Part IV: The Emergence of Regional Styles in the Later Middle Period
CHAPTER SEVEN

Calligraphy in Iran and its Environs under the Mongols and Turkomans

The Mongol invasions of the early thirteenth century disrupted the economic and political infrastructure of the eastern Islamic lands, and 656/1258, the year that the Mongols overthrew the caliphate, is often taken as a watershed. Yet, despite the devastation wrought by these pagan warriors, many social and cultural norms continued, and after Aqa's conversion in 695/1295, Islam again became the official religion throughout west Asia. This was the age of Mongol prestige and Persianate culture, and the Persian-speaking lands, under the control of various Mongol and Turkoman dynasties including the Ilkhanids (1256-1353), the Jalayirids (1340-1432), the Timurids (1370-1507), the Qaraqoyunlu (1351-1469), and the Aqquyunlu (1396-1508), set the standard in caligraphy as in the other arts.

The round scripts known as the Six Pens, typically arranged in pairs of majuscule and minuscule scripts, remained the main styles for prose texts, and the Koran manuscripts produced at this time are some of the finest known. These scripts were also used for other fancy manuscripts of Persian poetry and for calligraphic specimens, known in Arabic as qit'a, the noun meaning piece or fragment derived from the verb qata'a [to cut or cut off]. These specimens could be used as models for architectural revetment, and one of the major innovations of the period is the extension of calligraphy to other media, particularly stucco and tile. These specimens also served as exemplars for copying, and masters like Yaqut and his followers produced many signed and dated specimens. With the increasing prestige of individual hands, these specimens were collected and mounted in albums that began to be assembled by the middle of this period. The increasing predominance of Persian, including the new genre of lyric poetry, also led to the development of two new hanging scripts, ta'liq and nasta'liq.

Sixteenth-century Safavid chroniclers, the first to write an art history of this period, viewed the subject biographically. They borrowed the vocabulary of Sufi brotherhoods, describing the history of calligraphy as a path [tariqa] or chain [silsila] that passed from master (ustad, pir, or shaykh) to pupil (shagird or murshid). These chains were typically arranged along east-west lines, but such geographic divisions may tell us more about Safavid roots in fifteenth-century
rivalries between Timurids and Turkomans than about the practice of calligraphy in earlier centuries. Such a dialectic view of art history, something of a trope pitting Apollo against Dionysus, should not be accepted uncritically. In addition to a critical examination of written sources, we need to scrutinize extant examples to chart the history of calligraphy in this period.  

The Six Pens under the Ilkhanids and Jalayirids

Baghdad, which had been the seat of the caliphate under the Abbassids, remained the major center of fine calligraphy, especially for luxury manuscripts, regularly penned using four of the Six Pens [rāyhan, muhāqaq, naskh, and thuluth] and often elaborated with illumination and illustration. Signed and dated codices show that many calligraphers worked there in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, but the important calligrapher of the age — and later regarded as one of the most famous calligraphers of all times — was Abu'l-Majid Jamal al-Din Yaqut. Few details about Yaqut's life are certain, and much is the stuff of legend. He was born sometime in the first or second decade of the thirteenth century, probably at Amasya in Anatolia. He was likely a convert to Islam, since he regularly signed his work simply as Yaqut ibn 'Abdallah [son of God's servant] and such a genealogy would fit the etymology of his name Yaqut (ruby), a common name for a slave. As a young boy, he was brought to Baghdad, where he served the last Abbassid caliph, al-Musta'sim billah (r. 1242–58), thereby earning the epithet al-Musta'simi. Yaqut spent virtually all of his life in Baghdad. He studied calligraphy there with one of the masters of the day, Sāfi al-Dīn 'Abd al-Mu'min al-Urmawī (d. 1294). Like his predecessor Ibn Muqla, Yaqut became a secretary in the Abbassid chancery. After Hulegu took Baghdad in 1258, Yaqut remained in the city, where his career flourished under Mongol patronage. He was friendly with 'Ata-Malk al-Juwaynī, Persian historian and governor of the city for the Mongols, and taught calligraphy to Juwaynī's sons and brother Shams al-Dīn, the head of the chancery (sāhib dinw). Like Ibn al-Bawwāb, Yaqut was also a librarian, working in the Mustansiriyya Madrasa under the supervision of the historian Ibn al-Fuwati (d. 1318), who was appointed director in 1280–1. As with Yaqut's birth, various dates are given for his death, the most convincing are 667 or 668 (1267–9). All sources agree that Yaqut, like his predecessor Ibn al-Bawwāb, was buried in Baghdad near the tomb of the jurist Ahmad ibn Hanbal. It is difficult to judge Yaqut's skills or discern his style from textual descriptions, for they are brief and couched in abstract metaphors. For example, in the album preface prepared in 1511/1544, the Safavid librarian Dust Muhammad credited Yaqut with perfecting the round naskh script developed by Ibn Muqla. In Dust Muhammad's florid words, Yaqut 'laid down the rules for this script and brought down the cryptic regulations of this science from heaven to earth. Without the least hint of extravagance, it may be said that he caused his musk-scented pen to skim through the current of scripts in such a way that the pen's tongue and the two-tongued pen are incapable of describing it. Yaqut's own words, as recorded in later sources, are not much more helpful. Identifying Yaqut's style from extant examples is equally problematic. His prestigious reputation means many manuscripts and individual specimens in various scripts bear his signature, authentic and otherwise. Almost every major museum or collection has a piece supposedly in his hand. No scholar has been able to examine all of these examples and establish a methodology to distinguish authentic work from later forgeries, andgeries, and pieces in other hands. D. S. Rice's monograph showed that all six manuscripts bearing Ibn al-Bawwāb's 'signature' had been accepted as genuine by the second half of the fourteenth century, and Yaqut's work was likewise esteemed and copied by this time. Provenance is therefore not a reliable criterion for determining authenticity, and it remains for scholars to apply other types of analysis to distinguish genuine works of Yaqut from others supposedly in his hand. The problem is particularly complicated in the case of Yaqut, for he calligraphed a range of material [both manuscripts and individual specimens] in two languages (Arabic and Persian) using a variety of scripts. Qadi Ahmad's long passage about Yaqut reaffirms the calligrapher's productivity and breadth, and matching it with extant examples can suggest ways of interpreting such textual information. According to the Safavid chronicler, Yaqut copied two sections [juz'] of the Koran daily, such that each month he produced two complete codices. To judge from this speed, these must have been small, single-volume manuscripts. Yaqut supposedly numbered each manuscript at the end, and Qadi Ahmad reported that he had seen number 364, a figure chosen presumably for hyperbole and perhaps to show that Yaqut had outdone his predecessor Ibn al-Bawwāb, who is said to have calligraphed sixty-four copies. Qadi Ahmad added that Yaqut passed out samples of his writing daily to seventy people, thereby underscoring the calligrapher's substantial output. Finally, Qadi Ahmad summed up Yaqut's talents in a short verse containing puns on the double meaning of the name of five round scripts {muhāqaq, rāyhan, riqā', tawqi', and ghubar}, thereby drawing attention to Yaqut's mastery of different scripts. Surviving manuscripts with colophons naming Yaqut bear out Qadi Ahmad's description. Many are copies of the Koran. At least one is a thirty-page codex in muhāqaq, but most are single-volume codices copied in the small scripts of naskh or rāyhan. Such manuscripts must have suited the taste of the Muslim elite in Baghdad, who presumably acquired them. We can use a manuscript in Tehran [Figure 7.1] as an exemplar of the type of Koran manuscript calligraphed by Yaqut. According to the colophon written at the bottom of page 601 in the same size and script as the text, it was transcribed [tabatab] by Yaqut al-Mustaw'simi at Baghdad in Jamada 1685/July 1286.
EMERGENCE OF REGIONAL STYLES IN THE LATER MIDDLE PERIOD

The Tehran Koran is a large manuscript, with pages measuring 35 × 25 cm; other Koran manuscripts bearing Yaqt’s name are the same or half that size. While the size of the paper might be standard, what was written on it was not. The Tehran manuscript has thirteen lines of script per page. Other manuscripts written in the small scripts have anywhere from thirteen to nineteen lines per page. Rulings with a mustafa are not standard either: the pages in this manuscript are not ruled, but the ones in the Paris codex are. The quires vary as well: the Tehran manuscript has quaternions, the Paris manuscript quinions. The codicology of these Koran manuscripts, assuming that they are all actually the work of Yaqt, therefore varies.

So does the calligraphy. As Qadi Ahmad indicated, Yaqt was a master calligrapher, able to use different scripts for text and display. In the Tehran manuscript, for example, he penned the text in black rayhan, juxtaposed to thuluth, broken cursive, riqa’, and naskh as display scripts. Rayhan, the text script, bears many resemblances to naskh: both are small round scripts, in which alif is generally reckoned to be five dots high. In the full form of both scripts, unpointed (muhmaala) letters are marked in two ways: some letters such as yaa, sad, ta’, and ha’ have small versions written below the letter in the text; ra’ and sin are marked by a small V or hook written above the letters (Figure 7.1a). Vocalizations and tanwin are large.

Despite their general similarities, small but significant differences distinguish the two small scripts. Rayhan is more severe and rectilinear than the fluid and curvilinear naskh. One difference is the serif, used in alif and lam in rayhan (Figure 7.1a), but not in naskh. Independent alif stands upright in rayhan, but is pitched slightly to the left in naskh. In rayhan, the tails of mim and other descending letters are flatter; they descend deeper in naskh. Another feature distinguishing the two scripts is the tail of ra’: in rayhan, it is usually straight, whereas in naskh it usually ends in a small upwards hook. The letter dal is proportionally much larger in rayhan. In rayhan, the bowls of final mim and sin are flat on the bottom, whereas in naskh they are flattened on the top.

Rayhan is generally described as of medium roundness, between that of thuluth and muhaqqaq, and medium weight, and Yaqt’s rayhan is particularly delicate. The word rayhan also designates sweet basil, a plant from the mint family noted for its delicate stems, and later authors frequent make puns between the delicacy of this script and that of the plant. The Timurid poet Jami (d. 1492), for example, penned a famous line about an album probably made for his patron Sultan Husayn Mirza:

Before this copy, which is the pleasure ground of intellect and soul, the eye of reason is bewildered.
It is a cheerful garden filled with roses and odoriferous herbs;
The pages are roses and the lines sweet basil [rayhan].
Yaqut's lightness of touch was a feature emphasized by later chroniclers. According to Qadi Ahmad, Yaqut maintained the style of writing used by his predecessor Ibn al-Bawwab, but modified the way that the pen was cut. Ibn al-Bawwab had trimmed the pen at a right angle, but Yaqut's point was long, thick, and trimmed obliquely (mubattal) so that it rang like a sword made by Mashriqi, a famous swordsman. Therefore, in Qadi Ahmad's judgment, Yaqut's style was finer and more graceful than that of his predecessor.  

The lightness is emphasized by the script that Yaqut used: they are long, thin spikes, unlike the thick curls favored in other traditions and likened by poets to the black tresses of the beloved.  

The delicacy of Yaqut's text rayhan is heightened by its juxtaposition against heavier and more rounded display scripts. On this page from the Tehran manuscript, for example, the title is written in a fat thuluth verging on tawqi' (Figure 7.1b). Considered the most rounded and plumpest of the six scripts, thuluth was sometimes called sof (layyin) because of its swooping curves. Letters in thuluth descend quite far below the baseline. By contrast, in the other large script mubaqqaq, as in its minuscule counterpart rayhan, there is a narrower zone below the baseline so that the bowls of such descending letters as lam and nun are shallow and elliptically shaped. Because the letters descend so far in thuluth, the calligrapher usually adds an upturned hook at the end of ra', waaw, final ya', etc. Similarly, in thuluth, a final ha'ita marbata that is connected to the preceding letter is open at the bottom, almost like a squiggle, as in the last word of the title, ala. In contrast, final ha'ita marbata in mubaqqaq and rayhan is a loop that is closed at the bottom, as in al-madhqa and allah, the last words in the third and fourth lines from the bottom.  

The roundness of letters in thuluth makes it easy to join unconnected letters, a feature typical of the scribal pair tawqi'/tasiq'. In mubaqqaq and rayhan, by contrast, they are kept rigidly separate. In the sura heading, for example, waaw [and] is connected to the following word, thamaninya. Similarly, the letter ra' often runs over or touches the following ta' marbata, as in the word suur. All too commonly joined to the following letter, particularly lam in known combinations such as the definite prefix al- and the word qala (he said). This joining of unconnected letters in thuluth may be the reason that many sources from Ibn al-Nadim onwards name this script as the origin of riq'a, the minuscule partner of tawqi'. In thuluth, it is also permitted to fill in the eye or body of the letter, a procedure called tams (literally effacement).  

The layout of Yaqut's page in rayhan continues several characteristics of the pages penned by Ibn al-Bawwab (Figure 5.8). For example, both calligraphers extended the connector between sin and mim in bism like a long suspension bridge so that the basma fills out the first line of each sura (Figure 7.1). Both calligraphers also used the margin to write the last letter or two of the final word in a given line. Such penning of letters in the margin occurs regularly in this manuscript and others. This procedure allows calligraphers to avoid squeezing letters at the end of the line. It also draws the eye into the inner margin. With the increasingly use of ruled margins, however, it had a disruptive visual effect, for the gold and blue rulings often had to be stepped around the isolated letters. Hence calligraphers in later times avoided the problem by piling up the last letters above the word to make a justified left margin.  

Despite the care with which Yaqut wrote, he, like his predecessor Ibn al-Bawwab, made the occasional mistake. On this page from the Tehran manuscript, for example, Yaqut omitted the word mutfa (sperm) from verse twelve (Figure 7.1a). When he discovered the mistake in reading over what he had written, he added the missing word vertically in the right margin and inserted a small arrow in the middle of line nine to show the reader where to insert it. When the marginal rulings were added, they skirt the omitted word, for it was considered inappropriate to rule over God's word (though not to rule over the rosettes separating verses).  

A limited repertory of decoration enhances the delicate script of Yaqut's text. Instead of Ibn al-Bawwab's three blue dots, gold multi-petaled rosettes separate verses. In contrast to the careful calligraphy of the text, they are painted carelessly: the number of petals varies (some have ten petals, others eleven), and the gold paint often goes over the black outline. Marginal palmettes painted in gold outlined with blue mark groups of five and ten verses. Those marking five verses are pointed or pear-shaped, like the numeral for five in Arabic, whereas those marking ten verses are circular, from the dot used to indicate zero. On the Tehran page (Figure 7.1), for example, the three lower markers in the right margin mark the fifth, tenth, and fifteenth verses of Surat al-Mu'minun (Chapter 23). These marginal rosettes and palmettes, which are found in other manuscripts signed by Yaqut, seem to have become a hallmark of his style, for they were added around calligraphic specimens in an album compiled for the Timurid prince Baysunghur, although they are not typical of the early fifteenth century when the album was assembled.  

This restrained decoration was not always esteemed in later times, and the opening and closing pages of Koran manuscripts in Yaqut's hand were often redecorated and the textblock set in a new binding. The Tehran manuscript, for example, has elaborately decorated opening pages that were reworked in the sixteenth century, perhaps when the Safavid Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524-76) endowed the manuscript to the dynastic shrine at Ardabil. The elaborate gold binding may have been added at this time as well. Other Koran manuscripts penned by Yaqut and his followers were refurbished by the Ottomans, particularly under Sultan Sulayman and his vizier Rustam Pasha, and provided with elaborate frontispieces, margins, and bindings. As Yaqut's reputation waxed, manuscripts in his hand became collectors' items, treasured by princes and gussied up to suit changing tastes [and pocketbooks].
The arts of writing and books flourished under the Ilkhans, and the Six Pens as canonized by Yaqt were perpetuated by many followers. Calligraphers continued to copy single-volume Koran codices in the small scripts of naskh and rayhan, but the most impressive copies are thirty-volume codices in rayhan's larger counterpart, muhaqqaq. We can use the largest and finest of these thirty-volume copies, a dispersed manuscript with colophons dating between Ramadan 702/April–May 1301 and 707/1307–8, as an exemplar.42

The colophon from juz’ 28 [Figure 7.2] gives the name of the calligrapher as Ahmad al-Suhrawardi al-Bakri. He was Yaqt’s most famous pupil.43 Chroniclers record few details about Ahmad al-Suhrawardi’s life, but we can put together more information from signed works. His epistles al-Suhrawardi and al-Bakri shows that he belonged to the Suhrawardiyah, the important Sufi order founded by his great-grandfather.44 In contrast to Yaqt, who had been born a slave and brought to Baghdad, where he rose through the Abbasid and Mongol administrations, Ahmad al-Suhrawardi was an aristocrat who came from one of the most highly respected families in the city.

To judge from the colophons in other manuscripts, Ahmad al-Suhrawardi spent most of his life in Baghdad, where his family of prominent Sufis had lived for a century. According to Qadi Ahmad, Ahmad al-Suhrawardi designed most of the texts inscribed on buildings there.45 Works on paper signed by Ahmad al-Suhrawardi range from 701/1301–2 [a single-volume Koran codex] or 702/1302–3 [a calligraphic specimen] to 732/1331–2, a manuscript of his great-grandfather’s Sufi handbook, Awarif al-ma’arif with very fine calligraphy but faulty vocalization.46 Transcribed in several scripts including thuluth, naskh, rayhan, and tawqif, these works comprise a range of materials from individual specimens to Shi’ite and Sufi treatises and Koran manuscripts, both single and multi-volume copies.47

The text of this magnificent Koran manuscript is transcribed on very large sheets of very fine paper. The paper was rigorously rubbed to render the surface as smooth as possible so that it offered absolutely no hindrance to the pen. Such painstaking finishing requires enormous time and shows the care and expense involved in making this superb manuscript, which originally had some 825 very large bifolios (each 50 x 70 cm). As with the multi-volume Koran manuscript penned by his teacher Yaqt, Ahmad al-Suhrawardi transcribed the text for this multi-volume copy in five lines of black muhaqqaq script, with black for the vowels and orthographic signs. The monochrome black ink contrasts with the vivid polychrome paint used by the illuminator Muhammad ibn Aybak ibn ‘Abdallah for the ornaments, which is far more elaborate than that in the earlier manuscript by Yaqt. Ahmad al-Suhrawardi’s script also surpasses that of his teacher. It is more carefully done, without Yaqt’s occasional mistakes. This is one of the finest Koran manuscripts ever produced, and its calligraphy and illumination are in total harmony.

Ahmad al-Suhrawardi’s muhaqqaq script is more curvilinear than
that of his teacher Yaqt, borrowing several traits characteristic of thuluth. A`
for example, is pitched to the left at a 5° angle, and final nun is sometimes elongated and flattened in comparison to the
deeper bowl used by Yaqt. These curvilinear traits are exaggerated in Ahmad al-Suhrawardi’s signature in the colophons, where some
letters are joined, as in thuluth. Note, for example, the lowered ends of ta’ in the upper line [Figure 7.2a] and the connection of the final
alif of musallikan to the initial ‘ayn of ‘ala in the middle line of the
colophon from fā’28 [Figure 7.2b]. Strokes are smoothly written, without hesitation, as in the sweeping tail to final ya’ in al-Bakri.
Letters and words slope subtly at a 10° angle from upper right to lower left, without disrupting the horizontality of the baseline. The
rhomboidal dots echo the slope. To enliven the page, Ahmad al-Suhrawardi varied his serifs, particularly in the paired verticals of alif and lam, as
in the top line with al-Suhrawardi and the bottom line with ‘alaybi, using a more rounded serif for the first stroke and a spiked one for the
second. Similarly, he varied the shape of kaf, from a single long
sweeping stroke like an S-curve to a two-part stroke with a long
sweeping cap, as here in al-Bakri [Figure 7.2a]. The two-stroke kaf
often has a small spiked serif at the top of the vertical stroke.
Although the serifs are closely set to create a high density, they are
perfectly balanced, both to each other and to the large size of the page.

Pages from the two Koran manuscripts produced by Yaqt [Figure
7.1] and Ahmad al-Suhrawardi [Figure 7.2] illustrate several impor
tant points about the calligraphy used for fine manuscripts penned in
Baghdad at the turn of the fourteenth century. First, the page came
in standard sizes [Figure 7.3]. The Koran manuscript by Ahmad al-
Suhrawardi is very large, with pages measuring 50 by 35 cm. Although it lacks a certificate of com-
missioning, its large size and lavish illumination bespeak court
patronage. James suggested that it might have been begun for the
Ilkhanid sultan Ghazan before his death in 703/1304. In size and
style, it is related to other codices made for his vizier Rashid al-Din,
and it too may well have been finished under his auspices, either at
Ghazan’s pious foundation in Baghdad, which was overseen by the
vizier after the sultan’s death, or at the vizier’s own pious foundation
in that city.54

At least one other Koran manuscript made at this time — another
thirty-volume Koran manuscript made for Sultan Uljaytu and proba
bly also copied by Ahmad al-Suhrawardi — is twice this size.55 Its
enormous bifolios, each measuring 70 x 100 cm, correspond to what
the fifteenth-century Maniluk chronicler al-Qalaqshandi called the
full baghdadi size. Such paper represents the limit of what a single
person can lift from the mold. It must have been a Herculean task to
lift the wet sheets of paper, especially as over one thousand bifolios
were needed for this colossal Koran manuscript. The sheets for other
manuscripts were measured in relation to the full baghdadi size. In
addition to the half-baghdadi size used for Ahmad al-Suhrawardi’s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Name given by al-Qalaqshandi</th>
<th>Paper dimensions</th>
<th>Page dimensions</th>
<th>Sample manuscripts</th>
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<tr>
<td>Enormous</td>
<td>baghdadi</td>
<td>70 x 100</td>
<td>70 x 50</td>
<td>30-vol. Koran ms for Uljaytu’s tomb in Sultaniyat, 706-13</td>
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<td>Rum’s Mathnavi-yi Ma’navi, 1353 [8.13]</td>
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<td>Very large</td>
<td>half-baghdadi</td>
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<td>50 x 35</td>
<td>30-vol. Koran ms by Ahmad al-Suhrawardi, 730-8 [7.3]</td>
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<td>7-vol. Koran ms by Ruk al-Wali al-Din Baybars, 1304-6 [8.1]</td>
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<td>1-vol. Koran ms by Ahmad al-Mu’tazzabdi, 1334 [8.1]</td>
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<td>Large</td>
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<td>35 x 25</td>
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<td>1-vol. Koran ms by Shadi’i for al-Nasir Muhammad, 1313 [8.5]</td>
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<td>25 x 17</td>
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<td>Marzubanbani, 1399</td>
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Koran manuscript and other multi-part codices associated with
Rashid al-Din, bifolios one-quarter baghdadi size (35 x 50 cm) were
used for the large Koran manuscripts by Yaqt. Bifolios one-eighth
baghdadi size (25 x 35 cm) were used in turn for other medium-sized
manuscripts by these same calligraphers, as well as other illustrated
manuscripts produced in Baghdad at this time.56

Manuscripts of different sizes were made for different patrons and
used for different purposes. Most of the very large manuscripts made
on sheets of full and half baghdadi-size paper were commissioned by
the ruler and his courtiers as gifts for the pious foundations estab-
lished around their tombs. The enormous Koran manuscript copied
in muhaqqiq with lines of black outlined with gold alternating with
lines of gold outlined with black, for example, was endowed to Sultan
Uljaytu’s tomb at Sultaniyat.57 Others were made for the tomb com-
plexes of Ghazan and Rashid al-Din.58 To judge from the endowment
deed for Rashid al-Din’s pious foundation in Tabriz, these Koran manu-
script were intended for use by the Koran readers assigned to sit
near the tomb and recite the scripture round the clock.58 Paper of this
large size had been used earlier — the first surviving example is a six-
volume copy of Jalal al-Din Rumi’s mystical poem, Mathnavi-yi
Ma’navi made in Rajab 677/November-December 1278 [Figure 9.1] —
but such ‘imperial’ Koran manuscripts of what a scribe in sharp contrast
to the smaller single-volume manuscripts made by Yaqt, were in
particular demand after Ghazan had made Islam the state religion in
695/1395.59

Along with standard format, the paper produced at Baghdad in the
late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries was of extremely fine

Figure 7.3 Chart with paper sizes.
quality. Particularly white, it is thinner and stronger than that produced earlier and often has a slight sheen from the polished size. The smooth surface meant that the calligrapher’s pen glided smoothly across the surface so that the strokes are a uniform blackness. When viewed under a microscope (Figure 7.4), the page copied by Ahmad al-Suhrawardi shows well-beaten long white fibers under a flawless size. Such manuscripts represent the pinnacle of technical perfection of paper and ink.

This smooth paper offered a perfect surface for decoration, and compared to the Koran manuscripts by Yaqut, those by his followers like Ahmad al-Suhrawardi show a marked increase in the amount and quality of the illumination. These manuscripts have glorious double-page frontispieces, often with rectangular panels, some with inscriptions, others without. The text on the opening pages of the later manuscripts is also arranged more logically. In the Tehran Koran by Yaqut, the right page of the opening double-page spread contains the heading and text of Sura 1 (al-Fatiha, The Opening) and the heading and opening two lines of Sura 2 (al-Baqara, the Cow), while the left page contains nine lines of text from the second chapter. By contrast, Koran manuscripts by Yaqut’s followers have all of Sura 1 on the right page and the opening verses of Sura 2 on the left. The double pages thus form a matched pair, with sura headings at the top of the facing pages. The pigments used for the illumination in manuscripts by Yaqut’s followers are also finer, particularly the blue, which is deeper and darker, indicating a higher quality of lapis lazuli.

The increased amount of decoration meant that illumination became a more important speciality, and the calligraphers who succeeded Yaqut typically worked with a named illuminator. Muhammad ibn Aybak ibn Abdallah, the illuminator who repeatedly signed the thirty-volume Koran by Ahmad al-Suhrawardi, also signed the immense Koran manuscript commissioned by Sultan Qaytub, which has similar calligraphy.50 The increasing importance of illumination in these Koran manuscripts made at the turn of the thirteenth to the fourteenth century coincides with the rising importance of painting. The Koran manuscripts are particularly important in documenting this change, for the repeated signatures and dates give us some idea about contemporary methods of manuscript production, revealing in what order the work was carried out and how long it took. From these facts, we can deduce how prestigious (and expensive) it was.

Notes in the thirty-volume Koran manuscripts penned by Ahmad al-Suhrawardi and illuminated by Muhammad ibn Aybak, for example, confirm that both calligrapher and illuminator worked sequentially from the beginning of the text to the end.60 While this might seem logical, even self-evident, it was not always the case.61 Copying preceded illumination, for the dates of copying always antedate those of illumination, sometimes by a period of several years. For example, transcription of juz’ 7 of the enormous Koran (TKS EH 641) was finished in 707 (July 1307–June 1308), but illumination was only completed three years later in Dhu’l-Hijja 710 (April–May 1311). There was some overlap between manuscripts produced by the same team, and Ahmad al-Suhrawardi seems to have begun copying the enormous manuscript, while Muhammad ibn Aybak was still finishing the decoration of the very large one. Such overlap was possible because Ahmad al-Suhrawardi could transcribe the text twice as fast as Muhammad ibn Aybak could illuminate it. Transcription of a single juz’ of the enormous manuscript took a month and half, meaning that Ahmad al-Suhrawardi could transcribe about eight juz’ per year. By contrast, Muhammad ibn Aybak took slightly less than three months to illuminate a single volume, meaning that it took seven years to decorate the thirty volumes. These were expensive projects, worthy of the court.62

The Six Penns canonized by Yaqut continued to be the main scripts not only in Iraq but also in Iran, and work by Haydar, Ahmad al-Suhrawardi’s counterpart there, shows how calligraphers adapted these scripts, notably thuluth, to architecture.63 Qadi Ahmad included a short biography of Haydar among the six followers of Yaqut.64 According to the Safavid chronicler, Haydar, who came from
the sultan's order to embrace the new rite and also one of the first to revolt against the edict. According to the Moroccan globetrotter Ibn Battuta, who visited Isfahan a few years later, the inhabitants bore arms to the mosque to prevent the preacher from obeying the sultan's instructions. The mosque may have been damaged, for the inscription on the mihrab suggests that the building was restored and that the fine mihrab was one of the elements added to it, presumably as a sign for the new cult.

The superb design of the mihrab underscores Haydar's calligraphic skill, for he combined several sizes of thuluth script set against floral arabesque scrolls sprouting stippled palmettes. The tympanum is filled with horizontal lines of small script. It contains the foundation inscription with the sultan's name and titles and the date, given to the specific month, eulogized with a blessing for the particular month. The tympanum is framed by a slightly larger band that contains a hadith on the authority of the 'Abd al-Malik Traditionist Jabir ibn Zayd about the revelation of Koran 4:59. The band ends with the artist's signature, 'A'rab i haydar (work of Haydar). The largest and finest inscription on the mihrab is the rectangular frame. It contains a prophetic hadith, reporting that anyone who builds a mosque like the nesting place dug by a partridge in the sand will receive a house in paradise. This is followed by a Tradition on the authority of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib that anyone who frequents a mosque will receive eight rewards. The bodies of the letters in the text are compressed into a narrow zone that contrasts with the elongated stems whose thickening terminals swell upwards at the edge of the concave band. The band epitomizes the finest thuluth calligraphy of the age.

Haydar, like other contemporary calligraphers, probably drew up the design for the mihrab on paper. It was then transferred to the plaster, and the stucco carver's work is equally remarkable, for the stucco is not only carved on several levels but also shaped to fit a carved surface. The letters float above a dense garden of vegetation. Despite the complexity of both design and execution, the text is remarkably clear and readable.

While thuluth was the favored script for architectural inscriptions, its smaller counterpart naskh remained the most common script for transcription, in which it was regularized and often played off against a large thuluth as display script. We can see this from the most ambitious project to survive from the next generation: a large and magnificent two-volume copy of the Persian national epic, the Shahnama, or Book of Kings. The text, composed by the poet Ferdowsi in the early eleventh century, contains some fifty thousand verses. This copy, produced for the Ilkhanid court in the 1310s and known as the Great Mongol Shahnama, has been broken up, probably to sell the pages individually. Only fifty-eight illustrated pages and a handful of text pages are known, but originally it comprised nearly six hundred pages, each with thirty-one lines of text written in six columns. Copying such a long text was time-consuming,
and to speed up the work, the text was divided into two volumes, which were later bound as eighteen quires of quaternions. To judge from the calligraphy, the volumes were copied by different people.

This page from the first volume of the Great Mongol Shahnama showing a painting of Sindukht learning about her daughter’s actions (figure 7.6) exemplifies the fine, even naskh used at the time for fancy manuscripts. Abolala Soudavar articulated several features of this hand (figure 7.6a) in particular as distinct from that used in the second volume. The anonymous calligrapher of volume one, whom he labeled Calligrapher A, was adept at fitting his text within the columns, whereas the calligrapher who penned the second volume, Calligrapher B, often misjudged the space needed and had to pile up the last word of the hemistich above the line at the left. Calligrapher A also played with the dots used for vocalization. For example, he set the double dots on ta‘ and ya‘ vertically even where there was sufficient space for horizontal ones. He often lined up the dot of ba‘ with the dots of a subsequent ya‘. He also dotted final ya‘ in various places. Furthermore, Calligrapher A used long alif madda exclusively at the beginning of a word, whereas Calligrapher B sprinkled it more liberally across the line. Soudavar connected this correct use of alif madda at the beginning of a word along with the careful and correct diacritical marks with the elegant prose treatise on calligraphy written by the most famous calligrapher active in Iran during the first half of the fourteenth century, ‘Abdallah Sayrafi.

The son of Khwaja Mahmud al-sarraf (the money-changer) from Tabriz, ‘Abdallah Sayrafi seems to have spent his life in his hometown, the Ilkhanid capital Tabriz, and is said to have been buried in the cemetery of Chaharanab south-west of the city. He designed monumental inscriptions there, although none has survived. We are better informed about ‘Abdallah Sayrafi’s manuscript hands, known from several Koran codices. He penned at least one thirty-part manuscript completed in Muharram 728/November–December 1327, written in gold muhaqqaq with blue vowels on medium-sized paper. He also penned smaller, single-volume copies, including one in naskh now in Mashhad. Several features of the script he used there, such as the repeated elongation of the letters kaf and sometimes ba‘ show ‘Abdallah Sayrafi’s familiarity with designing architectural inscriptions.

Soudavar’s designation of ‘Abdallah Sayrafi as the calligrapher responsible for the first volume of the Great Mongol Shahnama has several important ramifications about the practice of calligraphy in Iran during the first half of the fourteenth century. It confirms that Yaqut’s followers, like the master himself, worked in several genres, transcribing both Persian literary texts and Koran codices as well as designing inscriptions. It also shows the increasing need for teamwork to produce these large and fine manuscripts. Different calligraphers may have penned different parts of a multi-volume work, and calligraphers often worked in teams with illuminators and painters.
In addition to manuscripts, Yaqut and his followers used the round scripts for calligraphic specimens, many later mounted in albums. Such specimens range widely in subject, from Koranic excerpts, traditions attributed to both the Prophet and his son-in-law Ali, and wisdom sayings (wasaya) attributed to philosophers and other learned figures like Socrates to pious phrases, sacred names, aphorisms, prayers, letters, treatises, exercises, and more. Most are in Arabic, but sayings in Persian, especially verse, became increasingly popular over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These calligraphic specimens were usually made as loose, single sheets. To judge from the folding, tears, holes, water stains, and other damage, some may have been carried about by peripatetic calligraphers who traveled about in search of work at various courts. At least one was composed while the calligrapher was on the pilgrimage.53

Most of the specimens that have been preserved were later mounted in albums, called in Arabic muraqa‘ (literally, patchwork) and in Persian jug (literally, large ship).54 In this process, the individual specimens were gathered, trimmed, repaired, and ruled before being pasted on sheets of backing paper and then attached to the page. In the fancier albums made for court patrons, the individual pages were also set in borders, which could be painted and decorated and served to unify the disparate compositions and components. The folios were then bound together, sometimes with alternating pictures, in either the codex or the concertina format. The most famous of these albums containing material from the time of Yaqut and his followers are preserved not in Iran, where they were made, but in Istanbul, where they were taken as booty or gifts and incorporated into the Ottoman archives stored in the Topkapı Palace. The larger and more elaborate albums contain both calligraphy and illustrations, including drawings, paintings, stencils, maps, and other material, but the earliest ones (B.411 and H.310), compiled during the reign of Shahrukh, Timurid ruler at Herat from 1405 to 1447, contain only calligraphy.55

This page from Album Bají with three calligraphic specimens, presumably all by the same hand (Figure 7.7), gives a good idea of the work produced in the mid-fourteenth century.56 The specimens at the top is a large basmala in thuluth, with the opening words bismi’llah (in the name of God) written in large size and the modifiers al-rahman al-rahiim (the merciful, the compassionate) written in a smaller size above the word allah. On the lower left is a small band with a line of Arabic poetry written in a script like thuluth but with so many unauthorized connections that it should be considered riq‘. The large specimen in the lower right contains the signature of the calligrapher al-Hajj Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Musharrijī and the date Dhu’l-Hijja 751/October–November 1350.

Hajj Muhammad, like his teacher ‘Abdallah Sayrafi, is known from both signed works and written sources. He carries several epithets. Often he is called al-Tabrizi, and he seems to have spent his working life in his hometown Tabriz. Sometimes he is called al-tashca‘i, meaning that he drew up the tashq, the ruler’s official emblem.57 More often he is called al-musharrij or baglakī, Arabic and Persian terms meaning brick-jointer or pivoter of the spaces between bricks.58 Hajj Muhammad was a noted designer of architectural inscriptions,59 and some of his calligraphies, like the larger thuluth specimen at the top with the basmala, might also have served as models for epigraphic texts. The tall upright allīf measures almost 30 cm, some sixty times the width of the penstroke and the size of some of the large stucco bands in contemporary mihrahls (Figure 7.5). Such a large script, which was used not only for headings but occasionally for dates, was as well known as tawwar, from the word for scroll. Its opposite was ghubār (literally, dust), the smallest of the scripts, said to have received its name because it resembled motes of dust. Though some authors considered this pair as separate scripts, many Iranian chroniclers considered tamar to be any of the Six Pens made large, in contrast to ghubār, any script made small.

Timur’s tiny counterpart, ghubār, is often thought to derive from tisq‘ and/or naskh, and modern writers often speak of naskh ghubār, meaning a very small naskh. The minuscule letters in ghubār script are usually less than 3 mm, often as small as 1.3 mm. Given their small size, they are usually written without serif, and the eyes of ‘ayn, fa’ gaf, and similar letters can be filled to make the script appear even smaller. Ghubār script is said to have been invented to write messages carried by pigeon post, but calligraphers in Iran soon came to use it in
other ways, notably for amulets, talismans, and even entire copies of the Koran. These manuscripts were sometimes written in miniature thirty-volume sets, which were stored in leather boxes. An intact manuscript in Tehran (Figure 7.8), for example, is boxed in a container measuring 10 × 12 cm. Each page in the thirty juz’ measures a mere 4 × 4 cm, but has seven lines of script per page, with a ruled area of less than 3 cm on a side. Headings are written in a larger gold script, in which alif reaches 0.5 cm, about twice the height of alif in the text. The manuscript is unsigned and undated, but has been attributed to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, a dating that might be confirmed by further examination of the paper and binding.

The Six Pens under the Timurids and Turkomans

In the early fifteenth century under the patronage of the Timurid ruler Shahrukh and his son Baysunghur, there was a conscious revival of Ilkhandid traditions, probably as a sign of dynastic affiliation to affirm Timurid legitimacy as the Ilkhandid’s successors. This revival extended to the arts, including calligraphy, and Timurid masters of the Six Pens adopted the calligraphic styles canonized by Yaquṭ.92 One way we can see this conscious revival of the past is the copying of older texts. Shahrukh had the universal history composed by the Ilkhandid vizier Rashid al-Dīn in the early fourteenth century not only reprinted but also extended by his own historian Hafiz-i Abūrā. The replacement volumes of the old text and the copies of the extension are so similar to the originals that they are often mistaken for work of the previous century. It took Richard Ettinghausen’s keen eye to point out the conservatism of the artists who painted the miniatures, dubbing their work ‘the historical style of Shahrukh,’93 and only recently has Abolala Soudavar sorted out the difference in content.94 The calligraphic styles differ as well, with Timurid calligraphers using a spacious flowing naskhī that echoed — but did not exactly match — the script used in the original volumes.

This desire to connect with the past is also clear from the calligraphic albums compiled at this time, B41i and H3310. Both are mounted on paper of half-baghdadi size, the format that had been standard in the early fourteenth century (Figure 7.3), and both contain runs of calligraphies by Yaquṭ and his followers. Based on the simple method of compilation, David Roxburgh suggested that the second part of B41i, containing the works of Ḥāfiz Muhammad bāndgīr and his family, is the earliest album to survive, for it has specimens of disparate sizes, shapes, and scripts mounted rather haphazardly on the page without border or outer rulings.95 In the page illustrated here (Figure 7.7), for example, all three specimens are mounted sideways to fill the page. The Timurid link to the past is even clearer in the other album compiled at this time, H3310. Identified in a later frontispiece as Baysunghur’s Album of Seven Masters, it contains calligraphies in the Six Pens by Yaquṭ and six followers. In contrast to the patchwork arrangement of B41i, the calligraphic specimens in H3310 are organized more like a Koran manuscript, with written surfaces to be read in linear sequence. During assembly, the album pages were even decorated to look like work of the previous century by adding palmettes that resemble those used in Koran manuscripts penned by Yaquṭ (Figure 7.1).

These albums document the growing interest in the preservation, display, and history of a calligraphic tradition and its practitioners descended from Yaquṭ. They also illustrate the increasing range of activities carried out by an individual calligrapher, who penned not only manuscripts but also single specimens, some designed for architectural revetment and others as models |Arabic mithāl| to be copied.
by students. In this sense, Roxburgh compared these albums to manuals of insha', the genre of literature comprising exemplary letters or documents intended as style books for chancery scribes. As part of the revival of the past, Yaqut became a cult personality. His hand was taken as the exemplar of the Six Pens; he himself was seen as the teacher of six pupils. Calligraphers began to copy works in Yaqut’s hand, both manuscripts and individual specimens.

Copying was the method by which calligraphers learned to imitate – and paid homage to – their earlier masters. We can see this from a page (Figure 7.9) in another album compiled at this time: the so-called Baysunghur Album [H152]. Twice the size of the B411 and H2130 (therefore on sheets on full-bagdati size), it contains pictures as well as 144 calligraphic specimens written by masters ranging from Muhammad ibn Haydar al-Husayni in Moharram 717 [March–April 1317] (fol. 31r) to the Timurid prince Ibrahim Sultan in 831/1428–9 (fol. 6a). This page, which may have been reformatted from a scroll, is assembled from seven pieces of paper pasted together with small ascriptions added after the pieces were joined. The texts repeat the phrase ‘favors continue through gratitude’ seventeen times. The one at the top right is ascribed to ‘our master’ (khatt-i mawlanā) Ahmad Rumi. Beneath is a copy by Baysunghur, followed by those by other calligraphers at the Timurid court, most of whom are otherwise unknown. The phrase is written in riqa’ script, in which the letters resemble those in thuluth, but with the unauthorized connection between alif and lam. The copies show how different calligraphers varied the same phrase by opening up the space, placing the dots differently, and modifying the vocalization. The person who compiled the page also used different verbs to ascribe the work to the different calligraphers, including various forms of kataba, masquta, and hatara, but all of them seem to indicate the same work of copying.

Ahmad Rumi was, according to Qadi Ahmad, one of Yaqut’s followers and a master of the Six Pens, whose style is even said to have eclipsed that of his predecessor. To judge from the layout of this page, in which Baysunghur’s sample is placed directly below the model, Ahmad Rumi may have been Baysunghur’s teacher. The calligrapher certainly worked in the prince’s scriptorium, for he penned the earliest manuscript associated with the prince: a copy of Juz’i’s history, Tabaqat-i nasiri, dated 814/1411–12. Ahmad Rumi used riqa’ at the end of the historical manuscript for the title, dedication, and colophon, but he penned the main text in naskh, the script used for most prose manuscripts in this period.

A distinctive style of naskh developed at this time in Shiraz, a thriving center of manuscript production in southwestern Iran under the governorship of Baysunghur’s brother Ibrahim Sultan (d. 1435). We can see this style of naskh not only in small Koran manuscripts, such as one transcribed by the prince himself, but also in prose works, such as a dispersed manuscript of Sharaf al-Din ‘Ali Yazdi’s Zafarana copy by Ya’qub ibn Hasan, known as Siraj al-Husayni al-Sultani, and completed in Dhul Hijja 839/June–July 1436 (Figure 7.10). The similarity between the scripts in the two manuscripts is hardly surprising, for the historical text was composed in Shiraz for Ibrahim Sultan, and this lavishly illustrated copy was probably intended for him, although he died a year before it was completed. The thin but sturdy script is characterized by long tails on the final forms of letters like nun, sin, and ya’ (Figure 7.10). These swooping tails, which often enclose the following word or phrase to create a
Shirazi calligraphers in the early fifteenth century used a distinctive style of naskh with long, swooping tails that often encircle the following syllable, word or even phrase and have an angular bend at the bottom. This style was exported to Anatolia and sultanate India by calligraphers like Siraj al-Husayni, who himself went to Bihar, where he wrote a treatise on calligraphy entitled 'Tuhfat al-muhībbin.' Calligraphers were also becoming increasingly skillful in manipulating layout, using diagonal bars of text to stretch out a text and frame an illustration.

The Koran manuscript copied by Ibrahim Sultan in naskh is the exception rather than the rule, and Koran manuscripts penned in muhaqqaq and its smaller counterpart rayhan were far more common in this period. The biggest and best known is the dispersed copy often attributed to Baysunghur, but likely made for his grand-son Fath 'Ali Sultan (r. 1370–1405). The elephantine manuscript that Jordan describes as ‘the one whose hand has been cut off,’ i.e., the left-handed, was said to measure one cubit (dharr) long, and was so heavy that it had to be transported in a wheelbarrow. Timur favored the colossal, as shown by his congregational mosque at Samarqand, known as the Mosque of Bibi Khanum (1399–1420), whose size and magnificence made it a fitting testament to his new capital. The largest in Central Asia, it was able to hold 10,000 worshippers. Timur’s grandson Ulugh Beg ordered a special stone Koran stand erected in the courtyard of this mosque, probably designed to hold this enormous (and correspondingly heavy) codex. When the Afghan Nadir Shah looted Samarqand in the eighteenth century, the manuscript was apparently taken to