valuable tool for the calligrapher.<sup>(14)</sup> Among different qualities, brown reeds, fine and light with a hard outer skin and tender inner fiber are the best. They should be firm to last throughout a long text. Mostly, the reed pen came from Wasit in Iraq, India, Egypt and the Caspian Sea area.<sup>(15)</sup> As a high value, they became an object of trade in the Islamic world.<sup>(16)</sup>



Reed pens, latter 17- earlier 18C; Pen box, Naskh and Kufic, Mamluk sultan Mansur Mohamed), Egypt, 1361-3

The pen had to be cut in a slightly different way for writing different scripts, and each master had own technique of cutting.<sup>(17)</sup> “Make your knife sharper than a razor; do not cut anything else with it but the pen, and take very good care of it”,<sup>(18)</sup> was a good advice. The penknife had beautiful ornaments and was esteemed by the masters. The cutting was done on a small plate of ivory or tortoise shell or similar hard material.<sup>(19)</sup> The standard pen was cut from dry reed, and its length was approximately 10 cm, with the width 1 cm, and its upper edge rounded. The shaft was curved and blunted at the edges, in order not to hurt or to rub the fingers. Its lower end needed most care and attention from the calligrapher who would cut it to a tapering shape, ending in a point.

The pens were made of different materials which often had a symbolic meaning. For example, a pen made of red copper was used to seal a marriage. For communication with an enemy, a pen cut from the branch of a pomegranate tree was used, probably to counteract an evil spell.<sup>(20)</sup> Reed pens were regarded as treasures even in the palaces of the kings, and poetical metaphors described them as “cypresses in the garden of knowledge”.<sup>(21)</sup> The Fatimid Caliph al Mustansir had boxes filled with all kinds of pens, and some of them had been used by Ibn Muqla and Ibn al Bawwab.<sup>(22)</sup>

**Ink**

The stars of wise sayings shine in the darkness of ink.  
-Caliph al Ma'mum-(23)



A bronze inkwell, Iran, 12C or early 13C, written in Eastern Kufic

With its power to preserve knowledge and extend thought over time and space, ink was compared to the water of life that gives immortality. Human beings were likened to so many pens in God's hand.<sup>(24)</sup> An essential part of a calligrapher's arsenal was ink.<sup>(25)</sup>

There were many different types and colors of ink, but black or dark brown inks were common. The intensities and consistencies of inks could vary greatly. The basic ingredient was soot, added to a heated mixture of water, salt, gum arabic, grilled gall nuts, iron sulphate and honey. Yellow inks were made with the addition of different metal oxides or arsenic.<sup>(26)</sup> Silver and gold inks could be used, instead red, white, blue, and yellow inks were regularly applied, particularly in illuminating headings.<sup>(27)</sup> A wad of raw silk or cotton was placed in the inkwell to absorb the ink and prevent the pen from overfilling. Inkwells were often works of art themselves. Glass, pottery, precious metals and jade were also used.<sup>(28)</sup>

## **Knife**

A good knife was important to the calligrapher. In Constantinople during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was a whole street, occupied by the masters of this craft. The blades were usually stamped with the maker's signature and sometimes set into a gold or brass lozenge. The highly decorative handles were made of ivory, walrus tusk, horn, agate, jade, wood, tortoiseshell, steel or silver, and some were hollow to contain a much smaller knife for splitting the nib.<sup>(29)</sup>

## **Makta**

The 'open' reed pen was laid on a plaque called "Makta", where a raised groove held it in place while the nib was cut. They were usually made of ivory, walrus tusk, tortoiseshell or mother-of-pearl. These materials were hard, but did not damage the blade of the knife. Some had the signatures of makers.<sup>(30)\*</sup>

---

\* (1) Bloom and Blair 1997, Islamic Arts (2) Qadi 1959, Calligraphers and Painters (3) Welch 1979, Calligraphy in the Arts of the Muslim World (4) Bloom and Blair 1997 (5) Ahuan Gallery of Islamic Art 1987, The Calligraphers' Craft (6) Bloom and Blair 1997 (7) Ahmad 1984, Islamic Calligraphy (8) Bloom and Blair 1997 (9) Ahuan Gallery 1987 (10-11) Schimmel 1990, Calligraphy and Islamic Culture (12) Welch 1979 (13) Ahmad 1984 (14) Schimmel 1990 (15) Ahuan Gallery 1987 (16) Welch 1979 (17) Ahuan Gallery 1987 (18) Welch 1979 (19) Schimmel 1990 (20) Khatibi and Sijelmassi 1995, The Splendour of Islamic Calligraphy (21) Ahuan Gallery 1987 (22) Schimmel 1990 (23) Ahuan Gallery 1987

## M Y S T I C   A P P R O A C H E S

Arabic calligraphy has sacramental character. God's first creation was *qalam* (pen) and *loh* (writing tablet). The 17<sup>th</sup> century Persian historian Qazi Ahmad asserts:

Through the *qalam* existence receives God's order,  
From Him the candle of the *qalam* receives its light.  
The *qalam* is a cypress in the garden of knowledge,  
The shadow of its order is spread over the dust.<sup>(1)</sup>

Sacred art is dependent upon mysticism, and for calligraphy, the dependence is particularly direct. In Mediaeval and later Islam it was generally accepted that perfect calligraphy was a manifestation of spirituality, and this inward perfection is the essential concern of mysticism. B. B. Zakhoder refers to Islam, "The religious consecration of a process of production...is typical for the whole of the Middle Ages, achieves its supreme expression in calligraphy. By maintaining that 'purity of

---

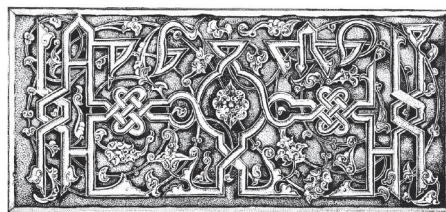
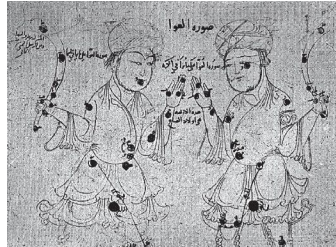
(24) Welch 1979 (25) Schimmel 1990 (26) Ahuan Gallery 1987 (27) Welch 1979 (28-30) Ahuan Gallery 1987



writing is purity of soul', the mediaeval outlook made on the master calligrapher the same stern demands of asceticism as it did on the members of the religious class."

The Sufis (mystics) and calligraphers trace back their spiritual lineage to the same individual, Ali ibn Abi Talib, who made mysticism and calligraphy closer. During the Middle Ages and even afterwards, the Sufis and calligraphers had close lines that could not be separated from each other. Therefore, it would be surprising if the spread of the reserved Sufi orders throughout the whole of Eastern Islam and in the West during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, should not have affected the sacred art, particularly calligraphy. From the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century there took place one of the most remarkable flowerings of calligraphy and illumination.<sup>(2)</sup>

Even in Muhammad's lifetime, some of his followers did not want to merely obey his rules; rather they wanted to have a closer relationship with God. They tried to have looser ties with the world to purify the soul of evil qualities. This movement got more followers as Islam spread in the seventh and eighth centuries. The Arab ascetics found imitators in the new areas and among the newly converted non-Arab Muslims.<sup>(3)</sup> Sufi mysticism existed side by side with orthodox Islam, providing a direct means of contact with God through solitude, prayer and other techniques.<sup>(4)</sup>



Bootes constellation, astronomy paper, Persia, c.1300  
Epitaph, tomb of Sufi Abd Allah al Ansai , Herat, 15C

Islam stresses the importance of the Koran and the Prophet Muhammad, because of the preservation of the divine message and the Prophet's absolutely pure mind. Consequently, Muhammad is praised in ever changing images: "The orphan, who recites the Koran without lesson, drew the line of abolition over the ancient pages, for the message that he brought abrogated all previous revelations." The message itself in the Koran has many references to writing.

At the very beginning of the revelation (*Surah* 96), God appears as He "who taught man by the pen," and the first words of *Surah* 68 read: "*Nun*, and by the Pen!" These sentences have inspired many poets and mystics.<sup>(5)</sup> According to *Hadith*, the pen is the first thing that God created. For the Sufi theoreticians it was regarded as the symbol of the First Intellect. The 15<sup>th</sup> century Shia thinker Ibn Abi Jumhur followed Ibn Arabi's

system, and considered the Divine Throne, the Pen, the Universal Intellect and the premium mobile as one and the same. Much earlier *Aql* (intellect) was interpreted as God's "book written by His hand", and a mythology of the heavenly Book and the Pen was developed. A Persian writer says:

The world found name and fame from the Pen:  
If the Pen were not there, there would not be the world.  
Anyone who did not get a share from the Pen-  
Don't think that he is noble in the eyes of the intelligent.<sup>(6)</sup>

The relationship between calligraphy and religion is quite clear. Copying the Koran with often *Hadith* promises was considered a religious act.<sup>(7)</sup> "He who writes the *Bismillah* beautifully obtains innumerable blessings" or "will enter Paradise." A story tells about a famous calligrapher who appeared to his friend in a dream, and told him that his sins were forgiven since he had written the *Bismillah* so well. "If a man writes *Bismillah Al Rahman Al Rahim* and writes it very well and carefully, God will pardon him". It is a Tradition attributed to the Prophet.<sup>(8)</sup>



"Bismillah al Rahman al Rahim." The sentence starts every chapter of the Koran

All the Islamic arts and crafts have been in some way connected with Sufism, but in calligraphy, this relationship is most evident.<sup>(9)</sup> A Muslim child begins his

learning process with the *Bismillah* ceremony in which the boy is taught the formula *Bismillah al Rahman al Rahim*. His entering into the world of the Holy word, to the points of God's splendor, God's sublimity and God's kingdom was then duly celebrated.<sup>(10)</sup>

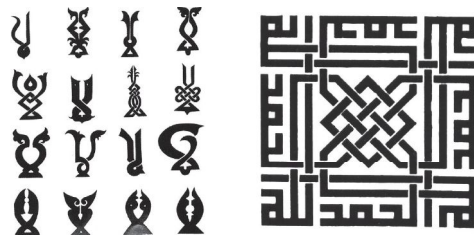
The Koran is the most precious treasure. A modern Turkish author writes, "Even though foreign artists could build mosques, yet they could not write a copy of the Koran. Calligraphers have been regarded as destined for Paradise for writing the Koran." As Arabic letters are said to bear sacredness, anything written in them has to be treated carefully. Those who picked up a piece of paper with Arabic letters, particularly Sufi, should not destroy it, because the name of God or a sacred word might be written on it.<sup>(11)</sup>

Letters or holy phrases are frequently duplicated, mirrored, and used as ornamentation. Many families had water-filled vessels with Koranic quotations in case of illness. Sometimes the ink from scraps of Koranic verses or prayers would be washed off for an ailing person's recovery. Weapons had Koranic inscriptions which referred indirectly to the owners' name. Pilgrim's clothes and tomb covers were embroidered with sacred texts, in which sometimes the Prophet was appealed to and blessed, indicating the owner's hope for the Prophet's intervention on Doomsday.

The names of God, or the Prophet, or Ali in rectangular Kufic added to the sanctity of religious buildings, and the words of *Shahada* convey blessing to the onlooker.<sup>(12)</sup> Belief in the particular, even magical efficacy of the letters, Arabic script was widespread, though learned

Muslims were suspicious regarding this aspect of their culture.

Among an amount of expressions on the properties of letters, the most dramatic one is in the writings of the Hurufis, whose *Ilm al Huruf* (science of letters) gave organized form to earlier occult treatments of the alphabet. This thinking divided the 28 letters into four equal categories, corresponding to the alchemical elements of fire, air, earth, and water. The letters *alif*, *lam*, and *mim* which begin the *Surah al Baqara* (The Cow) of the Koran, were believed to have healing powers, and to some other individual letters were ascribed special strengths too.



Lam-alif ; Geometric Kufic alif and lam, al hamdulillah  
(God be praised)

Moreover, the Arabic letters should be metaphorical in poetry, inspired by mystical thought. The letter *mim* resembled a mouth; the *'ayn* an eye; and the combined letters *lam* and *alif* of close embrace between two lovers. The Prophet's name looked like a worshipper bowing in prayer. Ascending vertical letters of the name Allah and *Shahada* was said to be a calligraphic evidence for the divine origins of the script and the truth of the faith.<sup>(13)</sup>

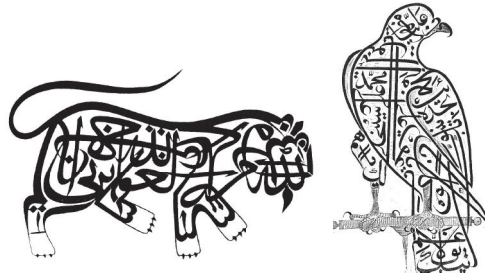
In other words, the letters are the expression of a higher order. The thinkers mused on the relation between the written word and its hidden meaning.<sup>(14)</sup> The mystical interpretation of individual letters may be based on Avicenna's philosophical alphabet, such as *alif-al amr* (the Divine Order), *ba-al aql* (Intellect), *jim-an nafs* (Soul), and so on.<sup>(15)</sup>

*Alif* was highly respected in early Islamic thought. For Rumi, the *alif* was honored by being the first letter of the alphabet, because of its unity and sincerity.<sup>(16)</sup> As the letter *mim* is connected with the Prophet, *alif* and *mim* are letters for God and the Prophet, respectively.<sup>(17)</sup>

The tendency to equate human figures to letters developed out of the art of calligraphy. A modern Turkish author, Ismayil Hakki Baltacoglu, has compared that some letters can be drawn in human shapes, and express empathies and antipathies. Thus one should never combine the inimical letters in a perfect calligraphic representation. "Talking letters" can be found on metalwork, mainly from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. A contemporary of Husayn Bayqara and Babur in Herat invented letters that looked like animals and human beings. The pictorial representations of the name of Ali belong to the Hurufi tradition. Face was composed from the names of Allah and Muhammad, and the first three imams.



Human face, from the words Allah, Muhammad, Ali, Hasan and Husayn, Persia, 18-19C



Lion, meaning the poer of Ali, Shia's prayer, "In the name of the lion of God, the face of God, the victorious Ali", Turkey, 19C

Calligraphy of hawk, Shia's prayer, Thuluth, written by Muhammad Fathiyab, Persia, early 19C

Oriental calligraphers, especially the Turks, created ingenious pictures of living beings built up from religious expressions and sacred formulas. The pigeon composed of the *Bismillah* in the mystical tradition is one of the numerous soul-birds. The pious bird was a fitting calligraphic symbol. Mustafa Raqim, an Ottoman calligrapher, made his famous stork in 1808. The rooster has been used for calligraphic pictures, because of a religious bird in the indigenous Iranian tradition and also an angelic animal that calls Muslims to their morning prayers.

Ali appears in numerous pictures as a lion, written from the *Bismillah*. Flowers also represent pious words. The Gul I Muhammadi contains the Prophet's family tree or his 99 names. Lamps were created from letters, reminding Muslims that God is the light of the heavens and the earth. Pictures of sacred buildings, especially

mosques, were often constructed from *Shahada* and some additional formulas in squared Kufic.<sup>(18)</sup> The Sufis, who had searched for the secrets of the letters and invented new explanations of each letter, reached the point where letters are “pure otherness which symbolizes everything as far as it is ‘other’, in connection to God”. They found that the letter is “radically incompatible with the quest for the Absolute”.<sup>(19)\*</sup>

## A P P L I C A T I O N S

Islamic art and architecture had powerful originality in the whole Islamic world. They had the same character everywhere beyond time and space. One of the places where Islamic art reached its highest level was Egypt. At the beginning of the Muslim conquest, there were

---

\* (1) Saif-Ur-Rahman Dar 1981, *The Roots of Muslim Calligraphy* (2) Lings and Safadi 1976, *The Qur'an* (3-4) Fritz 1980, *The World of Islam* (ed. by Lewis): *The Mystic Path* (5-6) Schimmel 1990, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture* (7) Ahuan Gallery of Islamic Art 1987, *The Calligraphers' Craft* (8) Schimmel 1990 (9) Ahuan Gallery 1987 (10-12) Schimmel 1990 (13) Welch 1979, *Calligraphy in the Arts of the Muslim World* (14-19) Schimmel 1990



Christian architects who worked for the first caliphs, and there might have been Byzantine influence in the earliest mosques in Arabia. The first building free of any imitation of other styles was the mosque that was erected in Cairo in the eighth century.

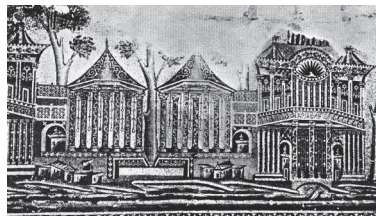
### Mosque

“Do so, but construct no more than three rooms, and above all let no edifice be erected; adhere to the ‘practice of the Prophet; thus will you preserve your rule.” The assertion of Ibn Khaldun about the Muslims’ ignorance of art is proven in description of the mosques of Mecca and Medina.<sup>(1)</sup> Islamic architecture was not necessarily always luxurious. A mosque could be very simple, just a place in a desert surrounded by walls or, two or three stones piled together, facing towards Mecc.<sup>(2)</sup> The mosque of the Prophet in Medina was at the beginning very small. It was made of crude brick, and was built open on a stone foundation without decoration. The roof’s material was palm branches, covered with plaster.

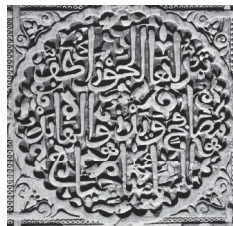
The mosque (*masjid*) is the center of religious life for Muslims. It is a place of prayer and contemplation where people gather together to worship the one and only God. The rites are simple: an annual holy day, ablutions, and prayer five times a day.<sup>(3)</sup> The pulpit (*minbar*) of the mosque used to be the platform from which important decisions and announcements were pronounced, such as the appointment and dismissal of officials, the first appearance of new rulers, policy statements, news concerning war and other major events.<sup>(4)</sup>

Muslims erected monumental buildings to glorify God and the Prophet, and to this, calligraphy added its splendor, raising the governing class above the common, and enhancing the prestige of the building's patron.<sup>(5)</sup> Calligraphy appeared in architecture from the end of the seventh century. The earliest known inscription is in Jerusalem.<sup>(6)</sup> When the Dome of Rock was erected, the population of the city was largely Christian, and Caliph Abd al Malik was aware that their sacred structures made the city very beautiful.<sup>(7)</sup>

However, as the system of writing Arabic is unsuitable for the preservation of God's revelations, due to various ways of reading and interpretation, he introduced significant changes.<sup>(8)</sup> The inscriptions are the earliest evidence for the written text of the Koran,<sup>(9)</sup> rendered in archaic Kufic script.<sup>(10)</sup>



Umayyad Mosque, Damascus, 705-15



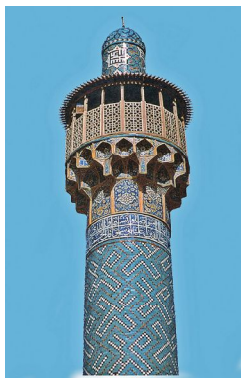
The Alhambra palace, Spain, 14C, stucco work with Arabic script

The Dome of the Rock is the first major Islamic urban monument, and demonstrates Islam's religious essence.<sup>(11)</sup> The second important inscription is in the mosque of the Prophet in Medina. The building was started in his lifetime, and was enlarged and rebuilt several times before its completion in 709. The calligraphic verse in archaic Kufic was taken from the Koran. This mosque inspired architectural use of calligraphy and how to organize the mosque's internal space.<sup>(12)</sup> Repeatedly, one of the striking aspects of Islamic architecture is calligraphy as a key element of decoration. Its greatest achievement happened in Alhambra of Granada in Spain. The brilliant mosaic with stunning Kufic and other styles of calligraphic writings cut in relief with geometrically intricate bands in arabesques.<sup>(13)</sup>

Islamic civilization spread gradually further from Arabia. When more major buildings works took place, rules became to be made for governing the structure of calligraphic texts, their arrangement, themes and contents. Initially the subject matter was short, unadorned phrases, inscribed on friezes in particular significant parts of the building. But, when calligraphy was a regular feature of decoration, covering the whole building, the subject matter draws not only on quotations from the Koran, but also phrases celebrating the glory of Islam and so on.<sup>(14)</sup>

Religious and political texts from *Hadith* were shown at the royal Mosque of Isfahan in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. And secular buildings bore pious epigraphs, thus nearly every wall of the Alhambra palace displayed the sentence, "There is no Victory but God."<sup>(15)</sup> Poetic texts, signature

monograms (*Tughras*), funerary inscriptions, information of commissioning the building, the names of patrons, and details of historical circumstances were added. Later, famous public figures and words were applied purely for decorative effect without meanings.<sup>(16)</sup>



Minaret of Shah Mosque, Isfahan, Iran, 1611-38

### **The Koran Copying**

Of all the Islamic arts, the art of writing was the most superior. All writers from the monarch down to the humblest men competed with each other, in order to determine whose writing was the most beautiful.<sup>(17)</sup> The central position of the Koran to the Islamic faith and its status as the divine revelation have meant that for centuries Muslims have made copies of their scripture as fine as their resources permitted. This pious desire for good manuscripts led to create the most impressive examples of religious art.<sup>(18)</sup> Arthur Upham Pope relates,

The Koran was the sole way to life and salvation. Upon it depended the whole structure of society, the order of the day and the path to the future. Supernatural in origin,

the final authority and standard of the good in life, it was deserving of every tribute that human skills could lavish upon it, and from the tenth to the 12<sup>th</sup> century its pages were ornamented with such knowledge and such sure feeling for splendid design that these early pages remain today almost the greatest achievement in the history of Abstract art.<sup>(19)</sup>

The earliest still existing copy of the Koran is believed to have been copied at Mecca or Medina in the late eighth century. It was written in the Ma'il script, exceptionally, in vertical format. The other surviving are done in Kufic script in black or dark brown ink, and afterward occasionally in gold, on white vellum. The Kufic Korans were all oblong, but Koranic inscriptional panels in mosques were horizontal. Its long, thick horizontal strokes give it a momentum, despite its overall static quality. Until the beginning of the ninth century, the Kufic Korans had little illumination, but gradually, the developing art of illumination afforded many ornamental devices to the Koran, and served necessary functions in arranging the Koranic text as well.<sup>(20)</sup>



Koran lea, early Kufic, Abbasid, North Africa, 8-11C

Umar ibn al Khattab, a close companion of Muhammad, urged the first Caliph Abu Bakr to commit

the Koran to writing. The Prophet's secretary, Zayd ibn Tahbit, was ordered to compile and collate the revelation into a book, and was later codified by the third Caliph Uthman in 651. This canonized redaction was copied into four or five identical editions, and was sent to the main Islamic regions as standard manuscripts; first in local variants of the Jazm script, then in Kufic, and further in most of the various Arabic scripts that were developed in the Islamic world.<sup>(21)</sup>

From the time of Ibn al Bawwab to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, two groups of script were divided. Naskh, Muhaqqaq and Rayhani for the Koran writing, and Tawqi', Riqā', Thuluth and Kufic for inscriptions, such as chapter headings, colophons and other complementary written material.<sup>(22)</sup> Ibn al Bawwab's Koran (1000-1001) is written in a consistent and well-proportioned script for understanding the verses easily.

The Koran has a small volume (17.5 x 13.5cm), of 286 brownish paper folio, and contains 114 chapters (*surah*). Each text page has 15 lines of round script written with a straight cut reed pen to produce letters of equal thickness.<sup>(23)</sup> The inscription gives the name of the chapter, number of verse, and place of its revelation, Mecca or Medina.<sup>(24)</sup> Muslims know them by a conventional name or title.<sup>(25)</sup>



Koran Surah 96, Thuluth and Kufic, Mamluk Egypt, 14C  
 Muhaqqaq Koran, Kufic-Abbasid with decorated frame,  
 Iran 15C

Ibn al Bawwab's Koran is the first example that has chapter headings in the gold, cursive Thuluth script, written on an undecorated ground with a palmette medallion in the margin.<sup>(26)</sup> The brown ink is subtly enhanced with blue and gold. Chapter headings, five double pages of illumination, and tables at both the beginning and end of the book are enriched with white, green and red. The combination of script and ornament make this manuscript a masterpiece, which Ibn al Bawwab signed in a colophon at the end.<sup>(27)</sup> In the same way as most early manuscripts, this was written on parchment. It exhibits also the horizontal layout, more frequent than either the nearly square or the upright format.<sup>(28)</sup>

Almost all early Korans, that still exist, are written in Kufic. A later variant, Eastern Kufic, introduced oblique elements, and played with the contrast between thick and thin pen strokes. In Iran, various forms of Eastern Kufic continued in use until the 12<sup>th</sup> century. More

cursive styles became standard for writing the Koran from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>(29)</sup>

At this time, the Korans were developed in format, material, script, and decoration. It took place first in Iraq, and affected most other parts of the Islamic world except the Maghrib where a more conservative style of book production was maintained. In the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Koran production reached its highest point in the Mamluk and Il Khanid empires. On the other hand, the arts of the book in the Eastern part came under the influence of a new style formulated in the Timurid courts of Western Central Asia.<sup>(30)</sup>

Gold was initially the most important element in the Kufic Korans, but by the middle of the tenth century, blue became more used than green and red. In the East, blue reached soon the same level with gold, whereas in the West, gold preserved its original supremacy over blue. Other pigments had the collective value for harmonizing total effect in combination with the two framework colors.<sup>(31)</sup> As the color of light, gold is intrinsically a symbol of knowledge and extrinsically a teaching or manifestation. Blue in the presence of gold is Mercy, inclined to reveal itself.<sup>(32)</sup>

### **Coins**

Coins and monetary paper note are tokens of consciously chosen visual forms and symbols. They are the official transcripts to indicate the prestige and power of the ruler. During the classical Islamic period, the variety and spread of mints was practically due to the necessity of political power and domination condition.



The independent sovereignty of rulers was validated by the appearance of their names on coinage and praying of blessings upon them in the Friday sermon. Design on monetary currency had a wide consequence, because of the historical indicators of the “official” aesthetic and conceptual values, and its portability. The Arabs of Mecca and Medina did not have their own coinage prior to Muhammad. There was no need for new currency during his time, but in the seventh century, they issued their first coins in the regions conquered by them,<sup>(33)</sup> influenced by the Byzantine or Sassanian Iran prototypes.<sup>(34)</sup>

A gold dinar from 692-4 shows three standing figures on the front, and imitates coins of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius. The Christian symbolism was simply removed by eliminating crosses and changing the Byzantine imperial costume to Arab dress. The most notable addition is the Islamic profession of faith (*Shahada*) inscribed around the edge on the reverse.<sup>(35)</sup> Gradually the coinage was consolidated in the epigraphic normative style, indicating the formal coins made by the imperial powers.<sup>(36)</sup>



Gold dinar, imitated Byzantine coin, Syria, 694-7 and 696-7

Minting in Syria began in Abd al Malik's time. By the end of the seventh century, the Arabic alphabet had assumed its role. A decree from the caliph Abd al Malik (685-705), the fifth Umayyad ruler, ordered that Arabic should be the administrative language of Islam, and that epigraphic statement should replace the ruler's portrait on coins. From this time on, word and non-image gave value to legitimize rule on coinage. On documents, minarets and objects, the ruler's name, not his face, symbolized the state.<sup>(37)</sup>

After 698, with few exceptions, coinage is purely epigraphic, presenting Koranic and other pious texts, combined with relevant information about the ruling caliph, the minting lord, date and place of minting.<sup>(38)</sup> Abd al Malik's epigraphic coinage remained the standard for centuries, and rarely coins contained images. The lack of images is that it is God, the *Musawwir*, who shapes and forms images. The human figure to make the image in stone or in paint was wrong.<sup>(39)</sup>

### Ceramic and Tiles

One of its most important features of Islamic art is the ceramic tradition. Although ceramics were used for domestic objects, bowls and jars, but have more significance on architectural facades. Entire structures, both inside and outside, have been covered with elegant and colorful tiles. Tile work was already known in pre-

Islamic times, and later, a number of superior innovations, such as the use of luster to create a metallic sheen, were introduced. Several design techniques like cobalt blue on white surfaces were started, while love for color, geometry and pattern made ceramic items into brilliant artistic creations. The tile was a favorite architectural adjunct, which produced a fine surface. The decor and writing were made to suit the purpose of the structure.



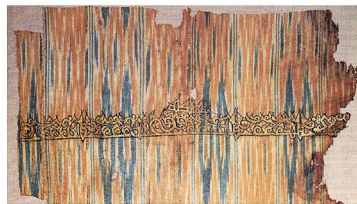
Tile, Surah 2.285, Thuluth, Kashan, Iran, 13C  
Blue Kufic in earthenware, Mesopotamia, Iraq, 9C

Kashan was one of the key centers for tiles, other ceramic plates, and bowls. While individual pieces built a huge ceramic mural, single interlocking star and cross tiles were collected into friezes for mihrab niches. Each tile on these friezes had its own independent design, frequently structuring a border of cursive inscription. The script was from Koranic quotations, *Hadith*, and verses of poetry. Sporadically it contained historic information, date, and name of maker and place of manufacture. Within the calligraphy, the design ranged from arabesques to human figures and animals with finely delineated foliage. Later during Safavid and Qajar times, the tiles were collectively composed into large narrative panels.<sup>(40)</sup>

## Tiraz Textile

Muslims had a custom of honoring a distinguished person by giving him a fine robe, in which the name and titles of the caliph, the workshop, names of its director, place of manufacture and date in formal Kufic or in the later cursive script included.<sup>(41)</sup> Textiles have two basic functions: dress and furnishings. Ordinary everyday clothes' material is cotton or wool; ceremonial robes of honor are silk such as Tiraz. Furnishings are utilitarian items; rugs, wall hangings and cushion coverings.

Tiraz is a significant fabric with official inscriptions. It was made with wool or linen ground, then of silk with linen one. The textile technique had its origin in Sassanian Iran, and was transported to Egypt, mainly in the Coptic workshops on the Nile Delta and Fayyum regions. It has the *Bismillah* or other inscriptions of pious wishes, titles and names of the caliph's family, the governor or the minister who superintended Tiraz, the weaver's name, place of manufacture and the year. Tiraz functioned like medals or coins for robes of special honor, or presented to members of the court on important occasions.





Kufic in plain cotton, Yemen ,11C; Thuluth in weaving textile, 'Glory to our lord the Sultan', Spain, 15C

After the fulfillment of imperial requirements, the excess fabric was sold to the public. Fatimid Egypt used a lot of the Tiraz tradition. The ruler owned workshops, and a select steward would bring the finished robes in ceremonial fashion. The robes were distributed several times during the year. Not only clothes like robes, but also everyday clothes such as stockings would have inscription, in order to bring merit to the wearer and owner. An ordinary and inexpensive article of daily wear would be significant as a result of the inscription.<sup>(42)\*</sup>

---

\* (1) D'Avennes 1983, Arab Art (2) Khatbi and Sijelmassi 1995, The Splendour of Islamic Calligraphy (3) D'Avennes 1983 (4) Ettinghausen 1980, The World of Islam (ed. by Lewis): The Man-Made Setting (5-6) Khatbi and Sijelmassi 1995 (7) Calligraphy in the Islamic World (8-9) Bloom and Blair 1997, Islamic Arts (10) Khatbi and Sijelmassi 1995 (11) Calligraphy in the Islamic World (12) Khatbi and Sijelmassi 1995 (13) Ziauddin 1979, A Monograph on Moslem Calligraphy (14) Khatbi and Sijelmassi 1995 (15) Welch 1979, Calligraphy in the Arts of the Muslim World (16) Khatbi and Sijelmassi 1995 (17) Ziauddin 1979 (18) James 1992, The Master Scribes (19) Ziauddin 1979 (20) Lings and Safadi 1976, The Qur'an (21) Safadi 1978, Islamic Calligraphy (22) James 1998, Qur'ans of the Mamluks (23) Bloom and Blair 1997 (24) James 1998 (25) Bloom and Blair