Fresco
Fresco Arabic: western Latin meets western Kufi.

The Fresco Arabic project began when Fred Smeijers was invited to develop an Arabic version of his Fresco typeface. He embraced the idea and was curious about the work done by his Arab partner, Lara Assouad Khoury. Fred and Lara were teamed up based on their design sensibilities and methodology—they both share a meticulous approach to researching and working on design problems, which potentially led to a smooth and fruitful collaboration. Lara’s journey into type design began in her native city of Beirut, and through work experiences in Cairo and Dubai, her research eventually crystallized in France where she came across Dutch type design and the specifics of the craft. She found Dutch type design to be of particular interest due to its similarity to the Arabic tradition, namely the evident calligraphic yet sturdy quality of Dutch typefaces.

When approached to take part in the Typographic Machinist project as a partner of Fred Smeijers, she welcomed the opportunity with great enthusiasm. She was excited to meet in person and work with one of the type designers she most admired. Prior to this project, Lara had coincidentally worked on several branding projects creating harmonious bilingual word-marks, namely, developing Arabic letterforms that match the Fresco first family (e.g. she had used the Fresco Bold and designed the Arabic lettering for the logo type of the Kiryat Arabic Calligraphy and Typography Conference in Dubai). For her, the Typographic Machinist project came as a continuation of these initial designs and a way to develop a full-fledged Arabic typeface extension to the Fresco family. Fred and Lara’s first encounters were on the phone and through email, where they exchanged ideas on how to approach the project at hand. Their first face-to-face meeting took place in Paris, in November 2005, where they had several extensive sketching sessions. The process of their collaboration and its outcome is recounted on the pages that follow.
The design process. The initial step was to come up with an analysis of the possible Arabic calligraphic styles that could be used as structural models for the new Arabic Fresco and to compare these with the characteristics of the Fresco typeface. Based on a thorough analysis of examples of old Kufi manuscripts and the work done for the Kitabat conference logo, the two designers decided to take the Kufi style as a starting point. Both designers felt that the Kufi styles were more adaptable as companions for roman type in terms of visual characteristics as well as from a historical point of view. Kufi styles are easier to relate to the western type design tradition because they can be both written and read. They can be simplified to pure mathematical shapes and dressed up in various ways, whereas Naskh mainly remains too fluid and calligraphic by nature. Kufi is maybe less well known in the west, yet in a way it is more related to western type design because like western letters it is rooted in handwritten shapes while having managed to escape this convention. Fred and Lara believed that Kufi allowed them the legitimate freedom necessary for designing the matching Arabic typeface.

The modulation of stroke thickness, the strong emphasis on verticals, the short descenders and ascenders, the generous x-height, the angles of the diagonals and the curves of Fresco; all these characteristics related quite naturally to the highly structured lettering of some of the Kufi styles. In order to give the Arabic Fresco a more bookface and fluid look it was decided to use a mix of the Maghrebi Kufi style (for its characteristic combination of the simple structure of Kufi and the fluidity of Naskh) and the geometric Kufi (for its minimal variety in letter heights and proportions). The intention was to create a balance between this hybrid mix of traditional Arabic letterforms while maintaining a resemblance to the roman Fresco’s visual characteristics. The challenge was to push the limits as far as possible in bringing the Arabic and the Latin versions of the Fresco typeface together without sacrificing the integrity of the Arabic script. After much research and back-and-forth sketching, the final design of the Arabic Fresco regular started taking shape. The second step in the process was to develop the bold version of Fresco Arabic. This months-long process resulted in the new Arabic member of the Fresco family.
The design concept. Fresco was initially selected for its sturdy and contemporary bookplate qualities, and its calligraphic traits that embrace the tradition of Dutch roman typefaces. A close-up look at the Fresco (meaning fresh) typeface reveals some clear sharp corners that contribute to the overall ‘freshness’ of the design. The Fresco Arabic typeface had to balance a warm calligraphic roundness with clean straight verticals and horizontals, and generously open counterforms. In order to create a good Arabic version of Fresco it was necessary to design a hybrid Arabic bookface that combines the structure of a Geometric Kufi with the freedom and fluidity of the Maghrebi (western) Kufi.

The starting principles and considerations behind the design concept of Fresco Arabic are as follows:

1. The Kufi styles in general have several similarities to Roman type. Kufi has a strong emphasis on the vertical strokes, with the verticals being bolder than the horizontals. Kufi is more structured than Nashi (with less free-flowing strokes) and can be more readily systemized. Kufi has very few levels in the middle heights, short ascenders and short descenders, which give the body-height a strong visual prominence. These qualities make Kufi visually compatible with Latin type in terms of overall color and rhythm.

2. The Maghrebi (western Kufi) styles are known for inventiveness and lexicacy in applying rules, whereby letterforms may vary according to context and aesthetic needs. Maghrebi combines straight horizontal strokes with rounded shapes. Its structurally simplistic and calligraphic fluid curves match well the roman Fresco typeface’s visual rhythm. Maghrebi is written with a broad-nib pen (just like Fresco), which breaks the sharp transitions from horizontal to vertical, and creates rounded serifs, stroke beginnings and endings, that are similar to those of the roman Fresco.

3. The Geometric Kufi style is highly structured, with a reduced number of levels for the body-height, descender and ascender heights. Geometric Kufi has very clear proportions that can be easily adapted to roman type and interpreted in any way (in this case with broad-nib pen strokes).

4. Most of the Kufi styles have roughly 30 degree angles similar to those of Fresco. Kufi in general has bold and sturdy serifs, which are also one of Fresco’s characteristics. Taking all of the above into consideration, the design of Fresco Arabic strove to balance the forms and proportions of the original Arabic script with the design details and proportions of the Latin Fresco typeface. The final design concept was to create a new Kufi typeface by stripping the design of any superfluous decorative elements, and creating a clear and sturdy typeface that reads well at small sizes and that matches its Latin counterpart in feel and color.
Designer's comments on the design process and challenges.

Despite the great parallels we had drawn between Freeso Roman and the Maghreb Geometric Kufi in our first sketches, a few design challenges arose as we started to produce our first draft of the font:

1. We couldn't limit ourselves to as few angles as the Latin, the Arabic letters started to look a little awkward.
2. In the interest of systematizing the Arabic as much as possible, we tried to reduce the number of levels on the x-height to two; however, a minimum of three was necessary to create a proper differentiation between characters and ensure good legibility (some letters appeared too open while others seemed ridiculously small).
3. The overall effect was too curvy in relation to Freeso roman.
4. The overall weight/texture of Arabic was lighter—some letters had to be given more presence, others had to be made more structured and less curvy.
5. A clear relation of proportions had to be established among the Arabic letters (similar counterforms, similar strokes, less variations in stroke modulations).
6. We had to define the angles and counterforms that related to Freeso roman but were not strictly directly copied from it.

**English Summary**

Despite the strong similarities between Freeso Roman and the Maghreb Geometric Kufi in our initial sketches, several design challenges emerged as we moved towards producing our first draft of the font:

1. We couldn't limit ourselves to as few angles as the Latin, the Arabic letters started to appear somewhat awkward.
2. In an effort to systematize the Arabic script, we attempted to reduce the number of levels in the x-height to two, but found that a minimum of three was necessary to achieve clear differentiation between letters and ensure good legibility (some letters appeared too open while others seemed excessively curved).
3. The overall effect was too curvy in relation to Freeso Roman.
4. The overall weight and texture of Arabic was lighter compared to Freeso Roman—some letters needed more emphasis, while others required a more structured and less curvy approach.
5. Establishing a clear proportion relation among the Arabic letters (similar counterforms, similar strokes, less variations in stroke modulations) was necessary.
6. Defining the angles and counterforms related to Freeso Roman, while not strictly directly copied, was crucial.

**Arabic Summary**

الرقماء المبردة، على عملية التصميم والتحديات.

裹ROWS ROMAN، والطربية. التظهير، على التصميم عاماً، أن كل أمل محلة أحلام الطابع التمويني: 1. لم تدخل في عناصر أهل الطابع مكافأة عيني. العين، قبل أن تدارس الأشكال. 2. من الذكور، وبعض الأدوات، بمثابة مختلفة من تصميم الطابع. 3. خلال العامية. 4. مع التوجيه، ، والحكم، الريフリー أمل محلة أحلام الطابع. 5. أدخل الأدوات.
The design characteristics. The interesting design aspect of Fresco Arabic is that it seamlessly bridges historical calligraphic models and interprets them in a contemporary design style. Fresco Arabic is inspired by the Maghrebi scripts and is respectful of the Maghrebi conventions. It fluidly embraces some of the trademark details of the Latin Fresco without compromising the integrity of the original Arabic script. Below is a detailed description of its design characteristics.

1. **Hybrid style**: Fresco Arabic is a contemporary interpretation of Geometric and Maghrebi Kufic. It is a handwritten Kufi, structured but not rigid. It maintains a good balance between the calligraphic broad-nib quality and the steady typographic system.

2. **Calligraphic feel**: Fresco Arabic matches the original Fresco design with its calligraphic strokes that on one hand fit the calligraphic Maghrebi styles, and on the other hand give a healthy stiffness to the design, making it highly desirable as bookface.

3. **Strokes**: Fresco Arabic has a reduced number of strokes that are used for creating various letterforms. The contrast and humanist modulation of the strokes follow those of the original Fresco, with the stress on the vertical being more pronounced (the vertical being thicker than the horizontal strokes). This gives the typeface a clear and crisp overall look and color.

4. **Stress and angles**: Fresco Arabic has a minimum number of angles, sticking as much as possible to one angle for all letters. It has the same angles for diagonals and its distinct digits are set on a similar angle as that of the connector ‘e’ of Fresco.

5. **Serifs and terminal**: Fresco’s characteristic asymmetrical serifs and rounded terminals are used (inverted) where appropriate in the Arabic version.

6. **Proportions**: The Arabic Fresco has the same proportions as the Latin Fresco: the large body height matches the x-height of the Latin Fresco, and the extremely short descenders have the same size as those of the Latin typeface. It has generous round counters that ensure good legibility at small sizes.

7. **Connections**: Fresco Arabic has straight horizontal connections between the letters that define a clear baseline without resulting in a rigid overall look.

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**Hamburgerfonts ipk**

**How to use the application**: Compare the Arabic and Latin typefaces of Fresco Arabic. The comparison shows that the two typefaces are similar in terms of their structural characteristics. The Arabic typeface is slightly more angular than the Latin typeface, but the overall design is consistent. The Arabic typeface has a more open and flowing structure, while the Latin typeface has a more compact and closed structure. Both typefaces have a similar level of detail and a high level of legibility.
Writing is the outlining and shaping of letters to indicate audible words which, in turn, indicate what is in the soul. It comes second after oral expression. It is a noble craft, since it is one of the special qualities of man by which he distinguishes himself from the animals. Furthermore, it reveals what is in (people’s) minds. It enables the intention (of a person) to be carried to distant places... It enables (people) to become acquainted with science, learning, with the books of the ancients, and with the sciences and information written down by them. Because of all these useful aspects, writing is a noble craft.
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quand se révèle mon Bien-Aimé,

avec quel œil Le vois-tu?

avec Son œil, non le mien.

car nul ne Le voit sauf Lui.

telle une lettre dédoublée:

nous-mêmes lors des adieux,
à force d'étreinte et d'enlacement.

deux personnes nous sommes:

les regards n'en voient qu'une.

n'était mon gémissement,
elle m'aurait pas vu!
The designers' final remarks on the project.

The design process for the Arabic typeface was challenging due to the complexity of the Arabic script and its distinct structure compared to Latin-based alphabets. The designers had to ensure that the typeface was not only aesthetically pleasing but also culturally and linguistically relevant. The goal was to create a typeface that would be widely accepted and used in various contexts, from digital media to print materials.

One of the key considerations was the need for legibility and readability, especially in small sizes, which is crucial for Arabic typefaces. The designers worked on refining the typography to ensure that it could be seamlessly integrated into everyday use, such as in books, websites, and other digital platforms.

Another important aspect was the adherence to traditional and modern styles. The designers aimed to strike a balance between maintaining the traditional aesthetics of Arabic typography and incorporating modern design elements to make the typeface more versatile and appealing in contemporary contexts.

The collaboration between the designers and the typography experts was essential in ensuring the success of the project. The input and feedback from various stakeholders were crucial in shaping the final design.

In conclusion, the designers' final remarks on the project reflect the dedication and commitment required to create a high-quality Arabic typeface. The success of this project is a testament to the collaboration and expertise involved in the design process.
Fred Smeijers. Born in the Netherlands and studied at the Academie voor Beeldende Kunsten in Arnhem (1980-1983). He worked as a designer in the Industrial Design section of the Research and Development Department at Oce Nederland (1987-1991), where he participated in designing fonts for their early laser printers. In 1992, he co-founded the graphic design group Quadraaat in Arnhem and in 1996 the group changed its name to Het Lab. In 1997 he left Het Lab and set up his own business, called 'Fred Smeijers plus, tailored type and typography'. He designed word-marks and custom fonts for various clients, ranging from screen fonts to fonts for specific products (including the Philips Script for Philips home appliances). Among his typeface designs are FT Quadrat & FT Quadrat Sans (FSI), Revand (The Escholde Font Foundry), DTL Nobel (DTL), Arnhem, Fresco, Monitor and Sansa. The last four are available from OurType (2002), the font-publishing label that he established with FontShop Benelux. He has published several articles on typography in various design magazines, and is the author of Countermarch: making type in the sixteenth century, designing type now (1996) and Type New, a manifesto for work in 2003, both published by Hyphen Press in London. He taught at the Academie voor Beeldende Kunsten in Arnhem and Breda, and lectures on typography at various academic institutions (such as the Plantin-Moretus Museum in Antwerp; the postgraduate course Type & Media at the Royal Academy of Arts in The Hague; the postgraduate course of MA Typeface Design at Reading University in the UK). In 2004, he was appointed Professor of Digital Typography at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst in Leipzig. He was awarded the International Gerrit Noordzij Prize for type design in 2000, for his work as a type designer, researcher and writer.
Writing is the outlining and shaping of letters to indicate audible words which, in turn, indicate what is in the soul. It comes second after oral expression. It is a noble craft, since it is one of the special qualities of man by which he distinguishes himself from the animals. Furthermore, it reveals what is in (people's) minds. It enables the intention (of a person) to be carried to distant places. It enables (people) to become acquainted with science, learning, with the books of the ancients, and with the sciences and information written down by them. Because of all these useful aspects, writing is a noble craft.

—Excerpt from Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddimah.
Lara Assouad Khoury. Born in Lebanon and graduated from the American University of Beirut with a Bachelor in Graphic Design degree (BGD) in 1998. She worked as a designer at Leoburnett (Lebanon, 1998-2000). After one year in Cairo, Egypt she moved to Dubai (UAE) and worked as a Senior Designer for Landor Associates (2001-2005) where she was involved in the design of extensive corporate identity projects for large Middle Eastern companies and institutions, such as the visual branding for the country of Jordan. She has graduated with an MA from the Atelier National de Recherche Typographique in Nancy (France), where she studied under renowned type designers such as Hans-Jürg Hunziker, André Baldinger, and others. She has researched and is in the process of developing her own extensive Arabic ‘Naskh’ font. She taught graphic design and Arabic typography courses, at the American University in Dubai. She is an independent type and graphic designer since 2005.
لا يوجد نص يمكن قراءته بشكل طبيعي من الصورة.