completion of the work had to be postponed until the return of the warmer season. There were, however, also happier moments: a 9th-century Irish scribe simply wrote in the margin of his manuscript: 'pleasant to me is the glittering of the sun today upon these margins, because it flickers so' (ibid. p.70). The scriptorium itself was run by the *archarius* whom a scribe could summon by hand signals whenever he needed fresh ink, a new pen or another sheet of parchment. Accuracy was of the uttermost importance; it not only saved the cost of re-copying but a monastery which became known for its reliable copies could gain a considerable amount of prestige and fame. Scribes might occasionally write from dictation but most medieval illustrations show them with an exemplar (the manuscript from which the text is being copied) on the lectern in front of them. Though they could not boast a powerful patron saint – the only one known in this connection seems to have been St Cassian who in the 4th century taught pagan children in Tirol and was promptly killed by one of them with a pen (one wonders why) – they had a special 'patron' demon, Thûwilis, first mentioned in John of Wales’s *Tractatus de potentia* (c.1265–69). His task was to wander around the scriptorium looking for errors; if he saw one, he carried it off in his sack so that the mistake could be held against the unfortunate scribe on the day of judgment (MS p.17). But, however arduous the task and however important the work, pride in one’s skill and achievements was rigorously discouraged. Should a scribe boast about his work, he could be taken from the scriptorium and given another, more humble task. But sometimes pride would win and a calligrapher/scribe (or illuminator) would slip in a signature (or a miniature self-portrait) to establish his claim of authorship [41]. The Eadwine Psalter,
a manuscript written in 1140 and now in Trinity College Library in Cambridge, has a small portrait of Eadwine, a scribe of Christ Church, Canterbury; around his portrait he proclaims himself a 'prince of writers' adding:

'... neither my fame nor my praise will die quickly demand of my letters who I am... Fame proclaims you in your writing for ever Eadwine, you are to be seen here in this painting. The worthiness of this book demonstrates your excellence. Oh God this book is given to you by him. Receive this acceptable gift.' (pp.70)

Something had obviously gone wrong.

After the break up of the highly centralized Roman Empire, Europe disintegrated into a number of small and quarrelsome tribal states with no central cultural impulse except that provided by the Christian Church in Rome. Under the Merovingians, the Franks eventually emerged as a unifying power. As the political situation became more stabilized, government and administration developed a need for clerical skills, which to begin with was supplied by the Church in the shape of the clericus or clerk. Merovingian chancery scribes took up the challenge and produced a special cursive script which came to be known as Merovingian minuscule. The unification of Europe was finally brought about by Charlemagne (742-814 AD), whose conquest united a large part of Western Europe, though England, Ireland and Spain (and with it many important centres of learning) remained outside his orbit. Charle- magne differed greatly from the preceding Merovingians in that — although illustrious himself — his ambition was to revive culture and learning, and to create a mode of life which combined Christianity with Roman civilization.

To this end he surrounded himself with learned men from all over Europe: the historian Paul the Deacon from Italy, the grammarian Peter of Pisa, Theodulf the Visigoth from Spain, and most important of all, Alcuin of York (see p.59) whose turba scriptorum (crowd of scribes) in the Abbey School at Tours not only copied valuable manuscripts brought from Rome and Monte Cassino, but in addition created one of the finest calligraphic styles, the Carolingian minuscule.

In the 12th century the Church's monopoly on scholarship began to decline, learning ceased to be synonymous with theology, and the clerk was no longer necessarily a clericus. This secularization of society, and the influence of Arabs, Jewish and Greek scholarship, encouraged the creation of new centres of learning, and led to the foundation of universities without direct links with the Church in places like Bologna (1156), Oxford (1166), Paris (1200), Padua (1222) and Salerno (1224). In consequence the monastic scriptoria ceased to be the main centres for book production; with the spread of wealth and education, the book market (and with it book ownership) increased, catering no longer just for the Court and the Church but also, increasingly, for the needs of students, scholars and the new wealthy merc-

chant class. By 1300 a good many monasteries had stopped producing their own manuscripts and monks began to patronize the commercial bookshops like everybody else. This drastically changed the position of the calligrapher/scribe. His purpose was no longer self-evident; like the copyist (who at first rather benefited from the new situation) he had to find his own clientele and commercial aspects began to influence him. Lay scribes had worked for hire in cathedral schools side by side with monks since the 9th century, but now scribes had to find customers themselves. Often they would travel the neighbourhood with their sample books to show what they had to offer; or post notices on the doors of inns and churches. In the newly prosperous towns, professional scribes and calligraphers set up workshops and, in order to keep up standards and protect themselves from unfair competition, organized themselves into guilds. Book production now required the co-ordination of a large number of different skills: writers (who produced the main body of the book), limners (who illuminated the pages), turnours (who drew initial letters and borders), rubricators, bookbinders and parchmenters, and, most important perhaps in the new climate, stationers and booksellers who acted as middle-men between different workshops or individual craftsmen and the customers who had placed the order. Apprenticeship was strict, usually lasting some seven years; after the 'master piece' had been presented to the master and the warders, the candidate would become a journeyman before settling down to practise his craft (usually well away from the locality in which he had been trained). A scribe was expected to be proficient in a number of different styles to serve the requirements of the text and prevailing fashions. An apprentice would usually perform the more humble tasks of checking the skins when they were delivered by the parch- menter, ruling lines, mulling and grinding colours on a stone slab, and mixing them with the yoke or white of an egg. Writing was done sitting at a desk, a sharpened quill in the right hand, and a pen-knife to hold down the parchment in the left. At the beginning of chapters space had to be left for large letters. Having completed a page the scribe would (with a finer pen and paler ink) scribble instructions in each empty space for the illuminators and rubricators (who filled in the red letters). Mistakes would be erased with a pen-knife; this is relatively easy since skin consists of several layers and the corrections only become visible after dirt has collected in that area. An impor-
tant task was that of the corrector who indicated errors in the margin. If whole sections were missing they had to be written in the margin, or at the bottom of the page; occasionally, the illuminator/illustrator would paint a little scene which showed the missing sentence being lifted (by, for example, a pulley) into the correct position.

Socially such calligrapher/scribes ranked as craftsmen and their status was on the whole fairly low. Unlike the monks working in their scriptoria the new town scribes had no longer any inbuilt job security. At times contracts contained deadlines with penalty clauses should they fail to deliver; with the
loss of monopoly the power had shifted, decisively, from the producer to the market. Pay itself was frequently late (the pay of a 14th-century scribe was generally the same as that of a common farm labourer, only half that of a carpenter), often it was altogether forgotten, and many a scribe died poor [42]. This was, however, not the whole story. Some calligraphers (and illuminators) were able to attract the attention of rich patrons who provided lifelong and well-paid employment: others, like Christine de Pisan (see p.64), managed to earn substantial sums of money by selling their manuscripts to rich members of the aristocracy or the Court.

In the second half of the 15th century the printed book became firmly established. Some enterprising calligraphers accepted the challenge and brought out manuals (see p.169) on calligraphy and handwriting, shrewdly using the increased circulation possibilities to further their own ends. Because of such efforts handwriting became formalized and calligraphy merged with the needs of common everyday business. The following centuries saw a steady increase in bureaucracy, which in turn created a need for officials and secretaries who could write in an appropriate manner, and take down dictations at short notice. These new job opportunities gave young men a chance of upward mobility, and also created possibilities for the calligrapher/scribe in the role of the writing master [43]; somebody had to teach all those aspiring young men. Teaching to write, which had up to then occupied a fairly low place on the social ladder (indeed, in Antiquity it had mostly been the task of slaves), acquired status. In the late 15th and during the whole of the 16th century the writing master gained in importance; by printing and publishing his copy-books he could extend his influence, attract pupils, win patronage, fame, perhaps even a chance to ensure that his particular style was preserved for posterity. Still, his position was not always easy to determine. Some famous writing masters came from noble families (Sigismondo Fantà, Giovanni Francesco Cresci); others were middle-ranking Church men (Vespasiano Amphiaraus, Augustino de Siena, or in Spain, Andrea Brun); some advanced to minor titles (Juan de Yciar [44]); others were appointed at Royal Courts (Francisco Lucas, and in France Pierre Hannon), Giovanni Antonio Tagliente was a minor official at the Vatican Civil Service, and Ludovico degli Arrighi was a professional copyist, a scriptor at the Vatican and a master printer; Giovanni Battista Palatino was on equal terms with the Roman upper circle of diplomats, literary men and Church dignitaries. Finally, in Pedro Madrada’s Libro subtilissimo (1587) we learn of a writing master who had three cargo ships at sea, which is not altogether surprising since in the same publication we are also told that in Spanish society writing was considered an essential accomplishment of an hidalgó (nobleman).
By the 18th century England had become a great trading nation. Industrialization, overseas trade and colonial expansion created a need for a large army of clerks who were able to write a clear, quick and above all legible hand [45]. The conflict between various styles which had provided previous writing masters with much of their raison d'être, encouraging individuality as well as extravaganza, was no longer in evidence. In consequence most copy-books now aimed, like George Bickham’s The Universal Penman [see 176], at teaching a good clerical hand. The new English Round Hand was also taken up by merchants in other countries (France, Spain, the Low Countries, eventually Italy, and in due course also America; see p.193) and became

known as Lettre Anglaise in fact only Germany, together with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, continued to prefer styles based on the Gothic script.

This increase in demand – further accelerated in Britain by the new Education Act of 1840 – again changed the position of the writing master. No longer a member of a respected community, or part of a team of scribes and craftsmen, he began to rank somewhere between a law-writing ‘scriivener’ (tainted in public esteem because of a perceived association with money lending and fraudulent costs) and a mere schoolmaster (never a popular figure), and with this loss of status, the type of scripts he propagated declined. The pedagogic copy-books which flourished during the late 19th
century in Europe and America were largely derived from the examples of Gualtiero's Hercolani's manual (146), published in Bologna in 1574, and those of his successors. They reduced handwriting to almost total mediocrity by confusing pen and burin (see p.176). Robert Bridges, a poet who regarded Victorian school copy-books as soulless models, claimed the ultimate degra-
dation of handwriting was to be witnessed in lawyers' offices where clerks 'scrupulously perfect the very most ugly thing that a conscientious civilization has ever perpetuated'. Or, even more damning, we read in George Eliot's Middlemarch (1871) that 'at that time the opinion existed that it was beneath a gentleman to write legible or with a hand suitable to a clerk'. Thus the writing master had finally become not only a teacher, but a teacher of those most despised by the snobbish middle-class section of Victorian society—people in trade.

WOMEN CALLIGRAPHERS

Christianity has always favoured literacy among women. Indeed, many saints, the Virgin Mary and her mother St Anne (147), are portrayed holding a book in their hands. Teaching children how to read and write was one of the parochial duties of the Church and during the middle ages women from noble families were often better versed in Latin and other school learning than boys, whose education centred around hunting, warfare and the courtly arts. The Church encouraged this trend, hoping that a good education would make a woman more suitable for taking up the religious life should her parents decide to dedicate her to a nunnery. As a result a good many nuns, especially those occupying prominent positions in the hierarchy (who, by definition, came from a more privileged background than the working sisters) were often highly literate and able to collaborate with monks who copied and/or illustrated a particular manuscript. Such work was done either in separate communities or in one of the double monasteries founded in Egypt in the 6th century and still quite common in medieval Europe. If we do not know many of them by name it is because their work was, like that of the monks working in the scriptoria, part of their dedication to God and not an exercise in self-expression. The framework in which calligraphy was practised during the middle ages imposed anonymity. Occasionally however this anonymity was breached and we are allowed glimpses of such a collabora-
tion. In an artistic treatise written in Alasea in 1154, for example, we find, on the dedication page, a picture of Brother Sintram (the Illuminator) and of Guta, the scribe, who was a Canoness of a sister house in nearby Schwartzenbam (ibid. p.70). But though nuns continued to produce books in collaboration with monks (or on their own) until the late middle ages, nun-
neries were never major centres of book production. After the 12th century, when the monastic scriptoria made way for scribal ateliers and commercial
workshops (see p. 77), such a collaboration between men and women was, however, often inevitable; a workshop was in many cases a family business where wives and daughters laboured side by side with the men of the family. Sometimes a woman could be found running such a workshop, but this was usually the result of a wife having lost her husband or a daughter her father; in other words, her position depended—in line with contemporary conventions—more on association than on personal merit.

There were, of course, exceptions. There were women who had, and were able, to earn an independent livelihood through their pen, as, for example, Christine de Pisan (1364–1430 AD), who wrote with authority on moral questions, education, the art of government, conduct of war, and the life and times of Charles V. Christine, who is often referred to as the first professional woman writer of Europe, was born in Venice and came to France as a child when her father accepted an invitation from Charles V. Educated by her father (a well-known physician and astrologer) she read French, Italian and Latin. Becoming a widow at the age of 25 she had to support not only herself, but also her three children, her mother and a niece who lived with them. Christine, a poet, author, illustrator and scribe, was soon able to earn a comfortable living by selling her manuscripts to the great ladies and gentlemen of the French Court [see Plate IV].

With the rarest of exceptions, women, however, did not feature as writing masters. This was a highly competitive profession, and rivalry could at times become rather acrimonious, if not outright violent. Successful writing masters had to be entrepreneurs with an ability to organize, take risks, look for financial backing, perhaps even own a printing press, or legitimize their authority by being officially employed at a Chancery or at a Court, with the poorer ones being forced to hack their samples around the country or post them on church doors—none of which was easy or even socially acceptable for a woman. Many writing masters, while trying to court women as potential pupils, were rather patronizing about their abilities. In his copy-book, The Pen in Excellence; or, the Secretaries Delight (published 1618), the author Martin Billingsley says soothingly: ‘suffer me not to give conceivance to that ungrounded opinion of many, who affirm writing to be altogether unnecessary for women... if any art is commendable in a woman... it is this of writing, whereby they;’ (qualifying statement) ‘commonly having not the best of memories... may commit many worthy and excellent things to writing.’ It is however only the Roman Hand which ‘is conceived to be the easiest that is written with the pen, and to be taught in the shortest time’ which in his opinion and that of other writing masters was ‘usually taught to women, for as much as they (having not the patience to take great pains, besides phantastical and humorous), must be taught that which they may easily learn, otherwise they are uncertain of their proceedings, because their minds are (upon light occasions) easily drawn from the first resolution.’

But as the Industrial Revolution progressed and women became an impor-

tant source of cheap labour, more and more of them found work in printers’ shops, in factories (making paper, steel pens, etc. (see 153), and eventually also as poorly-paid governesses and school teachers. By the end of the 19th century a few women were also employed as ‘scribentres’ by one or two law stations and it seems were even paid the same rate as men, but one wonders how comfortable they felt in the company of colleagues generally renowned for their drinking habits (139 p. 140).

The 19th-century revolt against what was by then considered the negative spiritual inheritance of the Industrial Revolution (mechanization and the mass-production of objects without any direct link between manufacturer and user) brought about a general nostalgia for the past. A positive by-product of such sentiments was an increased study of medieval art which in turn created a desire to see, handle, copy and produce manuscripts. A number of do-it-yourself copy-books appeared; some of them (for the less talented) gave the outlines of letters which could simply be filled in, thus creating results which looked reasonable enough even without any real talent on the part of the would-be calligrapher. Just as industrialization had provided a work place for poorer women, so it had also created a group of newly-fashionable ladies of leisure who looked for socially acceptable ways of spending their time. A good number of Victorian middle-class women took up the new ideas and wrote and illuminated manuscripts for their own pleasure, or as a suitable gift for their friends, some producing quite respectable work in the process. Those with less talent (the same who confused canvas work with embroidery) could at least complete one of the do-it-yourself manuals, often copying the outlined Gothic letters with a mapping pen before filling them in with a brush—totally missing the basic point of calligraphy.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and even more so the Arts and Crafts Movement inaugurated by the work of William Morris (see p. 163) and his followers, involved women more actively in their work; women became painters, embroiderers, designers, and eventually also calligraphers. Some of Edward Johnston’s (see p. 165) best pupils such as Irene Wellington or Margaret Alexander (who wrote beautiful Rolls of Honour) were women. Indeed his most famous pupil, who spread his ideas, his style and method of writing and teaching to the continent of Europe, was a woman, Anna Simons (1871–1951). Simons had come to London in 1896 to study at the Royal College of Art, since women were not allowed to train at Art School in her native Prussia. After her return to Germany in 1900 the Prussian Ministry of Commerce arranged a lettering course for art teachers at Dusseldorf, offering the teaching post to Johnston; it was only after Johnston had refused the offer that Simons was appointed. During the 20th century women’s interest and participation in calligraphy (including the teaching and commercial use of calligraphy) has increased progressively. Today women are amongst the best contemporary calligraphers, either teaching, contributing to journals, or actively involved in the work of societies designed to further standards.
Arabic calligraphy

At the heart of Arabic calligraphy lies the Koran and the need for its precise and appropriate transmission. According to tradition the sacred text was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the Archangel Gabriel over a period of some 23 years. Although in the 7th century AD the Arabs did possess a script of their own, a still angular development of Nabatean (c. p. 97) called Jazan, this script was not widely used; indeed the Koranic verses were at first either orally transmitted amongst Muhammad's followers, or recorded on various pieces of material such as wood, paper, parchment, bone, leather or even saddle bags. However, in 633AD, during the battles following the Prophet's death, many of the huffaz who traditionally memorized and recited the Koran were killed, and, alarmed at the possibility of losing any part of the revelation, Abu Bakr (reigned 632-634AD), the first Caliph, instructed one of the Prophet's secretaries to compile the text into a book. In 651AD, under the third Caliph Uthman, a collated and codified version was prepared which still forms the authentic basis for every single Koran.

The fact that the Koran had been transmitted to Muhammad in the Arabic tongue gave both language and script a new status. Provisions had to be made to safeguard the Message and to provide it with a vehicle worthy of its divine origin.

The Arabic script, which is written from right to left, consists of 29 letters made up of 17 basic outlines plus diacritical points to distinguish otherwise identical character signs. Short vowels are not included (Arabic is a Semitic language where the root meaning of the word is borne by the consonants, and vowels serve mainly to fashion grammatical forms), but they can be indicated by vowel marks written above or below the consonant preceding the vowel. Some letters can be joined to their neighbours, either on both sides, or on one side only, if this happens their shape is modified. Thus, despite the fact that the Arabic script has more or less the same number of characters as the Roman alphabet, the variations in which individual characters can be written provides the calligrapher, from the very outset, with a wider range of possibilities than the largely self-contained Roman letterforms.

The earliest copies of the Koran were written in calligraphic variants of Jazan named after the towns in which they had originated, such as Anbari (after Anbar, Hiri (Hitrib), Makki (Mecca), or Madani (Medina). None of them was well defined and available evidence points to the existence of only three definite styles, known in Medina as Muddawwar (pointed), Muthallath (triangular) or TTm (a combination of both). Only two of them were maintained: Muddawwar, curved and easy to write, and Mabsut, more angular and straight lined (VHS p.9). These features dominated the development of the early Meccan-Medinan scripts and led to the formation of several further styles, the most important ones being Muhammad (slanting) [40], Nashi
strength from right to left. To no other style does the Arabic term for calligraphy, *handarat al-khatt*, that is, ‘geometry of line’ (‘line’ meaning ‘letter’ and ‘writing’) apply more aptly.

At the beginning of the 9th century Kufic began to attract non-figurative illuminations to mark title-pages, chapter headings and verse divisions; eventually the letters themselves took on ornamental forms: foliated, flori-ated [50], plaited, knotted, or animated, with individual characters taking the shape of animals [51], or human heads and figures (VIII p.12). Orna-mental Kufic became an important feature of Islamic art, not only for Koranic headings but also for numismatic inscriptions and major commemorative writings; it was also (and still is) used with great effect in architecture [see PLATE IX] and on objects of everyday use.

By the late 10th century two distinct forms of Kufic emerged: Eastern (sometimes also called ‘bent’) Kufic (see PLATE VIII 52), which first developed in Persia, was an elegant, graceful script, its most beautiful variation being the so-called Qaramanian style; and Western Kufic [53], which originated around Tunis and became responsible for the development of the various scripts of North and West Africa, and of Andalusia, the Islamic part of Spain. After the 13th century Kufic went out of general use and became pre-dominatedly a decorative element contrasting with those scripts which had superseded it.
Besides the elongated and straight styles to which Mu’ill and Kufic belong, more rounded, cursive scripts had been used since early times for personal correspondence, and to meet the needs of commerce and administration within the rapidly expanding Muslim empire. Unfortunately, few calligraphic specimens from this period have survived, since, after the fall of the Umayyid dynasty (661–750 AD), the Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258 AD) destroyed most previous records. Early attempts at improving the cursive scripts had led to the creation of some 20 different styles, many of them localized and short-lived, all of them lacking the elegance of good Kufic and much in need of discipline. Discipline was eventually provided by Ibn Muqlah (886–940 AD), an accomplished calligrapher from Baghdad, who set himself the task of radically redesigning the cursive scripts so as to make them suitable for the writing of the Koran. He laid down a comprehensive system of calligraphic rules [54] which included a definite methodology of measurements based on the ‘rhombic dot’, the ‘standard’ alif, and the ‘standard’ circle. The ‘rhombic dot’ is formed by pressing the pen diagonally on paper so that the length of the dot’s equal sides are the same as the width of the pen. The ‘standard’ alif is a straight vertical stroke measuring a specific number of ‘rhombic dots’. The ‘standard’ circle has a diameter equal to the length of the ‘standard’ alif and provides the proportional grid for all letters. Thus the various cursive styles are ultimately based on the width of the pen used by the scribe and the number of dots chosen to fashion the ‘standard’ alif; those can be five to seven in number. This was a formula of great simplicity, successfully balancing dynamism against restraint and giving a creative tension to Arabic calligraphy. It also made it the most mathematically exact form of calligraphy which well befits a people who have always excelled in this science.

Ibn Muqlah’s reform (his method of writing is referred to as al-Khatt al-Mansab) was successfully applied to the sittah, the six major styles. They are: Thuluth [55], a static monumental style which was often used for

---

54 In the 10th century the great reformer and calligrapher Ibn Muqlah laid down a comprehensive system of rules based on the rhombic dot (formed by the pen being pressed diagonally on paper); the standard alif (made up of a specific number of rhombic dots), and the standard circle (which has a diameter equal to the standard alif). The size of the rhombic dot varies from style to style and depends on the width of the pen. Tiib, 7.18

55 Page from a Koran, copied in Egypt in Thuluth script in 1204 AD. British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, Add. MS 22406/15. 15th
decorative purposes in manuscripts and inscriptions; Naskhi [56], the most popular form of writing in the Arab world, it became (after 1000 AD) the standard script for the copying of the Koran; Muhaqqaq [57], characterized by extended upward strokes, shallow downward strokes and sweeping sublinear flourishes, the favourite script for large Korans throughout the Islamic east; Rayhani, another popular Koran script, with strokes and flourishes ending in sharp points and diacriticals written with a smaller pen, sometimes in coloured ink; Riqq, smaller and more rounded than Naskhi and Thuluth from which it is derived, with short horizontal lines and a convention by which the centre of the loops of letters is filled in (mostly used for personal correspondence and secular manuscripts it was one of the favourite scripts of the Ottoman calligraphers and one of the preferred forms of handwriting in the Arab world); and Tawqi, with lines thicker than Riqq and letters more rounded than Thuluth, it is a large and elegant script usually reserved for important occasions.

According to tradition four more cursive styles have a status similar to that of the six sitatāl Ghubar [58], a diminutive script which shared certain characteristics with Thuluth and Naskhi, originally used for writing messages on tiny pieces of paper to be sent by pigeon post, but later also for copying the Koran; Tumar, a large and heavy script, one of the earliest Arabic styles, which lost much of its static character under the reforms brought about by Ibn Muqlah and his followers, and acquired an elegance similar to that of
58. In Mughal India, calligraphers were highly regarded and at times their portraits were included in the manuscripts they copied. In this folio of the Persian poet Nizami’s Khamsah, dated c.1630, we see the miniature painter Dastur and the calligrapher Abd al-Rahim Ferbar, who had been given the title Hamshir (‘Imperious Pen’) at work surrounded by the tools of their trade: pen-box, ink pot, a roll of gold sprinkled paper, brushes and pots of paint. The text is written in Nasta’liq.

BRITISH LIBRARY, ORIENTAL AND INDIAN OFFICE COLLECTIONS, OR.12208, C.1630

59. A page from the Guru Shikoh album (see also 58), written in Nasta’liq within cloud formations, a typically Persian convention. Guru Shikoh was, like his father, the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, greatly interested in calligraphy and some of the pages in this album are probably in his own handwriting. The flower decorations show European influence and are thought to have been derived from a popular 17th-century herbal.

BRITISH LIBRARY, ORIENTAL AND INDIAN OFFICE COLLECTIONS, ADD. OR.5150, C.1630

Thuluth and the two most important scripts, which will be discussed later, which are Ta’liq (or Farisi) and Nasta’liq [58, 59], 60)

These cursive scripts were further perfected by the two famous Arab calligraphers Ihsan al-Basrawi (died 1062/1653) (see p.103), whose formulation of Naskhified the latter to a major script worthy for copying the Koran; and Yaqut (died 1290) who gave prominence to Thuluth, and also perfected a special oblique cut of the reed pen which increased the aesthetic dimension of his calligraphy.

As the sphere of Muslim influence extended – in the course of time Islam dominated an area from Spain to the Philippines, from Central Asia to Tanzania – several regional styles developed. The Maghribi, the western part of the Islamic empire (which includes all the Arab countries west of Egypt and until 1492 also parts of Spain), evolved its own distinct form of Islamic art and, with it, calligraphy. The most important centre for the development of Western Kufic, and subsequently the style referred to as Maghribi [see Plate VIII], was the city of Kairouan (now in Tunisia) which had been founded by
the Arabs in 670AD, between 800 – 1200AD it became an important cultural and religious centre, where, in the school attached to the great mosque, Korans were copied by accomplished calligraphers. The distinguishing features of Western Kufic are a rounding of rectangular angles into curves and semi-circles, especially in the final flourishes of letters. These flourishes, extended into the sublinear area, are a distinct feature of Western Kufic; later, in the Maghribi script, they sometimes touch other letters in adjoining words, giving the whole page a new element of integration and coherence. Maghribi spread from Kairouan and became the most widely used script of North-West Africa and Muslim Spain.

Ibn Muqlah’s system never found much favour in the Maghribi where the purity of style was safeguarded by copying acknowledged masters, rather than through the application of definite rules. This encouraged conformity but it did not prevent the development of some regional styles. The four most important variations were: Qiyrawani, the earliest style, which soon gave way to Fasli Andalusi, a fine, delicate script which originated in Cordoba and established itself throughout Muslim Spain, eventually reaching Morocco.

and finally Sudani. Sudani [61] was first used in Timbuktu (founded in 1233AD), the town eventually became the most important Islamic centre in the sub-Saharan region, from where it spread throughout the Islamic countries of Africa; it is a heavier, less disciplined script, with thick lines, irregular strokes and densely written letters.

Both Persia and Turkey (where, after the acceptance of Islam, the Arabic script was adopted for the writing of the vernaculars) made definite contributions to calligraphy. In the 16th century, Persian calligraphers developed and formulated an already existing style called Ta’liq (the Persian language belongs to a different linguistic system and requires the adding of diacritical marks to certain letters) which was to become the most influential style of the eastern part of the Islamic world. It gained favour not only among Persian but also Indian and Turkish Muslims. Ta’liq means “suspension.” A later development of the same style was Nasta’liq (the term is a compound from Naskh and Ta’liq), a more fluid and elegant variation. Both scripts have certain features in common, such as a lack of pointed elevations, frequent filling-in of centres of the loops of letters, and thin pointed endings in the case of many unjoined letters. Neither of them was much used for Koranic copies, but in the field of secular literature Nasta’liq [60] soon replaced Naskhi. In the middle of the 17th century there developed in Herat a variation of Nasta’liq called Shikasteh, a “broken form,” characterized by an exaggerated density, closely connected ligatures, low inclined verticals and no vowel marks; in due course this script became the preferred vehicle for Persian and Urdu commercial and personal correspondence. A larger variation, Shikasteh-zani, usually written on illuminated or coloured paper, served as Chancery script. Persian influence and Persian calligraphers also brought Nasta’liq to India and Afghanistan. During the 14th century a minor Indian style called Bilari (see Plate X), often written in multiple colours, developed, which is characterized by wide, heavy horizontal lines, sharply in contrast with the thin, delicate verticals (YH 5, p.28). Chinese Muslims usually adopted (for religious purposes) the calligraphic styles current in Afghanistan, but, in addition, a special script called Sini, with fine lines and exaggerated roundness, was used for writing on ceramics and chins.

Soon after the defeat of the Mamluks in 1517, Turkey began to extend its dominion over most of the Arab world. From then on Islamic art and Islamic calligraphy became increasingly associated with the Ottoman Turks, who not only accepted (and excelled in) most existing calligraphic styles, but were prolific in producing many highly effective scripts of their own, the most important being Diwani and Jali. Diwani has its roots in Turkish T’Aliq; refined and restructured, it became the main script of the Ottoman Chancellories. It is difficult to read, excessively cursive and superstructured, with undotted letters unconventionally joined together, and no vowel marks. An even more ornamental variation, full of embellishments and decorative devices, is known under the name of Diwani Jali.